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**‘ONLY WOODY ALLEN GETS TO DO THAT’: THE INFLUENCE
OF *ANNIE HALL* ON CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CINEMA**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first exploration of Woody Allen's influence on contemporary American cinema. It focuses specifically on the impact of *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977), Allen's most iconic film, on American film and television of the last ten years, specifically those that, like *Annie Hall*, take place in New York and are centred on a breakup that is expressed through memory. They all have central female protagonists who, like Annie, finally find artistic and personal fulfilment on their own. I examine Allen's own oeuvre post-*Annie Hall*, as well as *Tiny Furniture* (dir. Lena Dunham, 2010), *Girls* (HBO: 2012-2017), *Frances Ha* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2012) and *Appropriate Behavior* (dir. Desiree Akhavan, 2014).

Allen's films have mostly focused on the breakups of heterosexual white middle-class people, often to the detriment of the depiction of other races, social classes, and sexualities. My analysis uses intersecting methodologies, including feminist film theory, Black feminist theory, queer theory and disability theory to unpack the way these post-*Annie Hall* films repeat reductive and harmful stereotypes of different social groups, or mark their deviation from his work by focusing on a nuanced expression of these marginalised identities. This thesis makes an important contribution to the field by highlighting the complicated nature of Allen's influence on contemporary American cinema. I demonstrate how this influence is characterised by a compulsion to repeat and a desire to separate, underpinned, no doubt, by Allen's biographical scandals and a changing landscape that makes the filmmaker's legacy all the more uncertain.

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DECLARATION

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

INTRODUCTION

PERSPECTIVES ON *ANNIE HALL*

The influence of Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977) on Desiree Akhavan's *Appropriate Behavior* (dir. Desiree Akhavan, 2015) is clear from the outset. Sirin (Desiree Akhavan), like Alvy (Woody Allen), is introduced in the film alone in a close-up shot as Sirin rides the subway after a recent breakup. The film goes on to show Sirin, like Alvy, attempt to understand her breakup through memories of her relationship. Like Alvy, she ends the film able to move on, but the subway setting also reveals one of many differences from Allen's cinema. The scene changes from the close-up shot to reveal a train of chattering people. The passengers, like Sirin who is Iranian-American, are not white and thus immediately contrast with Allen's New Yorkers who are predominantly white, middle-class intellectuals who walk and talk along its streets. Public transport and those who use it are rarely featured, an exception being a subway scene in *Bananas* (dir. Woody Allen, 1971) where the protagonist is mugged. The difference from *Annie Hall* is emphasised in the next scene, when Sirin goes to pick up her belongings from her ex-girlfriend, Maxine (Rebecca Henderson). *Appropriate Behavior* then, while clearly bearing the influence of *Annie Hall* from its very first shots, also demonstrates a move away from Allen's oeuvre, particularly his interest in the complexities of love and sex between heterosexual white women and men. While Allen argues that he has had no influence on American cinema (save perhaps upon his friend Nora Ephron), this thesis looks at the impact of *Annie Hall* on

contemporary American filmmakers, specifically those featuring female protagonists navigating the complexities of modern relationships.¹

In an interview from 2015 about *Appropriate Behavior*, Akhavan highlighted the increased number of contemporary films made by women which focus on immature female protagonists navigating complicated relationships and stalled careers. She notes how they have been allowed to reject marriage and children without judgement or punishment, a freedom that is taken for granted for male protagonists. In the interview, Akhavan proposes:

Over the years in films we've had so many men be flawed, multi-dimensional characters who can be mature in some avenues and fall apart in others and the women are just there rolling their eyes and supporting them. But when I look around at the films that are coming out now by female directors we're seeing women characters go through a stunted adolescence where they're able to fuck up just as much as any dude would. I hear about this "new wave" of slacker female films and I think it's just women getting the opportunity to tell stories. I'm not ashamed to talk openly about my flaws like what, only Woody Allen gets to do that?²

For Akhavan, male directors like Allen have been creating these kinds of narratives about predominantly male characters for years. It is only recently that we have seen a wave of female filmmakers creating films about women who are immature and reject heteronormative markers like marriage and children. But her words simultaneously expose her filmmaking debt to Allen. The final line of her statement encapsulates some of the main ideas of this thesis. I, too, am interested in the complicated and uncomfortable influence of Allen on contemporary American cinema. All the films in

¹ Roger Friedman, 'Woody Allen: American Master, the Reluctant Auteur Opens Up', *Observer*, 30 July 2014 <<http://observer.com/2014/07/woody-allen-american-master>> [accessed 20 January 2018].

² Jess Commons, 'Desiree Akhavan Talks Women on Screen, Being The 'Bisexual Spokesperson' And New Film *Appropriate Behaviour*', *Grazia*, 4 March 2015 <<https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/music/desiree-akhavan>> [accessed 27 July 2015].

this thesis express their relationship with Allen's films (*Annie Hall* in particular) in a similar way, as a tense acknowledgement of Allen's influence matched by a determination to reject the heteronormative stories that he favours. The first two chapters analyse Allen's own response to *Annie Hall* and his attempt to move on from it, and the final three chapters focus on the work of contemporary American filmmakers (made in the last ten years) that express both a debt to Allen's cinema and a palpable discomfort with elements of his work and, in some cases, public image.

This thesis argues that *Annie Hall* is the most influential film of Allen's oeuvre. The filmmakers explored here all acknowledge its influence. In the first chapter, I analyse the way memory works in the film itself. Connected to this, and running through subsequent chapters, is a focus on the way that the film is remembered and, perhaps of equal significance, misremembered. The following chapters look at how *Annie Hall* has influenced a selection of films, including some of Allen's own work. These are explored in detail in the second chapter. The remaining chapters investigate Allen's influence on female-led comedy films and television series, particularly in the work of Lena Dunham, Noah Baumbach, Greta Gerwig, Issa Rae and Desiree Akhavan. In remembering *Annie Hall*, these films express their debt to Allen's film and a simultaneous discomfort with his legacy.

Annie Hall is widely regarded as one of Allen's finest works, securing the title of 'Funniest Screenplay Ever' by the Writer's Guild of America in 2012.³ During the 2002 Academy Awards, Allen presented a short film about New York in the movies to pay homage to the city after 9/11, which featured images of *Annie Hall* amongst other iconic films set in the city. Diane Keaton also emulated her performance as Annie by

³ Writers Guild of America West, *The Writers Guild of America*, 2015
<<https://www.wga.org/writers-room/101-best-lists/101-funniest-screenplays/list>>
[accessed 18 February 2017].

singing 'Seems Like Old Times' on stage at the Golden Globes in 2014, after accepting the Cecil B. De Mille Award on behalf of Allen. Such celebrations of Allen and his work are unlikely to be repeated after becoming a lightning-rod for Hollywood sexual misconduct, and the emergence of the Me Too movement. In fact, his most recent film, *A Rainy Day in New York* (dir. Woody Allen, 2019), had its release halted by its distributor, Amazon Studios, amidst the furore surrounding the return of media focus on the allegations made against him. *Annie Hall's* position in American cinema history is still, of course, that of a hugely influential film. But, as the trouble with Allen's most recent film shows, the filmmaker's personal reputation has changed the way his oeuvre is being promoted, viewed and celebrated.

ANNIE HALL IN RETROSPECT

Annie Hall was written by Allen and Marshall Brickman, a collaboration that began with *Sleeper* (dir. Woody Allen, 1973), and would come together again for *Manhattan* (dir. Woody Allen, 1979) and *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (dir. Woody Allen, 1993). *Annie Hall* stars Allen as Alvy the neurotic stand-up comedian who, after breaking up with his girlfriend Annie (Diane Keaton), sifts through memories of his relationship to understand why they broke up. These flashbacks are presented as Alvy's memories, and show (in a non-chronological order) the couple falling in love, arguing, and the impact they have upon each other. Through the relationship, Alvy is shown how to lighten up, and slowly learns to have a little more fun, while Annie, encouraged by Alvy, develops her talents as a singer and photographer, as well as enrolling in college classes. In the end, Annie is no longer the person that Alvy fell in love with and the couple break up so she can pursue her career and leave behind the morose Alvy that she has outgrown. In the final scenes Annie and Alvy meet once again, each with a new

date. They ‘kick around old times’, and part as friends. Alvy concludes that, despite the pain of relationships, they are essential to life.

Annie Hall co-stars Diane Keaton in an Oscar-winning role. Allen and Keaton had already worked together on Allen’s Broadway play, *Play it Again, Sam* in 1969, and the subsequent film of the same title directed by Herbert Ross. Before *Annie Hall*, Keaton had already worked with Allen on *Sleeper* and *Love and Death* (dir. Woody Allen, 1975) and she would go on to be directed by Allen again in *Interiors* (dir. Woody Allen, 1978), *Manhattan*, *Radio Days* (dir. Woody Allen, 1987) and *Manhattan Murder Mystery*. It is the role of Annie that she is still most known for, however. Tony Roberts plays Alvy’s LA-obsessed best friend, Rob, who encourages Alvy to have more fun and to leave New York for the promise of riches and success out west. Roberts had also worked with Allen on the play and the film, *Play it Again, Sam* (dir. Woody Allen, 1969). Like Keaton, he returned to act in other Allen films, including *Stardust Memories* (dir. Woody Allen, 1980), *A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy* (dir. Woody Allen, 1982), *Hannah and Her Sisters* (dir. Woody Allen, 1986) and *Radio Days*. *Annie Hall* was a critical success, winning four Oscars at the 50th Academy Awards, beating *Star Wars* (dir. George Lucas, 1977) for Best Picture. Allen secured Best Director (while missing out on a Best Actor win) and Allen and Brickman won Best Original Screenplay. Keaton won Best Actress and gained a BAFTA and a Golden Globe for her role. *Annie Hall*’s success, therefore, is at least in part due to Keaton’s star quality, with the role showcasing her artistry as an actor, comedian, and singer. I am not using star studies in this thesis, however. Instead, moments where Keaton’s star quality is showcased will be analysed to explore how Allen depicts women, tracking this influence in the films examined in this thesis.

Annie Hall was made during the 1970s, a time that some film critics, like Jonathan Kirshner, argue was an era in American cinema that was defined by ‘moral ambiguity.’⁴ According to Kirshner, the social and political backdrop of America during this time, including the civil and women’s rights movement, the Nixon presidency and the upheavals of the Vietnam War, all contributed to a sense of complex morality which informed the films of the time.⁵ Films like *Star Wars* and *Apocalypse Now* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) criticised the military. *All the President’s Men* (dir. Alan J. Pakula, 1976) exhibited a mistrust of the government. The moral ambiguity of the anti-hero protagonist was explored in Travis Bickle’s (Robert De Niro) homicidal vigilantism in *Taxi Driver* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1976), and reached its apex in Michael Corleone (Al Pacino), head of the Sicilian-American mafia family, preaching the importance of family while murdering enemies and horses alike in *The Godfather* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1972). The unpredictability of the 1970s, the submerged, constant threat of violence, and the futility of traditional masculinity is best illuminated by the great white shark that plagues a New England beach town in *Jaws* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1975).

Certainly, connections can be drawn between this period of American cinema history and *Annie Hall*, especially in the romantic comedy genre. The heterosexual narrative of marriage and children is often disrupted in the romantic films of the period. This was an era with many examples of less traditional romantic comedies, for example *The Goodbye Girl* (dir. Herbert Ross, 1977), where the ambiguous ending does not necessarily see the couple together. In *Annie Hall*, Alvy does not ‘get the girl’, perhaps conforming to what Kirshner highlights as a marker of the era, the fact that

⁴ Jonathan Kirshner, *Hollywood’s Last Golden Age: Politics, Society, and the Seventies Film in America* (London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 5.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

‘the hero doesn’t always win.’⁶ Moreover, Tamar Jeffers McDonald argues that the romantic comedy of the 1970s was influenced by the societal context of late 1960s and 1970s America, engendering a cynical apathy that fed into the films that tended to reject conventional, clean happy endings for the couples.⁷ That being said, this thesis will not view *Annie Hall* as a ‘70s film.’ While some of Kirshner’s assertions are certainly true, particularly that 70s film was a fertile era of American cinema due to the end of censorship and the fracture of the studio system, it will not be the focus of this thesis to trace these impacts on Allen’s film.⁸ While viewing films in their historical context is fruitful, the aims of this thesis mean that I am reluctant to focus on *Annie Hall* in relation to a specific period of time. I want instead to highlight the influence of Allen’s cinema, in particular this film, across the years. While I will analyse *Annie Hall* within the context of its cultural and historical moment, a full analysis of it as a ‘70s film’ is beyond the scope of this thesis but would certainly be a focus for future study.

The films by contemporary filmmakers in this thesis span a ten-year period, from Lena Dunham’s *Tiny Furniture* (dir. Lena Dunham, 2010) to Issa Rae’s television series *Insecure* (HBO: 2016-) which is still running. In this introduction, I will go on to explain some of the ways in which these comedies can be grouped, variously as ‘messy women’ narratives, ‘independent female film’, or ‘mumblecore’. As I will show, all of these terms are necessarily problematic and restrictive. These films are, however, all made by auteurs. The galvanising similarity of these films, however, is the shared influence of *Annie Hall*, especially in their depictions of neurotic central characters and focus on broken relationships. While all these films bear the influence of *Annie*

⁶ Ibid, p. 5.

⁷ Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (London, UK: Wallflower, 2007), p. 61.

⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

Hall, they also demonstrate a complicated relationship with Allen's cinema, as the allegations made against him are repeated with each new post-Me Too revelation. These filmmakers distance themselves from Allen in their decision to centralise a female character. Each of these offers a non-conventional and at times subversive depiction of a central relationship and its breakup, be it a focus on platonic female friendship, or a rejection of heterosexuality altogether.

ALLEN, ALLEGATIONS AND THE ME TOO MOVEMENT

Shortly after Harvey Weinstein faced an avalanche of accusations of sexual misconduct, assault and harassment in 2017, accusations against Allen dating back to the early 1990s were revisited. The very public separation of Mia Farrow and Allen (1992) also revealed the filmmaker's ongoing relationship with Farrow's 21-year-old daughter, Soon-Yi Previn. Both Farrow and Allen fought for custody of their children, during which Allen was accused of molesting their daughter, Dylan Farrow. On June 7th 1993, Judge Elliott Wilk of the New York State Supreme Court awarded custody of the couple's children to Farrow. Despite a team of child psychologists from Yale being unable to prove the claims brought by Farrow to the custody hearing (including the accusation that Allen had also abused other children in the family) the judge made clear his doubt over their findings and included a decidedly negative overview of Allen's part in Dylan's life. The very public and brutal case, however, led the Connecticut state's attorney to drop the charges of sexual abuse against Allen, to 'spare the child "the trauma of a court appearance."⁹ Allen subsequently married Soon-Yi (they are still married), while continuing to deny the allegations. Dylan Farrow

⁹ Sam Girgus, *The Films of Woody Allen: Second Edition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 2.

maintains them vehemently to this day. Allen's own account of the experience was laid out in his recent autobiography, *Apropos of Nothing* (2020). Naturally, this contrasts with Mia Farrow's account in her own autobiography, *What Falls Away: A Memoir* (1997).

Many commentators decided Allen was as guilty as Weinstein. Others pointed out the significant differences between the two cases. The sheer number of Weinstein accusers (and of course his recent subsequent conviction) is different to Dylan Farrow's accusation against Allen, which is essentially one (child's) voice against another (adult man's) voice. Perhaps the most frequently stated fact is that Allen was never charged for the accusations made against him, nor were they ever (to date) brought to criminal court. It is important to differentiate between the two major scandals that relate to Allen's personal life. The first, his relationship with Soon-Yi Previn, while certainly offensive to many, was neither illegal nor denied by Allen. The second, the accusation of sexual assault made by his adopted daughter Dylan Farrow when she was a child, has been vociferously denied by Allen, and he was never charged in court.

For some, this is enough to determine that Allen is not guilty of sexual misconduct against his daughter, and that his relationship with Previn, whilst unconventional, is not something to be punished for. Lloyd Michaels argues that his intent 'is never to judge Woody Allen the person,' whom he does not know, 'except through his films and writings.'¹⁰ For Tom Shone, the long period that Allen has spent in an apparently happy marriage to Previn puts to rest any questions surrounding their relationship.¹¹ Shone asks: 'would it be outrageous to see Woody's love for her as an

¹⁰ Lloyd Michaels, *Sweet and Lowdown: Woody Allen's Cinema of Regret* (New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. xiii.

¹¹ Tom Shone, *Woody Allen: A Retrospective* (London, UK: Thames & Hudson, 2015), p. 32.

admirably brave and romantic act? And to suggest that he made the decision to follow his heart despite finding himself cut off from the part of his own family and demonized by half the world— the same audience that used to worship him.¹² I disagree with Shone: the power structure inherent in Allen’s and Previn’s relationship (she a young, adopted, immigrant woman of colour and he a rich, white adult man) is poor evidence for Allen’s bravery in personal matters. It is also important for me to state that I believe Dylan Farrow: a young woman’s consistently maintained accusations of sexual assault should not be dismissed. This thesis will not, however, attempt to prove Allen’s guilt. Rather, I take the stance that, whether one believes Allen’s innocence or not, the fact is that these biographical scandals do change the way Allen’s films are viewed, especially in our Me Too era. The films explored in this thesis that have been influenced by Allen offer examples of how filmmakers have grappled with the influential work of troubling artists and give clues as to how they might do so in the future.

The impact of these scandals, whatever one thinks of Allen’s guilt or innocence, continues to have huge ramifications on the way we view his films, and the way we will come to understand his legacy. This thesis posits that Allen continues to influence contemporary American film, his influence oddly visible in the work of outspoken feminist filmmakers. As I will show, Allen has been lauded for his depiction of female characters in the past, though recently seen as crass and outdated, in particular for his comments about being a poster boy for the Me Too movement.¹³ Despite the current furore, some Allen critics hope that Allen’s biographical scandals will fade into

¹² Ibid, p. 32.

¹³ Benjamin Lee, ‘Woody Allen: “I Should Be the Poster Boy For the #MeToo Movement”’, *Guardian*, 4 June 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jun/04/woody-allen-dylan-farrow-metoo-movement-poster-boy>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

memory, and the legacy of his films will remain. Richard Schickel argues that ‘despite his dubiety, posterity will see him for what he has been—a great and serious comic artist.’¹⁴ Admittedly Schickel’s words came before Allen’s most serious and recent reckoning during the Me Too period, which resulted in *A Rainy Day in New York* being dropped by its distributor. The reputation of Allen’s works is a recurrent theme for his critics. According to Mary P. Nichols, while Allen’s films may be viewed ‘primarily in relation to his life,’ Allen’s death will bring about a different vantage point on the scandals, arguing that ‘like Woody Allen’s life, this will pass. His movies will remain.’¹⁵

It is difficult if not impossible for Allen critics to ignore the scandals surrounding Allen’s life since now, perhaps more than ever, to engage with Allen’s films is also to engage with the allegations made against him. For some, this involves a separation of Allen’s biography and Allen’s work, a position drawn at least in part from Roland Barthes’ 1967 essay, ‘Death of the Author’ and his famous separation of the artist from the art. This position is taken by the vast majority of Allen critics, including Foster Hirsch, Jason Bailey, Lloyd Michaels, Sam Girgus and Richard Aloysius Blake. Blake grapples with Allen’s biographical scandal, finally declaring that his book, *Woody Allen: Profane and Sacred* (1995) (centred on Allen’s moral universe) is ‘conceived as a study of the films, not the man.’¹⁶ Moreover, Blake contends that Allen’s scandals should be kept private and that the truth can only ever be known by the individuals immediately involved, and that Allen ‘like everyone else

¹⁴ Richard Schickel, *Woody Allen: A Life in Film* (Chicago, USA: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), p. 178.

¹⁵ Mary P. Nichols, *Reconstructing Woody: Art, Love, and Life in the Films of Woody Allen* (Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1998), p. xi.

¹⁶ Richard Aloysius Blake, *Woody Allen: Profane and Sacred* (Maryland, USA: Scarecrow Press, 1995), p. xi.

in the world, has a right to his privacy.¹⁷ Anticipating that some critics would disagree, Blake argues that ‘a fair-minded critic also has the right to respect that privacy and confine his efforts to the public record contained in the films.’¹⁸ Blake’s position isn’t about being ‘fair’ or unfair, but more to do with how a critic decides to remember an artist.

A similar position is taken by Jason Bailey in his celebratory volume, *The Ultimate Woody Allen Film Companion* (2014), where he states that his book would not tackle ‘at any great length’ Allen’s scandals.¹⁹ But Bailey is also clear to point out that this does not equate to a dismissal of the importance of these allegations, but is rather an acknowledgement of his focus ‘on the work and not the life.’²⁰ This is, of course, a fruitful avenue to handle the scandals, as critics can analyse Allen’s films unencumbered by the weight of guilt, shame and discomfort that can come for some who look at his work. To do so is in my view a false equation. Rightly or wrongly, engagement with Allen now comes with the baggage of his biographical scandals, and to separate him from them is to misremember the past. Instead, this thesis is centred on the creative work that can and has grown from filmmakers examining this very discomfort.

Some Allen critics have noted the difficulty involved in separating the artist and the art. Allen’s biography, opinions, and personality saturate his work. For Sam Girgus, ‘Allen has become a prisoner of his own image and public relations genius,’ to the point where the ‘narcissistic marriage of public and private selves that served him

¹⁷ Ibid, p. vi.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. vi.

¹⁹ Jason Bailey, *The Ultimate Woody Allen Film Companion* (Minneapolis, USA: Voyageur Press, 2014), p. 7.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

so well now encircles him.’²¹ While I do not aim to trace autobiographical elements in Allen’s films, the similarities in the personality of his protagonists, their fears, neuroses and even life events (celebrity, divorce and child custody), cannot be ignored. This is troublesome for Girgus, too, especially as Allen ‘opened himself to controversy and ridicule with onscreen relationships with youthful girls.’²² As Girgus implies, it is not just Allen that is encircled by his biography. To engage with Allen’s films is to circle and be encircled by the biographical scandals.

This separation is easier for some than others. Foster Hirsch grapples with the question ‘Do you like the artist or the man?’, before ultimately deciding he likes the artist.²³ Hirsch also relays conversations with friends about Allen’s personal life, implying the decision is not a straightforward one. He remembers a friend remarking upon men finding it easier to forgive Allen, or at least to separate his actions from his work.²⁴ Perhaps this goes some way in explaining the reason why there are so few female authored books about Allen. It also sheds light on my own thesis which, while centred on Allen’s work, is predominantly about the way filmmakers handle this influence post-scandal.

Jill Franks’s book, *Woody Allen and Charlie Chaplin: Little Men, Big Auteurs* (2019), is one of the few books solely or partly about Allen written by a woman. Hers is also a book about Chaplin, another auteur plagued by biographical scandals involving relationships with women. She states that Allen’s scandal did not put her off writing about his films, but rather motivated her ‘to explore many biographies and memoirs in order to understand all aspects of the scandal, including public opinion

²¹ Girgus, p. 3.

²² Ibid, p. 151.

²³ Foster Hirsch, *Love, Sex, Death and the Meaning of Life: The Films of Woody Allen* (Massachusetts, USA: Da Capo Press, 2001), p. 276.

²⁴ Ibid p. ix.

and the ways in which celebrities' personal lives affect the reception of their work in America.'²⁵ It is true that in remembering Allen's biography rather than consciously forgetting it we can gain a greater understanding of the power of celebrity that makes abuses possible. The resurfacing of the allegations made against Allen have made for thought-provoking debate outside the walls of academia too. Claire Dederer's article, 'What Do We Do With the Art of Monstrous Men?' (2019), looked to the uncertain future of art made by male artists who, for whatever reason, are viewed with unease. The article was not solely focused on Allen, but nonetheless used an image from *Manhattan* as its lead image. Isaac (Woody Allen) leers in the background, encroaching on a teenage Tracy's (Mariel Hemingway) space as she eats an ice-cream sundae. Those of us who know the film know that Isaac is not Tracy's father, uncle, or even teacher but is her boyfriend. The age-gap is made particularly stark and uncomfortable by the apparent childishness of their meeting place, an ice-cream parlour after school.

Dederer notes that when one takes a moralistic action, for example no longer watching Woody Allen films, there is a tendency toward smugness. But she also speaks of the genuine discomfort of those of us who abhor the artist but genuinely love some of the films, films which have had influence over our lives, taste and creativity. She writes:

They did or said something awful, and made something great. The awful thing disrupts the great work; we can't watch or listen to or read the great work without remembering the awful thing. Flooded with knowledge of the maker's monstrousness, we turn away, overcome by disgust. Or...we don't. We continue watching, separating or trying to separate the artist from the art. Either way:

²⁵ Jill Franks, *Woody Allen and Charlie Chaplin: Little Men, Big Auteurs* (North Carolina, USA: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2019), p. 3.

disruption. They are monster geniuses, and I don't know what to do about them.²⁶

While Dederer grapples with what to do, for fellow journalist A. O. Scott, leaving behind Allen is simply not an option as his films have been so instrumental to his life. In his column, 'My Woody Allen Problem' (2019) for the *New York Times*, he writes:

I could, I suppose declare that I won't watch any more of his movies. But I can hardly unwatch the ones I've seen, which is all of them, at least half more than once. And even if I could, by some feat of cinephilic sophistry, separate those movies from Mr Allen's life, I can't possibly separate them from mine.²⁷

Scott argues that those who can bear to watch Allen's film should now go back to his oeuvre to reassess those moments that we might have dismissed, to hold ourselves and Allen more accountable, to not let ourselves or him off the hook by abandoning his biography to memory.²⁸ I agree that Allen's films are too crucial to American cinema history to wipe away from cinematic memory. As Scott argues: 'Mr Allen's films and writings are part of the common artistic record, which is another way of saying that they inform the memories and experiences of a great many people.'²⁹ Rather than closing our eyes to biographical truths to avoid discomfort, perhaps we all need to pay closer attention.

This thesis makes Allen's scandal central. Whilst not going over the details of the scandal itself, the thesis takes our discomfort with Allen's biography, which I believe to be both important and unavoidable, and seeks to prove that it is a

²⁶ Claire Dederer, 'What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?', *The Paris Review*, 20 November 2017 <<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/20/art-monstrous-men/#.WhQOCjLuhck.twitter>> [accessed 13 December 2017].

²⁷ A. O. Scott, 'My Woody Allen Problem', *New York Times*, 31 January 2018 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/31/movies/woody-allen.html>> [accessed 3 February 2018].

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

worthwhile feeling to examine and live with. As I will show, acknowledging and engaging with this feeling has created many genuinely exciting and original works of cinema, a selection of which will be analysed in the chapters that follow. I will look at how these filmmakers have navigated the turbulent waters of adoration and repulsion, where they have copied Allen, where they have moved on from him, what methods they have used to do this, and what this might tell us about what sort of film *Annie Hall* was all along. While the truth of Allen's biography is a source of guilt, shame and discomfort for those who continue to engage with his work, I am also excited by the way that this thesis does not position his influence as a road block or as something to get around, but rather something that has helped create truly important work: films about queer women and women of colour; women who are messy; women who fail; and women who remind us of Annie and Alvy.

IMPRESSIONS OF ALLEN AND *ANNIE HALL*

Annie Hall has received the most critical attention in Allen's oeuvre, a body of work that itself has been studied extensively. An exploration of how this iconic film is remembered is, however, a gap in criticism on *Annie Hall*. This is especially important during a time when Allen's place in American cinema history is complicated. Here, I will discern some themes in the scholarship of *Annie Hall*, a film that is spoken of as culturally significant in terms of the romantic comedy genre and as a changing point in Allen's oeuvre. Contemporary reviewers perceived this shift upon *Annie Hall*'s release. Tim Radford called *Annie Hall* 'Allen's most closely focused and daring film to date', with a 'remarkable recreation of a spent love affair, which is both sad and

hysterically funny.’³⁰ For Vincent Canby the film marked a point where critics would begin to take Allen seriously as an artist, writing, ‘it’s taken us quite a while to recognize just how prodigiously talented he is.’³¹

While there was a clear positive critical response, there were also detractors. Robert Hatch found Allen’s use of split-screens, subtitles and address to camera reductive and lazy, writing that it is ‘unnecessary for an actor/director who knows well enough how to make clear what he and his fellow players are thinking without hanging up signs.’³² Hatch did concede, however, that *Annie Hall* had some good moments, with an albeit lukewarm conclusion that ‘for all its vagaries, it is a funny, often touching, sometimes astute picture.’³³ Joan Didion also characterises Allen’s ‘serious’ films as full of ‘thematic self-regard’.³⁴ On Allen’s characters she writes: ‘They are morose, they have bad manners. They seem to take long walks and go to smart restaurants only to ask one another hard questions.’³⁵

Whether critics thought *Annie Hall* was successful or not, there was a consensus that the film was a ‘turning point’ for Allen, and this opinion has stuck in Allen criticism. For Sander H. Lee, for example, the film is ‘Allen’s first really serious film’, for its greater focus on philosophical and psychological matters as well as comedy.³⁶

³⁰ Tim Radford, ‘Annie Hall’, *Guardian*, 29 Sept 1977
<<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/oct/18/annie-hall-archive-review>> [accessed 23 January 2020].

³¹ Vincent Canby, ‘Allen at His Best’, *The New York Times*, 27 April 1977
<<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/packages/html/movies/bestpictures/annie-re.html?scp=5&sq=Walken&st=cse>> [accessed 23 January 2020].

³² Robert Hatch, ‘Annie Hall’, in *Perspectives on Woody Allen*, ed. by Renée R. Curry (Michigan, USA: G. K. Hall, 1996), pp. 26-27 (p. 27).

³³ *Ibid*, p. 27.

³⁴ Joan Didion, ‘Letter From ‘Manhattan’, *New York Review of Books*, 16 August 1979
<<http://nybooks.com/articles/1979/08/16/letter-from-manhattan>> [accessed 23 January 2020].

³⁵ *Ibid*, N. P.

³⁶ Sander H. Lee, *Woody Allen’s Angst: Philosophical Commentaries on His Serious Films* (London, UK: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1997), p. 3.

Jason Bailey concurs, asserting that the film was ‘Woody Allen’s first masterpiece.’³⁷ This is a view shared by Allen himself. In an interview with Stig Björkman, Allen acknowledged the significance of the film to the direction of his future filmmaking, stating: ‘I really felt it was a major turning point for me, I had the courage to abandon ... just clowning around and the safety of complete broad comedy.’³⁸ While the film itself certainly exhibited a break away from Allen’s usual focus on broader comedy, for Diane Jacobs, the perception of *Annie Hall* as a turning point was also informed by the characteristics of the audience that fell in love with it: ‘*Annie Hall* touched a sensitive chord with contemporary audiences, and especially well-educated, urban audiences.’³⁹ As Neil Sinyard puts it: ‘It seems as if what the Woody Allen film critics had all been waiting for materialized in the form of *Annie Hall*, which turned out to be *the* screen romance of the late 1970s.’⁴⁰ While many of Allen’s films before *Annie Hall* had engaged with love, philosophy and psychology (perhaps most clearly in *Love and Death*), it was not until *Annie Hall* that audiences and critics began taking Allen seriously.

This thesis is centred not on *Annie Hall*’s importance for Woody Allen’s career but on the importance of Annie as a character. For me, the significance of *Annie Hall* is as much about the significance of its titular character as its auteur-director. This idea is supported by Julian Fox who argues that it was Annie’s type of femininity that resulted in the film’s success, stating that ‘it was on Annie that the emotional heart of the movie finally fastened and this provided for America, as elsewhere, a feminine

³⁷ Jason Bailey, *The Ultimate Woody Allen Film Companion* (Minneapolis, USA: Voyageur Press, 2014), p. 30.

³⁸ Stig Björkman, *Woody Allen on Woody Allen* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. 75.

³⁹ Diane Jacobs, *The Magic of Woody Allen* (London, UK: Robson, 1982), p. 103.

⁴⁰ Neil Sinyard, *The Films of Woody Allen* (London, UK: Magna Books, 1987), p. 46.

ideal for the late 1970s.’⁴¹ Annie’s femininity uses different codes and symbols from those that would be associated with traditional femininity: she is seemingly uninterested in children, wears masculine clothing, lives alone and, by the end of the film, chooses her artistry and career over a relationship with a man.

For Sander H. Lee, however, Annie’s character does not necessarily exhibit a feminine ideal, but rather reflects the character that Allen himself usually plays. The nervous suitor is this time cast as female, while Alvy is the calmer, cooler partner in their jittery, bumpy relationship.⁴² Lee asserts that Annie’s masculine clothing, fumbling and clear desire to impress Alvy signify traditionally masculine traits, and Annie does not mark a new form of femininity, but rather mirrors traditionally masculine roles.⁴³ To assume Annie’s characteristic of nervousness in the face of romantic and professional failure as something inherently masculine seems particularly reductive. Furthermore, the chapters that follow will analyse the female characters in films that centre on romantic and career failure, and will trace their lineage back to Annie. There is, therefore, not an essentially ‘masculine’ element in these characteristics, but rather simply a rejection of, as Julian Fox implies, traditionally feminine traits, particularly a focus on maternity and personal or professional sacrifice for the goal of a heterosexual union.

⁴¹ Julian Fox, *Woody: Movies from Manhattan* (New York, USA: Overlook Press, 1996), p. 92.

⁴² Lee, p. 61.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 61.

RADICAL ROMANTIC COMEDY: *ANNIE HALL* AND GENRE

Annie Hall is frequently presented by Allen critics as a realistic or believable romantic comedy, largely because of its rejection of the conventional Hollywood 'happy ending'. Its realism is also, however, buttressed by the belief of some critics that the film is, at least in part, autobiographical. Julian Fox, for example, argues that *Annie Hall* is drawn from Allen's real-life relationship and breakup with Keaton.⁴⁴ For critics like Diane Jacobs, the success of the film is grounded in the audience's knowledge of this relationship, and the idea that Alvy could really be like Allen, Annie like Keaton, and their relationship like the filmmaker and the famous actress.⁴⁵ For Jacobs, Allen capitalises on the residual affection for Allen and Keaton as actors and celebrities, making 'compelling use of a fifteen-year-old relationship between Woody Allen—a character, author, famous person—and his audience: this is our love story as well.'⁴⁶ After all, despite *Annie Hall* ending without the couple reconciled, the film is still very romantic.

Annie's decision to remain in L.A. and to pursue her career instead of reconciling with Alvy in a romantic relationship at the end of the film marks Allen's greatest deviation from the traditional romantic comedy. As Katherina Glitre outlines, the overarching generic feature of the romantic comedy is 'the comic formation of a (heterosexual) couple,' which is expected and guaranteed.⁴⁷ *Annie Hall* sacrifices the genre's necessity of the 'happy ending' to focus on the complexity of modern sex and relationships instead. Allen's film is highly influential in its deviation from the norm

⁴⁴ Fox, p. 87.

⁴⁵ Jacobs, p. 105.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 104.

⁴⁷ Kathrina Glitre, *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union, 1934-1965* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 10.

of the genre, gaining the label the ‘radical romantic comedy’ from Tamar Jeffers McDonald.⁴⁸ However, *Annie Hall* is still recognisably a romantic comedy, reflecting some characteristics of the genre while reworking others. For all its deviations from generic conventions, *Annie Hall* is still a story of the difficulties of navigating heterosexual romantic love and sex, and the influence of other romantic comedy genres, especially the screwball comedy, is palpable.

The influence of the screwball comedy upon *Annie Hall* can be seen from Annie and Alvy’s first meeting on a tennis date. As Wes Gehring outlines, the screwball genre plays with the traditional ‘boy-meets-girl’ narrative, where the man is completely unaware of the courtship at least at the beginning of the film.⁴⁹ It looks as though Annie’s intentions are romantic, while Alvy’s mind seems to be elsewhere. The game of tennis that acts as the pair’s meet-cute signposts the influence of screwball comedy. As Jeffers McDonald notes:

The term ‘adversarial sport’, with its connotation of competitive games, aptly describes the screwball attitude towards love: it is a game each combatant wants to win and is prepared to cheat in order to do so.⁵⁰

The tennis game shows how *Annie Hall* both reflects and moves on from the screwball comedy: the couple’s adversarial positions are set up (Annie and Alvy clash in their outlooks on life) but in the screwball comedy, as Jeffers McDonald outlines, the game concludes with ‘a benevolent draw in which both parties are reconciled.’⁵¹ That being said, the conclusion to *Annie Hall* is not simply ‘unhappy’. Annie and Alvy are not together, but the conclusion is still romantic: Annie’s singing over the closing images

⁴⁸ Jeffers McDonald, p.59.

⁴⁹ Wes D. Gehring, *Screwball Comedy: A Genre of Madcap Romance* (London, UK: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy*, p. 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 23.

of a New York street, perfect in its uncharacteristic quietness, accompanies the camera as it waits for Annie to leave Alvy, perhaps for the last time. When the couple finally separate, they are not alone, but instead each carries the memories of their relationship into future loves and future failures.

Gehring and Jeffers McDonald note another aspect of the screwball comedy which is reflected in Allen's film, namely that of the unconventionality of the characters. Jeffers McDonald notes that the characters often act crazy or drunk, implying that love makes fools of everyone, certainly seen in Annie's nervous rambling after her tennis date with Alvy.⁵² Moreover, Gehring argues that the female character is generally 'pleasantly potty,' mirrored in Annie's 'la-di-da's, charming dizziness and meandering, laughter-filled anecdote about her dead relative.⁵³ According to Gehring, it is the focus of the screwball comedy to follow the woman's influence on the male character, who injects fun and joy into his life, shaking away the shackles of rigidity, conformity and most importantly, sexual frustration, something which is only hinted at under the restrictions of the Production Code.⁵⁴ The simultaneous influence and move away from the screwball comedy is seen in *Annie Hall's* lobster scene: Alvy is shown to be laughing and having fun with Annie, whose contagious laughter at least momentarily drags Alvy from his thoughts of death. But Alvy's fears, of course, still lurk in the scene, signalled by a pair of pincers and a pot of boiling water that will bring death to at least some beings in the scene.

Another progression from the screwball comedy is that Annie is also influenced by Alvy, and, ultimately, this transformation leads to the incompatibility of the couple that culminates in their separation. Unlike in the screwball comedy, in *Annie Hall*, the

⁵² Ibid, p. 23.

⁵³ Gehring, p. 41.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 44.

character's transformations are not enough to hold the pair together: in fact, they are what keep them apart. It is the rejection of the happy ending which sets *Annie Hall* apart from previous Hollywood romantic comedies. It is important to point out, however, as Jeffers McDonald highlights, the film is not the first to do this: *Harold and Maude* (dir. Hal Ashby, 1971) concludes with the death of Maude (Ruth Gordon) and in *The Graduate* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1967), even though the couple end the film together, the extended closing scene hints at uncertainty and trouble ahead for them.⁵⁵

For Jason Bailey, however, *Annie Hall* is the template for the modern romantic comedy, as many of the films that followed (for example the Meg Ryan vehicles *When Harry Met Sally...* (dir. Rob Reiner, 1989) *Sleepless in Seattle* (dir. Nora Ephron, 1993) and *You've Got Mail* (dir. Nora Ephron, 1998)) all showed a similar dedication to investigating the difficulties of modern relationships.⁵⁶ For Tom Shone, it is *Annie Hall's* style (influenced by cinematographer Gordan Willis) that is reflected in these subsequent romantic comedies, which showed a similar dedication to artistic form, and cast New York as the locus of these stories.⁵⁷ These films, however, neglect to reflect *Annie Hall's* greatest departure from the conventional romantic comedy, the unreconciled couple. Jeffers McDonald labels these films 'neo-traditional romantic comedies'.⁵⁸ Instead of continuing the radicalism of 1970s films like *Annie Hall*, they take the stylised appearance of them while returning to a more traditional ending that upholds the happy ending of the genre.⁵⁹

The inherent conservatism of the romantic comedy genre is underpinned by this continued focus on heterosexual relationships. As Jeffers McDonald notes, 'the

⁵⁵ Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Bailey, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Shone, *Woody Allen: A Retrospective*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy*, p. 85.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 85.

final convention of the romantic comedy genre to be disposed of is the gender of the protagonists’, and while there have been several independent films that have done so, a queer romantic comedy has not quite reached the mainstream.⁶⁰ In 2018 however, two romantic comedies did focus on queer stories as the central narrative, *Love, Simon* (dir. Greg Berlanti, 2018) and *Alex Strangelove* (dir. Craig Johnson, 2018). Both were released to commercial success. It is important to note, however, that both films were set in an American high school. Mainstream queer romantic comedies seem, at least for now, restricted to youngsters discovering their sexuality.

BEYOND *ANNIE HALL*: THE FILMS THAT FOLLOWED

Each chapter analyses a film that exemplifies a particular way of remembering *Annie Hall*. The first two chapters of this thesis focus on Allen’s cinema, tracing the influence of *Annie Hall* on Allen’s own oeuvre. Chapter Two mentions several of Allen’s films, but is focused on the influence of *Annie Hall* on two of his later romantic comedies, *Anything Else* (dir. Woody Allen, 2003) and *Whatever Works* (dir. Woody Allen, 2009). Made just under thirty years after *Annie Hall*, *Anything Else* stars Jason Biggs as Jerry, a writer reeling from his breakup with aspiring actress Amanda (Christina Ricci), and follows his attempts to make sense of the end of their relationship through his memories. The influence of *Annie Hall* on Allen’s own film is clear, emphasised by Allen’s presence in the film as Jerry’s friend Dobel (Woody Allen) who, like Jerry, exhibits many Alvy-like qualities. Jerry’s nervous, brittle and morose character is tested when Amanda’s eccentric stage performer mother, Paula (Stockard Channing), comes to stay with the couple. By the end of the film, Jerry is able to reflect upon these

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 80.

memories of his relationship with Amanda, learning that even though they remain separated (Amanda is now seeing her acting coach, mirroring Annie's implied relationship with her tutor), the memories of their happiness will always remain. The similarity to *Annie Hall*, therefore, is clear, but upon further analysis, the character of Amanda is revealed to be a hollow reflection: she is beautiful but vacuous, and Allen ridicules her throughout the film for her lack of education and love for pretty things. While Alvy teased Annie and encouraged her development, Allen was never this cruel to her. Instead, it is in the character of Paula that the character of Annie is recalled.

In *Whatever Works*, made only six years later, the character of Annie resurfaces in another mother figure. Retired and grumpy Boris (Larry David) enters into a relationship with the cheerful teenager Melodie (Evan Rachel Wood), teaching her about nihilistic philosophy and life in New York, all the while calling her stupid and an 'imbecile'. When Melodie's mother, Marietta (Patricia Clarkson), arrives to stay, however, Boris's life is disrupted. Marietta responds to being in New York by becoming a successful artist, and it is through Marietta that Annie's presence is felt, while Melodie is ridiculed and belittled. Both films are unambiguously influenced by *Annie Hall*, particularly in their plots. But upon further analysis, this influence is not straightforward. While objectified for their beauty, Amanda and Melodie are punished for not living up to Annie. For this reason, *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works* are also used to analyse Allen's representations of women. This will be contrasted with an analysis of Dia (Freida Pinto) in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (dir. Woody Allen, 2010), whose depiction as an orientalised Indian woman complicates the impression of Allen's portrayal of women in his oeuvre.

Chapter Three looks at the work of Lena Dunham, who I have chosen to focus on, in part, because she, like Allen, has experienced something of a fluctuating

reputation. At the start of her career, Dunham was hailed as a pioneer for new depictions of complicated, flawed women, but her depictions were only ever centred on white middle-class women. The privilege of her background and cultural capital has always been explicit in her works. Dunham's first feature film, *Tiny Furniture*, won Best Narrative Feature at the South by Southwest Music and Media Conference in 2010, and an Independent Spirit Award for Best First Screenplay. The film's success led to a deal with HBO, and the ground-breaking television series, *Girls* (HBO: 2012-2017) followed. Dunham's work clearly demonstrates Allen's influence, especially in her depiction of neurotic, Jewish protagonists living in New York and dealing with breakups. The protagonists, as in Allen's early and middle work, are played by Dunham.

In *Tiny Furniture*, Aura (Lena Dunham) returns to her family home in TriBeCa where her mother (Laurie Simmons) and sister Nadine (Cyrus Dunham) still live. Aura navigates the transition back to life in New York, while her neuroses make finding and keeping a job difficult. In *Girls*, Hannah (Lena Dunham), like Aura, is an aspiring writer, and many of the episodes explore the creative process for her, a process that is often blighted by her romantic and relationship trouble, as well as her own deteriorating mental health. Allen's impact on Dunham's work is obvious, but it is the complexity of her acknowledgement and disavowal of it that concerns me in this chapter.

Chapter Three analyses the way Allen depicts race in his films, using Dunham's feature film *Tiny Furniture* and television series *Girls* to highlight the whitewashing and the racist depiction of Black women in his cinema, in particular Cookie (Hazelle Goodman) in *Deconstructing Harry* (dir. Woody Allen, 1997). This is done through a utilisation of bell hooks' and Toni Morrison's work, especially the latter's assertion that

Black presences in American texts are often used to help serve the presentations of white characters. The motif of heavy items (books, beds and furniture) that are found in Dunham's work is deployed here in two ways: first to demonstrate Allen and Dunham's use of non-white characters to be picked up, moved and rearranged; and secondly, to symbolise the heaviness of Allen's influence, something that is a source of anxiety for Dunham and palpable in her work.

The fourth chapter focuses on Noah Baumbach and Greta Gerwig's film, *Frances Ha* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2012), while also touching on other works they have collaborated on and directed individually. In *Frances Ha*, Frances's (Greta Gerwig) and Sophie's (Mickey Sumner) friendship is put under strain when Sophie decides to move out of their shared New York flat. Frances's financial problems, failing career (she is a dance apprentice and perpetual understudy), and jealousy culminate in the end of their friendship. Frances is forced to make new friends and, no longer able to afford their flat, forced to move out herself. Her movements around the city in various shared flats mirror her rootless state without Sophie but are finally what enable her to come to the realisation that she is fine being by herself. Frances takes a new job, is able to afford her own flat, and choreographs her own show. Sophie attends the performance and the pair smile across the room to each other, mirroring Annie and Alvy's final meeting in *Annie Hall*. Little has changed in terms of their relationship, but both Frances and Sophie are content with their respective lives and in their own spaces. Baumbach's entire oeuvre shows Allen's influence, but I have singled out *Frances Ha* because of Gerwig's collaboration as writer. This thesis prioritises female filmmakers' responses to Allen's work, and so Gerwig's involvement marks not only a change in Baumbach's filmmaking, but also a change in how Allen's influence is figured in the film.

I demonstrate that *Frances Ha* repeats the whitewashing of New York, showing a resistance to moving on from Allen's oeuvre. At the same time it does reject the heteronormative thrust of *Annie Hall* by focusing on the breakup of a pair of female friends. This tension between mirroring Allen's oeuvre and moving away will be understood through dance scholarship, underpinned by Frances's career as a dancer. Dance theory often contradicts feminist film theory, and so this engagement with it necessarily illuminates the limitations of the framework, which is set up as a success or failure dichotomy. Through this analysis, an embrace of failure will be introduced via books like Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) and Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2-13), arguing for failure to be looked at as a creative process. In doing so, Frances's failure in heterosexual relationships and in her career is positioned as a leap forward in the film's distancing from Allen's oeuvre.

The final film analysed in this thesis is *Appropriate Behavior* which mirrors the narrative of *Annie Hall*, as Sirin works through her memories to make sense of her broken relationship with Maxine. Like Alvy who negotiates and grapples with his Jewish identity throughout *Annie Hall*, Sirin's Iranian heritage is similarly interwoven into her outlook on family, love and relationships. Unlike Allen's films, *Appropriate Behavior* is centred on a queer relationship. In the film, Sirin, like Alvy, filters through her memories of Maxine, finally coming to realise that their relationship, while ending, was worth the pain. The ending of the film again recalls *Annie Hall*, as Sirin and Maxine wordlessly wave at each other during a chance meeting at a railway station, itself a symbol of progression and movement. I have chosen *Appropriate Behavior* because it offers an example of what Allen's influence is now and might be in the future. While not a straight or indeed a straightforward romantic comedy, *Appropriate Behavior* nonetheless takes *Annie Hall* and shows its relevance for queer

stories, and stories of women of colour. Through this, *Appropriate Behavior* also shows which elements of *Annie Hall* and Allen's oeuvre more generally can be left behind, especially its prioritisation of white characters, and its dedication to heteronormativity.

I draw on Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) and Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) to show that Akhavan's film is just as influenced by its own queer focus as it is by *Annie Hall*. This, in turn, spotlights the queerness of *Annie Hall* itself. Here, I will analyse the drag-king potential of Alvy as a character by Halberstam's work on drag culture, in itself an engagement with time and memory. Here I offer an example of what Allen's influence, and the influence of *Annie Hall* in particular, might look like in a culture increasingly uncomfortable with Allen's work.

The characters in all these films are complex and offer different examples of female representation on film and television, challenging the dominant image of women in cinema. As Allen has become a symbol (perhaps surprisingly given his on screen embodiment of nervous masculinity) of the toxicity of male power in Hollywood, it may seem curious to trace the characters in these films to *Annie Hall*. But of course, Allen's reputation has fluctuated, and for many years and until quite recently he was hailed as a great writer and director of women. The films chosen for this thesis, therefore, show how the influence of *Annie Hall* does not have to be straightforward or uncomplicated for it to still be present. In fact, the more complicated, uncomfortable and awkward, the more it reflects the reality of handling Allen's influence, which is, now more than ever, underpinned by discomfort.

LA-DI-DA: INCOHERENCY AND MUMBLECORE

While each of these films have been chosen for their different manifestations of this influence, they also share commonalities. One way they could be grouped is with the term ‘mumblecore’ which some critics see as a genre. I agree with critics like Aymer Jean Christian who assert that it is more of a style or a movement.⁶¹ In 2014, Nessa Johnston defined mumblecore as ‘a cycle of independent, very low budget American movies that emerged in the middle of the 2000s’.⁶² The term ‘mumblecore’ apparently came from a joke made by a sound mixer, as the low budget, poor sound quality and the heavily improvised dialogue frustrated him.⁶³ These films are also described in terms of their ‘indieness’ due to their close association with independent American cinema and their success at festivals like SXSW.⁶⁴ It is not the focus of this thesis to make a case for mumblecore as a legitimate movement in American independent cinema. Instead, mumblecore is mentioned to highlight another rationale for the inclusion of these films, since mumblecore, whether a film genre or not, is clearly a movement which shows Allen’s influence.

Like Allen’s dialogue-focused films, mumblecore films generally feature middle-class, educated characters and their pursuit to overcome the struggle to communicate and forge meaningful relationships in modern society.⁶⁵ The film *LOL* (dir. Joe Swanberg, 2006), for example, examines the difficulty of creating and maintaining relationships online. These films focus on the same troubles of

⁶¹ Aymer Jean Christian, ‘Joe Swanberg, Intimacy, and the Digital Aesthetic,’ *Cinema Journal*, 50: 4 (Summer 2011) 117-135 (p. 119).

⁶² Nessa Johnston, ‘Theorizing “Bad” Sound: What Puts the “Mumble” into Mumblecore?’, *The Velvet Light Trap*, 74 (Fall 2014), 67-79 (p. 67).

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Johnston, p. 67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 68.

twenty/thirty-something life and prioritise naturalistic dialogue and realistic plots, as many have unhappy or at least ambiguous endings. While the dialogue may be mumbled, it is paradoxically eloquent. As Johnston argues: ‘the improvisatory “mumble” in mumblecore can be understood to represent a heartfelt mumble.’⁶⁶ They highlight the limitations of language to convey meaning, ill-equipped as it is for the complex work of forging meaningful relationships. Like Annie’s ‘la-di-da’s and hesitations, inarticulateness does not always mean incoherency: in fact, in these films it means the opposite.

The significance of mumblecore to my thesis also comes from the film’s complicated gender politics since most of mumblecore films are directed by men and have male leads. There are a few, however, that have a female protagonist, even though they are still directed by men, among them *Funny Ha Ha* (dir. Andrew Bujalski, 2002) and *Hannah Takes the Stairs* (dir. Joe Swanberg, 2007). These films often star Greta Gerwig. Allen’s influence on these films has been noted by critics, for example Christian, who states that these films ‘recall, in style and tone, serious and listless Woody Allen dramas with female protagonists’, citing films like *Interiors* and *September* (dir. Woody Allen, 1987) as examples.⁶⁷ Dunham, Gerwig and Akhavan’s work within the largely male-dominated mumblecore movement makes them all the more ostentatious and interesting in terms of their relationship with filmmaking.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 70.

⁶⁷ Christian, p. 120.

MESSY WOMEN, ALLEN AND INDEPENDENT FEMALE FILM

The films in the second part of this thesis have been selected for their shared centralisation of female characters. These films are also written and directed by women, with the exception of *Frances Ha* which, while co-written by a woman, is still nonetheless directed by a man. These films therefore belong to ‘US independent women’s cinema,’ defined by Veronica Pravadelli as a genre of the last twenty-five years that began with Nancy Savoca’s *True Love* (dir. Nancy Savoca, 1989). It is a ‘ramification of cinematic and social transformations producing a new configuration of the relation between female authorship and filmic form,’ driven by a ‘shared project of narrating the formations and metamorphosis of female subjectivity within the precincts of identity politics.’⁶⁸ The increase of female filmmakers and artists has led to more female-centred and female concerned narratives, which have in turn responded to the ever changing prominence of gender issues in American cinema and more widely.

To call these films, ‘feminist films’, however, will not be the aim of this thesis. Feminist elements are present in all the films, but the definition of ‘feminist’ is contentious and controversial in film. As B. Ruby Rich argues, the increased visibility of female filmmakers has led to their films being named, ‘feminist film,’ or ‘films by women.’⁶⁹ This is restrictive and reductive. Rich argues convincingly that both ‘are vague and problematic names: the one disregarded or even denied by certain women filmmakers and writers, the other descriptive or nothing but a sex-determined ghetto

⁶⁸ Veronica Pravadelli, ‘US Independent Women’s Cinema, Sundance Girls, and Identity Politics’, in *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, ed. by Laura Mulvey, and Anna Backman Rogers (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 149-160 (p. 160).

⁶⁹ B. Ruby Rich, ‘*The Curse of Naming in Feminist Film Criticism*’, in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Thornham (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 4-18 (p. 41).

of classification.⁷⁰ Instead, these films highlight this simplification, by allowing their female characters to express their feminism as ‘messy’, complicated and inconsistent.

These films feature female protagonists who are struggling with their relationships and their careers. They strive to assert their independence while simultaneously relying on their parents for rent. Like Annie, these characters navigate the challenges of single life while trying to realise their talents. These protagonists belong to a set of films, perhaps not quite a genre in themselves yet one that has been described by some as ‘messy women’ films.⁷¹ Sady Doyle meanwhile describes these films as belonging to the ‘Lady Loser Comedy’ genre, riffing off male-driven comedies like those of Judd Apatow that depict slovenly characters.⁷² In these films, women are allowed to be ‘losers’ like male characters, losers in their relationships and in their careers, and are not pressured to sacrifice their independence to end the film in a heterosexual relationship. The trope of the messy woman is found in films where the protagonist might be interested in sex but is uninterested in monogamy, lives in an untidy apartment, and doesn’t always wash her clothes. She is not an uncomplicated symbol of female solidarity either, sometimes expressing sisterhood and sometimes letting down other women. She is steadfast in nothing more than her inconsistency. The characters of Hannah in *Girls* and Aura in *Tiny Furniture* are examples of this trope; Hannah’s lack of personal hygiene is a frequent complaint of her friends. In *Frances Ha*, Sophie complains that Frances never cleans the dishes or makes her bed. She is certainly uninterested in conventional markers of female adulthood such as marriage and children. In *Appropriate Behavior*, Sirin’s messiness, like these other

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 41.

⁷¹ Hurst, N.P.

⁷² Sady Doyle, ‘Lady Loser Comedy,’ *Social Science Premium Collection*, 35: 12 (Dec 2011), 43, 27, 44 (p. 43).

women, is reflected in her disorganised apartment and tangled romantic and sexual relationships.

These films are generally made by women and favour female-led stories but are in direct contrast with the traditional ‘woman’s film’ of melodrama. As Barry Langford outlines, the genre of melodrama generally featured ‘a reductive and gross simplification of complex issues and emotions,’ where the protagonist is concerned with her love of her family, often to a sacrificial extent.⁷³ The often denounced genre, ridiculed for its ‘hysterical’, ‘unreflective’ or ‘irrational’ emotional centre, has been revisited and reassessed by many feminist film critics, among them Annette Kuhn.⁷⁴ The films explored here, however, cannot be described as melodramas. The female protagonists are often far from selfless. Indeed, they are instead entitled and often privileged in terms of race and class.⁷⁵ In comparing these films to *Annie Hall*, I hope to show how the struggle with *Annie Hall*’s influence results in exciting examples of how to handle the influence of men who have enjoyed the patronage and patriarchal advantages of American cinema. I will highlight, however, their residual conservatism. For example, while these films express new models of complicated, messy femininity and feminism, they are almost all concerned with white women.

⁷³ Barry Langford, *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: UK, Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 34.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷⁵ Ariana Romero, ‘Stop the Debate About TV’s Messy Women & Start the One About Who Gets to Play Them’, *Refinery 29*, 4 June 2020 <<https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2019/11/8770958/stop-the-debate-about-tvs-messy-women-start-the-one-about-who-gets-to-play-them>> [accessed 10 June 2020].

ANXIOUS INFLUENCE

Each chapter in this thesis sets out new ways to understand Allen's influence. That being said, Harold Bloom's controversial *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973) is important to note here as (despite his feminist detractors) it is still a seminal work on theories of influence. The poets that Bloom is concerned with are male poets, poets he describes as 'major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death.'⁷⁶ Bloom's theory is therefore underpinned by a masculine, violent energy, which does not mirror the focus on female characters, stories, filmmakers and writers that informs this thesis. However, Bloom's theory is useful in its introduction of the notion that influence is not straightforward or straightforwardly deferential: all of the artists in this thesis have a complicated relationship with Allen's oeuvre.

Bloom's theory is based on the notion that influence is fundamentally characterised by 'irresistible anxiety.'⁷⁷ He posits that (male) poets are locked in an Oedipal fight to the death with their poetic fathers.⁷⁸ It is a theory that draws on Freudian notions of repetition and repression, the compulsion to repeat being built in to the notion of influence.⁷⁹ As Bloom writes: these poets are locked in a battle, 'wrestling with their ghostly fathers.'⁸⁰ He accepts that his theory is a riff on Freud's uncanny, or *unheimlich*, where poets repeat elements of the former only to show the differences in their work.⁸¹ For Bloom, the theory does not focus so much on the

⁷⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, Second Edition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. xviii.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 80.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 88.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 76.

characters of this drama, but rather the sense of anxiety that permeates the relationship. As he writes: ‘influence-anxiety does not so much concern the forerunner but rather in an anxiety achieved in and by the story, novel, play, poem, or essay.’⁸² This anxiety is not something that destroys either the former or the latter work, but rather an opportunity for creative expression. While I do not use Bloom’s theory extensively to understand Allen’s influence, I do share its fundamental argument, that a complicated, even uncomfortable influence is not one that destroys the latter or former work but an opportunity for new and exciting creative expression.

Bloom’s theory of the paternalistic battle between the poet father and poet son has been, understandably, decried by feminist theorists, most notably by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar who ask: ‘Where, then, does the female poet fit in? Does she want to annihilate a “forefather” or a “foremother”? What if she can find no models, no precursors? Does she have a muse, and what is its sex?’⁸³ For Gilbert and Gubar, the overrepresentation of male poets in the Western canon is evidence of patriarchal systems that privilege male voices over female ones, a system that is, in turn, bolstered by Bloom’s theory of male poets locked in a fight with their male predecessors, honouring them in their struggle and only able to create a poetic space for themselves once their father has been fought.⁸⁴ If Bloom’s theory necessitates a fight to the death to determine one’s greatness as a poet, then female poets, Gilbert and Gubar argue, experience anxiety of influence much more strongly than men.⁸⁵ The woman is once again cast in the light of the Freudian ‘lack’. Female poets’ anxiety is not one of a

⁸² Ibid, p. xxiii.

⁸³ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London, UK: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 47.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 47.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 48.

struggle, but of absence of influence. Instead of an anxiety of influence then, Gilbert and Gubar posit the notion of the ‘anxiety of authorship’ for female poets, based on the fear that a female writer is unable to create without a precursor for her own writing.

Gilbert and Gubar encounter presentations of femininity that work *against* traditional depictions in Western canonical patriarchal literature.⁸⁶ They use Bloom’s theory to highlight how female expressions of influence are necessarily different due to the social background of literary history. Female writers necessarily have a different relationship to the canon, and therefore influence will work differently. In this thesis, a similar approach is taken. The films that have been made by those influenced by Allen are often reading *against* depictions of femininity in Allen’s work, whilst also exhibiting anxiety over his influence.

ALVY WATCHING ANNIE: ALLEN AND FEMINIST FILM THEORY

Feminist film theory is the main methodological approach employed in this thesis. I use the theory firstly to analyse the way that Allen positions Annie as a character that is revisited in some of his subsequent films. As E. Ann Kaplan outlines, ‘men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and possession which is lacking in the female gaze’ and that the fetishization of women, which is based on repetition, is designed to annihilate the threat that woman (as castrated and possessing a sinister genital organ) poses.’⁸⁷ Feminist film theory offers a way of understanding this repetition. I argue that the loss of Annie in Allen’s post-*Annie Hall* films is addressed by fetishization and repetition. In Chapter Two, I use feminist film

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 50.

⁸⁷ Kaplan, p. 30.

theory, particularly Kaplan's work on motherhood, to show how the younger female characters are cast in a scopophilic gaze to both eradicate the threat that the absence of Annie symbolises and to punish them for not living up to their cinematic forebear. This mirrors the argument of feminist film theory that showing the manipulation of the female image by the masculine look positions the man as the controller of the gaze. Feminist film theory therefore highlights that *Annie Hall* is always from Alvy's point of view and the Annie we see is the Annie of his memories.

The feminist film theory I draw on here is indebted to the work of Claire Johnston who drew on Lacanian psychoanalysis. She looked at the way films organise meaning around the female figure, and called for an alternative cinema that would disrupt it.⁸⁸ By 1975, Laura Mulvey's seminal theory of the male gaze was introduced, which drew on the notion of the female 'lack' that was created by the male fear of castration. Her argument posited that the male gaze relied upon scopophilia and fetishization to address this lack, leading to the depiction of women in cinema as passive objects. Feminist film theory during this period also provides the intellectual and cultural context of *Annie Hall*. Mulvey's gaze theory, as well as the work of Brandon French, Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen, exists in the same period as Allen's film. In the 1980s, critics, including those like Mulvey who had been responsible for the popularity and ubiquity of theories of the male gaze based on the female protagonist's objectification, highlighted the limitations of feminist film theory that privileged the vantage point of white women, with the work of Jane Gaines, bell hooks and Tania Modleski calling for revised theories to address and correct these

⁸⁸ Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Thornham (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 31-39 (p. 32).

inequalities.⁸⁹ Monique Wittig and Gaines objected to the essentialism of Mulvey's theory which set up a binary of male subjectivity and passive female objectivity, ignoring the desires of lesbians and queer characters and spectators.⁹⁰ This revision of earlier feminist work was continued in Judith Butler's work during the 1990s, which analysed the performance of gender in more detail.

Feminist film theory also ignores examples of spectatorship that lie outside the prevailing white female positionality. In Chapters Two and Three, hooks's more complex response to Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is used to unpack the way that Allen depicts non-white female bodies, specifically the character of Dia in *You Will Meet a Tall White Stranger* and Cookie in *Deconstructing Harry*. While non-white characters are few and far between in Allen's work, their depiction is startling in their contrast to Annie, a character that is, I argue, glorified for her whiteness. This celebration of whiteness is repeated in the works of Dunham, Gerwig and Baumbach as explored in the third and fourth chapters, and rejected in Issa Rae's *Insecure*, a television series influenced by Allen's cinema which embraces Black female subjectivity.

Allen has been criticised by feminist film theorists for his depiction of women. Beatriz Oria Gómez asserts that Allen's complicated and complex female characters conceal a punishing conservatism regarding traditional gender roles. She focuses on how in *Another Woman* Marion's rejection of a motherly role is punished by a sense of guilt that doesn't leave her.⁹¹ Equally, hooks addresses Allen's depiction of Black

⁸⁹ Jane Gaines, 'White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory', in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Thornham (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 293-306 (p. 293).

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 294.

⁹¹ Beatriz Oria Gómez, 'Genre and Ideology in Woody Allen's *Another Woman*', *Revista Alicantina del Estudios Ingleses*, 20 (2007), 167-183 (p. 167).

female characters, singling out the maid character in the 1920s black and white film shown in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.⁹² She notes that Allen tends to give ‘witty versions of old racist stereotypes when representing black womanhood’ but is never concerned with nuanced depictions of Black women.⁹³ That is not to say that all feminist film critics and theorists feel this way. There are many that have published sympathetic analyses of Allen’s work. Despite the fact that the majority of Allen scholarship is dominated by men (there are very few single-authored books by women, for example those written by Nancy Pogel, Jill Franks, Mary Nichols and Annette Wernblad), feminist theorists like Joanna Rapf, Renée R. Curry, Katherine Fusco and Diane Snow have all written complementary pieces about Allen’s work.⁹⁴ Feminist film theorist Jill Franks comments upon Allen’s interest in female perspectives noting that when Allen does privilege the male viewpoint he addresses the female’s role with equal importance.⁹⁵ For Molly Haskell, Allen’s forty-ish-year-old female characters (characters played by Dianne Weiss, Barbara Hershey and Mia Farrow) are celebrated for their ‘richly dimensional natures’ and are ‘symbols of defiance’, resistant of the ‘perfect mother’ or ‘superwoman’ trope that came before them.⁹⁶ Despite all this, Haskell tempers her celebration of Allen with her detection of ‘sexual narcissism’ in his depictions of these women. She argues that there is the sense that these ‘are *his* women, his disciples, and without his sponsorship, where would they be? They’d have fallen through the cracks in a film industry dominated by men.’⁹⁷ Feminist film

⁹² bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies* (London, UK: Routledge, 1996), p. 124.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁹⁴ Franks, p. 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies: Second Edition* (London, UK: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 400.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 401.

theory's love/hate relationship with Allen's work seems to have stabilised into a mainly negative one. This is very unlikely to change now.

Feminist film theory remains a crucial tool in understanding Allen's cinema, however much the current reassessment of Allen's work is, particularly for feminist film theorists like myself, characterised by guilt, shame and discomfort. As Annette Kuhn notes of feminist film theory:

feminists may feel secretly guilty about their enjoyment of images they are convinced ought to be rejected as politically unsound. In analysing such images, though, it is possible, indeed necessary, to acknowledge their pleasurable qualities, precisely because pleasure is an area of analysis in its own right.⁹⁸

The way that the subsequent filmmakers in this thesis have figured pleasure, guilt, discomfort and distrust of Allen's work is illuminating and, when framed via feminist film theory, can offer insight into how one might begin to respond to the work of filmmakers that have become charged with discomfort in a post-Me Too Hollywood. To understand our discomfort, we must first understand the images. This thesis therefore focuses on the depiction of women, crucially including queer women and women of colour, to understand Allen's images, particularly their implications for contemporary images of femininity. As Kuhn argues: 'perhaps there is another justification for a feminist analysis of mainstream images of women: may it not teach us to recognise inconsistencies and contradictions within dominant representation, to identify points of leverage for our own intervention: cracks and fissures through which may be captured glimpses of what might in other circumstances be possible?'⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London, UK: Routledge, 1987), p. 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 10.

LOCATING QUEERNESS IN *ANNIE HALL*

Alongside feminist film theory, queer theory is central to my argument, especially in the final two chapters. Annamarie Jagose defines queer theory as ‘those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire.’¹⁰⁰ Queer theory as an analytical framework disrupts given ‘truths’ of gender and sexuality whilst also expressing what it means for a subject to live outside of the conventions of heterosexuality.¹⁰¹ The framework therefore exists in two iterations: as an expression of life as a queer subject, and as a way of viewing life in a deliberately askew way that changes the perception of the heteronormativity of life.¹⁰²

While queer theory was built on many of the foundations of feminist theory, its genesis has often been linked with the specific critical work of poet Adrienne Rich, particularly her article ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’ (1980) which sought to disassociate heteronormativity by highlighting the truth of lesbianism.¹⁰³ During the mid to late 1980s, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work also began to dismantle heterosexuality as a norm, identifying queer desire in Western culture, particularly in her seminal book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985).¹⁰⁴ The 1990s saw work from Judith Butler make unparalleled contributions to the field, in particular *Gender Trouble* (1990) which sought to extrapolate the inherent performance of gender in culture and society. In the

¹⁰⁰ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1996), p. 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁰² Robert Leckey and Kim Brooks, ‘Introduction’, in *Queer Theory: Law, Culture, Empire*, ed. by Robert Leckey and Kim Brooks (London, UK: Routledge, 2010) 1-18 (p. 2).

¹⁰³ Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality’, *Signs*, 5: 4 (July 1980), 631-60 (p. 631).

¹⁰⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 2.

early 2000s, Lee Edelman looked not back but forward in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). His influence is felt in Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, and Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009), both of which inspire the fifth chapter of this thesis and its dismantling of the way time works in Akhavan's *Appropriate Behavior*. Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, which queers heteronormativity and capitalism by exploring popular cultural texts, for example Pixar films, shows the capacity of queerness to hide in plain sight, existing in texts that one might never have considered queer. This thesis also draws upon the work of another contemporary queer theorist, Sara Ahmed, who works from a postcolonial perspective, particularly in her books *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) and *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*.

The strength of queer theory as an analytic framework is paradoxically its weakness. The theory's expansive subject matter means that it can feasibly encapsulate analysis that reads against any traditional and conventional ways of living and creating knowledge. This engenders an exciting permissibility, but also a difficulty in grappling with its blurry boundaries. It can be seen as both thrillingly broad and frustratingly woolly. As Robert Leckey and Kim Brooks assert: 'If it has a core, queer theory is about resisting categorization, for itself and for its subjects.'¹⁰⁵ Because of this, queer theory has, for some, not fulfilled its potential for radical change. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker note the impact of queer theory but also argue that it is in decline, suggesting that authors are now writing in a time 'after' queer theory.¹⁰⁶ Their argument is, in

¹⁰⁵ Leckey and Brooks, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory* (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 2.

part, rooted in the notion that the actual queerness of queer theory has been erased through the proliferation of the framework.¹⁰⁷

It is important to note that this argument could easily be levelled at my own thesis. While the final chapter looks at a queer relationship in *Appropriate Behavior* and there is certainly an ambiguously queer relationship in *Frances Ha*, Allen could never be described as a queer filmmaker. Allen's films rarely focus on queer relationships, with the most obvious exception being *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (dir. Woody Allen, 2008), a film that depicts a polyamorous, throuple relationship but through a titillating lens. Allen's films are not interested in nuanced depictions of queer relationships. By drawing on Halberstam's work, however, I analyse the queerness of Allen's texts that may not be initially apparent. By analysing the queerness of films like *Appropriate Behavior*, a hidden queerness in *Annie Hall* can be discerned. Annie, like the women in films by Dunham, Gerwig, Baumbach and Akhavan, is largely uninterested in traditional markers of heterosexuality, especially in procreation. Annie and Alvy do not have a conventional happy ending either, a method used by romantic comedy to cement and emphasise the conventionality of heterosexuality.¹⁰⁸ But I argue that in discerning these queer moments in Allen's cinema, our understanding of his influence becomes less burdensome and restrictive for contemporary American filmmakers who wish to explore these narratives.

Queer theory therefore offers a lens through which to understand other ways in which Allen's films break away from conventionality. In addition to this, queer theory also pushes me to read against the binary of feminist film theory, the main methodological framework of this thesis. I am inspired by the spirit of Halberstam's

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2010) p. 93.

The Queer Art of Failure, and their argument that, ‘failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing’ actually ‘allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development.’¹⁰⁹

Dance scholarship has a complicated relationship with Mulvey’s gaze theory too, particularly the binaries of male/female and subject/object. In the 1890s, dance was associated with the sexualised female dancing body, especially those of working class and raced people, but by the 1920s, some dance forms were accepted as artistic forms of expression.¹¹⁰ As middle and upper-class women began to dance publicly, the artistic legitimacy of dancing was encouraged but the objectification of these bodies wasn’t entirely eradicated, especially for non-white women.¹¹¹ Sally Banes writes that: ‘the distinction between looking and doing disappears into the choreography,’ as ‘the distinction between *doing* versus *being looked at* is a category error, since with dance *doing* and *being the object of the gaze* are not opposites.’¹¹² Dance theory allows a way to critique feminist film theory from within the theory itself. Ann Daly argues that dance bumps up against feminist criticism, and leads to a critique of ‘the “success-or-failure” brand of feminist criticism’.¹¹³

This embrace of failure is explored by queer and disability scholar Alison Kafer in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), who recalibrates failure as a positive and democratic phenomenon and process of creativity: everyone can and does fail, including all races, genders, sexualities and both disabled and able-bodied people. Dance theory shows

¹⁰⁹ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2011) p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Amy Koritz, *Gendering Bodies/Performing Art: Dance and Literature in Early-Twentieth-Century Culture* (Michigan, USA: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹¹² Sally Banes, *Before, Between, and Beyond: Three Decades of Dance Writing* (Wisconsin, UK: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007) 325-343 (p. 327).

¹¹³ Ann Daly, ‘Trends in Dance Scholarship: Feminist Theory Across the Millennial Divide,’ *Dance Research Journal*, 32: 1 (Summer 2000), 9-42 (p. 39).

that there is room outside of the essentialist binary of feminist film theory, in the same way that Allen's cinema might not need to be closed to feminists. Equally, failure can be questioned and reassessed here, offering a less rigid and penal option to feminist film studies.

Failure and its place in feminist film theory is particularly prescient for those that continue to engage with Allen in a post-Me Too culture, who are going to come up against failure and rejection when looking at Allen, his work, his influence and what is to be done with his legacy now. Feminist film theory on its own may not be equipped for the task. As Ann Daly writes of feminist film theory: 'If you buy into the male gaze theory, which posits that everything is constructed from a male point of view, and you also believe that we are all constructed within culture, there's nowhere to go.'¹¹⁴ Dance theory therefore offers a new way into feminist film theory, and into Allen's cinema, and is a methodology that this thesis intends to offer as an option for the future. By encountering Allen in the spirit of queer theory and dance scholarship, one can be appreciative of failure, copy some elements of his work, but also set off on one's own direction.

AN ISLAND UNTO HIMSELF: ALLEN AND AUTEURISM

Most critics write about Allen's films using auteur theory, with Sander H. Lee arguing that 'Allen is one of the clearest examples of an American film auteur in this century.'¹¹⁵ Auteurism, first introduced into Anglo-American film criticism by Andrew Sarris, is built on the assumption that 'a film, though produced collectively, it most likely to be

¹¹⁴ Ann Daly, *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture* (Connecticut, UK: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 320.

¹¹⁵ Lee, p. 8.

valuable when it is essentially the product of its director', and that the director's 'personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director's films.'¹¹⁶ Auteurism centralises the director despite the contribution of other artists. It assumes that the director's personality, themes and artistry can be seen as a consistent presence throughout their films, or their *oeuvre*, and that a film is more likely to be valuable when created with the consistency of this singular vision.¹¹⁷ According to Renée R. Curry, during the seventies, Allen's critics began to examine his films in terms of his 'total artistry' so that by the eighties he was considered an auteur and as an authority on the American character, Jewish identity, and religion.¹¹⁸ This is despite hugely influential collaborations, for example cinematographer Gordon Willis, screenwriter Marshall Brickman and actors Diane Keaton and Mia Farrow. I will show that Allen's position as an auteur has created a blueprint for the kind of intellectual, New York-based filmmakers that Akhavan, Dunham and Gerwig have subsequently been described as. In this thesis, auteur theory is therefore used as a means through which to trace Allen's influence, even on much smaller oeuvres like Akhavan's.

Pauline Kael, however, is a notable critic of auteurism and argues that filmmakers frequently reuse themes, devices, and techniques that reappear in their work, and that auteur theory is not needed to discern these recurrences.¹¹⁹ Kael also asserts that, rather than a marker of greatness, this repetition is usually uninteresting, as the filmmaker 'falls back on the devices he has already done to death.'¹²⁰ Kael's complaints marked the beginning of an anti-auteurism backlash. Though the seventies

¹¹⁶ John Caughie, 'Introduction', in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. by John Caughie (London, UK: Routledge, 1981) 9-17, (p. 9).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9

¹¹⁸ Renée R. Curry, 'Woody Allen: The Artist as Worker', in *Perspectives on Woody Allen*, ed. by Renée R. Curry (Michigan, USA: G. K. Hall, 1996), 3-18 (p. 6).

¹¹⁹ Pauline Kael, 'Circles and Squares', *Film Quarterly*, 16: 3 (Spring 1963), 12-26 (p. 13).

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 15.

other movements such as poststructuralism, Lacanian studies and, most importantly for this thesis, feminist film theory, started to push auteurism aside.¹²¹ Given that auteurism focused on the filmmaker who was nearly always male, it is not surprising that it has little to offer feminist film theory. As Maggie Humm asserts: ‘it is hardly surprising that the auteur ceased to be a central issue in film theory just at the moment of the burgeoning of feminist literary criticism in the 1970s.’¹²² Some feminist film theorists were able to find expressions of female sexuality and desire within auteurism by reading against canonical film, as Tania Modleski did with Alfred Hitchcock’s oeuvre.¹²³

Auteurism frequently underpins Allen criticism. Sander H. Lee defends his use of auteurism in understanding Allen’s cinema, rejecting ‘any views which deterministically attempt to separate the creative activities of the artist from the ultimate meaning of his or her work,’ arguing that ‘it is clear in all these films that the hand of Allen has been the determining factor of their overall worth.’¹²⁴ Meanwhile, Lloyd Michaels simultaneously acknowledges the crucial involvement of other artists (in this case Ralph Rosenblum as editor) while asserting that Allen is an ‘auteur by virtue of his contract as well as his celebrity as a screenwriter and star.’¹²⁵ Auteurism is still the way Allen’s films are considered by critics despite the acceptance that Allen’s films have been influenced by others well beyond the director. Allen is still centralised and his films orbit around him. In many ways, this thesis is about the burden of auteurship, and how Allen’s biographical scandals have impacted upon the way his films have been viewed. Auteurism is also the reason Allen’s films are now being re-

¹²¹ Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press) p. 97.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 97.

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 98.

¹²⁴ Lee, p. 8.

¹²⁵ Michaels, p. 29.

evaluated, reassessed and reconfigured in American cinema history, as Allen's films have so far been inseparable from him. I am therefore necessarily engaging with auteur theory from the outset of this thesis. I am not, however, using auteurism to discern Allen's personality in these films, as I do not want to fall into the trap of making connections between his films and biography.

ALLEN AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: A LOVE STORY

Many of Allen's films feature psychoanalysis, his characters often attending therapy sessions. His depictions of relationships, memory, love and neuroses are nearly always informed by Freud's theories. In *Annie Hall* alone, we see Annie and Alvy attend analysis sessions and Alvy attempt to understand a current trauma through memory. Allen even opens the film with a joke he attributes to Freud. Alain J.-J Cohen focuses on this relationship, arguing that 'Allen's remarkable contribution to psychoanalysis is to have illuminated psychoanalytic questions through filmic form, and we may add chiasmatically, to have infused film form with psychoanalytically distinct material.'¹²⁶ In my analysis of *Annie Hall* I use Freud's *On Mourning and Melancholia* (1918) to unpack the way Allen depicts Alvy's memory as foundational to the film. As Freud posits, mourning and melancholia occur after the loss of a loved one.¹²⁷ Alvy's loss of Annie is set up as the motivating act of the film as he tries to make himself feel better and less melancholic through a successful mourning process that looks to memory for

¹²⁶ Alain J. -J. Cohen, 'Woody Allen and Freud', in *Celluloid Couches, Cinematic Clients: Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in the Movies*, ed. by Jerrold R. Brandell (New York, USA: State University of New York Press, 2004) 127-146 (128).

¹²⁷ Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London, UK: Penguin Modern Classics, 2005), p. 204.

the cure. Loss is also the galvanising theme of this thesis, as each of the films analysed in these chapters aims to handle the memory of *Annie Hall*.

In the first chapter psychoanalysis allows me to set up the way memory will be understood in the rest of the thesis. While Allen's work has often been analysed through the lens of psychoanalysis, it has not yet been used to think about Allen's influence on other filmmakers. Psychoanalysis, like influence, is about repetition. As psychoanalyst and writer Adam Phillips argues: 'Repetition is reassuring because it implies that there is a recognizable something—a pattern or relationship, a scenario, an impulse, a recognition, our competence at distinguishing the familiar from the unfamiliar.'¹²⁸ The absence of *Annie Hall* then leads to a compulsion to repeat, which I argue is made all the more striking due to the discomfort of Allen's biographical scandals which makes this repetition uncomfortable for some. Remembering in this case is complicated by elements of fear, disgust, shame and taboo, and is far from straightforward.

It is important to note that my use of Freud and psychoanalysis is not an implicit corroboration or co-signing of all the theories of Freud. The erasure of female experiences in Freud's work troubles me as it does other feminist film theorists. Moreover, my use of psychoanalysis should not imply that I believe Freud's notions to be literal truths. Like feminist film theorist E. Ann Kaplan, I draw on how psychoanalysis reveals 'a surprising recurrence of Oedipal themes' in Western art and literature¹²⁹ Psychoanalysis is a story that helps understand other stories. In the same

¹²⁸ Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts* (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press) p. 58.

¹²⁹ E. Ann Kaplan, *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York, USA: Methuen, Inc., 1983), p. 24.

way, I think that psychoanalysis is a helpful option to understand the way meaning is created in Allen's cinema, especially as Allen is so invested in Freud's theories.

A REAL JEW: ALLEN, WHITENESS AND BLACK FEMINIST THEORY

Due to the construction of whiteness as largely invisible in film, Allen's films have never been positioned as 'about race.' They are often spoken of as being about Jewishness, with his protagonists frequently struggling with their religious identity. For example one can easily interpret the story of nervous assimilation in *Zelig* (dir. Woody Allen, 1983) as a metaphor for Jewish assimilation into mainstream American society and culture. In *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (dir. Woody Allen, 1989), Judah (Martin Landau) must reconcile his guilt with the teachings of Judaism. Jewish people, like Italian Americans, are generally seen as white in the USA, but this has not always been the case, with Jews only legally given this status in 1790 with the Naturalization Act.¹³⁰ Whiteness is a theory and a concept which Critical Whiteness Studies seeks to unpack. Whiteness is addressed 'explicitly as a racial code and indirectly as an implicit discourse that fractures the representations and stories of other colours.'¹³¹ Depictions of whiteness are therefore made visible by exaggerated, stereotypical presentations of other races.¹³² The invisibility of whiteness as a race and the fact that Allen's films are largely populated by white people, has meant that the racial focus of his films have largely been ignored. But, of course, Allen's films are about race in that they are about whiteness. Little has been written about Allen in terms of whiteness, focusing instead

¹³⁰ Daniel Bernardi, 'Introduction: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema,' in *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. by Daniel Bernardi (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008) xv-xxvi (p. xvii).

¹³¹ Ibid, p. xv.

¹³² Ibid, p. xv.

on his depictions of Jewishness and Judaism. Even less has been written about Allen's depictions of non-white people.

The incorrect assumption that Allen's films are not about race is addressed explicitly in the third and fourth chapter of this thesis. I examine his depiction of non-white characters, particularly women, and show how these have influenced the way subsequent filmmakers influenced by Allen, particularly Dunham, have presented Black women. These depictions are refracted through the lens of whiteness and are stereotypical and dangerous. As Keith M. Harris notes, mainstream images of Blackness in American cinema 'are the traditional encodings informed by popular discourse of race and gender, reflecting and sustaining popular convictions about blackness as deviancy is the encoding, the way of seeing whiteness as the social and sexual norm, as reason and rationality, as civility and tradition.'¹³³ Allen's depiction of blackness is no different, as he draws on the same racist stereotypes that have plagued Hollywood cinema for decades. Allen uses aggressive stereotypes about women of colour, as hypersexualised or pliant, and uses them to make his white characters appear as the 'norm' in contrast with the racialised 'other.'

In these examinations, I use Black feminist theory, particularly the work of Toni Morrison and bell hooks to unpack the invisibility of whiteness in Allen and Dunham's films. In particular I employ Morrison's theory of 'The serviceability of the Africanist presence,' that is outlined in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992).¹³⁴ Morrison's book analyses the extent to which white authors throughout American history have used Black characters to help define their own

¹³³ Keith M. Harris, 'Boyz, Boyz, Boyz: New Black Cinema and Black Masculinity,' in *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. by Daniel Bernardi (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008) 51-66 (p. 51).

¹³⁴ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Massachusetts, USA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 72.

identity. Blackness makes evident the essential invisibility of whiteness in both American literature and American scholarship.¹³⁵ Morrison's theory helps me to identify the whiteness in Allen's films and to trace it in his influence on other filmmakers. I follow hooks's calls for an examination of images in mainstream media that 'support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people.'¹³⁶ I believe that Allen's films must be analysed further in this direction. My own analysis can only be a starting point. My focus on Black feminist film theory and analysis of Black female characters in Allen's work is unique, and I believe, important work, especially as Allen's depictions have huge ramifications for American contemporary cinema as this thesis will show. This is particularly important now, while we are in the process of reassessing and redefining our relationship with Allen's films. It is crucial for those of us still engaging with Allen to do this work, as more and more critics decide to leave him and his oeuvre behind.

RE-ASSESSING *ANNIE HALL*

While Allen's influence is invoked in analyses of specific texts, for example Tamar Jeffers McDonald's book-length study of *When Harry Met Sally* (2015), to date there has been no comprehensive study of Allen and his influence.¹³⁷ This work is of crucial importance as the future of Allen's legacy is more uncertain than ever. The relentless resurfacing of Allen's biographical scandals means that many have decided to abandon Allen scholarship and his work altogether. For those who decide to do so, there must

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 72.

¹³⁶ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York, USA: Routledge, 2015), p. 2.

¹³⁷ Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *When Harry Met Sally (BFI Film Classics)* (London, UK: Palgrave, 2015), p. 21.

be an acknowledgement of Allen's considerable influence and with this a realisation that many of Allen's ideas about cinema remain significant to cinema history.

This thesis addresses boldly *and* with discomfort the affective reality of thinking and writing about Allen's work in the wake of the accusations and revelations about his private life that have to a greater or lesser extent dominated conversations about his work since the early 1990s. As I have highlighted in this introduction, most Allen critics writing after the release of *Husbands and Wives* (dir. Woody Allen, 1992) dealt with this awkwardness by arguing for the separation of the artist from the art, or at least some iteration of this idea. Others distance themselves from the squeamish work of engaging with an artist who has been repeatedly accused of child sexual molestation by ignoring the allegations altogether. In my opinion, the discomfort cannot and should not be ignored; it is a reality of our experience of engaging with Allen's work. It is one of the emotions that will be involved in further scholarship on Allen and to ignore it would both eradicate the voice of a victim and essentially lie about the reality of Allen's position in contemporary society. In light of this, I seek to spotlight this discomfort to show how filmmakers have handled it and created genuinely exciting work in the process, work that takes Allen's films in more diverse directions.

This thesis also brings new analyses to Allen criticism and to *Annie Hall* in particular. While Allen's films are often analysed in connection to their expression of Jewishness (for example *Woody on Rye: Jewishness in the Films and Plays of Woody Allen* (2013)), there has been little analysis of the whiteness of Allen's cinema. There has been no comprehensive analysis, however, of the depiction of non-white characters in Allen's cinema, something which I focus on specifically in the second and third chapters of this thesis. In fact, the diverse identities that I look at in this thesis

(queer, disabled and raced perspectives) show the surprising breadth of perspectives that Allen's work has inspired.

CHAPTER ONE

LOBSTERS AND SPIDERS: MISREMEMBERING *ANNIE HALL*

Even though he begins *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977) with a joke, Alvy Singer (Woody Allen) is not laughing. He is plagued by nostalgia (derived from the Greek word, *nostos*, meaning ‘return home’, and *algia*, meaning pain) after his breakup with Annie (Diane Keaton).¹ This psychological homesickness and yearning for the idealised past means that progression forward is not yet possible. The camera’s close-up reflects Alvy’s stagnation as he confesses to an unknown listener (possibly a stand-up comedy audience, a therapist, or the film viewer) that he has been sifting through the pieces of his relationship with Annie, filtering through the moments to see ‘where the screw up came’. *Annie Hall* is made up of these memories and Alvy is therefore the architect of the film’s narrative. By working through his memories, Alvy nostalgically misremembers Annie, and it is through this process that he comes to some understanding and successfully makes the past safe for the present. It is through the depiction of this process that Allen creates a very different kind of romantic comedy.

Romantic comedy as a genre focuses on the story of two people falling in and out and normally back in love again. The two people are almost always white and heterosexual in mainstream romantic comedies. The basic ideology of the genre is the importance of the couple.² This chapter makes the case for *Annie Hall* as a deviation from the traditional romantic comedy. Tamar Jeffers McDonald also highlights *Annie Hall* as an example of a ‘radical romantic comedy’ in its rejection of characteristics that seemingly underpin the genre, the most fundamental of which is the conventional

¹ Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Lewisberg, USA: Bucknell University Press, 2005), p. 21.

² Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (London, UK: Wallflower, 2007), p. 13.

‘happy ending’ where the couple are reconciled in romantic union.³ Claire Mortimer notes that the genre has developed a spatial iconography like many other genre films, with the romantic comedy tending to feature ‘urban settings, domestic spaces, often desirable apartments, restaurants and other social spaces’.⁴ Certainly this is the case for *Annie Hall*, but instead of analysing the urban architecture of the film, I am going to analyse some of the non-human animals that inhabit these spaces, in particular lobsters and spiders, two beings that do not initially conjure images of the traditional romantic comedy. In this chapter, I will also explore how memory works in *Annie Hall*, particularly how the film’s depiction of lobsters and spiders show Alvy’s misremembering of Annie and his difficulty in forgetting her. In short, this chapter will ask why it is so hard for Alvy to let Annie go.

Perhaps surprisingly, Allen’s career has had a close relationship with animals. In his work, animals offer Allen a way to express fear and explore sexuality, memory and absurdity. The moose anecdote in his stand-up routine in 1965 was used to effectively mock the absurdity of antisemitism, as the Jewish married moose costume-wearing Berkowitzs of his joke are mistakenly shot, stuffed and mounted on the wall of a golf club. The punchline is that the golf club didn’t allow Jews, so the joke was on them. Equally absurd is Allen’s kangaroo boxing sketch from 1966 which drew on the cinematic depiction of kangaroos and boxing. In the wild, the animals adopt a similar stance as a boxer, but the cultural association of boxing and kangaroos can be largely attributed to cinema, particularly Disney’s short film *Mickey’s Kangaroo* (dir. Dave Hand, 1935). The humour of the sketch comes from the slight figure of Allen (whose comedy is often generated from his puncture of traditional masculinity) facing these

³ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴ Claire Mortimer, *Romantic Comedy* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2010), p. 9.

unusual creatures in a decidedly odd fight. When viewing the scene now, however, the upsetting exploitation of the kangaroo does not seem so funny. Allen's aim of making fun of machismo is accidentally destabilised when, instead, it is Allen that chases a terrified kangaroo around the ring.

Upon further inspection, it becomes clear that Allen's use of animals and animal images permeates his films. The character Doctor Ross (Gene Wilder) experiences erotic love for Daisy the sheep in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* But Were Afraid to Ask* (dir. Woody Allen, 1972). A giant, chemically manipulated chicken appears in *Sleeper* (dir. Woody Allen, 1973) along with a robot dog. In *Another Woman* (dir. Woody Allen, 1988), Marion (Gena Rowlands) remembers her work on Rilke's poem *Der Panther* and of seeing a panther at the zoo, an image that apparently haunts her. In *Annie Hall* alone, Alvy questions a police horse about relationships, tells a joke about a man who thinks he is a chicken, and likens a failing romance to a dead shark. While animals in are not the first things to come to mind when thinking of Allen's work, they are a persistent presence in his films nonetheless.

In one of *Annie Hall's* most iconic scenes, Alvy and Annie move around the kitchen trying to capture the liberated lobsters to cook. The scene devolves into hysteria, as both characters are overcome with laughter. The camera dips to avoid the handle of an ornamental oar Alvy waves around (a nautical artefact in keeping with their choice for dinner), while narrowly missing the swinging lamp that he collides with. Keaton delivers her lines while often breaking into laughter, the tone of her words and her delivery of them mismatched. In one moment, she angrily says 'For God's sake Alvy, they're only babies!' before convulsing with laughter. This heightens the awareness of the camera in the scene, reminding the audience that this scene is not real, a fabrication for the purposes of the film. In fact, this was the first scene shot on

the film and despite redoing the scene seven— or eight—times Allen decided that the version in which the pair made each other laugh would be the one in the final cut of the film.⁵ Such is the vibrancy and joy of the scene. The memory of this lobster scene is remembered at least five times in the film: firstly, the memory itself; second, during the replaying of the memory, where Alvy remembers Annie asking Alvy to repeat holding a lobster so she can take a photograph; thirdly, the physical photograph in Annie's apartment; fourthly, during Alvy's date where he attempts to re-enact the moment; and finally in the concluding montage scene. The emphasised artificiality of the scene and its repetition contribute to the film's presentation of memory as inherently fabricated, the clear implication being that the Annie in *Annie Hall* is constructed out of Alvy's memories.

The return to this scene also reveals Alvy's mourning process and the mourning work that will eventually led to him finally leaving Annie behind. In Sigmund Freud's *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud defines mourning as 'the reaction to the loss of a beloved person'.⁶ Melancholia, on the other hand, is 'a profoundly painful depression' characterized by 'a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love ... a reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults'.⁷ This is reflected in Alvy's one-shot at the start of the film where he is boxed inside the frame alone. It is also emphasised in his 'essential joke': 'I could never belong to any club that would have someone like me for a member.' The opening of *Annie Hall* finds Alvy mourning Annie but at huge risk of

⁵ Eric Lax, *Conversations with Woody Allen: His Films, the Movies, and Moviemaking* (New York: USA, Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), p. 30.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London, UK: Penguin Modern Classics, 2005), p. 203.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 204.

becoming melancholic. The film follows Alvy's eventually successful attempt to get back to mourning and moving on from Annie.

REMEMBERING ANNIE

*'Seems like old times, dinner dates and flowers
Just like old times, staying up for hours
Making dreams come true, doing things we used to do
Seems like old times being here with you.'*

“Seems Like Old Times”, Carmen Lombardo and John Jacob Loeb, 1945.

In the first shot it is not clear from where in time Alvy is speaking. The notion of past, present and future is complicated in *Annie Hall*, as even the reliability of Alvy's memories is called into question in this opening monologue. Alvy warns us that he has always had trouble separating reality from fantasy, something that is confirmed later in the film when Alvy imagines Annie as a cartoon witch and addresses the audience during a memory of a cinema queue. The blandness of the background during this opening monologue encourages a sense of displacement, with very little to hook Alvy to a time or place. This is emphasised by the direct address to the camera, with Alvy facing neither forward nor back, but rather straight to the unknown audience. From the very first moments of the film, then, Alvy breaks the fourth wall and shatters the illusion that we are watching something real. As Svetlana Boym writes in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001): ‘Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement’.⁸ Melancholia

⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, USA: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiii.

pervades an establishing shot that does not establish the time or place of its character. Allen creates a sense of displacement, unclear even where the scene figures in the chronology of Annie and Alvy's relationship.

Nostalgic longing underpins *Annie Hall* throughout, seen in Annie's singing of old songs like 'It Had to be You' from the twenties and the 1945 song 'Seems Like Old Times'. Jeffers McDonald points to the use of such old songs as a marker of the radical romantic comedy of the 1970s, which shows a yearning for the past and a time where romantic relationships were less cynically presented.⁹ Annie sings lyrics that she would never verbalise to Alvy herself: her own declaration of love for Alvy sounds decidedly less sure, managing only a 'well, yeah' when Alvy asks her if she loves him. Equally, Alvy himself can only muster an 'I luff you', a stark contrast to the unashamed proclamations of love imbued in the songs Annie sings. As Jeffers McDonald asserts, the use of these songs bears a nostalgia for 'a past when romance seemed less doomed to fail, and people could therefore (it was assumed) go about proclaiming their feelings without such complex clusters of emotions.'¹⁰ But of course, Annie and Alvy do not love in this imagined world and the film shows the complications of modern romance that contrasts to the implied simplicity of love in previous eras. Susan Stewart defines nostalgia as 'sadness without an object' and something which 'creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience.'¹¹ She adds that the 'point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire.'¹² Annie's singing of old songs, the flashbacks and return to Alvy's memories

⁹ Jeffers McDonald, p. 72.

¹⁰ Jeffers McDonald, p. 72.

¹¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London, UK: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 23.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 23.

create a sense of nostalgia that permeates the film. This sense is extended to Annie herself who is remembered nostalgically, and therefore misremembered. After all, nostalgia is memory plus fantasy.

By addressing the past and readdressing his memories of Annie, Alvy manages to avoid melancholia and return to a mourning process. The mourning work, according to Freud, results in a detachment of the libido from the lost object through a re-visitation of memories:

It is now carried out piece-meal at great expenditure of time and investment of energy, and the lost object persists in the psyche. Each individual memory and expectation in which the libido was connected to the object is adjusted and hyper-invested, leading to its detachment from the libido.¹³

This work is seen throughout the film, as Alvy revisits memories to make sense of the present. They are 'hyper-invested', as he reworks them and adds his own interpretations, questions and thoughts through the process. In one scene, Alvy remembers Annie accidentally saying the word 'wife', asking the audience to confirm that they heard the same. As Adam Phillips notes, however, this is a complicated process as 'Mourning is painful not only because it is an acknowledgement of loss, but because it confronts us with the knowledge that we are never the possessors of what we have lost, but rather, the partial inventors'.¹⁴ Nostalgia, as an idealised version of the past, is always a misremembering. Annie, like anybody we remember from the past, is thus misremembered. In one scene, Annie appears as a cartoon reminiscent of the evil queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (dir. David Hand, 1937), itself a nostalgic nod to the first film Allen remembers watching at the cinema.¹⁵ In another

¹³ Freud, *On Murder*, p. 205.

¹⁴ Phillips, *On Flirtation*, p. 123.

¹⁵ Charles L. P. Silet, 'Introduction', in *The Films of Woody Allen: Critical Essays*, ed. Charles L. P. Silet (Oxford, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2006) xi-xiv (p. xii).

scene, the spectre of Annie leaves her body while she is in bed with Alvy. As Freud states, mourning can often see ‘a turning away from reality and holding on to the object through hallucinatory wish psychosis’.¹⁶ Annie is built out of memories, and as Alvy tells the audience at the beginning of the film, Alvy has always had trouble separating fantasy and reality.

Alvy’s memories of Annie extend even to imagining her thoughts, actions and own memories. In the balcony scene before Annie and Alvy begin dating, Allen uses subtitles ostensibly to show the audience what each character is really thinking. As Alvy and Annie discuss photography, Alvy wonders what Annie looks like naked. This is echoed in the innuendo of his pseudo-intellectual photography criticism spoken out loud, as he asks her about ‘a set of aesthetic criteria that hasn’t emerged yet.’ Annie meanwhile speaks about her photographs, as Alvy imagines that she was worrying that she isn’t smart enough for him. Her subtitles read, ‘Listen to me. What a jerk’. When Alvy remembers this scene, he combines everything he remembers about Annie: he recalls that she was insecure about her work and her intelligence, and he remembers that he was attracted to her.

While it is generally accepted by audiences and critics, as Alain J.-J Cohen observes, for example, that here we see ‘their inner thoughts appear as subtitles’, this scene actually does not show what Annie was thinking but rather what Alvy thinks she was thinking.¹⁷ Through his recollections of their relationship he invents her inner thoughts so they fit his understanding of her. Even in the apparently private moment of therapy, Annie is constructed by Alvy (Fig. 1.1.). He remembers the information

¹⁶ Freud, *On Murder*, p. 204.

¹⁷ Alain J. -J. Cohen, ‘Woody Allen and Freud’, in *Celluloid Couches, Cinematic Clients: Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in the Movies*, ed. by Jerrold R. Brandell (New York, USA: University of New York Press, 2004), 127-146 (p. 133).

Annie has already given him about her session; that her therapist was a woman and Annie was asked to sit rather than lie down like Alvy. Significantly, Annie's therapist is not shown on screen because Alvy never met her.



Figure 1.1. Alvy and Annie in therapy.

The split screen gives more space to Alvy, reflecting the fact that these are his memories, just as earlier in their relationship Alvy's family are given more space in the split screen of the Halls and the Singers at Easter. The analysis scene also reveals Alvy's anxieties over their relationship with the mentally constructed barrier between them showing Alvy's fears that Annie has become uninterested in sex. When their respective therapists ask how often they have sex, Alvy replies, 'Hardly ever, maybe three times a week', while Annie replies in a distorted echo of Alvy's own answer, 'Constantly, I'd say three times a week.' Alvy imagines Annie's responses to the same questions he is being asked.



Figure 1.2. Annie's date at the movies.

In another scene, Alvy's control over his memories (and therefore the narrative) is so potent that he imagines Annie's own past. While theoretically impossible, this does help him come to terms with his present, as he remembers a time in his relationship when he imagined Annie's previous boyfriends, boyfriends that are either dismissed as childhood flings or as ridiculous. This also chimes with a trope of traditional romantic comedies, where the couple, at one point in the film, will date an unsuitable partner, used to emphasise the essential right-ness of the main couple.¹⁸ *Annie Hall* again engages with the generic characteristics of the romantic comedy while subverting them in some way: Annie does date the wrong men, but they are firmly in the past and the depiction of them is not accurate, being remembered, strangely, by Alvy. As Stewart notes, 'Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as a narrative'.¹⁹ This

¹⁸ Jeffers McDonald, p. 11.

¹⁹ Stewart, p. 23.

manufactured narrative has healing potential. Far from being intimidated by Annie's ex-boyfriends, Alvy creates a story in which he is the more suitable match for her.

Alvy's imagination informs the images of the film. Discussing her past relationships, Alvy suggests that her first boyfriend was a local boy who would meet her outside the cinema on Saturday night, while commenting that he could imagine what she looked like then, 'probably the wife of an astronaut.' The image that accompanies his voiceover is exactly that as Annie and her first boyfriend greet each other in front of the cinema (Fig. 1.2.). Annie's hair is piled on top of her head in a sixties style which recalls the era of the Apollo Moon Landings (1969). Alvy's recollections therefore show how his memories have been formed and in turn reveal their artificiality. As Freud writes in 'Screen Memories':

Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time.²⁰

For Alvy, the heart-breaking memories of his relationship with Annie come in the screen memories of lobsters and spiders. These memories, loaded with meaning and significance, are hyper-invested so they are finally able to be separated from the libido. Paradoxically, then, memories are the means by which we begin to forget.

²⁰Sigmund Freud, 'Screen Memories', in *On Freud's: "Screen Memories"*, ed. by Gail S. Reed and Howard B. Levine (London, UK: Routledge, 2018), p. 24.

LOVE, DEATH AND LOBSTERS

Phoebe: *She's your lobster. Come on, you guys. It's a known fact that lobsters fall in love and mate for life. You know what, you can actually see old lobster couples, walking around their tank, you know, holding claws.*

Friends, 'The One With the Prom Video',
1996.

Lobsters are, as Tom Shone argues, the romantic comedy delicacy *par excellence*.²¹ They have surfaced in romantic comedies like *Splash* (dir. Ron Howard, 1984) where Darryl Hannah's mermaid, Madison, crunches into a whole lobster shell while on a date with Tom Hanks's character, incidentally also called Allen. In the romantic drama *Flashdance* (dir. Adrian Lyne, 1983), the film's working-class protagonist Alex (Jennifer Beals), enjoys a lobster dinner with her middle-class boss and love interest Nick (Michael Nouri). In the movies, lobster dinners are to be shared with the object of your affections; they are rarely, if ever, eaten alone. They are decadent, indulgent, and supposedly an aphrodisiac. Shone writes that 'Lobsters get you thrown out of the restaurant' since the messiness that comes with the dismembering of their bodies for consumption necessitates a quashing of inhibitions.²² They also emerge in the television show *Friends* (NBC: 1994-2004), where Ross's abiding love for Rachel is

²¹ Tom Shone, 'Love and Lobsters', *The Sunday Times*, 11 April 1993, p.10.

²² *Ibid*, p. 10.

characterised by the iconic line, ‘She’s your lobster’, referencing the (incorrect) cultural belief of the animals’ long-term monogamy. The line now adorns t-shirts and Valentine’s Day cards.

Despite the chaos of getting the lobsters in the pot and Alvy’s insistence that they ‘should have gotten steaks’ because ‘they don’t have legs’, it is no coincidence that the couple pick lobsters for dinner. Steaks just do not mean as much as lobsters do in the cinema history of the romantic comedy. Their significance is emphasised when Alvy returns to The Hamptons later in the film with a new date and attempts to cook lobsters again. Alvy attempts to recreate the scene, frantically trying to pick up the lobsters that have fallen (probably not accidentally) onto the floor again. But the new date cannot see what all the fuss is about. While she says, ‘they’re only lobsters’, to Alvy and in the context of his relationship with Annie and the romantic comedy more largely, they are loaded with meaning and significance. This meaning, however, is slippery, and like the lobsters themselves it eludes capture. It is in visual art that lobsters have undergone the greatest recalibration of meaning and significance, particularly Salvador Dalí’s iconic *Lobster Telephone* (1936). As Nancy Frazier argues, ‘Dalí created a uniquely Dalían metonymy: a telephone receiver that signifies a lobster.’²³ It evokes a potent combination of repulsion and absurdity with the implied act of holding such a strange and sometimes frightening creature (its pincers are used to tear flesh) to one’s ear and face.

The animals themselves strangely elude definition. As Richard J. King argues: ‘No clear-cut definition exists for biologists or linguists.’²⁴ They are neither fish nor

²³ Nancy Frazier, ‘Salvador Dalí’s Lobsters: Feast, Phobia and Freudian Slip’, in *Gastronomica*, Vol. 9, No. 7 (Fall 2009), pp. 16-20 (p. 16) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/gfc.2009.9.4.16>> [accessed 29.07.2016], p. 16.

²⁴ Richard J. King, *Lobster* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 16.

insects, despite their habitat and appearance. Perhaps, they are best understood as food, safely made into a lifeless being ready for consumption. Even as a food product, however, a lobster's meaning traverses the boundaries of definition. As Frazier writes in *I, Lobster: A Crustacean Odyssey* (2012), 'Lobster is more than food: it is an idea, an event, a challenge, a happening, a celebration, an indulgence'.²⁵ But the fact remains that the dominant image of the lobster is the brilliant red of Dalí's telephone, the colour the animals take on *after* they have been cooked, when the carotenoid pigment in their shells reacts to heat. Redness is, as Frazier argues, the 'aesthetic rule' of lobster depictions.²⁶ What this means is that when many of us think of lobsters, we are thinking of cooked, dead ones.

It is telling, therefore, that in *Annie Hall*, Allen uses the animals in their before-cooked form, the mottled, muddy-brown version that is not depicted as much as the red. However, the frantic energy of Annie and Alvy is juxtaposed with the clearly lifeless animals in the scene, and while the characters and the camera move continually, the lobsters do not. Still, lifeless marine animals are present even in the happiest moments of Annie and Alvy's relationship, and perhaps the foreshadowing of dead sharks is there all along. Annie lifts a lobster to Alvy's face, its claws and limbs flop listlessly, clearly dead already. Not cooked, but not alive either, Allen signifies the artifice of the scene once again, showing that the lobsters are lifeless props in a memory that is being retold on screen and in Alvy's own memories. Alvy only recalls the preparation of the animals and does not remember eating them. The lobster dinner itself is not remembered and instead Allen focuses on the part of the meal that is not depicted in romantic comedies, just as in *Annie Hall* Allen portrays the part of the

²⁵ Nancy Frazier, *I, Lobster: A Crustacean Odyssey* (Durham, UK: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), p. 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

romantic comedy not typically seen: after the 'happy ending'. Like the lobster scene which shows the part of the lobster dinner rarely seen in romantic comedies, in many ways, *Annie Hall* is a romantic comedy about the moments that happen once the romance is over.

By the end of the film, Annie and Alvy reconcile but only as friends. At the same time, the film suggests they part better off because of their relationship. Their romance was worth the breakup, and the memories leave with them. They do not, as in most traditional romantic comedies, end the film in a romantic relationship. Instead, it is only in Alvy's new play where the Annie and Alvy characters end up together that a romantic reconciliation can be found. Jeffers McDonald notes that radical romantic comedies are often reflexive in their character, and are 'aware of film history and genre conventions, and are frequently happy to jettison many of the elements of earlier forms.'²⁷ In providing an example of a happy ending in Alvy's play, Allen foregrounds the generic convention of the romcom only to withhold it. Moreover, the play itself seems melodramatic and unrealistic in comparison with the real Annie and Alvy. The play is the traditional romantic comedy within the radical one, and it is telling that it is only possible through misremembering. Subsequent chapters will analyse the memory of *Annie Hall* in other films, but here Lloyd Michaels' question, 'Test your own memory of *Annie Hall*: do you recall it as an analysis of a break-up or as a love story?', reveals the film's complex relationship with memory.²⁸ My recollection is somewhere in between, that *Annie Hall* is a film about the presence of love in a breakup story, or more simply, that a film about a breakup is also a love story. This is

²⁷ Jeffers McDonald, p. 70.

²⁸ Lloyd Michaels, *Sweet and Lowdown: Woody Allen's Cinema of Regret* (West Sussex, UK: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 107.

largely due to the film's conclusion which cannot be defined as a happy ending in traditional romantic comedy terms but not an unhappy ending either.

In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) Sara Ahmed argues that the happy ending is actually about the promise of moving forward, of progressing, and of experiencing something different from before which is thus positioned as the unhappy time:

This is how happiness becomes a forward motion: almost like a propeller, happiness is imagined as what allows subjects to embrace futurity, to leave the past behind them, where pastness is associated with custom and the customary. In other words, in becoming an individual, you acquire a sense of freedom: you acquire capacities, energies, and projects. In turn these capacities, energies and projects become a sign of the good of your freedom. To become an individual is to assume an image: becoming free to be happy turns the body in a certain direction.²⁹

As Ahmed argues, the marker of a happy ending is the presence of something happening, and at the end of *Annie Hall* both Annie and Alvy move in the forward motion Ahmed describes. The final images are of Annie and Alvy moving forward into their own lives, accompanied by memories of the past and promises for their future. At the end of *Annie Hall*, both Annie and Alvy have become richer for their experiences together: Annie has begun a professional career as a singer and grown in confidence and Alvy has written his first play. Both have experienced the 'projects' Ahmed writes about that often characterise the happy ending. Most strikingly, however, in *Annie Hall* both Annie and Alvy leave the past behind them and, while they do part, they part as individuals moving forward.

The ambiguity of the film's ending is reflected throughout Allen's oeuvre. Few of Allen's romantic films conclude with an uncomplicated, straightforward happy ending. Even those that end with the couple together are often complicated by

²⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 134.

something, for example Isaac (Woody Allen) and Tracy (Mariel Hemingway) reunite in the conclusion to *Manhattan* (dir. Woody Allen, 1979) but Tracy's imminent trip to London suggests that their relationship struggles are not over. In *Hannah and Her Sisters* (dir. Woody Allen, 1986), the complex romantic web Allen weaves throughout the film between ex-husbands and sisters is improbably re-stabilised by a marriage and pregnancy between Mickey (Woody Allen) and Holly (Dianne Wiess). Elliot's (Michael Caine) love and lust for Lee (Barbara Hershey) is unconvincingly wished away as he reconciles with his wife Hannah (Mia Farrow). Elliot's voiceover at the end of the film belies a lurking attraction to Lee ('you look so beautiful') as he muses over his disbelief at the pain he caused the sisters. The conclusion plays with the romantic happy ending as, ostensibly, the characters are stable in their respective relationships, while the undercurrent of forced happiness, jealousy and resentment is still palpable.

An exception to these complicated happy endings is *Hollywood Ending* (dir. Woody Allen, 2002), where the film's protagonist Val (Woody Allen) reconciles with his estranged ex-wife Ellie (Téa Leoni) after they work on a film together. The neatness of the conclusion speaks to the film's dedication to adhering to the traditional romantic comedy trajectory which is reflected in the film's title. The narrative does not further or complicate the romantic comedy genre, but joyfully, if lazily, repeats its generic features. For example, career obsessed filmmaker Val learns through the course of the film that his job is less important than those he loves, symbolised in his reunion with Ellie. His 'blindness' to this fact is metaphorically represented by his literal psychosomatic blindness which makes directing his film impossible and a failure but eventually leads him back to Ellie. The insensitive and ableist portrayal of blindness (Val frequently falls, trips and bumps into things) comes to an end only after his film fails and he learns what is important in life.

The ending to *Annie Hall* is a happy one in many ways, but as a romantic comedy it is at the very least unconventional. As the romantic comedy traditionally centres on the pursuit of a heterosexual relationship, the conclusions to these films almost always feature a man and woman together in a romantic relationship. The happiness of these happy endings often comes from the securing of heterosexual union which comes to imply stability. As Ahmed writes: 'Heterosexual love becomes about the possibility of a happy ending; about what life is aimed toward, as being what gives life direction, purpose, or as what drives a story.'³⁰ This drive towards a happy ending necessarily involves obstacles, obstacles which simultaneously affirm the desire to achieve this happiness, and make its achievement hard won and therefore all the more satisfying and apparently worthwhile. As Ahmed writes: 'happiness might keep its place as a wish by its failure to be given.'³¹ In the pursuit of happiness in their relationship, Annie and Alvy encounter obstacles as the couple grow apart and new lovers enter their lives. But the promise of happiness encourages them to get back together, back on course for the fulfilment of the heterosexual narrative. Even when, at the end of the film, Annie and Alvy part ways, Alvy knows that he will return to this path of heterosexual love and romance one day.

In fact, it is in the pursuit of happiness, not in its achievement, that happiness is found. As Alvy says, relationships are 'totally irrational and crazy and absurd' but in the end he 'needs the eggs'. Alvy ends the film much happier for his memories of Annie, despite the rejection of the traditional romantic comedy ending. This pursuit of the happy ending can be seen in the lobster scene. As in the lobster scene, the actual joy is in the preparation of the lobster dinner and not in the main event, and it is this scene

³⁰ Ibid, p. 90.

³¹ Ibid, p. 1.

that is remembered by both Annie and Alvy rather than the couple's meal. The lobsters are symbolic of the obstacles they will encounter in their relationship, the hurdles they will have to jump and the detours they will take. Ultimately, their relationship may not end in a union, just as we do not get to see the finished product of the lobster dinner, but the fun moments and memories of them will remain.

Annie Hall engages with many of the characteristics of the romantic comedy, however, including the first meeting, the first kiss, the miscommunication and eventual reconciliation. According to Mortimer:

The film subverts the conventions of the romantic comedy for an audience who are familiar with such narratives, creating pleasure and comedy in departing from the expected. Some of the scenes are entirely typical of the genre: the meet-cute, the montage of images of the growing romance, the misunderstandings and eventual break-up of the couple; yet the normal trajectory to reunion is blocked by departure from the fantasy of true love, to a more realistic, downbeat conclusion, where feelings are complex and love is not always requited. The 'nervous' nature of their relationship is implied through the reflexive nature of the film, showing an awareness of the genre's conventions.³²

Mortimer's analysis notes how the more 'realistic' conclusion is the greatest deviation of the film from the romantic comedy genre. However, it is in fact in the misremembering of the relationship that Allen frustrates the genre most clearly. Alvy forgets moments of importance (what happened when they ate their lobster dinner), misremembers others (the balcony scene), and all without a linear chronology. In reflecting the process of memory, Allen ruptures the romantic comedy genre while retaining all of its central characteristics. The conclusion that Mortimer remarks as being 'realistic' is less this and more another example of Allen's divergence from the chronology of the romantic comedy. In more traditional films, the film ends when the

³² Mortimer, p. 91.

couple are happy and together but in *Annie Hall* Annie and Alvy are happier earlier in the film.

Genre is itself an exercise in memory which makes *Annie Hall* a misremembering or perhaps a conscious forgetting of the romantic comedy. As Barry Keith Grant argues, 'Put simply, genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations.'³³ Repetition begets comfort in the genre film. For audiences, a confirmation that you have remembered these films correctly and that you understand the genre is a great source of pleasure in the genre film. In *Annie Hall*, moments that are generic of the romantic comedy appear out of order in comparison with traditional romantic comedies. According to Mortimer:

A rom com certainly has a very distinctive narrative structure: boy meets girl, various obstacles prevent them from being together, coincidences and complications ensue, ultimately leading to the couple's realisation that they were meant to be together.³⁴

The non-chronological narrative structure of *Annie Hall* is emphasised precisely because it still involves scenes normally found in the traditional romantic comedy, including the meeting, the first kiss, the first fight, the breakup and the reconciliation. They are just presented in a different order.

Annie Hall opens with the breakup having already happened, and the first meeting of Annie and Alvy is shown after we have seen the pair experience problems in their relationship. Their first kiss happens on the way to their first date, where Alvy convinces Annie that this way they can get on with the rest of their time together

³³ Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London, UK: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 1.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

without nerves. Alvy faces Annie's ex-boyfriends not in the present, but in the past when he visits her memories. The meeting of the in-laws happens across space and time, as Alvy imagines the Halls of the present meeting the Singers of his childhood, separated by a split screen that represents the gulf of years and miles. While Mortimer notes that the conclusion of the generic romantic comedy depicts the couple at their happiest, Annie and Alvy are perhaps happiest in the lobster scene, which appears earlier on in the film. The deviation from the romantic comedy genre, then, is less to do with the 'downbeat conclusion' as Mortimer argues, and more to do with how Allen plays with the chronology of these generic features. The romantic comedy is edited and the order of events is shuffled in *Annie Hall*.

In the depiction of the relationship between people and lobsters on screen there is also a fair amount of censorship and editing: the romance of the lobster meal obscures the preparation of the animals for consumption and the brutal reality of the long death of the lobster boiling alive in a pot. In his essay 'Consider the Lobster', David Foster Wallace's trip to the 'Maine Lobster Festival' is marred by thoughts of those grisly deaths. His essay interrogates the human-lobster interaction just before the latter is eaten by crowds of festival goers. He notes that many lobster cooks wait outside the kitchen with a timer to avoid the ominous clattering of the animals' legs as they try to escape the boiling pots and their death 'screams' that many believe, instead, to be produced from escaping gas inside the lobsters' shells.³⁵ Perhaps as a lobster-cook, one would have to believe that.

While Allen shows the preparation of the lobsters, like Alvy's selective memory, he picks the moments to be shown. Allen leaves out the truly uncomfortable and

³⁵ David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (London, UK: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), p. 248.

intimate moment of death. The censoring of the lobsters' deaths mirrors the avoidance of detailed sex scenes in romantic comedies, and in fact in Allen's oeuvre. Sex is implied, usually expressed in a fade out, jump-cut or scene change that suggests a temporal shift: the couple wake up next to each other in bed, the act over, never seen, but the audience knows that it happened.

This is satirised, along with other romantic comedy generic traits, in the film *Isn't it Romantic* (dir. Todd Strauss-Schulson, 2019). The film's love-sick and cynical protagonist Natalie (Rebel Wilson) wakes up to find that her life has been turned into a romantic comedy, complete with a gay best friend, high-powered job in New York City and a glamorous apartment filled with designer clothes. After beginning a romantic relationship with the successful and handsome Blake (Liam Hemsworth), the pair go to bed together. The scene cuts to the following morning. Natalie says, 'I didn't think we did anything, it just cut to the next morning.' They try to have sex again but the romantic comedy formula will not allow the sex scene to be shown and there is another jump cut. In romantic comedies, the bodies of the protagonists are seen before and after sex but never during, just as the lobster cooking and killing is absent from the lobster's presence in these romantic narratives.

While lobsters feature heavily in romantic films as a shorthand for sex and romance, they also encourage fear. The lobster's shelled body is framed by spider-like legs and two large serrated claws, while its face is about as unlike that of a human's as possible. Dalí discerned a combination of sex and fear in the image of the lobster and interpreted it as an expression of the castration complex. Perhaps this is inevitable when one considers the phallic shape of the lobster's body attached to two sharp claws. As Frazier notes, invoking Wallace's famous lobster essay with her words:

Consider the lobster and its deadly serrated claws, the smaller and sharper of which is known as the slicer. This creature outclasses a knife (or scissors) and outstrips the locust as a symbolic agent, or instrument, of castration. Moreover, it is the color of blood, as if in confirmation of the deed.³⁶

Dalí's castrating lobsters were ultimately manifest most clearly in his 1939 project 'The Dream of Venus', wherein the artist 'clothed' nude female models in fresh seafood, their genitals usually covered by a lobster.

In Allen's lobster scene, therefore, Alvy's primal fears of castration are writ large. When Annie brandishes a lobster to his face Alvy is reminded of Annie's castrating potential. Throughout Allen's oeuvre there are jokes about castrating women. In *Manhattan*, Isaac toys with the idea of expanding his short story, *The Castrating Zionist*, and in *Melinda and Melinda* (dir. Woody Allen, 2004) Susan (Amanda Peet) tells her dinner party about her new all-female theatre project, *The Castration Sonata*. The association between women and the fear of castration thus looms large in Allen's cinema. This is reflected in Allen's segment of the *New York Stories* (1989) anthology film, *Oedipus Wrecks* (dir. Woody Allen, 1989) which follows Sheldon's (Woody Allen) relationship with the women in his life. Sheldon's opinionated and controlling mother (Mae Questel) literally looms large as she appears in the sky critiquing and questioning her son's romantic decisions. Her sole purpose seems to be to observe him ('Sheldon, where've you been? I've been looking all over for you') and therefore to keep him close. Her omnipresence is figured as a manifestation of Sheldon's anxiety over his mother, invoking the castration complex which is also referenced in the film's title.

³⁶ Nancy Frazier, 'Salvador Dalí's Lobsters: Feast, Phobia and Freudian Slip', *Gastronomica*, 9: 7 (Fall 2009), 16-20 (p. 19) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/gfc.2009.9.4.16>> [accessed 29.07.2016].

In *Oedipus Wrecks*, Sheldon's mother is reluctant to see him marry a non-Jewish woman, while Sheldon seeks to distance himself from Jewish women that remind him so much of his mother. As Martha Ravits argues, for some Jewish men aiming to assimilate to American society, marrying outside of Judaism is an act informed by the misogyny of the Oedipus Complex:

The Jewish son, then, need not light out for the territory in search of the raw material of life; for him the raw material of life resides at home. The hero's (or anti-hero's) most challenging adventure consists of negotiating the family romance. His quest for autonomy continues well past adolescence and circles back to the relationship with the mother. Insistent variations on the Oedipal theme connect the stereotype of the Jewish mother to the misogyny of psychoanalytic theories which ... continue to blame socio-sexual maladjustment, Oedipal "wreckage," on the mother.³⁷

In *Annie Hall*, Annie's difference from Alvy's mother is perhaps part of the attraction. A WASP apparently in need of guidance and support, she contrasts with Alvy's mother who is depicted as full of opinions, especially about Alvy. When Annie begins to assert her opinion and criticise Alvy for not enjoying his life, Alvy is reminded of his mother, contributing to his distancing from Annie. By his own admission, Alvy is particularly sensitive to the castration complex as a subject, and clearly Annie has been thinking about it too. After her analysis session, Annie asks if Alvy has ever heard of penis envy. Alvy responds with a joke, saying 'Me? I'm one of the few males who suffer from that.' Annie goes on to tell him that in a dream she did 'this really terrible thing' to Frank Sinatra that resulted in him singing in a high-pitched voice. Through Alvy's memories of the conversation Allen shows his anxiety about castration being on Annie's mind too.

³⁷ Martha A. Ravits, 'The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in American Popular Culture' in *MELUS*, 25:1, Jewish American Literature (Spring 2000), pp. 3-31, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/468149>> p. 24.

Death, sex and the fear of castration once again converge on the image of the lobster in the film *The Lobster* (dir. Yorgos Lanthimos, 2015). In this film single people are sent to a hotel to find a partner. If they fail to do so they are turned into an animal of their choice, doomed to live out the rest of their days in their non-human form. David (Colin Farrell), the film's protagonist, chooses to be turned into a lobster because, he says, they 'stay fertile their entire lives'. While for David lobsters are a symbol of virility, their hard shells encase a soft vulnerability and he comes to understand that the plight of the lobster (and therefore himself) is a gruesome one. This is seen when an angry, rebuffed resident of the hotel says that she looks forward to the day she will 'crack open his claws' after he is transformed into a lobster. Getting to the flesh, both through eating and through sex, ties the relationship between love, death and lobsters. It is depicted in another scene where David and his new girlfriend sit in an outdoor hot tub by the sea, the real lobsters invoked by their proximity to their habitat and the image of the couple sat in a bubbling pot, fearing for their lives. Like two lobsters in a lobster pot undergoing the semantic transition from animal to meat, the pair try to convert their desire (for sex and to live) into a relationship. The shells of lobsters mark a barrier between the two lobster states of live animal and meat, a boundary that must be removed in order for one to be transformed into another. The characters' vulnerability is therefore emphasized by their semi-nakedness, their flesh exposed for consumption.

The transformation from animal to meat is, of course, not a reversible process, just as Annie and Alvy's relationship is not, and Alvy must come to terms with the end of their relationship for him to be able to move on. It also means that the lobsters he uses on another date are not the same lobsters, and the date is not even close to Annie despite the same The Hamptons setting. Through the repetition of the lobster scene,

Alvy mistakenly looks for sanctuary in a warm memory of his time with Annie, like the lobsters themselves that, in the face of danger, will ‘retreat with the greatest rapidity into nooks, corners, and crevices.’³⁸



Figure 1.3. Alvy grabs a lobster from the kitchen floor.

In the recreated lobster scene, Alvy attempts to redo the lobster moment with Annie with a new date. The first shot is of Alvy on his knees, speaking to his date as he tries to collect the lobsters off the kitchen floor once again (Fig. 1.3.). The lobsters are lifeless, but brown, and Alvy is making a lot out of the situation. As Alvy’s date lounges on the counter smoking a cigarette, she asks what all the fuss is about. The clothes of his new date mirror the colours of the lobsters, emphasising the fact that, for Alvy, the scene is about these animals and not about her, which of course means that it is really about Annie. The memory of Annie pervades the scene and highlights her absence.

³⁸ William Barry Lord, *Crab, Shrimp, and Lobster Lore: Gathered Amongst the Rocks at the Sea-Shore, By the Riverside, and in the Forest* (London, UK: Routledge and Sons, 1867), p. 91.

While Annie joined in on the action of lobster-wrangling, here the new date insists ‘they’re only lobsters.’

The camera’s angle and position connects Alvy to the audience in a way that synthesizes his longing for Annie with ours: Alvy’s position in this scene is where the camera was in the first lobster scene. Alvy’s memories of the scene with Annie are therefore as an audience member, and so any recreation of that scene would be positioned from this vantage point. Alvy is once again revealed as the director of action in the film. Unlike his memories, however, that can be revisited, replayed and remade, the past cannot be relived, and the new lobster date is a faint echo of his previous date with Annie. The scene itself is repeated several times in the film, while on another date, in the end montage and through photographs and invocations of the event throughout the film. As Jason Bailey argues, Alvy is ‘replicating the flights of fancy and strange nostalgic cubbyholes that the human mind can disappear into on a moment’s notice’, like the lobsters that hide in the crevices of the rocks when in danger.³⁹

Annie records the scene by taking a photograph, that medium of memory that implies truthfulness, however incorrectly. Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister outline in their book, *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts* (2014) that:

As a visual medium, the photograph has many culturally resonant properties that it shares with no other medium. Above all, the photograph is widely held to be a record, a piece of evidence that something happened as some time, somewhere— in the time and place in front of the camera.⁴⁰

³⁹ Jason Bailey, *The Ultimate Woody Allen Film Companion* (Minneapolis, USA: Voyager Press, 2014), p. 32.

⁴⁰ Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister, ‘Locating Memory: Photographic Acts- An Introduction,’ in *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*, eds. Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (Oxford, UK: Berghann Books, 2006), p. 1.

It is therefore unsurprising that Annie takes the photograph, to hold a great day with Alvy suspended in time. However, the moment that Annie photographs is in itself a replica, as she asks Alvy to pick up one of the lobsters again to pose with. She takes another photograph to make sure she got a good shot. The photographs of Alvy and the lobster that adorn her wall therefore capture reworkings of a moment just passed. The photographs are also in black and white which adds to the sense of nostalgia. They invoke a memory of a not-quite truth, a moment that was constructed for the camera, just as the entire scene was constructed by Allen.

While the lobster scene is remembered in these more obvious ways, Alvy and Annie's lobster dinner surfaces in more subtle ways in the film. When Alvy is ill, or at least pretending to be to get out of a television gig in L.A., his doctor wonders what could possibly be wrong with him, finally asking him if he has eaten pork or shellfish. In this question the lobster scene is implied, as is Grammy Hall's decidedly non-Kosher ham at Easter. These foods highlight the religious and cultural differences between Alvy and Annie.⁴¹ The consumption of the ham at the Hall's serves to display the cultural separation between Annie and Alvy's families, visually depicted by the slicing of the scene of their families with Allen's use of a split screen.

As Katherine M. Rogers notes in *Pork: A Global History* (2012), pork has historically 'served to help define the Jews' identity as a separate people, sharply distinguished from the surrounding non-believers.'⁴² Allen visually illustrates this separation during the Easter dinner, as Alvy imagines himself as a Hasidic Jew in the eyes of the reportedly racist Grammy Hall. Instead of assimilating into the WASP Hall family, Alvy feels his Jewishness becomes hyper-visible where no amount of roast ham

⁴¹ Henry Bial, *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage & Screen* (Michigan, USA: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 97.

⁴² Katherine M. Rogers, *Pork: A Global History* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 21.

or lobster dinners can change his Jewishness. As Nathan Abrams writes in *The New Jew in Film* (2012), ‘even as food like lobster signals acculturation and sophistication, it can become emblematic of the cultural gap between Jews and Gentiles that is predicated on dietary difference.’⁴³ It is not Annie’s identity that has shifted through the course of their relationship but Alvy’s too, signified in his bodily response to the foods that represent these changes: lobster is no longer funny and it makes him sick.

MEMORY, FEAR, SPIDERS AND LOBSTERS

*‘To be petrified of a pigeon is a way of
making it new.’⁴⁴*

Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling, and
Being Bored*, 1993.

Alvy’s fears have therefore become tangled with memories of Annie too. His fear of the lobsters has enlarged in significance, now incorporating his fear of the loss of Annie and of loss in relationships more widely. The memory of the lobsters is therefore re-enacted, the potency of its original signification destined to be renewed in new iterations of romantic love. As Freud posits in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), our subconscious holds the fears, dreams and wishes that have been informed by our past, our memories holding them in the secret motivations and yet-to-be-enacted movements that will direct our futures:

⁴³ Nathan Abrams, *The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema* (New Jersey, USA: Rutgers University Press, 2012), p. 168.

⁴⁴ Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 17.

And what of the value of dreams in regard to our knowledge of the future? That, of course, is quite out of the question. One would like to substitute the words: 'in regard to our knowledge of the past.' For in every sense a dream has its origin in the past. The ancient belief that dreams reveal the future is not indeed entirely devoid of truth. By representing a wish as fulfilled the dream certainly leads us into the future; but this future, which the dreamer accepts as his present, has been shaped in the likeness of the past by the indestructible wish.⁴⁵

Drawing on Freud's ideas, Phillips expresses this another way in *Terrors and Experts* (1995): 'Tell me what you fear and I will tell you what has happened to you'.⁴⁶ Fear, then, is firmly rooted in the past, but is always anticipating the future.

As Phillips goes on to write, 'Fear, as I have been suggesting, is a state of mind in which the object of knowledge is the future, but it is, of course, a knowledge that can only be derived from the past.'⁴⁷ The fear that Alvy is experiencing comes from a moment in the past, where frightening lobsters crawled on his kitchen floor and the simultaneous fearful knowledge that it might not happen again. When he complains to his new date that this 'always happens to me', his real fear is that it will not again. Fear is therefore Alvy's tool for recreation here, as through his fear, the lobsters are repeated, and therefore so is Annie. Or, as Phillips writes in his book *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored* (1993), 'To be petrified of a pigeon is a way of making it new.'⁴⁸ By *having* the phobia of lobsters Alvy holds them close to be repeated habitually.

Allen seeks to present the absolute necessity of the fear of loss to the pursuit of romantic love. As Phillips writes of Freud's work:

⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997) p. 452.

⁴⁶ Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 53.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 17.

Getting what you want has the fear of losing built into it; as an experience from the past and, therefore, a possibility in the future. The cost of wanting is the terror of losing- of not securing the future- what you have received. This is what we know in fear.⁴⁹

The romantic comedy genre necessitates heartbreak and pain to enable the narrative to fulfil the trajectory of the lovers finally winning each other over: heartbreak is not only unavoidable but essential to romantic love and to fulfilling desire in the genre. As Mortimer notes, 'Suffering is often a part of the narrative process of self-discovery and transformation that characterises the genre.'⁵⁰ Alvy's romantic fulfilment in his relationship with Annie immediately anticipates its end. Or, as Freud writes: 'If you wish to endure life, prepare yourself for death.'⁵¹ These notions are summed up at the end of the film with Alvy's closing words, another joke that strangely conjures up the images of the lobsters once again. Involving another shelled object, the joke is about a patient who thinks he is a chicken and his brother who refuses to turn him in for fear of losing the eggs he lays. According to Alvy, the joke expresses his feelings towards romantic love: 'I guess that's how I feel about relationships. They're totally crazy, irrational and absurd but we keep going back to them because we need the eggs.'

Eggs themselves are loaded with meaning in this joke: at once holding the possibility of new life (they are Christian symbols of rebirth) while their shells anticipate breakage. As Diane Toops writes in her book, *Eggs: A Global History* (2014), an egg is 'as beautiful as a planet, heaving with life, stronger than it looks yet still likely to break.'⁵² Initially, the joke seems to express Alvy's eventual understanding of his relationship with Annie, that even though they are no longer together, he will continue to search for love again. He is no longer anxious that psychological torment

⁴⁹ Phillips, *Terrors*, p. 53.

⁵⁰ Mortimer, p. 4.

⁵¹ Freud, *On Murder*, p. 194.

⁵² Diane Toops, *Eggs: A Global History* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2014), p. 4.

will keep him frozen in a heartbroken state, neurotically focusing on the shattered pieces of the relationship. After all, in the final scene the pair part ways as the road sign flickers to 'Walk', an instruction to Alvy as much a symbol of Alvy's progression forward.

This interpretation, however, obscures the importance of fear in the film's conclusion. Rather than simply 'needing the eggs' meaning needing romantic relationships, Alvy's Freudian engagement with the lobsters shows that, crucially, there needs to be the *fear* of not getting the eggs in order for these romantic relationships to work. Alvy's experience shows him that in a world where these relationships have the potential to exist, the fear of not getting them is essential. In the first scene Alvy only speaks of trying to figure out where his relationship went wrong and not of getting Annie back. Alvy's fear is not of not being with Annie but rather that he won't want to be in a relationship again. Through the egg joke, the presence of the lobsters is therefore felt again, the narrative's past suitably invoked in its present. Annie's phobias become similarly entangled in her relationship with Alvy in the spider scene. Sander H. Lee sees this scene as nostalgically linked to the previous and beloved lobster memory. He writes: 'In a re-enactment of the romantic lobster scene, Alvy rescues her from a spider'.⁵³ The lobster scene is certainly present as Annie's photographs of Alvy are seen in the shot, a reminder of happier memories in their relationship and the film itself. But Lee's misremembering of the film hinders his analysis of this scene, as the scene is certainly no re-enactment, but rather a half-echo where Alvy is not joined by Annie (Fig. 1.4). Alvy enters the bathroom alone in the way that bathrooms are usually entered alone while Annie waits outside for the gruesome

⁵³ Lee, p. 70.

business to be done. Any memory of the lobster scene is a reminder of how far Annie and Alvy's relationship has deteriorated.



Figure 1.4. Annie waits for Alvy to kill the spiders.

In both cases, however, the animals face an early demise. The grisly deaths of being boiled alive or being squished by a tennis racket are their fates, but at least for Annie and Alvy, the lobsters were an interaction motivated by fun. Furthermore, the spider scene comes during a time of heartbreak and separation and after both Annie and Alvy have been seeing other people. Alvy finds artefacts of Annie's new dates around her flat, and Annie says that she thought she heard a woman on the phone when she called Alvy. The memory of the lobster scene clearly lingers in Annie's mind too, as she stands opposite the photograph of Alvy holding one at arm's length (Fig. 1.4.). Annie calls Alvy under the pretence of getting him to remove the spiders but has the ulterior motive of romantic reconciliation. Perhaps she was hoping for the same delight and chaos of loose animals to rekindle their relationship.

While the symbolism of Annie as a spider luring Alvy into her web lingers in this scene, we have to be careful of viewing Annie's interactions through the misogynistic lens that informs the cultural understanding of the spider. Katarzyna Michalski and Serguiz Michalski argue that: 'It is not only misogynistic males that tend to associate the spider with female conceit, aggressiveness and female dominance. The antifeminist stance is extended also to the sexual cannibalism of some species, for example Black Widow spiders.'⁵⁴ Cannibalism is a behaviour present in both lobster and spider species, as Elizabeth Townsend writes of lobsters: 'They are solitary and aggressive, sometimes eating their partner after mating'.⁵⁵ Sexual aggression and deceit are also paired with connotations of motherhood in cultural understandings of the spider: the Black Widow eats her mate in order to gain enough strength to become a mother. This association is implied in the spider scene in *Annie Hall* when Annie, desperate to keep Alvy in her apartment, offers him some chocolate milk. Alvy's responds, 'What am I, your son?', and both his misogynistic view of Annie and Annie's ulterior motive are revealed.

In the end, Alvy does not rescue Annie from the spiders at all as he leaves them in the bathroom presumably for someone else to remove. It is intriguing that in Sander H. Lee's reminiscing of the scene he determines that Alvy 'rescues her from a spider', revealing another misremembering of the scene.⁵⁶ In fact, after discovering a concert ticket in Annie's apartment, Alvy angrily suggests that she calls the man she went on that date with to handle the spiders. The gendered pursuit of spider-killing is reserved for the men Annie dates, a somewhat diluted act of machismo that offers urban city-dwellers like Alvy an opportunity to come to his girlfriend's rescue. Of course, Alvy is

⁵⁴ Katarzyna Michalski and Serguiz Michalski, *Spider* (London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2010), p. 11.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Townsend, *Lobster: A Global History* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 13.

⁵⁶ Lee, p. 70.

not quite up to the job and the gendered nature of the spider-killing is humorously undercut. He cannot or will not do it, anticipating their eventual breakup and Annie's romance with another man. Relationships, it seems, are about who gets to remove the spiders.

Lee also fails to notice that there is not one spider, but two. This oversight, in many ways, reflects Alvy's own as while he has been away dating new women, the fact that Annie too has been dating comes as a shock. The surprise of finding two spiders in the bathtub mirrors his own realisation that there is, and has always been, two people in the relationship. Alvy throws the spider-killing objects in the bath with the possibly dead animals to be dealt with at another time, and the spiders come to represent the aspects of their relationship that Annie and Alvy have not addressed. In an earlier scene, Annie complains about her apartment to Alvy who ignores her concerns and passes it off with a joke: 'Sure it has bad plumbing and bugs, you say that like it's a bad thing.' Ignoring the spiders proves detrimental to Annie and Alvy's relationship, and when they reconcile at the end of the scene it is the beginning of the end of their relationship. Left without proper attention the lobsters in boiling pots become spiders in the bathtub and bad plumbing with bugs. Like a dead shark they are representative of their failing relationship. Their anxieties and fears are still left almost-dead in the bathtub as they move on to the next phase of their relationship: its eventual, and perhaps inevitable, demise.

If the lobsters and spiders teach Alvy anything, it is that returning to them is not the answer. As Phillips writes: 'There is, as it were, no future in repetition.'⁵⁷ Alvy finally acknowledges his compulsion to repeat towards the end of the film, with his first ever play that re-enacts his interaction with Annie in the health food café in L.A.

⁵⁷ Phillips, *On Flirtation*, p. 69.

The play's artifice is emphasised by the rehearsal setting. As the actor-Annie and actor-Alvy read their lines Alvy watches on as his perfected version of the past plays in front of him. The scene in the health food café with the real Annie and Alvy, however, anticipates their separation. The café's umbrellas read 'Addio' and 'Ciao', instructing the pair to say their goodbyes (Fig. 1.5.). Alvy's order of 'alfalfa sprouts' and 'mashed yeast' reveal his discomfort in these surroundings: lobsters they are not. And Annie herself is different as Alvy remembers her wearing a kaftan-like top, so different from the ties and shirts she favoured in New York, instead looking similar to the women frequenting Tony's (Paul Simon) parties. Alvy remembers her this way because, even then, he knows that she is lost to L.A. and her new life.



Figure 1.5. The health food cafe in L.A.

In the final scenes of the film, Annie appropriately sings 'Seems Like Old Times' over the top of images from the film, images that are Alvy's nostalgic memories of the past and therefore formed and created: it only *seems* like old times, and the old times have gone, unable to be repeated. A set of edited highlights from the film is introduced

as the scenes Alvy recalls are important moments in their relationship. The passing images mimic memory as one scene flits by seemingly provoked by the memory of another. As I have shown, the film has been a decidedly one-sided (mis)remembering of his relationship with Annie. Her singing at the end, while providing the soundtrack to Alvy's memory, serves to remind the audience that Annie has been part of the relationship too. Just as Alvy is surprised to find two spiders in the bathtub, Allen here reminds us that only Alvy has had his say. The montage of Alvy's memories involve happy times from Annie and Alvy's relationship, including the lobster scene, the tennis match, and the night Alvy tells Annie that he 'luffs' her. It also shows Annie and Alvy in less happy times, for example the scene where Annie and Alvy argue over her moving in, along with Alvy's frustration at being called back to Annie's home to remove the spiders. These moments show his ability to understand his relationship more clearly and to acknowledge both positive and negative moments. This greater understanding of Alvy's relationship with Annie is reflected in the final shots of the film, which I will now analyse.

Alvy directly addresses the camera again (Fig. 1.6.), echoing the first shot of the film. While still a close-up of his face, this shot gives Alvy more space and he is less boxed in by the frame. Significantly, he is also not alone, the arm of his theatre collaborator visible behind him. Alvy has successfully evaded the plight of the melancholic that Freud describes as harbouring 'a loss of interest in the outside world ... the inhibition of any kind of performance'.⁵⁸ Instead of the frantic solitary Alvy of the first shot, stuck in time and confused, here Alvy is creating new work and spending time with others, sat calmly rather than stood and he clearly has more understanding of his current situation. He says, 'well, what do you want? It was my first play'.

⁵⁸ Freud, *On Murder*, p. 204.

Furthermore, this scene is rooted in time, coming after Annie and Alvy's final breakup, adding to a greater sense of stability for the character which is reflected in this shot's mise-en-scène.



Figure 1.6. Alvy addresses the camera once again.

The next shot (Fig. 1.7.) is instigated by Alvy's revelation that he did see Annie again after their breakup, bumping into her and another man going to watch *The Sorrow and the Pity* (dir. Marcel Ophüls, 1969), the first film we see Annie and Alvy watch together. While this is reminiscent of their relationship it is also a 'personal triumph' for Alvy. It speaks poignantly of the compulsion to repeat relationships. This is visually invoked by the repetition of couples (there are three altogether), and the similar coat two the women wear. The bookshop to the right of them recalls another of Annie's and Alvy's dates while couples walk in and out of the frame. This is a scene of repetitions. Perhaps Alvy has stumbled upon Annie's own version of the lobster date

and her going to watch *The Sorrow and the Pity* is the experience she repeats with new dates.



Figure 1.7. Alvy and Annie meet at the cinema again.

The camera's distance from the action adds to a sense of anonymity, emphasised by other pedestrians entering and exiting the frame. As the film draws to its close, the camera is kept at a distance from Annie and Alvy, foreshadowing her eventual and permanent exit from the shot in the last scene. Moreover, the lack of nondiegetic sound is made all the more ostentatious by Annie's singing of 'Seems Like Old Times' over the images. The nondiegetic music is a reminder of the Annie of Alvy's memories.

Alvy's new understanding and appreciation for Annie is most clear in the next scene (Fig. 1.8.) where the pair, after meeting for lunch sometime later, sit in a café laughing. The camera is positioned distinctly outside of the action, separated by a windowpane that evokes the camera's lens: there are several degrees of separation

here and a sense of privacy is created. While *Annie Hall* is a romantic comedy with jokes and in fact opens with a joke, Alvy spends very little time in the film laughing. Here is an exception, once again evoking the lobster scene, another occasion of Alvy's laughter. Annie is back in her usual clothes associated with New York, perhaps revealing that her L.A. attire (Fig. 1.9.) was another of Alvy's misrememberings, an exaggeration that exposed his anxiety over the loss of her to L.A..



Figure 1.8. Annie and Alvy kick around old times.

There is another split screen in this shot but this time Annie's side has slightly more space. For the first time in the film, Annie is granted the advantage with the camera angled a little more towards her. Alvy's side is obscured by the reflection of the leaves on the glass. Unlike the other split screens in the film, Alvy is able to reach across the divide and touch Annie's shoulder. It is different from the other split screens in the film as this one is not a creation of Alvy's imagination. Finally, the separations are not in Alvy's mind and his neuroses about Annie are lifted. The montage of sixteen scenes,

no more than four seconds each, follows and Alvy is able to understand his relationship with Annie as a mixture of good and bad moments.



Figure 1.9. Annie in L.A.

In the next shot (Fig. 1.10.) the camera shoots from Annie's vantage point in the previous shot. This is a symbolic shift in perspective or even just a reminder that there is another perspective to Alvy's decidedly one-sided story. Moreover, the camera is out of step with the couple who are too quick for it to keep up. When Annie finally leaves the shot, Alvy is left alone (Fig. 1.11.). The camera is similarly still and static as Alvy and the audience watch her walk away. The road sign reads 'Don't Walk', instructing Alvy not to fulfil the last-minute romantic comedy chase to get back the woman he loves. Instead, the movement of traffic disturbs the serenity of the scene, a reminder of normal life that moves on regardless of the comparatively small love stories of the city's inhabitants. As the cars and trucks surge forwards they symbolise a propulsion forward into the future. From the camera's perspective, Annie leaves the shot walking from right to left, while Alvy leaves the shot walking left to right. His direction mirrors

the direction of Western reading from left to right which in part informs the understanding of this movement as ‘forward’. From this vantage point, Alvy moves into his future while Annie returns to his past where she will always be made of memories. But of course, from Annie’s own perspective, she is simply walking forwards and away from Alvy.



Figure 1.10. The view from inside the diner.

The final shots of the film do not feature Annie or Alvy (Fig. 1.12.). The artificiality of film is invoked here, as the camera’s stillness reflects the position of the audience in the cinema. *Annie Hall* constantly points to its own fabrication, from the ostentatious camera movements of the lobster scene to the use of split screens and cartoon. But here, the audience’s actions are examined: the protagonists we have been watching are now gone yet the audience still sits like the camera which waits observing moving images behind glass. Finally, the audience must get up and walk away just as the camera must stop filming, and the camera person must leave the set. Our

impressions of Alvy, like Annie, can be repeated, however, through memories and through revisiting the film.



Figure 1.11. Alvy leaves the frame alone.



Figure 1.12. New York traffic and the final shot of Annie Hall.

In conclusion, in *Annie Hall* there is no ‘cure’ for memory and the repetition of these memories is inevitable even after successful mourning for the lost object. I do not think that Allen is suggesting that by the end of the film Alvy will no longer return to his memories of Annie. Rather, as Freud attests in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), ‘We must therefore expect that the patient will yield to the compulsion to repeat— which now takes the place of the impulse to remember.’⁵⁹ Here, the result of the mourning work is revealed. Depicted in its ultimate form in the montage, Freud’s argument that ‘Each individual memory’ is ‘adjusted and hyper-invested’ is shown here, ‘leading to its detachment from the libido.’⁶⁰ These nostalgic images have been repeated so much and romanticised to such an extent that they bear little resemblance to the past and Alvy is therefore able to walk away from his relationship with Annie. As Pam Cook writes, nostalgia is a process of focusing on idealised images finally ‘enabling it to be exorcised in order that society, and individuals, can move on.’⁶¹ Alvy’s mourning over the loss of Annie results in a nostalgic look back at their relationship. As the idealised lost object, Annie proves difficult to move on from, but it is this very nostalgia that means that Annie is finally exorcised and painful memories are, while not forgotten, made safe for the present just like Alvy’s lobsters and spiders. In a similar way, the influence of *Annie Hall* on contemporary romantic comedy reveals this same nostalgic look back, sometimes with laughter, joy and fondness, and more recently, after the resurgence of criticism of Allen in the post-Me Too era, with pain.

⁵⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 37.

⁶⁰ Freud, *On Murder*, p. 205.

⁶¹ Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (New York, USA: Taylor & Francis Inc., 2005), p. 4.

CHAPTER TWO

ANNIE AND HER DAUGHTERS: REPEATING *ANNIE HALL*

In Woody Allen's *Anything Else* (dir. Woody Allen, 2003) and *Whatever Works* (dir. Woody Allen, 2009), Annie's (Diane Keaton) absence is keenly felt. Both films draw upon elements of *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977), for example the Pygmalion narrative and the relationship between the Alvy-esque protagonists Jerry (Jason Biggs) and Boris (Larry David) and their beautiful girlfriends, Amanda (Christina Ricci) and Melodie (Evan Rachel Wood) respectively. But it is in the depiction of the women's mothers, Paula (Stockard Channing) and Marietta (Patricia Clarkson), that the memory of Annie returns as they are celebrated for their talent and similarity to her. Meanwhile, Amanda and Melodie are fetishized and ultimately dismissed as attractive but vacuous. Despite Allen's attempts to move on from *Annie Hall*, Annie is remembered in the figure of the mother, mirroring the repression of motherhood in Freudian theory, and its return in feminist film theory, especially in the work of E. Ann Kaplan. Mothers are not absent in Freudian theory, but rather silent. They are, of course, potent figures in psychoanalytic theory for both the female and male child. As Nancy Chodorow notes, mothers 'are the parents who threatens their sons with castration, and whom their daughters blame for their lack of a penis.'¹ But the mother has not been viewed from *her* vantage point in psychoanalysis.

For Maud Ellmann, this silencing exposes the patriarchal basis and motive embedded in psychoanalysis:

¹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (London, UK: University of California Press, 1999), p. 3.

Murder, mourning, melancholia: this alliterative trio encapsulates Freud's story of the human race, from the murder of the primal father to the potential melancholy of modernity. Missing from this murmurous miscellany of Ms is the word "mother"— a symptomatic omission, since the mother is conspicuously missing from Freud's reconstruction of prehistory.²

The mother is omitted, Ellmann argues, precisely because of the threat she poses to man.³ The mother symbolises the lack the child fears, the lack that signals castration. Through the fear of the mother, the fear of her castrating potential figures her as the proponent of violence, and psychoanalysis fails to acknowledge her as a subject. As Ellmann attests, she is silenced in the process. In the meantime, attention is brought to the missing part, to the lack. In this chapter, I will show that the missing part of Allen's repetition of *Annie Hall* in *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works* is Annie, and it is through this omission that she is similarly and paradoxically centralised.

REPEATING ANNIE HALL

*'Paradoxically, our complex Oedipal struggles prevented us from seeing the Mother's oppression (although we had no such problems in other areas), and resulted in our assigning the Mother, in her heterosexual, familial setting, to an absence and silence analogous with the male relegation of her to the periphery.'*⁴

E. Ann Kaplan, *Feminism & Film*, 2000.

² Maud Ellmann, 'Introduction', in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* by Sigmund Freud (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2005) vii-xxvii (p. vii).

³ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁴ E. Ann Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*', in *Feminism & Film*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2000) 466-478 (p. 466).

Annie Hall's influence on *Anything Else* is mainly through a repetition of character and plot. Florence Colombani argues that *Annie Hall* is not the only influence upon the film, writing that '*Anything Else* recycles characters from all Allen's films' but it is still *Annie Hall* that she singles out.⁵ She writes: 'Alvy Singer the neurotic comedian of *Annie Hall*, reappears with the young features of Jason Biggs.'⁶ The Alvy-esque Jerry works through his memories of his breakup to understand, like Alvy, why it has failed. By the end of the film he comes to realise that his relationship was important, but not important enough to continue and he and Amanda, like Annie and Alvy, end the film apart. Allen features in the film as Jerry's friend Dobel, a character whose obsession with jokes, the presence of antisemitism in America and the futility of life also echoes Alvy's behaviour. Amanda's neuroses and career as an aspiring actress recalls Annie's own nervousness and ambitions as a performer. But Amanda's lack of artistic progress and a greater focus on her propensity for jealousy presents her as a less compelling and less loveable character than Annie. As Xan Brooks observes: 'Christina Ricci plays the wayward Amanda as a toxic variation on Diane Keaton's Annie Hall.'⁷ Amanda's character is a reminder of what she is not, all the while signifying the lost object, Annie, and conjuring a sense of nostalgia for *Annie Hall* itself.

The Pygmalion plot of *Annie Hall* is repeated in the plot of *Whatever Works*, as genius physicist Boris begins a relationship with the much younger Melodie. His name echoes Allen's character Boris Grushenko in *Love and Death* (dir. Woody Allen, 1975), drawing attention to its place within Allen's oeuvre. Although *Whatever Works* was

⁵ Florence Colombani, *Woody Allen: Masters of Cinema* (Paris, France: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2010), p. 89.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 89.

⁷ Xan Brooks, 'Anything Else', *Sight and Sound*, July 2004, p. 80.

largely received with ambivalence, Colombani defends the film, particularly the filmmaker's tendency to allude to past works in his films. For Colombani, *Whatever Works* most clearly recalls Allen's cinema of the 1970s and argues that the charm of the film is 'that of rediscovering an Allen who has been somewhat forgotten, the dialogue virtuoso and genius of the sharp, witty rejoinder.'⁸ But these rejoinders usually come in the form of Boris's retorts to Melodie as she responds to his teaching. They are frequently cruel and misogynistic. In one scene, he calls her an 'imbecile child' and a 'brainless inchworm', and ridicules her for, among other things, her lack of knowledge of string theory, philosophy, and life in New York City.

The Pygmalion plot is demonstrated through Boris's berating of Melodie for her apparent stupidity and allows Allen to write particularly mean-spirited dialogue. Melodie is presented as beautiful but unintelligent and any attempts by the film to show that her naïve outlook tempers Boris's cynicism are small triumphs in the face of such harshness. She shows Boris the happiness possible in a relationship but mostly her role is as his student and carer, catering to his needs and always ready to be taught a lesson. Boris's morose personality, like Alvy's in *Annie Hall*, means that he ends the film without her. Unlike *Anything Else*, *Whatever Works* does not feature Allen but the similarity between Boris and Alvy (as well as many of Allen's characters) is certainly emphasised. Lisa Mullen writes that, 'the film as it stands feels like it's been assembled from the deleted scenes of Allen's back catalogue.'⁹ This is seen in the marketing of the film, where Larry David's shrug on the movie poster could be Allen's. Even though the film does not feature Allen, the selling point is the memory of him, the memory of his films, and the mythology of the auteur.

⁸ Colombani, p. 92.

⁹ Lisa Mullen, 'Whatever Works', *Sight and Sound*, August 2010, p. 80.

This repetition of *Annie Hall* in *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works* both fetishizes the film and attempts to distance itself from it. Allen is working towards moving on from a film that is itself about moving on, creating a psychological vertigo that only returns him to the source of his anxiety. This strangeness is complicated further by the fact that Allen is showing that one of his greatest influences is himself. This intertextual layering contributes further to a slippery feeling of time between these three films: the past and the present merge as Allen remembers Annie through later films that only serve to signify her absence. As Linda Hutcheon argues in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), ‘we repeat to control the past.’¹⁰ Through Allen’s repetition of *Annie Hall* he returns to a film that saw huge critical and commercial success. Simultaneously, he attempts to move on from the film by omitting the most crucial element, Annie herself.

Nevertheless, like the mothers of Freudian theory, this omission paradoxically results in a centralising of it. Allen’s fetishization and simultaneous distancing from *Annie Hall* is thus illuminated by Hutcheon’s argument that the act of adaptation is ‘Oedipally envious and worshipful at the same time.’¹¹ While *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works* are not adaptations of *Annie Hall*, Hutcheon’s words describe the act of repetition that is certainly present in these films. And through this repetition of the plot of *Annie Hall*, Annie becomes taboo, an image at once feared and protected, envied and worshipped. This paradox forms a crucial concept in psychoanalysis, one described by Freud in ‘Totem and Taboo’ (1913): ‘On the one hand it means sacred,

¹⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation: Second Edition* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

consecrated; on the other: uncanny, dangerous, forbidden and unclean.¹² Annie is central in Allen's attempt to move on from her.

Just like Alvy in *Annie Hall*, Allen attempts to move on from Annie by omitting her. As I explored in the previous chapter, this is futile for Alvy, as remembering is essential to the process of forgetting: in Alvy's attempts to move forward, his mind is cast back to understand 'where the screw up came.' Similarly, in Allen's separation from *Annie Hall*, Annie is invoked by her absence. This apparent contradiction is illustrated by the similar absence of motherhood within psychoanalytic theory. Despite the silencing of the mother, she re-emerges and disturbs, calling attention to her absence. This is the basis of E. Ann Kaplan's feminist film theory in her book, *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (1983). According to Kaplan, this ignorance of the mother's perspective is directly linked to the patriarchy's continued ignorance of motherhood in society. Kaplan writes that 'unlike in the realm of sexuality, some part of Motherhood lies outside of patriarchal concerns, networks, economy.'¹³ In society, the position of the mother, according to Kaplan, has been largely silenced, as women exist 'silently, quietly, often in agony, often in bliss, but always on the periphery of a society that tries to make us all forget our mothers.'¹⁴

Approaching patriarchal culture from the position of the silenced mother figure provides an alternative vantage point from which to view *Annie Hall's* influence upon the films explored in this chapter. It enables a shift in perspective that is more aligned with the feminist thrust of this thesis, as opposed to other, male-centred theories of influence, for example Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*

¹² Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and Taboo', in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London, UK: Penguin Modern Classics, 2005) 1-166 (p. 23).

¹³ E. Ann Kaplan, *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London, UK: Routledge, 1983), p. 206.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 201.

(1973). Bloom's theory focuses on male poets' anxiety in the shadow of other male poets. Bloom's theory outlines a patriarchal and paternal struggle which is necessarily defined by violence and embattlement. In fact, it is this very struggle with a father-figure poet that defines a great poet. As Bloom writes: 'My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death.'¹⁵ The presence of patriarchal, dominating figures in a metaphorical battle to the death clearly invokes Freud's theory of Oedipus, which Bloom acknowledges is an influence upon his thinking.¹⁶ As he writes, 'Battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads.'¹⁷ But it is Bloom's focus on repetition, an essential element of his theory, that reveals Freud's greatest influence upon his work. Bloom writes:

Repetition as the recurrence of images from our own past, obsessive images against which our present affections vainly struggle, is one of the prime antagonists that psychoanalysis courageously encouraged. Repetition, to Freud, was primarily a mode of compulsion, and reduced to the death instinct by way of inertia, regression, entropy.¹⁸

Through the course of Bloom's theory, the anxious, tormented male progeny engages in the battle with their artistically greater fathers. The strong sons emerge with new works, their art worthy of attention after the struggle with their fathers.

The exclusionary focus on masculine poets in Bloom's theory has been highlighted, for example by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), where they observe that, 'Bloom's model of literary history is

¹⁵ Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry: Second Edition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 80.

intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal. For this reason it has seemed, and no doubt will continue to seem, offensively sexist to some feminist critics.¹⁹ The centrality of the male poet and the metaphorical battle between father and son that informs Bloom's theory is a problem when considering how female artists fit into the model of influence. Using motherhood to understand the influence of *Annie Hall* on *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works* instead highlights the female presence in these films and helps illuminate the way Allen depicts them. By largely ignoring motherhood, psychoanalytic theory has not completely co-opted it, and in this inattention has saved it from patriarchal dominion. As Kaplan attests:

This is because, unlike in the realm of sexuality, some part of Motherhood lies outside of patriarchal concerns, networks, economy. It is this part that eludes control. The extremity of patriarchal domination on female sexuality may be a reaction to helplessness in the face of the threat that Motherhood represents.²⁰

It is through this 'gap' in patriarchal attention, and therefore control, that women can establish meaning outside of the domination of the patriarchy. There are, of course, problems with the argument that motherhood should offer an alternative to patriarchal culture. The bourgeois sanctification of motherhood has been questioned and critiqued by feminist thinkers, including Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal feminist text, *The Second Sex* (1949). She writes that motherhood, from pregnancy, necessitates a tension between subjectivity and objectivity, since the pregnant woman is 'a human being, a conscious and free individual, who has become life's passive instrument'.²¹ It is therefore important to be sceptical of Kaplan's notion that

¹⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination: Second Edition* (Connecticut, USA: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 47.

²⁰ Kaplan, *Women & Film*, p. 206.

²¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London, UK: Vintage, 1997), p. 513.

motherhood should be a site of liberation and to understand its limits even when it is being used in a symbolic way as it is here.

As Chodorow outlines, ‘Women’s mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour.’²² Alongside this conceptualisation of motherhood as sometimes repressive, it is also necessarily exclusionary along gendered lines (omitting trans women and other genders marginalised along the gender spectrum), and not all women are, want to, or can become mothers. Equally, the traditional characteristics of mothering far from signal feminist resistance. The nurturing and supportive role of motherhood is traditionally directed towards children and husbands. As Chodorow writes: ‘Bourgeois women were to act as both nurturant moral models to their children and as nurturant supporters and moral guides for husbands on their return from the immoral, competitive world of work.’²³

However, my reservations are addressed by Kaplan, who offers a counterargument for this position, defining her terms more clearly. She states that she is not arguing that ‘women are inherently mothers, or that the only ideal relationship that can express female specificity is mothering.’²⁴ Rather, she argues that the position of motherhood has been ignored and not defined by the patriarchy, ‘allowing us to reformulate the position as given, rather than discovering a specificity outside of the system we are in.’²⁵ Motherhood is, for Kaplan, a way to talk about the male gaze without repeating patriarchal thought. As Kaplan argues, this is ‘a place to start rethinking sex difference, not an end’, and motherhood can offer *a* way into critiquing patriarchal thought even if it is not *the* feminist praxis of choice.²⁶ In the case of *Annie*

²² Chodorow, p. 3.

²³ Ibid, p. 5.

²⁴ Kaplan, *Women & Film*, p. 202.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 202.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 202.

Hall's influence on *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works*, what it offers is an alternative route into understanding the way influence works away from patriarchal concepts, for example Bloom's paternal struggle.

It could initially seem as though Allen is illustrating this feminist theory through the resurfacing of Annie in *Paula* and *Marietta* like the silenced mother in Freudian theory. This is not to say that Allen is performing a feminist reading, however inadvertently. Instead, it highlights his misogyny, as the younger women Amanda and Melodie are dismissed and ridiculed for not living up to their mothers, and their cinematic mother, Annie. And for all their celebration, Allen does present *Paula* and *Marietta* misogynistically as destabilising and threatening presences for the Alvy-esque protagonists. This depiction of the mothers as disturbances begins from their introduction in the films. The arrival of *Paula* and *Marietta* subverts the romance plots, and both Jerry and Boris are thrown off-course in their romantic relationships with their daughters. Both mothers enter the films when the couples are together and relatively happy. In keeping with the generic features of the romantic comedy, *Paula* and *Marietta* act as the obstacle in the romantic narrative of the films, obstacles that must be overcome for the generic happy ending. The ending does not come, however, and the mothers successfully destabilise the traditional romantic comedy ending.

Marietta sweeps into Boris's apartment recalling Blanche Du-Bois, an allusion Allen made earlier in his career in the film *Sleeper* (dir. Woody Allen, 1973) where Miles (Woody Allen) takes on the iconic role during a regression therapy session. Allen would allude to Tennessee Williams' play again in *Blue Jasmine* (dir. Woody Allen, 2013), where Cate Blanchett plays a character like du-Bois, who goes to stay with her working-class sister (Sally Hawkins) and her husband (Bobby Cannavale). In *Whatever Works*, *Marietta's* Southern accent makes the allusion explicit, as she sighs

the words lifted from Williams's play, 'You were not the gentleman I was expecting', upon her arrival. Here, Allen invokes Clarkson's acting pedigree, especially as a theatre actor, while cementing the character as a destabilising presence in Boris and Melodie's life together. The reference to Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* means that we anticipate the disruption that Marietta's presence, like Blanche, will bring.



Figure 2.1. Paula at her piano.

In *Anything Else*, the destabilising presence of Paula, especially her sexual appetite, reminds Jerry of his lack of sex life with Amanda. Paula also brings a talent for singing that makes Amanda anxious over her own talent and simultaneously reminds us of Annie. Paula clearly casts a shadow over Amanda, also a singer-actor who, crucially, we never see sing or act. Meanwhile Paula has a whole scene dedicated solely to her startling and impromptu performance for Jerry. The initial long shot (Fig. 2.1.) makes Paula look small as she is obscured behind her piano and is in keeping with the types of shots Allen has used for her until this point. Paula has not had a close-up, but has instead been shot at a distance, usually with her moving around. Until this

point, Paula's talent has also not been shown, and her role in the narrative is mainly as an annoyance to Jerry. When Paula begins playing and singing, however, Channing's talent is foregrounded, like Keaton's in the similar scene in *Annie Hall*. Jerry enters the shot, apparently entranced by Paula's singing too. The scene cuts to a close-up (Fig. 2.2.), the first and only such shot of Channing in the film, and her star quality is realised. She is central in the shot and the camera is still.



Figure 2.2. Paula's close-up.

In one scene towards the end of *Annie Hall*, Annie is centre stage and centre of the frame. The diegetic sound of Annie's singing focuses attention on her presence and the stillness of the camera emphasises her significance. In *Anything Else*, Paula's face is also illuminated by a light standing on the piano, contrasting with the dark browns of the background which is cast in shadow. Furthermore, the limited editing of the scene simultaneously encourages the attention on Paula and also points to the film's artifice: the longer the scene continues, the more we understand that this scene is

about Channing's performance as much as it is about Paula's, just as the similar scene in *Annie Hall* is about Keaton's performance as much as it is about Annie's.

The focus on Annie and Paula therefore ruptures the verisimilitude of the scenes, in the same way Laura Mulvey argues in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) actors like Marilyn Monroe and Lauren Bacall's depictions disrupt theirs in their respective films, *The River of No Return* and *To Have and To Have Not* (1944):

For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space ... One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen.²⁷

In the performance scenes in *Annie Hall*, the verisimilitude of the shot is ruptured by the focus on Annie's singing which, through the minimal editing and continued focus, becomes a scene about Keaton's star quality, just as Paula's scene in *Anything Else* is really about Channing's. Neither performance is a significant plot point but is instead used to showcase the talent of the respective actors who are here cast as screen icons. Of course, Paula's performance also recalls Channing's most iconic role as Rizzo in the 1978 musical film *Grease* (dir. Randal Kleiser, 1978) which was released a year after *Annie Hall*.

The women command attention during these performances, not least from the films' protagonists Jerry and Alvy. In fact, it is the male protagonists' attention that defines what is focused on in the film. As Mulvey writes, the male protagonist, 'is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and

²⁷ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: UK, Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 58-69 (p. 63).

creates the action.’²⁸ Boris and Jerry are depicted as directly responsible for the narrative. Like Alvy in *Annie Hall*, both Boris and Jerry break the fourth wall and address the audience, confirming their power as motivators of the films’ action as they break a rule of cinema that is used to conceal this artifice. In *Whatever Works*, the opening scene shows Boris enjoying a conversation with his friends. The illusion of the scene’s verisimilitude is shattered when Boris acknowledges that he is being watched by an audience behind a camera and outside of the narrative. To his friends’ disbelief, he addresses the camera.

Like Alvy, the story that follows is the protagonist’s recollection of events as Boris tells the story of his relationship with Melodie for this unseen audience. This identifies Boris as the male protagonist of which Mulvey writes. Similarly, Jerry breaks the fourth wall in *Anything Else*, addressing the audience as he describes the relationship problems he is experiencing with Amanda. The film, like *Annie Hall*, flits in and out of Jerry’s memories, and so the narrative is again controlled by the perspective of its male protagonist. All depictions of characters in these films, then, are necessarily cast through the lens of Boris and Jerry, just as Annie is cast in the nostalgic light of Alvy’s memories. The control over the narrative that these men represent, however, is destabilised by the presence of the young women they become attracted to. Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze goes some way in explaining the depiction of these women, particularly the fetishization and objectification of Amanda and Melodie. In ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Mulvey writes:

The presence of women is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid, p. 64.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 63.

Both Melodie and Amanda destabilise the movement and action of the male protagonists' trajectory, and it is this threat that they seek to neutralise through fetishization and objectification. Allen uses fetishization to eradicate the threat of women embodied in Amanda and Melodie, and the threat of the memory of Annie that haunts their characters.

While Mulvey's theory is helpful in analysing the depiction of the young women in these films, it only goes some way to explaining the way Allen presents young women in his films after *Annie Hall*. Mulvey's theory has been critiqued most specifically for its apparent rigidity and simplification. The failure to acknowledge the experience of Black women was addressed by bell hooks, for example, in her seminal essay, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators' (1992), which detailed the politicisation of Black spectatorship and the racialization of the right to look and be looked at.³⁰ Mulvey's theory also ignored lesbian desire and the pleasure in looking which Judith Stacey responds to in her essay 'Feminine Fascinations: Forms of Identification in Star-Audience Relations'.³¹

As Mulvey acknowledged in her book *After Images* (2019): 'The male/female binary oppositions of "voyeurism" and "exhibitionism" or "passive" and "active" were infinitely more schematic on the screen than they ever were in Freud and, equally, infinitely less complex than in life.'³² Mulvey's simplified binary structure was useful for critiquing the way patriarchal ideas informed the depiction of women in cinema, and how these patriarchal ideas were perpetuated by the propagation of these images.

³⁰ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), p. 115.

³¹ Judith Stacey, 'Feminine Fascinations: Forms of Identification in Star-Audience Relations', in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: UK, Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 196-209 (p. 197).

³² Laura Mulvey, *After Images: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2019), p. 243.

It did not, however, reflect the multiplicity of ways in which women could be viewed in cinema, ignoring, for example, the non-heterosexual look and the experiences of women of colour as mentioned above. Once again, Mulvey addresses this neglect, critiquing the female spectator's look in her essay, 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1981). And in *After Images*, she circles back on this point again, arguing that she 'could have argued that women spectators, untroubled by castration anxiety, could find visual pleasure in a female, and so too a lesbian gaze'.³³ Of course, the binary opposition of male and female itself cannot include an understanding of the way other genders may interact with the gaze, including trans, non-binary and intersex people.

Another limitation of Mulvey's work is the exclusion of race in the theory, an intersection that complicates the binary power structure of man and woman. Racist systems of power undercut and destabilise the power structure of man over woman, as power does not solely lie across gendered lines. Mulvey's oversight of the significance of race means that her theory is necessarily exclusionary. This is something that Mulvey has addressed and has focused attention on correcting in her subsequent works. In *After Images*, she acknowledges her ignorance while working on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema':

Speaking solely for myself, I only gradually began to realize the way that racial presence and absence dominated the Hollywood screen, with the necessary implication that the excessive investment in the female star as spectacle is symptomatic of racial as well as male sexual anxiety.³⁴

In her book with Anna Backman Rogers, *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures* (2015), Mulvey addressed these

³³ Ibid, p. 245.

³⁴ Mulvey, *After Images*, p. 19.

limitations, stating ‘we realised that we would have to draw upon a diverse range of scholars for whom the term feminism might have different meanings. This book speaks to that difference and plurality of perspective and rejects a reductive form or definition of feminism.’³⁵

Mulvey’s theory (or perhaps it is more accurate to say Mulvey’s *theories*) is therefore only the beginning for the analysis in this chapter, as to fully understand the way that Allen depicts Amanda and Melodie, one must also understand the way that Allen depicts non-white women in his cinema. When analysing the character of Dia (Frieda Pinto) in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (dir. Woody Allen, 2010), Mulvey’s argument therefore only reaches a certain point: an understanding of the fetishized and *orientalised* gaze is imperative. In the following section, I will analyse the depiction of the characters Amanda, Melodie and Dia, to discuss to the extent to which Allen’s gaze which fetishizes, dismisses and ultimately punishes these young women for not living up to the memory of Annie.

MARIETTA AND MELODIE AS ANNIE IN *WHATEVER WORKS*

‘Hello, I must be going

I cannot stay

I came to say

I must be going

I’m glad I came

³⁵ Anna Backman Rogers and Laura Mulvey, ‘Preface’, in *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, ed. by Anna Backman Rogers and Laura Mulvey (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2015) 10-14 (p. 10).

But just the same
I must be going, la-la!

“Hello I Must Be Going”, Groucho Marx, 1930.

The song that opens *Whatever Works*, ‘Hello I Must Be Going’, reveals the anxiety of regression and progression and of remembering and forgetting. As Adam Phillips writes in *Terrors and Experts* (1997): ‘As in neurosis, we are pursuing something by running from it’ because the ‘neurotic is always arriving at the place he is running from.’³⁶ The locus of simultaneous arrival and departure in *Whatever Works* is the film *Annie Hall*. In fact, the significance placed on music in *Whatever Works* is itself a nostalgic nod back to Allen’s oeuvre. The songs in Allen’s films are often inherently nostalgic, harkening back to the golden age of the radio era. This is most explicitly explored in *Radio Days* (dir. Woody Allen, 1987). In the mockumentary *Sweet and Lowdown* (dir. Woody Allen, 1999) Allen celebrates his favourite genre of music, jazz, the casting of Sean Penn as the jazz musician supporting the notion that Allen has often marginalised the narratives of Black people. In *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (dir. Woody Allen, 1989), the two plots of comedy and tragedy are defined in part by the application of jazz music and classical music respectively. Just as in *Annie Hall*, ‘Seems Like Old Times’ always reminds Alvy of Annie so in *Whatever Works*, ‘Hello I Must Be Going’ always reminds Boris of Melodie, with the significance of music also present in her name.

When Boris first meets Melodie she is waiting outside his apartment, cold, homeless and looking for help. Boris’s first instinct is that she is a thief, a source of

³⁶ Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts* (London, UK: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 48.

danger and a criminal subject ('Why'd you creep up on me like that you little vagrant?'). The majority of the film sees Boris delving into Melodie's past and discovering her life's secrets, exploring the backstory that later reveals her mother, the much more interesting Marietta. Boris saves Melodie from a life of destitution on the streets and untangles her mystery in the process. Through this investigation, the castration fear is neutralised, echoing Mulvey's words:

The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object ... or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star).³⁷

While in *Anything Else* Amanda is fetishized as a means to address castration anxiety, in *Whatever Works* Boris looks closer at Melodie, the cause of his fear, and through his investigation concludes that Melodie is as unthreatening as she is unstimulating.

Like Annie, Melodie does not end the film with the Alvy-like protagonist. But unlike Annie, who refuses to reconcile with the morose Alvy, Melodie recognises her unhappiness being with the nihilistic Boris and does not see herself as worthy of anything more. Berated by Boris for her apparent stupidity (in one scene he calls her 'stupid beyond all comprehension'), she frequently remarks that she is lucky to be with such a genius. Melodie eventually and reluctantly enters a relationship with the younger and more romantic Randy (Henry Cavill), but only after her mother orchestrates several meetings between the pair. Melodie's complicity in the secret relationship is presented as a result of her impressionable nature rather than any desire to expect more for herself.

³⁷ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 65.

Instead, it is Melodie's mother, Marietta, who is the character that develops in a way most like Annie. After arriving in New York (she is not a New York native, just like Annie), she begins dating a philosopher who encourages her talent for photography. She develops in confidence, finally becoming a successful artist. Like Annie, who discovers that she wants more than Alvy, Marietta finds that she is happiest in a polyamorous relationship and lives with both her philosopher boyfriend and his friend, an art curator. Marietta can, like Annie, see the limitations of a morose character, even if her daughter cannot. She is brilliant and talented and has a love for life that Boris cannot understand. She is threatening to his philosophy on life, and her vibrant sexuality frightens him, a fear that, as in *Annie Hall*, is indicated by the image of lobsters.



Figure 2.3. Lobster signs.

Before Marietta's arrival, Melodie and Boris walk around New York with bright red lobster signs above them (Fig. 2.3). Boris's voiceover reflects upon his new relationship, revealing that his happiness with Melodie is because of her happy-go-lucky and undemanding nature in comparison to his ex-wife, Jessica. He says, 'She's cheerful, not demanding. Okay, she's not as brilliant as Jessica but not as ambitious or

predatory either.’ The castration fear lurks in Boris’s comment with the word, ‘predatory’. The male gaze is shown in action as he dismisses Melodie as a less brilliant and therefore safer choice of partner. The bright red of the lobsters’ shells once again connotes blood and death, and Boris’s comparison of Melodie to Jessica shows that memories of her ‘predatory’ nature still linger. As the couple walk beneath the signs, the presence of lobsters recalls Annie and foreshadows the involvement of a more threatening woman for Boris that will come in the form of Marietta in a later scene.



Figure 2.4. Marietta arrives in a red dress.

The fear of predatory women is paired with these animals, once again referencing *Annie Hall* and proving Melodie to be unlike Annie in her lack of threat. Alvy, after all, is frightened of Annie’s capacity to castrate (depicted in the repetition of the lobster scene in *Annie Hall*), whereas Boris’s misogynistic understanding of Melodie renders her clawless, safe and, in the end, unmemorable. After this scene, Marietta is introduced in the film wearing a bright red dress which connects her to the lobsters and Boris’s fear of castration (Fig. 2.4.), the redness of her dress conjuring the image of blood and danger. She literally stands between Boris and Melodie like the

lobsters between Annie and Alvy, but unlike in *Annie Hall*, here the creature is alive and can cause considerably more damage. His hatred of her throughout the film belies his fear of her, and her simultaneous hatred of him makes her a very real threat, as well as a subconscious one. It is in Marietta's art, however, that Boris's fear of castration is most keenly felt, which depicts images of naked bodies that she has sliced and reassembled into a collage. In this photograph series, which she names 'Ode to Lust', the combination of fear, sex and violence is invoked (Fig. 2.5.). Unlike her daughter, Marietta's claws are still sharp.



Figure 2.5. Ode to Lust.

Boris's fears of Marietta's castrating potential is emphasised by both the sliced images and the presence of the models' penises. Collage as an art form combines the act of cutting with reassembling, tying the castration fear with creation. It is for this reason that Jack Halberstam views the collage, often favoured by female artists, as an example of female creativity that uses the positive act of destruction as its foundation:

Collage has been used by many female artists, from Hannah Hoch to Kara Walker, to bind the threat of castration to the menace of feminist violence and

both to the promise of transformation, not through a positive production of the image but through a negative destruction of it that nonetheless refuses to relinquish pleasure.³⁸

In the act of cutting, then, Marietta destroys images and foregrounds the fear of castration, but also creates a new order, a new image of which she is in control. There is a recurring theme in Allen's films that female artists are obsessed with the anxiety of castration, and here Allen implies that Marietta's desire is dangerous. Her gaze is purely carnal, slicing into the flesh, each portrait built up of parts of bodies that are collaged together. They are bodies without subjectivity, and this transformation recalls the lobsters who undergo this same change from subject to object. The hanging lifeless bodies are like another scene in the film, where Boris visits a Peking duck store. Like the male bodies on display, the ducks hang suspended in the air, meat ready to be consumed. The sliced photographs anticipate the slicing of the ducks, and their glistening bodies in the window are equally objects of lust for the hungry New Yorkers, Boris being one of them.

PAULA AND AMANDA AS ANNIE IN *ANYTHING ELSE*

Jerry: *Stop reliving the past.*

Anything Else, 2003.

While Melodie is dismissed as unstimulating, unintelligent and, ultimately not a great loss to Boris, Amanda's threat is neutralised through the scopophilic gaze of the camera which renders her safe through observation and fetishization. As Kaplan

³⁸ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 136.

writes: 'the sexualisation and objectification of women is not simply for the purposes of eroticism; from a psychoanalytical point of view, it is designed to annihilate the threat that woman (as castrated and possessing a genital organ) poses.'³⁹ In one scene (Fig. 2.6.), Amanda offers her body up for Jerry and the camera to inspect. She asks, 'do you think I look fat?', while her semi-naked body is presented for the scopophilic gaze. She is positioned in the centre of the frame and the brilliance of her white t-shirt and underwear contrasts with the dark, warm browns of the shot's mise-en-scène. In this way, the beauty of the shot, even outside of its fetishization of Ricci, is influenced by scopophilia. In fact, as Kaplan writes, cinema itself is dependent on this scopophilic look:

Scopophilia or sexual pleasure in looking, is activated by the very situation of cinema: the darkened room, the way the gaze of the spectator is controlled by the aperture of first, the camera and second, the projector, the fact that the spectator is watching moving images rather than either static ones (painting) or live actors (theatre), all help to make the cinematic experience closer to the dream state than is possible in other arts.⁴⁰

In short, the scene tells the audience to look at Amanda, just as she instructs Jerry to do the same. Amanda's words literally demand the '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' that Mulvey describes, while the mise-en-scène of the shot attracts attention and ensures this scopophilic look.⁴¹

Amanda's white clothing in this scene is reminiscent of a similar scene in *Annie Hall* (Fig. 2.7.), where Annie wears a white vest and underwear. Unlike the shot in *Anything Else*, this two-shot depicts both Annie and Alvy. The pair are discussing their sexual relationship and so, while the scene certainly concerns sex, Allen does not focus

³⁹ Kaplan, *Women & Film*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁴¹ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 62.

attention on Annie's body in the same way he does Amanda's. Alvy's presence in the shot means that the focus of the gaze is not solely on Annie, unlike in *Anything Else* where both the mise-en-scène and Amanda's dialogue demands that we focus on the female body to the exclusion of all else.



Figure 2.6. Amanda and the scopophilic look.

The depiction of Annie is less obviously fetishistic than of Amanda. Unlike Amanda's static form, Annie is moving in and out of the doorway as she goes to retrieve a joint that she claims she needs to have sex with Alvy. As the camera remains static the vertical lines of the doorway split the screen into panels which obscures Annie's body as she moves around the room. Annie is in between the gaze of the camera and Alvy's gaze as she walks between the two looks. Neither can capture her, however, as her constant movement and the obscuring architecture restricts visibility and resists the objectification and fetishization of her body.



Figure 2.7. Annie and Alvy's gaze.

Unlike the depiction of Amanda in *Anything Else* which is fetishistic in its overt sexualisation of the character's body, these scenes in *Annie Hall* are pleasurable in their stylised beauty, in a way separate from the male gaze upon Annie. It is as though Allen is protecting Annie from the male gaze through these shots, at once depicting a scene of sexual intimacy between the pair and simultaneously shielding her from the camera, from his own gaze as the director, and the gaze of the implied male audience. That is not to say, however, that scopophilia is not present in this depiction of Annie's body. The images are startling, as the flash of Annie's clothing stands out against the darkness of the doorframe, and her periodically visible and then invisible form demands attention. The scene actively encourages the scopophilic look precisely because of the stylised shots. Annie's semi-nakedness (especially in contrast to Alvy's clothed body) encourages objectification.

Once again, Annie is cast as an unattainable and unreachable figure. In spite of being positioned between the gaze of Alvy and the camera, she is never caught. Annie's

unobtainability is implied towards the end of the scene where her subjectivity is separated from her body, visualised as a phantom-like figure that watches Alvy and the body of Annie engage in sex. This is not enough for Alvy, who wants the whole of Annie, something which is also denied to the audience. This depiction of Annie is essential to how we come to understand the character in the film. Alvy's search for her through his memories depicts her as an intangible figure, perpetually out of his reach. As I have shown in the first chapter, Alvy's return to the past is necessarily a voyeuristic endeavour, and by replaying his memories he watches Annie through a lens of nostalgia. The influence of nostalgia upon these images of Annie is evident from the very beginning of the film where Alvy admits that he has trouble separating reality from fantasy. Annie is imagined as a cartoon evil queen and in scenarios with ex-boyfriends and private analysis sessions where Alvy couldn't possibly be present. The bedroom scene I analyse here is a culmination of these nostalgic images, as the Annie of Alvy's memories is loaded with fantasy and therefore un-real.

Alvy's memories of this scene define its depiction on screen. Allen positions Alvy's version of events as the narrative of the film itself. As I outlined in the previous chapter, Allen also offers moments where Alvy's version can be questioned. Gaps in the narrative and weaknesses in memory reveal the limitation of Alvy's memory. Annie is therefore a memory of a memory, and her depiction in the film is cast in the beautifying light of nostalgia: she is permanently out of Alvy's reach, featuring as a cartoon evil queen, a hologram separated from her body during sex with him and, at the end of their relationship, across the country in L.A. In their final moments together in the film, we do not hear her voice as she speaks to Alvy, only her singing voice, a memory of their relationship and of Keaton's performance in the film. For Jerry, the controller of action in *Anything Else*, the problem with Amanda is a lack of progression

in their relationship: she is the dead shark Jerry is left with. This is manifested physically as the pair struggle with their sexual relationship. Amanda's career has halted, leading to frustration and upset. The presence of Amanda's dynamic mother does nothing to help this fact. Paula embodies progress and movement and the contrast with Amanda and Jerry's stasis emphasises their unhappiness. This eventually culminates in their separation at the end of the film.

If Amanda is inaction, Dobel is action. The gendered division positions masculinity as progression. As Mulvey writes: 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.'⁴² Amanda's inability to succeed professionally is the foil to Dobel's determination to progress and the pair are presented as two opposing forces in Jerry's life. In one scene (Fig. 2.8.), this is shown visually as Jerry is positioned in between Dobel and Amanda as they each try to influence his decision over whether to keep a gun in the house.⁴³ The visual humour is generated from the physical contrast between the ageing Allen and fetishized Ricci, and the innuendo of the gun which is an emblem of masculine sexuality, power, Oedipal progression and fetishism. Dobel's brandishing of the gun and Jerry's fascination with it acts as a safeguard against the castration threat that Amanda presents to the two nervous men in the scene. As Kaplan writes: 'The gun or knife stands in for the phallus which must dominate by eliminating [the woman]', and

⁴² Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 62.

⁴³ The gun is also a reference to an earlier Allen film, *Hannah and Her Sisters* (dir. Woody Allen, 1986) where the unlikely pairing of Allen and a firearm is depicted. In a key scene from the film, Mickey (Woody Allen) contemplates suicide while pointing a large rifle to his forehead, until it slips off the sweat collected on his brow and fires a bullet into a mirror behind him. It is a somewhat darkly humorous scene, as the serious matter of suicide is contrasted with the strange bedfellows: Allen and a gun. Mickey is an anxious and lonely character, not dissimilar to Dobel or Jerry.

so Dobel and Jerry's obsession with the gun represents their desire to neutralise the threat Amanda poses.⁴⁴



Figure 2.8. Jerry, Amanda, Dobel and the gun.

From the beginning of the film, Amanda is presented as a disrupting force. She, like Annie, arrives late to a date in a yellow New York City taxicab, a symbol of both the city and of arriving and departing (Fig. 2.9.). When Jerry complains about his girlfriend's lateness with the words, 'She's late, she's disorganised', we are reminded of Alvy and his frustration in the first scene we see with him and Annie together (Fig. 2.10.). Like Annie, Amanda arrives at their cinema date in a bad mood, a sign of the state of their relationship at the film's opening. But unlike Annie, her bad mood extends throughout the film and is more of a character trait. And when Amanda steps out of the cab, we are alerted to Annie's absence as Ricci's face appears in the shot. The

⁴⁴ Kaplan, *Women & Film*, p. 6.

similarity of the scene to one involving Annie only makes her absence more poignant, like Alvy and his new date in the lobster scene in *Annie Hall*.



Figure 2.9. Annie arrives in a taxicab.



Figure 2.10. Amanda arrives late.

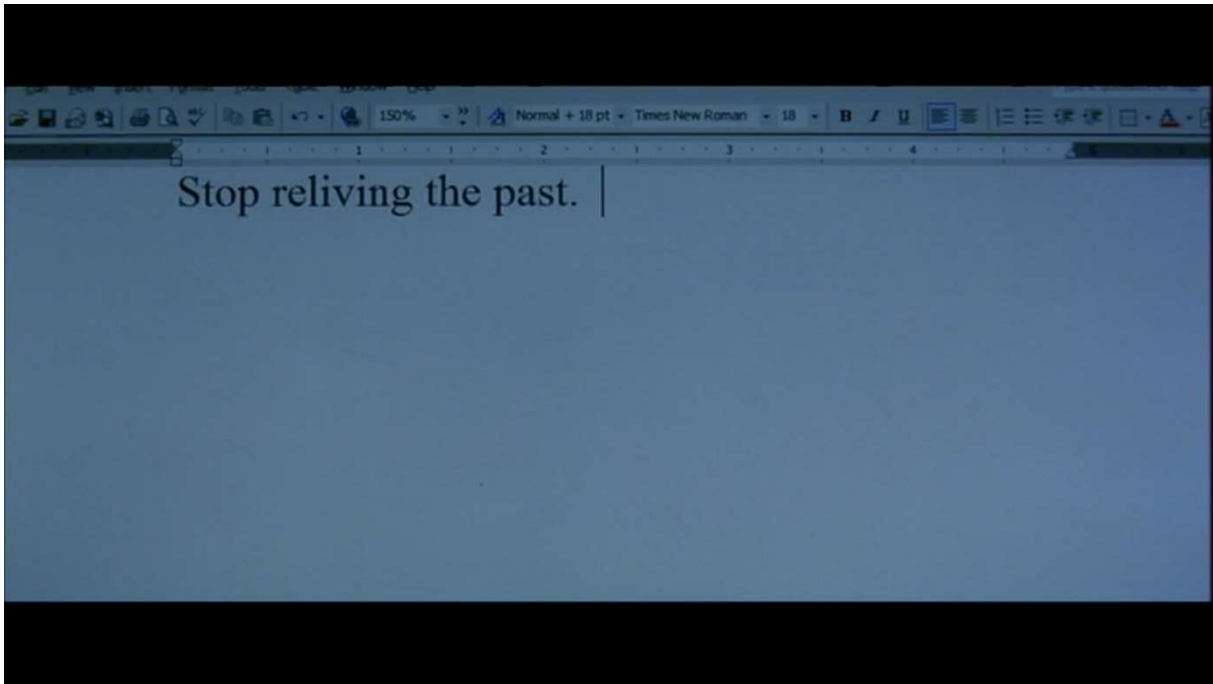


Figure 2.11. Jerry's laptop.

It is in the depiction of her sexuality that Amanda's disruptive force is presented most clearly. Her reluctance to have sex with Jerry is made more unbearable for him as her sexuality is emphasised and fetishized through the course of the film. This misogynistic positioning of Amanda in the narrative is shown as something to be neutralised: she is the antagonist in the film precisely because of her sexuality which is presented as a frustrating presence there only to exasperate Jerry. In one of Jerry's memory flashbacks he remembers the time his temporary breakup with Amanda resulted in reconciliatory sex. As the scene from his memory plays out, Jerry's voiceover says, 'If only some moments in life could last. Stay frozen in time like some old vase.' At this, the scene stops and the image of the pair in bed together freezes. The next shot is of Jerry's laptop screen, and the words typed out upon it: 'Stop reliving the past' (Fig. 2.11.). The memory of *Annie Hall* is invoked here, particularly Alvy's line in the cinema queue, 'If only life were like this'. The protagonists' control over the

narrative is shown as Jerry and Alvy are depicted as having control over what the audience sees, revisiting memories of sex and returning to the past.

Talk of vases and being trapped in space and time are clear references to John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', particularly the opening line: 'Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness'.⁴⁵ Jerry's greatest gripe against Amanda is that she refuses to sleep with him, and his allusion to this line of poetry is an attempt to elevate his misogyny to one of the most famous poems in Western literature. Instead, the result is a sense of discomfort as Jerry positions Amanda as a body that has the potential for sex (he and Dobel frequently discuss her body and sexual appetite) but not achieved. The reason that Jerry wants this moment to last is so he can make Amanda's body available to him through his memories: by controlling the course of the narrative he can voyeuristically revisit moments of his past with Amanda to exert scopophilic gaze for sexual pleasure. Jerry, like Alvy and Boris, is the male protagonist that Mulvey describes, a narrator who controls the way he sees Amanda, directing his own memories with the male gaze and viewing them for his pleasure. Whereas Alvy works through his memories to find out where his relationship with Annie went wrong, Jerry does so to see Amanda's body which he believes has been withheld from him. There is probably an element of this when Alvy returns to his memories of Annie, but it is not his main goal. While Jerry presents Amanda in an unflattering light to Dobel and the audience in order to move on from her, Alvy works through his memories to take on the psychological work himself. Alvy did not rely on others to do this work as Jerry does, and he was never this cruel.

⁴⁵ John Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', in *Poems of John Keats* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2011) 33-34 (p. 33).

Like Amanda, psychotherapy is associated with inaction in *Anything Else*. Jerry attends his sessions while his psychoanalyst listens and doesn't speak, never offering advice or giving direction. This is contrasted with Dobel who is presented as the embodiment of action. He is presented as the antithesis to Jerry's psychoanalyst who acts as the silent authority figure that looms over Jerry's prostrate body during his sessions, and instead gives Jerry advice and encourages him to make decisions and actions that will determine the course of his life. Jerry's indecision is pushed forward not by his silent therapist but the chattering, incessant Dobel. In this way, Dobel is curiously like Annie. After all, it is Annie's laughter, mumblings and talking that actually teach Alvy about the possibilities of happiness, and it is through the experience of their relationship that Alvy is able to create art in the form of his play at the end of the film. She is the real talking cure.

In *Anything Else*, Dobel's proclivity for action leads to a fateful incident when, after he is confronted by two large men over a parking space, he insists on revenge and smashes their car. This leads to an altercation with reportedly antisemitic police officers and Dobel flees the country as a result. Jerry must take their planned journey to L.A. alone. Dobel's actions mean that Jerry's life changes and progresses. Like Alvy, it is not psychoanalysis that changes his life and outlook but the chattering person by his side. Dobel is often depicted driving around New York with Jerry in tow, a visual representation of his relentless desire to move forwards, tying cars and characters together in a similar way to Annie and her reckless driving in *Annie Hall*. He tells Jerry to ditch his long serving but wildly inefficient acting agent as well as Amanda, whom he insists is not worth Jerry's persistence. Jerry's psychoanalyst listens but Dobel propels the plot. Allen's role as Dobel therefore draws attention to the film's artifice as

Allen is controlling the plot as both the character and filmmaker. This duality, or 'double', is even echoed in the character's name.

The unseen double is a feature of Allen's cinema. This can be through another filmmaker's influence, for example Ingmar Bergman's presence in *Interiors* (dir. Woody Allen, 1978), or another writer's influence, like Tennessee Williams in *Blue Jasmine*. In Allen's films, there is often also the implication of another filmmaker arranging the narrative, for example the documentary makers in *Zelig* (dir. Woody Allen, 1983) and in *Husbands and Wives* (dir. Woody Allen, 1992). Their presence is only directly addressed at the end of the latter film with Gabe's (Woody Allen) words, 'Can I go? Is this over?', but the documentary style of the film suggests the involvement of the documentary crew throughout. Binaries are also present in the titles of Allen's films, for example *Love and Death* (dir. Woody Allen, 1975), *Hannah and Her Sisters*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (dir. Woody Allen, 1989), *Shadows and Fog* (dir. Woody Allen, 1991) and *Sweet and Lowdown* (dir. Woody Allen, 1999).

The gendered division between action/inaction and subject/object clearly informs the depiction of Allen's female characters so far explored in the chapter. It stands to reason, especially when one considers the apparently ubiquitous presence of the male gaze, that Allen's depiction of women would involve, at least in part, their beauty and the pleasure of looking at them through the scopophilic look: so many of Allen's films are concerned with the nature of photography and of beauty, for example, the iconic monochrome skylines and startling interiors of *Manhattan* (dir. Woody Allen, 1978) that showcase Gordon Willis's cinematography.

DIA IN THE WINDOW: ALLEN'S ORIENTALIZING GAZE IN *YOU WILL MEET A TALL
DARK STRANGER*

Narrator: *All that cheered him up was the beautiful creature in red across the way, whose life grew increasingly tantalizing behind her windowpane.*

You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger, 2010.

While Mulvey's theory clarifies how scopophilia works in Allen's films and in his depiction of female characters like Amanda and Melodie, it has several limitations as Mulvey herself admitted that can misrepresent and simplify the complexities of this look, a startling one being the omission of the intersection of race. Understanding how Allen depicts non-white women is crucial when analysing how the gaze works in his films. In the final part of this chapter, I will focus on the character of Dia in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* and how she is fetishized as both a woman and as a woman of colour. As Roy (Josh Brolin) falls in love with Dia, Allen presents Roy's gaze as one which fetishizes the character, also othering her as a racialised figure very different from Annie. The interaction between Dia and Roy is clearly inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), as Roy observes Dia from his bedroom window which overlooks her apartment. In Hitchcock's film, the protagonist Jeff (James Stewart) is a photographer recovering from a broken leg who must remain in his flat while his injury heals. His boredom leads to an intense obsession with his neighbours to whom he gives nicknames in lieu of their real ones. While the majority of the film is concerned with Jeff's investigation into a suspected murder, his

observations about his neighbours reveal his assumptions about their lives: the young woman living alone is assumed to be sexually liberated, and the arguing couple's sudden quietness is assumed to be a result of violence. Jeff's quickness to interpret sex and violence in his neighbours' actions tells us about his life too, particularly his boredom sitting at home with a broken leg, and perhaps his own fascination (like many of Hitchcock's protagonists) with sex and violence.

In this way, Jeff's look is an example of the male gaze. This is emphasised by the fact that what Jeff sees is what the audience sees, the shot often depicted through Jeff's camera lens. As Mulvey writes: 'the male hero does see precisely what the audience sees', especially as these observing shots in the film are presented through the view of Jeff's camera.⁴⁶ Jeff's profession as a photographer itself signals observation. The male gaze informs the way Jeff views his neighbours. His vantage point often limits the view of his neighbours, one in particular, whose head is often obscured by the windowpane. Her apparently insatiable sexual appetite is assumed as several men visit her home through the course of the film. This simultaneously unnerves and excites Jeff who, as a response, objectifies her through his nickname 'Miss Torso' which acts as a dismembering force. She is only a torso, a clinical term normally referencing a dead body. As Tania Modleski writes in her essay, 'The Master's Dollhouse' (2005), the voyeuristic underpinning of *Rear Window's* narrative means that the film is 'literally stressing the man's point of view throughout'.⁴⁷ In the course of *Rear Window*, the 'film spectator apparently has no choice *but* to identify with the male protagonist, who exerts an active controlling gaze over a passive female object.'⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 66.

⁴⁷ Tania Modleski, 'The Master's Dollhouse,' in *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory: Second Edition*, ed. by Tania Modleski (London: UK: Routledge, 2005) 69-88 (p. 69).

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 73.

Jeff's obsession with his neighbours' movements is mirrored by Roy's infatuation with his female neighbour in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*. Jeff's stagnation and physical lack of movement is reflected in Roy's inability to write a successful second novel. In both films, distraction comes in the form of voyeurism and the woman in the building across the way.

From Roy's vantage point, he can watch Dia kiss her partner, undress and play the guitar. That is until Roy shouts across the space between them and the pair begin communicating, ultimately resulting in a relationship that is only briefly complicated by Dia's engagement to another man. She calls off the wedding to be with Roy who, after moving in with Dia by the end of the film, now observes his ex-wife, Sally (Naomi Watts), in his old bedroom as she undresses and goes on with her own life without him. It is an ending much like Allen's other films, and the conclusion drawn from the film is that Roy will never or perhaps can never be happy. He joins Alvy and the majority of Allen protagonists in suffering anhedonia. Scopophilia is present here too: the women that are viewed through this scopophilic gaze are objectified to the extent that they are no longer real, but an idealised version informed by the person who gazes. Roy sees what he wants to see, and what he subconsciously wants to see is that the grass is always greener. Sexuality in both *Rear Window* and in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* is informed and in fact defined by voyeurism and the scopophilic gaze of the man looking at the woman. Without his gaze there is no pleasure.

The use of feminist film theory to unpack these scenes in both *Rear Window* and *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* is illuminating. In both films, the pleasure of the male gaze is centralised, and both can be said to be 'about' the male gaze. The male protagonists' scopophilic pleasure is derived from observing voyeuristically from a distance, unseen and unknown by the women they watch. Equally, the prevalence of

windows in both films implies the camera lens (doubly acknowledged in *Rear Window* in Jeff's career as a photographer) and the scopophilic gaze of the cinema audience watching women act and act as though they do not know they are being watched.

In *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, the presentation of the character Dia is also informed by her race and ethnicity. As an Indian woman, she is objectified by the camera in a different way to the white women already analysed in this chapter. Roy's male gaze is certainly still present here but so too is his exoticisation of her. She is depicted as very different from his blonde, English wife, Sally. In fact, it is this exoticisation that informs both Roy's view of Dia and the way she is presented in the film, an exoticisation of brown women that has historic precursors and current ramifications. In Edward Said's seminal text *Orientalism* (1978), the depiction of women from the 'Orient' (which Said defined broadly as 'the East' as opposed to Europe as 'the West') is explored through interrogating the work of eighteenth-century writers like Flaubert who helped create a set of characteristics that were understood to define the East:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institute for dealing with the Orient— dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.⁴⁹

These infantilising characteristics were attached to this concept of 'the Orient'. In doing so, Europe's colonial power over it was confirmed.

When Dia is first introduced in the film, the voiceover narrates Roy's thoughts as he watches the 'lovely apparition moving into a flat across the way'. The word

⁴⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, USA: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 1

‘apparition’ chimes with the orientalist view of the East as mystical. As Said writes: ‘The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, erotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences’.⁵⁰ Later in the film, the narrator says that, for Roy, Dia’s life grew ‘increasingly tantalising behind her windowpane’. Equally, the romanticised East which provided inspiration for writers like Flaubert is reflected in writer Roy’s obsession with Dia, who he says is his muse. Her passive, objectified status is confirmed when she replies, ‘I’ve always wanted to be someone’s muse’. In an interview for *The Guardian*, Pinto talks about her acting roles including Allen’s film. She addresses the discrepancy between her feminism and advocacy for women’s rights and the roles she has historically played, roles which centred on her beauty and very little else. In *Slumdog Millionaire* (dir. Danny Boyle, 2008) she plays Latika who is described throughout the film as ‘the most beautiful girl in the world’. In *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (dir. Rupert Wyatt, 2011) she plays a primatologist who, despite her crucial knowledge and expertise during the simian uprising, is mainly used as a love interest for Will (James Franco). In her interview, she criticises her one-dimensional depiction in the film, saying: “I was just the muse, the ingenue.”⁵¹ Of her work with Allen, she declares that she would not work with the filmmaker again, citing her decision to stand by women who accuse powerful men of assault.⁵²

In the interview Pinto addresses the scopophilic gaze at play and references the way that filmmakers have historically focused solely on her beauty. This is seen particularly clearly in one scene where Dia acknowledges Roy’s gaze, and derives

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 1

⁵¹ Simon Hattenstone, ‘Frieda Pinto: “I wouldn’t work with Woody Allen again”’, *Guardian*, 27 Jan 2019 < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jan/27/freida-pinto-i-wouldnt-work-with-woody-allen-again> > [accessed 30 Jan 2019].

⁵² Ibid.

pleasure herself from this look. During a conversation with Roy, Dia asks him to look over to her window at an arranged time, the implication being that she will be performing for his gaze. Perhaps there is another allusion here to Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, as Jeff's beautiful girlfriend Lisa (Grace Kelly), while often shot in soft focus to emphasise this beauty, is largely dismissed by him. It is only when Lisa leaves the flat where she dutifully visits Jeff and investigates the building opposite, the building that Jeff has been observing, that Jeff really becomes interested in her. Once she becomes part of Jeff's pseudo-cinema screen and part of the exciting action across from him, the scopophilic gaze is employed, and she is the focus of Jeff's attention. Disturbingly, he also becomes more interested in her when she is in danger, and her life is threatened. Dia is more aware of this phenomenon than Lisa, and actively engages in Roy's pleasure in looking at her, in turn receiving her own pleasure in this knowledge.

In fact, Dia seems to welcome Roy's objectification of her, and invites the camera to do the same. And for Roy, this objectification enables him to neutralise the threat of the beautiful woman in the building across from him. One way he does this is through infantilization, again referenced by Said as a feature of Orientalism.⁵³ In the texts Said analyses, the Oriental woman is 'a disturbing symbol of fecundity, particularly Oriental in her luxuriant and seemingly unbound sexuality'.⁵⁴ Bolstering this misogynistic sexualisation is the fact that these women are depicted as largely silent, and are thus inferred to be bodies ready to be colonised and exploited. As Said writes, 'There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the

⁵³ Said, p. 187.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 187.

Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for her and represented her.⁵⁵ This silence is certainly manifested in the character Dia.

In one scene, Dia plays the guitar as Roy listens. Through their ensuing conversation, it is revealed that the music she is playing is that of the Italian classical composer Boccherini. For a character that speaks so little, this moment is significant in that it is a scene involving a form of expression for the character. In this rare moment, it is striking that it should be the music of a European composer that Dia plays. It recalls Said's description of orientalised women being spoken for by European artists like Flaubert. The male gaze is therefore doubly oppressive in its power as a tool of both misogynistic and racist hegemony. To view the depiction of Dia, for example, as solely informed by the male gaze is to ignore the colonial and postcolonial gaze that renders her the Other twice over. Her Indian ethnicity also specifically recalls these oppressive and objectifying ideas of the Orient. Allen's film *Sweet and Lowdown* is relevant here, as the romantic relationship depicted in the film involves a morally flawed jazz musician Emmet (Sean Penn) and Hattie (Samantha Morton). Emmet is often cruel and dismissive towards Hattie, his coarseness contrasting with the delicacy of his musical talent. His guitar playing offers an antidote to this harshness as the music shows his ability to eloquently express himself. It is Hattie, however, that is the most expressive in the film, despite her inability to speak.

Morton's performance is perhaps recalled in the character of Eliza Esposito (Sally Hawkins) in Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water* (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 2017). Like Hattie she cannot speak but has the most complex and intimate relationships with the other beings in the film, from humans to cats to water monsters.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 6.

Her name recalls Eliza Doolittle (Audrey Hepburn) in *My Fair Lady* (dir. George Cukor, 1964) the film based on George Bernard's play *Pygmalion*. In the film, Dr Higgins (Rex Harrison) attempts to teach Eliza how to speak 'proper English' and to eradicate her cockney accent. For Higgins, the cockney accent is incorrect and Queen's English is the most appropriate and effective way to communicate. By the end of the film, however, it is a recording of Eliza's original accent that reminds him of his love for her: Eliza's way of speaking was the original basis of his attraction. Like Annie's mumblings (the 'la-di-da's and giggles) in *Annie Hall*, the way these women communicate is perhaps outside of the established and standardised method of communication. For Hattie and Eliza Esposito, their muteness operates outside the ableist notion that verbal speech is the prime method of communication. In all cases, these women create the most potent relationships in their respective films, precisely because of their alternative and subversive methods of communication.

This is not, however, the case in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*. While Dia is not literally silent in the film (although she only speaks infrequently), her lack of agency reflects this orientalised view of the Eastern woman as silent. As Said writes, orientalised women came to symbolise 'verbally inexpressive femininity'.⁵⁶ When Dia meets Roy, she is engaged to be married, but after their very brief courtship, Roy convinces her to call it off. In another scene, she remains almost completely silent while her parents argue with her ex-fiancé's family over the cancelled wedding. And in another scene towards the end of the film, she joins Roy to meet his friends in the pub. With his arm around her waist and her body pressed against his, she speaks very little, and only then to confirm her sexual attraction to Roy who leers over her, boasting to his friends that he has been 'exploring the erogenous zones' of her body.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 187.

The racist and misogynistic connection between women of colour and silence has been explored in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988). In the essay, Spivak interrogates the Indian Sati practice of widow sacrifice, and the absence of the voice of the women involved in the practice on both sides of the argument, both for and against its abolition. As she writes, from the postcolonial Eurocentric standpoint, 'the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.'⁵⁷ Their voices are absent on the British colonial ruling side that called for its eradication (while the British themselves were committing colonial atrocities), and on the side of tradition, bolstered by patriarchal hegemony that maintained that the widows were active participants in the practice.⁵⁸ As Spivak writes: 'The two sentences go a long way to legitimize each other. One never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness.'⁵⁹ As Spivak observes, this silencing enables objectification: we never actually hear any of Dia's own thoughts, feelings or ambitions, limiting her development and solidifying her as an objectified body. During her moments of artistic expression when she plays the guitar, she plays another person's music (not incidentally a European man's), and her interactions with Roy are mostly about his attraction to her.

The overt objectification and sexualisation of Dia, and Roy's romantic interest, is due to the voyeuristic nature of Roy's interaction with her. The distance between them and his observation of her is the reason for his attraction. In one scene, he tells her 'You were slipping out of a red dress and I thought it was the most erotic fifteen seconds I'd ever seen', revealing the scopophilic nature of his attraction. It is, after all,

⁵⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago, USA: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 271-316 (p. 287).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

her physicality which most appeals to him, evoking the ‘dumb and irreducible sexuality’ that Said notes in the orientalised portrayals of Eastern women.⁶⁰ In a later scene, after Dia and Roy have entered into a relationship, Roy pauses to watch his ex-wife undress in his old room. The male gaze necessitates distance, and it is this distance that informs his attraction to both Dia and Sally. In the case of Dia, this distance is also because of her othered embodiment as an Indian woman.

The Orient is therefore defined by its distance in relation to the vantage point of the West. Centralising Europe as the point of neutrality, the East is orientalised and othered to represent the opposite, the counter, and crucially the different. This distance is reflected in Dia’s physical distance from Roy in her apartment in the building across from his. The space between them is a void where nothing bridges the gap. The connecting force is Roy’s gaze which defines at least the initial communication between the two. The notion of distance and otherness is suggested in the film’s title, *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*. Ostensibly this refers to the film’s subplot of Sally’s mother’s visit to a medium, who tells her that she will be happy once she meets a tall, dark stranger. But really, the ‘tall, dark stranger’ is Dia and her ‘darkness’ and ‘strangeness’ reveals the racist and misogynistic orientalism that informs her depiction in the film, and romance more generally. In Sara Ahmed’s book, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000), the concept of the stranger is interrogated and revealed to embody the origin of difference.⁶¹ Difference invokes danger, and as Ahmed notes the stranger is also the ‘origin of danger’, marked in the prevalence of such terms as ‘stranger danger’.⁶² Dia is therefore doubly threatening, as the potentially castrating woman and as the orientalised stranger. She

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 187.

⁶¹ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.

⁶² Ibid, p. 4.

always wears red, as if confirming the castrating fears by evoking blood, like Marietta in *Whatever Works*. Dia's dangerousness necessitates containment and domination through the objectifying look of the male gaze which make it safe.

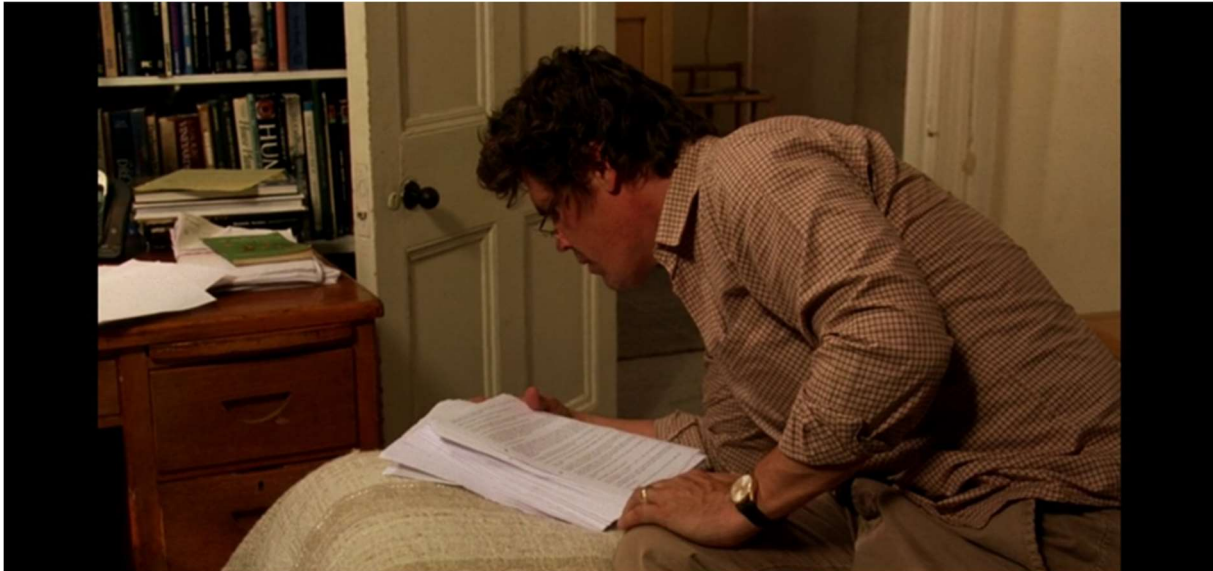


Figure 2.12. Roy reads the manuscript.



Figure 2.13. Roy watches Dia play the guitar.

Dia is introduced in the film's narrative when the struggling author Roy reads his friend's far superior manuscript (Fig. 2.12.). Perhaps needing a distraction from the disheartening read, he looks up to see Dia in the window in the building across

from his. The camera follows Roy as he walks over to the window to get a better look. The ostentatious camerawork draws attention to its mechanism, and in doing so evokes a sense of voyeurism, a motif that is repeated in the next scene when Roy himself watches Dia through the window (Fig. 2.13.).



Figure 2.14. The view from Dia's window.

The over the shoulder shot aligns the camera's look with Roy's as the male spectator is in control of the gaze. In the previous shot, the camera actively moves to engage with Roy's look, to rest behind his shoulder and to mirror in his gaze. This evokes Mulvey's description: 'The man controls the film fantasy and emerges as the representative of power'.⁶³ The shot visually mirrors that of several scenes from *Rear Window*, where Jeff observes his neighbours from his window. His observation of his neighbours forces the audience to identify with his look and to engage with the male gaze that his look is characterised by.

⁶³ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 63.

Dia's sense of being watched causes her to stop playing the guitar and a jump cut takes the next shot into her room (Fig. 2.14.). The behind the shoulder shot reveals Roy leaning out of his window to watch her. However, Allen does not present this moment as a disturbing one for Dia. Instead, she is flattered by his attention and leans across the window to speak to him about the music she is playing. While the shot from the vantage point of Dia's apartment might have shown a shift in consciousness to Dia's narrative and point of view, instead, the chiaroscuro of the scene casts her in shadow. In *Rear Window*, Lisa is also introduced in the narrative cast in shadow. The implication is that these women are only worth looking at through a man's eyes. Equally, the over the shoulder shot does not engage in Dia's look, but instead connects the two characters by mirroring the camera's position with Roy's position in the previous shot.

Dia's red dress, as I have argued, elicits fear of castration through its connotation of blood and danger. In *Annie Hall* and *Anything Else*, however, the clothing the women wear in the particularly scopophilic scenes I have analysed are white. Another fetishized character in Allen's oeuvre is Nola Rice (Scarlett Johansson) in *Match Point* (dir. Woody Allen, 2005), her last name evoking the whiteness of the clothes she wears. Nola's sexuality is presented as dangerous, as Chris (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) begins an affair with her. Nola's neuroticism, jealousy and insecurity means that she threatens his marriage with Chloe (Emily Mortimer), a marriage that provides Chris with the wealth, success and stability he has been reaching to achieve and has come to expect. The whiteness of Nola's clothing is in part a reference to the film's tennis motif that underpins the narrative (Chris met Emily as her tennis coach) and the themes of luck that come with it. Of course, the whiteness of Nola, Annie and Amanda's clothing in these scopophilic scenes also reflects the whiteness of the women

themselves, especially when compared to the exoticisation of Dia in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, and the redness of her dress. The long-established association of whiteness and purity is particularly uncomfortable here, as the whiteness of the women and their clothing is contrasted with the bloodiness of Dia's.

According to Richard Dyer in his book *White* (1997), white clothing connotes sexual innocence in particular (hence its association with weddings and virginal brides), because it 'is "pure and untouched" and therefore redolent of sexual untouchedness.'⁶⁴ For Dyer, white clothing is 'a symbolically explicit case: it bespeaks the absence of sex.'⁶⁵ In the case of Annie, Amanda and Nola, the absence of sex that the whiteness of their clothes may symbolise only draws attention to the sexualisation of their bodies and the contrast fetishizes their bodies even more. While the whiteness implies untouchedness it also demands, again to borrow Mulvey's word for scopophilia, 'to-be-looked-at-ness'.⁶⁶ The brilliance of the white is startling on screen and invites inspection. This whiteness therefore encourages the scopophilic gaze of the camera and therefore the characters' fetishization.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that *Annie Hall* has influenced the depiction of the women in several more recent Allen films, particularly *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works*. But in analysing *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* I have shown that this influence is only felt in the way these white female characters are portrayed. Dia is always racialised and therefore doubly othered as a woman of colour, and this is the primary way she is depicted in the film. In other words, it is only the white female characters that have the privilege of mirroring Annie, and Dia's character is informed instead by racist misogyny. While her relationship with Roy recalls *Rear*

⁶⁴ Richard Dyer, *White* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 1997), p. 47.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁶⁶ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 62.

Window, Dia is not presented in the same way as the white character Lisa, but rather embodies the sense of distance, of otherness, and of exoticism that underpins Hitchcock's film. She is a manifestation of the excitement Jeff feels for the other in *Rear Window*, signified in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* by her orientalist depiction.

She is, however, subject to the scopophilic gaze like all the women discussed in this chapter, including Annie. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Alvy's memories of Annie allow him to voyeuristically observe her. His memories of her are unmistakably and unavoidably defined by Alvy. His memory is therefore an exercise in the male gaze as the Annie we see is the Annie seen through his eyes. We only ever see Annie through Alvy's eyes because she is his memory, and we only ever see Dia as an othered woman of colour because of the film's exoticizing gaze. There is an echo of this in *Anything Else*, in a scene where Jerry accesses his memories of Amanda to voyeuristically observe her. In the scene, Jerry and Amanda attempt to rekindle their sexual relationship by revisiting a hotel room they used earlier in their relationship, at a time they were happy. Like Alvy, who returns to his memories to recreate the lobster scene to access Annie again, here Jerry and Amanda hope to find earlier versions of each other in their return to past events.

Again, like Alvy's attempts, the return to the past does not yield the same results, and Amanda subsequently has a panic attack, brought on by the prospect of having sex with Jerry. His agitation is clearly intended to be humorous, as he complains of his sexual frustration while Amanda attempts to control her breathing. But the depiction of male sexual entitlement is uncomfortable, precisely in this clear intended purpose of humour. In an earlier scene, Amanda angrily asks Jerry, 'What do you want me to do? Grit my teeth, close my eyes, hold myself stiff and let you do it to

me?', to which he replies, 'It's getting to the point where I may settle for that.' The absence of Amanda's consent and the presence of sexual coercion surely suggests rape. The scene is a hollow repetition of a similar scene in *Annie Hall* where Annie and Alvy start to have sex, and a hologram of Annie literally detaches and leaves her body. Alvy wants to have sex with Annie, and not just her body: in *Anything Else*, Jerry is clear that he is happy to settle for that.

The idea of 'settling', or rather not settling, pervades *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works*. The young female characters, in the end, decide not to settle for the Alvy-like protagonists. Amanda finds inspiration, like Annie, in the company of her teacher, and Melodie leaves Boris and his nihilism behind in favour of a much more optimistic outlook on life, again, like Annie. In *Annie Hall*, Annie tells Alvy, 'you're like this island unto yourself,' and she decides she can no longer stay with him. Like Annie before them, Amanda and Melodie decide they cannot settle on these islands with their boyfriends either. Instead, they do not settle but move. Melodie moves onto a houseboat with her new boyfriend, her new mobile home and emblem of movement and changeability. Amanda is seen in the final scene of the film walking arm in arm with her new boyfriend, on the move. Annie, of course, moves to L.A. for a time, and then back to New York, and in the final scene is shown walking away from Alvy and out of the frame, her perpetual out-of-reach-ness finally culminating in her fixture in the past.

Paula and Marietta, equally, do not settle. Throughout *Anything Else*, Paula moves in and out of the frame, getting up in the middle of the night to practice her singing, and constantly rearranging Jerry's flat. She is always moving, a cause of anxiety for Jerry who longs to live in the past where he can understand and control things. And Marietta's burgeoning sexuality goes hand in hand with her creative

fecundity as the fluidity of her sexual and romantic relationship speaks to a sense of freedom and movement as opposed to stagnation and stasis. The resurfacing of Annie in these films is also unsettling. Annie's ghost disturbs the narrative and the story cannot settle as she emerges again in references, characterisation and even in her absence. It is this absence that Allen seeks to address in these films and which, paradoxically, confirms Annie's absence even more. The resurfacing of Annie cannot be controlled, and she does not settle.

These disturbances only serve to confirm how very different *Anything Else* and *Whatever Works* are from *Annie Hall*. They are shallow repetitions of *Annie Hall* that reduce the most imaginative and poignant moments to mere repetition as I have shown in the chapter. For example, the scene in *Annie Hall* where Annie and Alvy discuss sexual intimacy and Alvy's desire to have sex with Annie and not just her body is repeated without its creativity and depth. Instead, Jerry decides that he can settle for Amanda's body in a disturbing exchange that positions him as a would-be rapist. Equally, Alvy's encouragement of Annie's education loses all its nuance in *Whatever Works*. Alvy's preoccupation with developing Annie's talents is presented by Allen as necessarily complicated: is he trying to make Annie into a female version of himself? Does he not love her the way she is? Or does he simply want to encourage her passions and support her ambition? In *Whatever Works*, the repetition of the Pygmalion story is superficial and cruel, as Melodie is disparaged by Boris for her apparent stupidity and she has very little authority over her own life, only leaving Boris for Randy because of the interference and manipulation of her mother.

Built into this unsettled and disturbed repetition of *Annie Hall* is the fear that Allen will not make another film like it. Like Alvy, whose final words in *Annie Hall*, 'I need the eggs', reveals a fear that he will not move on from Annie and enter into a new

relationship, these shallow repetitions of *Annie Hall* secure the memory of the original pleasure of the film in our minds, just as Annie is secured in Alvy's. In the process, Annie is consecrated like the mothers of Freudian theory, and cemented more and more into the memory of American cinema and certainly within Allen's oeuvre. And like the mothers of Freudian theory, she re-emerges to unsettle the narrative and remind us of her absence. While there is pleasure in repetition, here there is also anxiety, from both the filmmaker and the audience.

CHAPTER THREE

ANNIE HALL, LENA DUNHAM AND THE WHITEWASHING OF NEW YORK

Lena Dunham's works, in particular her film *Tiny Furniture* (dir. Lena Dunham, 2010) and her television series *Girls* (HBO, 2011-2017), focus on the lives of neurotic, talkative women, struggling with, amongst many other things, their hypochondria, their relationships, and their mothers. The influences from Woody Allen's work are sometimes made more explicit, for example in *Tiny Furniture*, when Dunham shows a copy of Allen's *Without Feathers* (1979) left in a bed, or in an episode of *Girls*, where a portrait of Allen hangs behind a writer accused of sexual misconduct. Both Allen and Dunham have also faced criticism for the whitewashing of New York City in their work.¹ The centralising of whiteness and erasure of people of colour in their films is only one of the many similarities between Allen and Dunham's work, similarities that reflect Allen's influence upon Dunham. Despite this, Dunham has been vocal about her criticism of Allen and his art.²

In highlighting the influence of Allen on Dunham, there is a risk of misogynistically portraying Dunham as indebted to a male filmmaker like Allen: Dunham is of course an artist in her own right and this chapter in no way argues that Allen's is the only influence upon her work (the work of female filmmakers Nicole Holofcener and Nora Ephron are clearly an influence too). It is uncomfortable and incorrect to assert that Dunham's considerable success is *because* of Allen's work. Instead, I hope to trace the complexity of Allen's influence on Dunham's work and

¹ Elwood Watson, 'Lena Dunham: The Awkward Ambiguous Politics of White Millennial Feminism', in *HBO'S Girls and the Awkward Politics of Gender, Race, and Privilege*, ed. by Elwood Watson, Jennifer Mitchell, Marc Edward Shaw (London, UK: Lexington Books, 2015) 145-166 (p. 148).

² Helen Niernas, 'Lena Dunham Calls Woody Allen a 'Perv' at Sundance', *Independent*, Jan 25 2015 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/lena-dunham-rips-into-woody-allen-and-calls-him-a-perv-at-sundance-10002087.html>> [accessed 7 Feb 2019].

demonstrate the extent to which this process is characterised by discomfort. Dunham's relationship with Allen's work is clear in hers, but her public statements about Allen show her distancing herself from the filmmaker, invoking his biographical scandals. I am therefore interested in the way Dunham articulates this burdensome influence, which is figured in her work through heavy objects, like books, bodies, paintings and furniture. While cumbersome, these objects can be picked up and put back down in the same way that Dunham can leave behind Allen by focusing on the lives of women living in New York, all the while acknowledging his considerable influence.

Allen's greatest influence upon Dunham's work, I argue, is the myopic and persistent focus on whiteness. All Allen's films are centred on whiteness, and when he romanticises New York (and other major European cities like Paris, London and Barcelona) in films like *Manhattan* (dir. Woody Allen, 1979) and *Everyone Says I Love You* (dir. Woody Allen, 1996), he depicts them as overwhelmingly white. In Allen's cinema, the romanticisation of the city means the depiction of city life more or less without Black people. *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977), the film around which this thesis is organised, is about nostalgia and memory, but also about whiteness. In this thesis, I argue that nostalgia is a fundamental narrative feature and psychoanalytical force in Allen's cinema, and it is also a factor in Allen's whitewashing. As Renato Rosaldo argues, 'a mood of nostalgia makes racial domination appear innocent and pure.'³ The same can be said of Allen's beautiful and arresting images of people in New York City nostalgically remembered in films like *Radio Days* (dir. Woody Allen, 1987), *Bullets Over Broadway* (dir. Woody Allen, 1994) and *Sweet and Lowdown* (dir. Woody Allen, 1999). The charm and magic of these films, particularly

³ Renato Rosaldo, 'Imperialist Nostalgia', *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), (p. 107) Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), 107-122 (p. 107).

those about memory and childhood like *Radio Days*, obscure the centralisation and prioritisation of white stories, acts which uphold a racist hegemony that positions whiteness as superior. As Rosaldo states:

Nostalgia is a particularly appropriate emotion to invoke in attempting to establish one's innocence and at the same time talk about what one has destroyed. Doesn't everyone feel nostalgic about their childhood memories? Aren't those memories genuinely innocent?⁴

Repetition of this trope in Allen's work runs the risk of perpetuating this depiction of the city. It also obscures the racism of whitewashing. This is, in my opinion, what has happened in Dunham's work.

While some critics like Renée R. Curry have analysed Allen's centralisation of whiteness in his oeuvre, my focus in this chapter is on the few times when Allen and Dunham do depict Black people in their work, their presence made all the more ostentatious because of their rarity. Black characters are used as a contrast to their white character counterparts, following what Toni Morrison describes as 'the serviceability of the Africanist presence.'⁵ In this chapter, I will outline the way Allen and Dunham figure whiteness in their films, in particular *Annie Hall* and *Tiny Furniture*. I will look at the character of Cookie (Hazelle Goodman) in *Deconstructing Harry* (dir. Woody Allen, 1997), the first Black female character in Allen's films, and the character of Laura (Danielle Brooks) in *Girls*, the first Black female character in Dunham's television show. Like the physical heavy objects that reveal the awkward and persistent weight of Allen's influence in Dunham's work, these Black characters

⁴ Ibid, p. 108.

⁵ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 46.

are also picked up and dropped back down again, used and disposed of once the point has been made.

JEWISHNESS, WHITENESS AND *ANNIE HALL*

Annie: You're what Grammy Hall would

call a real Jew.

Annie Hall, 1977.

Allen's films are often, if not always, concerned with whiteness. In *Annie Hall*, Annie and Alvy's love story is a story of memory and nostalgia. It is also a story of whiteness, with New York, the backdrop of their relationship, depicted as a city populated overwhelmingly by white people. While there are people of colour in the film, they walk in the background, and certainly do not have speaking parts. It is a presentation of the city as it has never been. Whiteness also underpins the plot of *Annie Hall* since in the film a classic story is replayed, that of an older Jewish man beginning a relationship with a younger, less educated WASP woman precisely because of her contrast to his cultural background.⁶ Alvy chastises Annie for her flakiness, encourages her to undertake more formal education, and pushes her to focus on her singing. Through Alvy's involvement in Annie's artistic development, he is positioned as a superior figure despite the structural racism that would position his Jewishness beneath Annie's WASP whiteness. Allen's predominant concern is with the relationship between these two forms of whiteness. His films never engage with the way whiteness

⁶ Annette Wernblad, *Brooklyn is Not Expanding: Woody Allen's Comic Universe* (London, UK: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 64.

oppresses people of other races. Instead, Alvy's Jewishness is centralised from the beginning of the film. Alvy's (perhaps) exaggerated memories show his working-class Jewish family living in a cramped house emphasised by its location underneath a rollercoaster in Coney Island. While other families have fun on the rides, the young Alvy anxiously eats his soup as the whole house shakes. Alvy's family home is contrasted with that of the Halls, a large, airy house where polite (to the point of coldness) WASPs eat their non-kosher ham quietly. Alvy's relationship with Annie allows him to get close, at least romantically speaking to this epitome of whiteness, and to distance himself from Jewishness which has always had a complicated relationship with whiteness.⁷

This narrative is a story about Jewish assimilation in America. As Lauren S. Cardon outlines, this narrative involves criticism of the WASP world within which the Jewish character attempts to assimilate. For Cardon, Alvy views 'the American dominant culture with a mix of desire and disdain: as a population of anti-Semitic oppressors and as the Eden of assimilation and acceptance.'⁸ While Alvy desires a relationship with Annie, he also seeks to change her and make her more like him. As Cardon argues: 'The protagonists therefore negotiate two separate hierarchies, one that places whiteness at the top and another, more recent paradigm in American popular culture that elevates the Jew to a kind of moral and humanitarian superiority.'⁹ Alvy's nurturing of Annie positions him above the dominant white culture of America, and at the same time takes aim at that culture.

⁷ Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 1.

⁸ Lauren S. Cardon, *The "White Other" in American Intermarriage Stories, 1945-2008* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 81.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 81.

The narrative is deployed in several of Allen's films, for example *Manhattan*, where Isaac is caught between the love of two WASP women, Mary (Diane Keaton) and Tracy (Mariel Hemingway). The memory of Annie lingers in Keaton's portrayal of Mary despite the character being so very different from her. Tracy is played by the granddaughter of Ernest Hemingway, a potent symbol of American culture. In some films, Allen focuses wholly on WASP culture, for example the families in *Interiors* (dir. Woody Allen, 1978) and *September* (dir. Woody Allen, 1987). In other films, he is disparaging of Jewishness. For Julian Fox, this disdain is particularly directed at Jewish women. As Fox argues: 'the Jewish ex-wives and girlfriends who inhabit his stories, remain unsympathetic'.¹⁰ Although it is true that Allen's depiction of a Jewish mother in *Oedipus Wrecks* (dir. Woody Allen, 1989) is a Freudian nightmare of a mother, literally hovering over her son's life as a giant face in the sky, the Jewish women in films like *Radio Days* are presented with affection and warmth.

Jewish history is underpinned by oppression, discrimination and genocide, and has always had a complex relationship with whiteness. The racist hegemonic structures that exist to uphold the hierarchy of white supremacy have clearly not always worked for white Jews. The 'whiteness' of Jewish people (after all, any race can be Jewish) is a complicated phenomenon. As Eric L. Goldstein outlines, 'Far from playing the role of indifferent whites Jews held an uncertain relationship to whiteness from the late nineteenth century until the end of World War II, a period when both Jews and non-Jews spoke of the "Jewish race" and of "Hebrew blood."¹¹ While the Ashkenazi Jews have been legally 'white' in the United States since the Naturalization Act in 1790, the resurgence of bare-faced antisemitism supported by the rise of the alt-

¹⁰ Julian Fox, *Woody: Movies from Manhattan* (New York, USA: Overlook Press, 1996), p. 95.

¹¹ Goldstein, p. 1.

right has resurfaced the question of the ethnicity of Jewish people, questions that allow space for hostile and racist notions of eugenics.¹²

Alvy's exposure to the Hall family and their presumed antisemitism during the Easter dinner scene makes Alvy feel his Jewishness even more keenly. Their Easter celebrations alienate Alvy immediately, as the Christian holiday marks the death of their religious leader, Jesus Christ, at the hands of Jews. Their meal of choice is a cooked ham, a non-Kosher food that once again throws into relief Alvy's Jewishness against the wall of WASP whiteness. For Richard Aloysius Blake, the ham they eat is a 'reminder that Alvy is tasting forbidden food and forming a relationship with a *shiksa*.'¹³ The significance of the food is emphasised when Alvy tells Grammy Hall that 'it's dynamite ham', a comment meant to compliment her cooking but one that simultaneously reveals Alvy's awareness of hostility, danger and conflict. Alvy's feelings are revealed when he breaks the fourth wall to say 'They really look American you know? Very healthy, like they never get sick or anything.' The Halls' whiteness implies that they are free from any racist connotations of illness and contamination, associations that have been made of Black people for example.¹⁴ The Hall's whiteness, after all, is the northern and western European kind which has always been well-established, unlike the Jewish people.

The scene opens with an establishing shot of the Hall's family home, a large, pale blue house surrounded by greenery. The shot implies airiness and freshness, a

¹² Emma Green, 'Are Jews White?', *The Atlantic*, 5 Dec 2016, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/are-jews-white/509453/>> [accessed 28 May 2020].

¹³ Richard Aloysius Blake, *Woody Allen: Profane and Sacred* (Maryland, USA: Scarecrow Press, 1995), p. 69.

¹⁴ Sander L. Gilman, 'Black Bodies/ White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, 12: 1 (Autumn 1985) 204-242 (p. 206).

stark contrast to the claustrophobia of Alvy's family home, allegedly a small house underneath a rollercoaster on Coney Island. The next shot is of Alvy in close-up at the dinner table, facing the camera in a position that recalls the opening of the film. He is similarly anxious and fidgeting. Like the opening of *Annie Hall*, there is no non-diegetic sound which exacerbates the quietness of the dinner table, with the only sound being the ominous clanking of metal cutlery. Alvy describes Grammy Hall as a 'classic Jew-hater', encouraged by her glaring looks at him, which makes Alvy feel his Jewishness more keenly. He imagines himself as an Orthodox Jew, a visual manifestation of how he thinks the Halls must see him.



Figure 3.1. The Halls and the Singers.

The next shots depict the Hall family next to the Singers in a sliced shot that shows them next to each other in the same frame (Fig. 3.1.). The Singers are introduced into the frame with Alvy's words: 'Nothing like my family. The two are like oil and water.' Exactly which family is oil and which is water is perhaps depicted in the next shots of the two families side by side. The Hall's side of the frame is light and pale blue

with a quietness that suggests tranquillity and calm like water. The Singer's side is dark with the top corners cast in shadow, and their constant chatter and sporadic arguments imply a combustible quality like oil. But oil, of course, gives flavour, and the darkness of their presentation has a comforting, warm amber colour, in contrast to the sterile coolness of the Hall family.

Perhaps Allen is referencing the way Jewish people were first depicted in cinema through the contrast of the chattering Singers with the quietness of the Halls. Nathan Abrams notes the antisemitic presentation of Jews in 1920s cinema which depicted them as 'unrefined, venal, grasping, greedy'.¹⁵ While the Halls slowly eat their food, the Singers pile their plates and reach across the table for more. They argue and talk about a man named "Moskowitz" who has apparently stolen from his father. This ties the Singers to crime, while the Halls discuss shopping for picture frames. The Singers talk about Moskowitz's coronary heart failure, and his wife's diabetes, referencing illness and disease while, as Alvy points out, the Halls look like they never get sick.

The depiction of the Singers is also anachronistic. Alvy imagines his family not as they are now but as they were in his childhood. Alvy is likely to have been born towards the end of the 30s if *Annie Hall* takes place at the same time as its creation (he is about 40 at the beginning of the film). This would place the Singers in this shot during the late 30s and 40s, a time that Abrams points out was when Jewish people had been forced out of acting on screen. As Abrams outlines:

by 1935 Jews had all but vanished from the screen. Jewish actors changed their names, as their Jewish bosses— for commercial reasons, as well as fear of inciting Depression and Hitler-fuelled anti-Semitism

¹⁵ Nathan Abrams, *The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema* (London, UK: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2012), p. 2.

even further—calculated that their predominantly white working-class audiences did not want to watch Jews on screen.¹⁶

Alvy is fearful that the Halls do not want the Singers on their screen either. This is portrayed through the Singer's larger space in the frame, as they take up more than half of the space. While this shows how Alvy favours his own family in a film that is about his perspective, it also reveals an anxiety about the Hall's perception of his Jewish family, a family that has been understood in America through the lens of antisemitism. As Abrams notes, 'The Jew was an "outsider" and "invader" to be feared', and Alvy fears that the Halls still feel this way.¹⁷



Figure 3.2. Annie and Alvy order sandwiches as the diner.

While Alvy registers the Hall family's sense of superiority, he is still willing to criticise Annie's kind of whiteness. In one scene, Annie and Alvy go to a diner after their first date. Annie is sitting on the left of the frame, the same space that her family

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

will occupy in the later Easter scene, while Alvy sits on the right, the Singer side of the frame (Fig. 3.2.). Annie's WASP whiteness is emphasised through her white shirt, her collar turned up in a breeziness that connotes the effortless style of Keaton's character. When Alvy orders a deli staple, a corned beef sandwich, Annie makes the sacrilegious order of 'pastrami on white bread with mayonnaise and tomatoes and lettuce.' In New York delis, pastrami famously accompanies rye bread and never white, highlighting Annie's obliviousness to Jewish deli rules.¹⁸ Alvy cannot hide a look of contempt after her order. Annie's accompaniment of mayonnaise also signifies her as a Gentile. As Abrams points out, mayonnaise and white bread are the markers of a Gentile palate.¹⁹ When, in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (dir. Woody Allen, 1986), Mickey Sachs (Woody Allen) considers converting to Catholicism during an existential crisis, it is Wonder Bread and mayonnaise that he picks up from the store to mark his religious conversion and entrance into another kind of whiteness.

Renée R. Curry examines Allen's fascination with whiteness, arguing that this is conveyed through his camera, a view of the world that prioritises whiteness and leaves out people of colour altogether. As Curry states:

Allen's eye dominates, and Allen's eye envisions whiteness. For this filmmaker, the grand schematic landscape of these cities is a white landscape that dominates, threatens, and ultimately obliterates any existence he deems not pertinent to his worldview.²⁰

The lives he ignores are the lives of people of colour, people that live and thrive in the real-life settings of his films. Curry argues that Allen's whitewashing of these cities has

¹⁸ Richard Aloysius Blake, *Woody Allen: Profane and Sacred* (Maryland, USA: Scarecrow Press, 1995), p. 68.

¹⁹ Abrams, p. 165.

²⁰ Renée R. Curry, 'Woody Allen's Grand Scheme: The Whitening of Manhattan, London, and Barcelona', in *A Companion to Woody Allen*, ed. by Peter J. Bailey and Sam B. Girgus (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013) 277-293 (p. 291).

two major features. Although his films are set in culturally rich cities (culturally rich precisely because of the diversity of its non-white inhabitants), he nearly always omits people of colour from his depictions of them. In a whitewashed landscape, white characters are the only protagonists of the story. In *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (dir. Woody Allen, 2008), Curry argues that Allen ‘participates in such a white privileged idea by utilizing the landscape of contemporary Barcelona as a mere space onto which he can paint his own white American characters and tell their story.’²¹ The second is that in the process, the sociological landscapes of these cities are removed from their contexts by eradicating the reality of the people who live there. Through this whitewashing, the dominant perspective of whiteness is privileged.

In advertising to a global audience a whitewashed version of these cities, Allen contributes to a greater whitewashing of Western cinema where the stories of people of colour are eradicated. Allen’s influence on American cinema means that to be influenced by Allen runs the risk of repeating this myopic, homogeneous world view. This is certainly the cause for Dunham. Allen’s influence becomes synonymous with the eradication of people of colour from films about the cities they live in and call home. When Black characters are present, they are shown in predominantly whitewashed worlds. As a result of their scarcity, Black characters are made ostentatious, thrown against a white backdrop that makes their presence visible and significant.

The hypervisibility of Black characters is encouraged by the medium of film itself. Daniel Bernardi highlights the extent to which ‘Hollywood functions as a sort of prism, refracting the colors we see on cinematic screens by separating them from

²¹ Ibid, p. 281.

whiteness.’²² Black characters like Cookie are therefore separated from the dominant, central and galvanising presence of whiteness. Bernardi points out that ‘Hollywood attempts to segregate whiteness from colour in ways that make the former invisible and the latter isolated and stereotypical.’²³ From the central vantage point of whiteness, characters are reduced to stereotypes and racist assumptions are attached to Black characters in order to further cement the central position of whiteness, and uphold the contrast between whiteness and blackness.

Depictions of Black characters are just as striking in Dunham’s work, as she repeats the whitewashed New York of Allen’s films. In the pilot episode of her television show *Girls*, Dunham introduces the four central characters, all of whom are white. The only people of colour are passers-by, or background characters of no significance. Through the course of Dunham’s television series, New York is presented as a city with drawbacks, with things that are less than glamorous, a distraction from the ideal that was promised. There are the rising rent rates, the small apartments, and the less than perfect sexual encounters with less than perfect men. At the end of the pilot episode, Hannah walks down the street, only to be catcalled by a homeless Black man. He shouts, ‘Girl when I look at you I just wanna say “Hello New York!”’ The man is connected to New York with his words. Chillingly, his depiction taps into racist stereotypes of the unbridled sexuality of Black men, particularly the lust for white women. This stereotype was created by white men and has long been used to uphold white supremacy and racist hegemony. As bell hooks outlines:

²² Daniel Bernardi, ‘Introduction: Race and Contemporary American Cinema’, in *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. by Daniel Bernardi (London, UK: Routledge, 2008) xv-xxvi (p. xv).

²³ *Ibid*, p. xv.

That story invented by white men is about the overwhelming desperate longing black men have to sexually violate the bodies of white women. The central character in this story is the black male rapist.²⁴

In the scene, Dunham implies that the man is also one of the less than perfect elements of New York, a threatening inconvenience that must be overcome to live in the city. This depiction sets out an attitude of fear and loathing that comes to be an important part of her series.

For some, Allen's singular worldview means that if Allen were to depict the lives of Black people it would be disingenuous at best and dangerous at worst. In his piece, 'Stop Being Mad at Woody Allen for Not Casting Black Actors', Ricky Camilleri writes: 'Why would we want Woody Allen to attempt to write black characters? Based on his limited world-view it's obvious he would have very little perspective or authenticity.'²⁵ Camilleri concludes his article by referencing the times that Allen actually *has* cast Black actors in his films. He lists Vena O. Hobson who plays a maid in *Hannah and Her Sisters*; Linda Kuriloff who plays a nurse in *Everyone Says I Love You*; Hazelle Goodman who plays Cookie, the sex worker, in *Deconstructing Harry*; and Chiwetel Ejiofor who plays the jazz musician Ellis Moonson in *Melinda and Melinda* (dir. Woody Allen, 1993). For Camilleri, the detractors are doubly wrong to be angry as Allen has indeed cast Black actors in roles in his films all along. Allen himself also acknowledged that he would only hire a Black actor when the character called for it.²⁶ What Camilleri fails to acknowledge is the damage being done when Allen does feature Black people, and the racist stereotypes he upholds through these depictions, and what

²⁴ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2014), p. 58.

²⁵ Ricky Camilleri, 'Stop Being Mad at Woody Allen for Not casting Black Actors', *The Huffington Post*, 8 April 2014 <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/woody-allen-black-actors_b_5648976> [accessed 13 May 2020].

²⁶ Roger Friedman, 'Woody Allen: American Master', *The New York Observer*, 30 July 2014 <<https://observer.com/2014/07/woody-allen-american-master/>> [accessed 3 June 2018].

characters Allen thinks call for a Black actor. *A maid. A nurse. A sex worker. An entertainer.*

UNCOMFORTABLE FIT: WOODY ALLEN, WHITENESS AND *TINY FURNITURE*

Nadine: *How long are you
gonna be staying in our house?*

Aura: *Last time I checked it was my house too.*

Tiny Furniture, 2010.

In Dunham's film *Tiny Furniture*, Allen's cinema is invoked frequently. Aura's (Lena Dunham) neuroses, hypochondria and struggle to navigate romantic relationships recall Alvy's similar personality traits. The artistic parties Aura frequents are full of white New York artists, like the characters in Allen's films. Dunham's films, like Allen's, are not intentionally about racial politics. Richard Dyer points out that 'the invisibility of whiteness as a racial position' means that films depicting white people, their lives and their stories are misread as stories about *people*.²⁷ He analyses how

in Western representation whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves *as whites* but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abused. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race.²⁸

²⁷ Richard Dyer, *White: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2017), p. 3.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 3.

Allen's films are also films *about* whiteness. This can be overt as in *Annie Hall*, but is also true for every other film in his oeuvre.

In Allen's film, *Interiors*, whiteness is an aesthetic choice, something replicated in Dunham's film, *Tiny Furniture*. The film is about the claustrophobic effect of a mother and her two daughters living together in their shared apartment. Dunham uses her real family home in TriBeCa. She also plays Aura, the film's protagonist. Dunham's real mother plays Siri (Laurie Simmons), and her real sibling plays her sister Nadine (Cyrus Dunham). Siri is an artist who takes photographs of doll's house furniture juxtaposed with body parts of real-sized people, just like Simmons. Perhaps the juxtaposition of Nadine and the doll furniture is a comment on materialism, on femininity, domesticity or perspective, but for Aura, it is a comment on the way her mother sees each of her children: Aura is never chosen to pose in her mother's photographs because Siri instead favours Nadine's taller form. Nadine is seen as the more successful and intelligent child, despite being younger.

In the opening scene of the film, Aura returns from college to her family home to find it exactly how she left it. Although she brings with her bags of old clothes and objects from college, she feels displaced. The quiet stillness of the house echoes a feeling of stasis and, like the tiny furniture, Aura and her possessions are out of place. The austere architecture of the house recalls Allen's *Interiors*. In Allen's film, a sparsely decorated, austere white-walled summer house provides the setting for the troubles of an all-white family, the enclosed space emphasising the tense environment. The angular architecture, white walls and open empty spaces are picked up by Dunham in Aura's home in *Tiny Furniture*. In both films, initially empty spaces are not empty spaces for long. The characters drift in and out of the frame, bumping up against one another and building the tension that characterises both films. The family in Allen's

film spends most of the film inside the house. In one scene, the three sisters look out of the window towards the beach, watching their younger selves play, bringing together the past and the present.



Figure 3.3. Aura watches as Nadine poses for Siri.

In *Tiny Furniture*, sibling tension is established from the beginning of the film. As Aura walks into the house for the first time, she finds Nadine posing for one of Siri's photographs (Fig. 3.3.). Nadine is firmly in the picture, taking Aura's position as the focus of her mother's life and work. At first, the shot only captures Nadine's legs, which are described as more 'supple' than Aura's and therefore more suitable for the photograph. Nadine is made gigantic in these first shots, as Siri and Aura are made smaller by her dominating presence. Her face is not shown, making her giganticness the primary feature of Nadine's character in the eyes of Aura. In Aura's absence, the human furniture has been moved around in this triangular relationship (they even live in the ternary TriBeCa). As her sister becomes part of her mother's work, she is forced into the role of audience member. Aura finds herself displaced. The usurpation of

power places the sisters in opposition, like the sisters in *Interiors* or any number of other middle-period Allen films (*Hannah and Her Sisters* being the most obvious example).

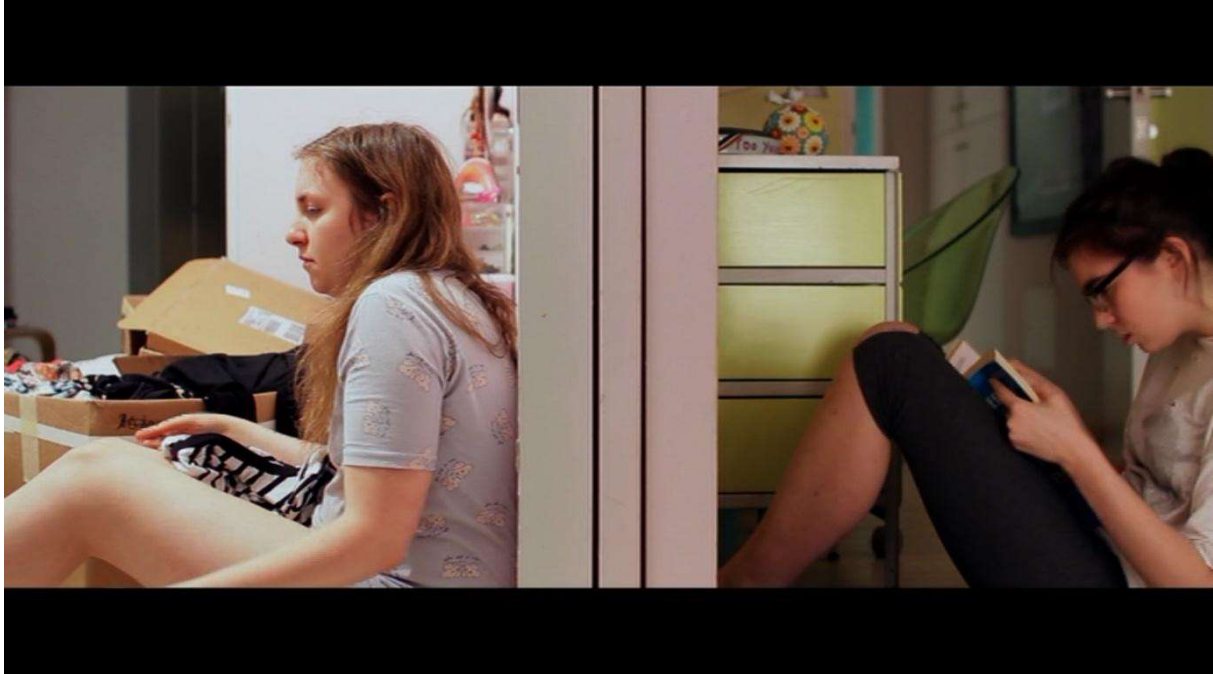


Figure 3.4. *Aura and Nadine divided.*

It is through Dunham's use of a split screen that this conflict is most clearly demonstrated, and where *Annie Hall's* influence is evident. Visually reflecting the dichotomous relationship of the two women, the sliced shot recalls Alvy and Annie's therapy sessions. In both films, the slicing of the shot is not created during the editing process but through dividers used during the filming itself.²⁹ This means that the actors are able to communicate and respond to the actor on the other side of the shot. For example, in *Annie Hall*, even though each character is having a separate conversation with their therapist in a different location and a different time, their replies to the therapist are also replies to each other, showing the contrast in their

²⁹ Jason Bailey, *The Ultimate Woody Allen Film Companion* (Minneapolis, USA: Voyageur Press, 2014), p. 33.

experiences and perspectives on their shared relationship. When the therapist asks how often they have sex, Alvy answers ‘almost never,’ Annie answers that it is ‘constant.’ This creates a paradoxical intimacy and distance. While the characters are physically close, they are also on different sides, simultaneously in the same place but far apart.

A similar shot is used in *Tiny Furniture*, where Aura and Nadine sit in their respective rooms while arguing. Aura sits on the left side, leaning up against the bedroom divider (Fig. 3.4.). Nadine is positioned on the right of the frame, her feet pressed against the barrier as though she is keeping it in place, supporting it, and holding up the retaining wall that keeps her sister on the other side of the frame. Aura presses against it, longing for intimacy, while Nadine upholds the boundary that keeps them separate. In the scene, the sisters argue about their respective attitudes to work. Aura’s laziness irritates the high achieving Nadine who encourages Aura to take more responsibility for her life. The harshness of Nadine’s words belies a desire for her sister to be happy. All Aura wants is some a connection with her sister. As in *Annie Hall*, the filming of the couple via a split screen that is not really a split screen reveals a desire for closeness, if at least one of them would reach across the divide.

Dunham makes explicit reference to Allen’s work in other ways too. In one scene, Aura’s friend Jed (Alex Karpovsky) reads a copy of Allen’s *Without Feathers* in bed (Fig. 3.5.). Jed is unemployed and crashing with Aura while her mother is away. He is a semi-famous YouTube personality with a small following. His videos show him on a rocking horse while dressed as a cowboy and reading nihilistic quotes from philosophy books. His videos are posted under the name, ‘Nietzschean Cowboy.’ Dunham presents Jed as educated but pretentious. His sense of humour is an exaggerated version of Allen’s: the ridiculousness of the situation contrasts with the

moroseness of his character and deadpan delivery. When Jed picks up the copy of *Without Feathers* to read in bed, this connection is emphasised.



Figure 3.5. Without Feathers left in the bed.

When Siri returns home, Jed is kicked out, but the copy of *Without Feathers* remains in the crumpled duvet. The forgotten book, barely visible amongst the folds of the cover, is nonetheless a permanent fixture in the home. Dunham has similarly hidden the influence of Allen, buried beneath layers of ostensibly feminist filmmaking, but his legacy remains. Perhaps through this image Dunham is conveying that Allen does have a place in American cinema if he is influencing female artists, but for men like Jed to continue Allen's legacy is a problem, and those men are removed from the female space. Aura does not bother to remove the book. Perhaps she can't. The heaviness of the book reflects the heaviness of Allen's influence, an unavoidable and unmoveable presence.

The heaviness is even implied in the book's title: *Without Feathers*. It is an object that cannot be lifted easily. In a film that is, in many ways, about beds and who gets to share them, the book's position in the bed is even more significant. Jed demands the best bed in the house, perhaps a reference to Allen's elevated position in American cinema history compared to female filmmakers (the women in Aura's home are all artists). Upon her return from college, Aura is devastated to find that her sister is now permitted to sleep in her mother's bed with her, a spot once reserved for Aura alone. Bed-sharing is often associated with sexual intimacy as Stanley Cavell explores in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981), a seminal study about romantic comedies during the screwball era. The censorship of the Production Code operating in Hollywood at this time meant that intimate scenes of an unmarried couple in bed together could not be shown.³⁰ The screwball comedy therefore found new ways to express sexuality without showing it on screen. Aura spends a lot of time in the film trying to get her mother into bed but is unable to do so until the film's closing shots. In *Annie Hall*, each of Alvy's memories of his ex-wives take place near to if not exactly in bed. In *Annie Hall*, Annie leaves Alvy's bed first to get a joint and again when her subjectivity, visualised as a hologram, leaves her body and the bed. Neither Alvy nor Aura can keep the object of their affections in bed with them for very long.

The significance of beds in American cinema is highlighted through Cavell's analysis of *It Happened One Night* (dir. Frank Capra, 1934), a film made just before the Production Code was more rigorously enforced. In the film, Peter (Clark Gable) and Ellie (Claudette Colbert) overcome their initial dislike and mistrust of one another

³⁰ Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 80.

as they complete a road journey to New York, a journey which finally concludes in a romantic union. The pre-code timing of the film meant that a bed scene was permitted in the film, a bed that becomes charged with significance through the course of the film. As the pair are pretending to be a married couple on their journey, they rent motel rooms with two beds next to each other. While pretending to be married, Peter and Ellie are permitted to share the bedroom space, but very soon actors pretending to be married on screen were not.

In *It Happened One Night*, Peter and Ellie's modesty (and feigned disinterest in one another) is protected by a blanket suspended above the bed which slices it in two. Like the split screens in *Annie Hall* and *Tiny Furniture*, the split does not really separate the characters who could easily cross the barrier. Cavell acknowledges this symbolism too, as he writes that 'we could already predict that the action of the film will close with the walls tumbling down'.³¹ The blanket's very presence invokes closeness, as the attempt at separation shows how close the characters really are to one another. In one scene, the blanket that separates Aura from the object of her affections is the heavy presence of Nadine. Just as the presence of the blanket signifies its eventual tumbling down in *It Happened One Night*, so Nadine's presence means that Aura's purpose is to get her out of the bed, out of her spot, and away from their mother. In the scene, Aura is illuminated by a small amount of light in the left of the shot. Aura is kept away from the calm, dark quiet that she longs to be a part of. Aura's name is made significant in this scene, as the character brings with her an intrusive brightness, a disturbing light that shatters the peacefulness of the uterine dark space inhabited by

³¹ Ibid, p. 81.

her mother and sister. Once Aura enters their scene, Siri and Nadine's faces are illuminated, and their sleep is broken.



Figure 3.6. Chuck and Allen in their frames.

Dunham also depicts the bed as a site of conflict in a more explicit way. In the 'American Bitch' episode of *Girls*, Hannah has a complicated sexual experience with Chuck Palmer (Matthew Rhys), a writer she loves but who has been accused of sexual misconduct on his book tour. In the episode, Hannah visits the lavish apartment of the well-respected, successful author who has invited her to discuss a recent piece she had written about the allegations made against him by college women. He is presented as a symbol of hyper-masculinity, his name suggesting Chuck Palahniuk, author of the novel that was adapted into the machismo-drenched film *Fight Club* (dir. David Fincher, 1999). Dunham makes a clear visual connection between Chuck and Allen very early on. A picture of Allen hangs on Chuck's wall, amongst the framed awards that visually confirms his status as an established and celebrated artist (Fig. 3.6.). The picture of Allen hangs ominously behind Chuck as he disputes the women's stories. Allen haunts the scene, reminding us of the art he creates and has created, the

accusations made against him, and in recent times, of the repeated accusations of Dylan Farrow, another woman who is believed by some, and not believed by others. Despite Dunham's apparently uncompromising invocation here, in her own life she has found taking sides difficult. In 2018 she publicly discredited the account of actress Aurora Perrineau who accused a co-writer on *Girls* of sexual assault. Dunham publicly sided with her friend and lied to disprove Perrineau. After an intense media backlash, Dunham admitted to lying, publishing an apology to Perrineau in a special edition of *The Hollywood Reporter*.³²



Figure 3.7. Hannah dwarfed by the bookshelves.

In the picture, Allen is surrounded by a halo of gold wearing a colourful jacket while holding a gun to his head in a typically morose pose. Chuck's bookshelves split the shot, positioning him on the left-hand side of the frame just below the image of Allen, the similarity emphasised by the dark frames of both their glasses. Allen hovers above the action like Norman Bates's (Anthony Perkins) taxidermy birds of prey in

³² Lena Dunham, 'My Apology to Aurora' in *The Hollywood Reporter*, 12 May 2018 <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/lena-dunham-my-apology-aurora-perrineau-1165614>> [accessed 20 May 2018].

Psycho (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). While Allen is a silent presence, Chuck attempts to convince Hannah of his innocence. He tells Hannah of his distress upon hearing the accusations, and that in fact these women were eager to have sex with him, their favourite author. He is the one who feels used. He has lost sleep, he sees a therapist, and has been taking sleeping pills. It has put a strain on his work and family life. He's depressed. He is simultaneously self-destructive and self-loathing, while still enamoured with himself.

Books, beds and photographs are particularly important in this episode. A framed photograph of Chuck standing next to Toni Morrison is also used to comment on Chuck's powerful position in the arts. Chuck uses the image to convince Hannah of his innocence, but also to establish his place in the literary world. He uses Morrison's image to cultivate a specific one for himself. Hannah is meant to feel intimidated by his proximity to Morrison and thus to question her understanding of the situation. How can a man who is friends with Toni Morrison be sexually deviant? In this way, Chuck uses Morrison to his own end, ironically invoking her argument in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). In the book, Morrison details the 'serviceability of the Africanist presence', the use of Black characters to serve the white characters' depiction in literature.³³ For Chuck, the photograph can be picked up and put back down, moved to be more visible for its intended audience, and then put away, much like his relationship with Morrison. His implied relationship with a prominent Black author like Morrison does not change how he interacts with women however. Like Chuck, Allen uses the image of a Black woman, Cookie, to service the development of his white characters.

³³ Morrison, p. 46.

Despite herself, the image of Morrison, the plush Manhattan apartment and the awards on the walls intoxicate Hannah, and she is slowly subsumed into the world Chuck represents and her proximity to success, an enticing prospect for a struggling female author. A jump cut reveals Hannah sitting on a sofa in front of a vast bookshelf that stretches from the floor to ceiling (Fig. 3.7.). She looks small and insignificant. Here, the experiences of the women she wrote about is evoked, women who find themselves chewed up by the misogynistic literary world that is set up to protect its male stars. Hannah's smallness makes her a piece of furniture, something to adorn his house, and something he can move around.

Chuck and Hannah spend time discussing the morality of enjoying Philip Roth's work. This is another veiled reference to Allen. As a Jewish-American writer, Allen is often compared to Roth and while Chuck and Hannah's conversation does not explicitly refer to Allen he is nonetheless invoked here. Hannah finally confesses, 'I know I'm not supposed to like him because he's a misogynist and he demeans women, but I can't help it. I fucking love his writing.' Chuck delights Hannah with his reply, 'You can't let politics dictate who you read or who you fuck,' giving her a copy of Roth's novel, *When She Was Good* (1967). Roth's novel focuses on Lucy, a woman who determines to improve the men around her to the cost of her own happiness and self-worth. Its story in other words speaks to women artists like Hannah and Dunham who attempt to confront the patriarchy but in doing so harm themselves.

In the scene Dunham shows the intoxicating power of absolution for Hannah. Chuck permits her to experience pleasure without shame, and without the weight of politics and the responsibility of feminism. Hannah is no longer restricted by her hate for Chuck and the allegations are forgotten, at least for the time being. They move closer to one another, their intimacy cemented in the first two shot of the scene which

binds them in the frame together. The background to the shot is a bookshelf of the books they both love. The frame of the book cabinet nevertheless slices the shot, a visual reminder that they are still on opposing sides.

By the end of the episode, Hannah goes to bed with Chuck, after he asks for some (non-sexual) human contact. She is flattered that she has reached this level of intimacy with her favourite author. After a few seconds, he exposes himself and she touches him. Chuck's grin reveals that he has won. He has reduced Hannah to another story, another one of the women that thought they had been specially selected for their intellect and talent. Hannah will never be believed. She went to his house. She accepted a gift. She got into bed with him. She touched him. When Hannah leaves the apartment, she joins the street where streams of women flock into the building. She is invisible and voiceless precisely because her experience is ubiquitous. In her damning indictment of male toxicity in the arts, Dunham implicates Allen by suggesting his presence throughout the episode.

ALLEN, WHITENESS AND THE SERVICEABILITY OF THE AFRICANIST PRESENCE

Harry: *But don't you see? I'm a huge blur!*

Deconstructing Harry, 1997.

In *Deconstructing Harry*, Allen introduces Cookie, a sex worker, who is hired by Harry, a writer undergoing an identity crisis. In the film, Harry is a writer experiencing writer's block, which is perhaps because of the tumultuous state of his personal life that results in him hiring a sex worker in the first place. Cookie is the first Black woman

to have a significant role in an Allen film. While critics discuss the increased profanity, overt sexuality and references to Allen's private life in *Deconstructing Harry*, they ignore the role of Cookie as a Black woman in Allen's film and the way in which her blackness is used as a means by which to define Harry and his internal conflicts. As Morrison outlines:

Explicit or implicit, the Africanist presence informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature. It is a dark and abiding presence, there for the literary imagination as both a visible and invisible mediating force. Even, and especially, when American texts are not "about" Africanist presences or characters or narrative idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation.³⁴

Cookie, specifically her blackness, is an example of that presence Morrison argues hovers 'in implication', and is used to define Harry's subjectivity.

Cookie is hypervisible as a Black woman in an Allen film with a predominantly and overwhelmingly white cast. As Curry writes: "The centrality of Allen's vision of whiteness diminishes people of color to their most offensive stereotypes: mere entertainers, servants, and oversexed male studs."³⁵ The depiction of Cookie draws on and exacerbates aggressive racist stereotypes about Black people, especially Black femininity. Annecha Marshall outlines the racist propagation of Black female sexuality as highly sexualised and aggressive. She writes: 'Since slavery, images of Black women as hypersexual have been used to justify our sexual exploitation and, as such, have contributed to our inferior socioeconomic and political position'.³⁶ Marshall highlights how images of Black female sexuality have a material impact upon the lives of Black

³⁴ Ibid, p. 46.

³⁵ Curry, p. 287.

³⁶ Annecha Marshall, 'From Sexual Denigration to Self-Respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality', in *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women*, ed. by Delia Jarrett-Macauley (London, UK: Routledge, 1996) 5-36 (p. 5).

women, as well as their depiction in art: ‘The obvious conclusion to the theory that Black women are promiscuous is that we are prone to prostitution.’³⁷ Allen uses Cookie, and the racist stereotype that Black women are hypersexual, to comically depict Harry as emasculated. Upon their first meeting, he asks Cookie to hit him and then to perform oral sex on him.

After so few depictions of Black people in his films, it is dismaying to find him choosing such a stereotype of Black female sexuality when he finally casts a Black actress. The subjectivity of sex workers is also elided here. As Danielle Hipkins and Kate Taylor Jones outline in their book, *Prostitution and Sex Work in Global Cinema: New Takes on the Fallen Woman* (2017), ‘the figure of the female prostitute in all her varieties is a malleable cultural symbol that has been used to address a myriad of social fears and desires across global cinemas.’³⁸ Sex workers in Hollywood cinema are frequently used as objects to comment upon and to define others in film, usually depicted as victims in need of saving (for example, *Taxi Driver* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1976) and *Pretty Woman* (dir. Garry Marshall, 1990) to name two). Cookie is therefore doubly Othered as a Black woman *and* as a sex worker. Allen depicts another sex worker in *Mighty Aphrodite* (dir. Woody Allen, 1995), where Linda (Mira Sorvino) begins a friendship and eventual romantic relationship with Lenny (Woody Allen). The narrative contains conventional plot points of rescue such as when Lenny helps Linda escape a violent pimp and leave the world of prostitution behind her. In so doing, Allen reaffirms notions that sex workers’ livelihoods, both inside and outside of prostitution, are in the hands of men. It is important to highlight that Linda’s character arc

³⁷ Ibid, p. 15.

³⁸ Danielle Hipkins and Kate Taylor-Jones, ‘Introduction’, in *Prostitution and Sex Work in Global Cinema: New Takes on Fallen Women*, ed. by Danielle Hipkins and Kate Taylor-Jones (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) 1-18 (p. 2).

culminates in a romantic relationship, something never afforded to Cookie who is used solely as comic fodder. She is denied subjectivity of becoming a romantic interest.

This reduced subjectivity means that Cookie is the character who has the closest relationship with Harry. She listens to his worries and neuroses without judgement, and through their conversations Harry comes to understand himself better. Of course Harry's relationship with her is a power imbalance based on an exchange of money and a racist and misogynistic society that places Cookie below Harry as a female sex worker, and a Black female sex worker at that. In a film where several white male characters are undergoing identity crises, Cookie's presence helps Harry define himself coping under new circumstances as a single man fighting for custody of his son. The film appears to reference the experiences of Allen at the time after his separation from Mia Farrow and the ensuing carnage it wreaked upon both their lives.

While Allen has always disputed that his films are autobiographical, the similarity of Harry's situation to Allen's is undeniable, and one must consider that these protestations are disingenuous. For some critics like Maurice Yacowar, *Deconstructing Harry* is Allen's attempt to argue his case and to defend his actions. Yacowar argues that the film 'seems an attempt to clear himself against the rumours and accusations that have undermined his persona and challenged the faith of his audience.'³⁹ The argument is a difficult one to prove, especially with Allen's frequent proclamations against it. But the similarity between Allen and Harry's life is similarly difficult to ignore, especially in the depiction of a protagonist that seems to have shed some of the more endearing qualities of previous characters played by Allen like Alvy Singer, Mickey Sachs and Clifford Stern. Harry instead is presented as a reflection of

³⁹ Maurice Yacowar, 'Reconstructing Woody: Commentary on *Deconstructing Harry*', *Queen's Quarterly*, 105: 1 (Spring 1998) 95 (p. 95).

the Allen shown through the media coverage of the scandal, a character without a moral compass, replaced instead by a greed and lust that govern his actions.



Figure 3.8. Blurred Harry is out of focus.

Harry is a much less loveable figure than Alvy and the misogyny that can be discerned in many of his earlier characters is emphasised in this one. Harry takes delight in the pain caused by his affairs, affairs that are often very close to home (between sisters, his therapist and then her patient). Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky argues that: ‘Radical changes in his private life have served as a trigger for his growth as a director,’ and that the ‘break with Mia Farrow engendered a search for a new artistic direction (and a new persona), signalled by the unsettling film *Husbands and Wives* (1992)’.⁴⁰ The narrative is ruptured by frequent disturbances where Harry’s imagination upsets the linearity and realism of the film.

⁴⁰Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, ‘Woody Allen After the Fall: Literary Gold from Amoral Alchemy’, *Shofar*, 22: 1 (Fall 2003) 5-28 (p. 5).

This uncertainty is physically manifested in perhaps one of the greatest jokes of the film, where Harry imagines a story about an actor (Robin Williams) who is out of focus. This is manifested physically as the character appears fuzzy, and literally ‘out of focus’ by the camera’s lens, much to the concern of his colleagues and family. He is told to go home, to get some rest and ‘sharpen up.’ Harry experiences the same problem before he is about to attend an award ceremony in his honour. The scene physically displays Harry’s confused sense of identity. According to Rubin- Dorsky:

For an actor to be out of focus is (in film speak) to be “soft”, that is, undefined, not having made himself sufficiently real to viewers. Or, from the perspective of his creator, he is uninformed, not yet alchemically transmuted from life to art. A character can be in no worse state: if he cannot be seen clearly, he simply does not exist within the picture.⁴¹

In order to sharpen up the outlines of these blurry white male characters, Cookie is used. Such is the serviceability of the Africanist presence that Morrison describes that her involvement in the film quickly brings Harry into focus. Alone in his one-shot, Harry panics, saying ‘I’m a huge blur!’ (Fig. 3.8.). His outline is fuzzy, reflecting the character’s confused and troubled sense of identity. He is joined by Cookie in a two-shot, the pair sitting on the sofa together. She calms him down and he comes into focus, mirroring the use of blackness in cinema to make whiteness discernible. For Bernardi, scenes like this one work by isolating other races, ‘separating them from whiteness,’ and therefore defining them as Other.⁴² Cookie’s presence as Other is used to define Harry’s whiteness, an identity that is positioned as neutral and only discernible through contrast.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 24.

⁴² Bernardi, p. xv.

While Dunham implicitly criticises Allen for this via Chuck's manipulative use of Toni Morrison, Dunham is also guilty of using Black characters to define and develop her white characters. After receiving criticism for the lack of racial diversity in the first series of *Girls*, Dunham cast Donald Glover, a Black actor to play Hannah's new boyfriend, Sandy. The character is in only two episodes of the series, and his arc culminates in an argument with Hannah about his political beliefs (he is a Republican, something Hannah can't quite reconcile with his race). The episodes are used as the sole exploration of race in the whole of the series.

For some critics, the discomfort of their interaction and the fact that Hannah's white liberal nervous chatter halts any true understanding of Sandy's experiences is precisely the point that Dunham was trying to make. Hannah's inability to listen to Sandy's experiences is a comment upon the character's privilege. As Stefania Marghita and Conrad Ng write of Sandy:

The conclusion of his two-episode arc, however, reveals the difficulty of initiating an honest discourse on race, even if it is between two educated metropolitan twenty-somethings amidst a presumed post-racial America.⁴³

Marghita and Ng suggest that we shouldn't be surprised to find Hannah reacting in this way. She is always depicted as privileged, selfish and self-involved. But what Marghita and Ng do not acknowledge is that the issue is that there is a *conclusion* to Sandy's arc: he is written out of the series after just the two episodes. Like Chuck and his photograph with Morrison, Sandy is little more than a prop to be moved on and discarded.

⁴³ Stefania Marghita and Conrad Ng, 'Body Talk: Reconsidering the Post-Feminist Discourse and Critical Reception of Lena Dunham's *Girls*', *Gender Forum* 45 (2013) 108-23 (p. 117).

It is this serviceability that Donald Glover, who plays Sandy, critiques in the music video for his song, 'This is America', performed under his stage name 'Childish Gambino'.⁴⁴ Amongst other issues that impact upon Black people in the USA like police brutality and gun violence, the lyrics lampoon the hijacking of Hip Hop by white audiences, audiences that demand the genre's Black artists perform for them. The lyrics, 'We just wanna party/ Party just for you/ We just want the money/ Money just for you', mock the ways in which Hip Hop and Black American culture more widely are utilised for the consumption of white audiences.



Figure 3.9. Childish Gambino in the music video for 'This is America'.

In the music video, Glover replicates some of the images of Black masculinity that have pervaded American culture and which perpetuate racist stereotypes that have been active since slavery, images of simultaneous servitude and deviance, victimhood and violence. In one scene, Glover assumes the exaggerated pose of the

⁴⁴ Tad Friend, 'Donald Glover Can't Save You', *The New Yorker*, 26 Feb 2018 <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/03/05/donald-glover-cant-save-you>> [accessed 17 May 2018].

Jim Crow caricature before shooting another man in the head (Fig. 3.9.). Throughout the video, scenes of extreme violence (for example the gunning down of a gospel choir in a reference to the Charleston church shooting in 2015) are contrasted with Glover imitating viral dance moves created by Black musicians. The combination of entertainment and violence depicts the different and often contradictory ways that images of African Americans have been used to benefit and enrich white people, their image exploited for commercialism and for entertainment. Glover's blackness is similarly used by Dunham as a means to help define and develop the white character Hannah. Once this service is completed, Sandy is written out.

(WHITE) FEMALES ONLY: *GIRLS* AND THE USE OF BLACK FEMININITY

*'White patriarchal embrace of Mammy's fictional and commercial image in the United States alternately masks and communicates an effort to locate and elide blackness through exaggeration. The result is a formulated and unrepresentative staging of black womanhood that conforms to a white hegemonic ideal of an acquiescent, subordinate, and nondisruptive version of black femininity.'*⁴⁵

Andrea Elizabeth Shaw, *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women's Unruly Bodies*, 2006.

⁴⁵ Andrea Elizabeth Shaw, *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women's Unruly Bodies* (Oxford, UK: Lexington Books, 2006) p. 20.



Figure 3.10. Laura and Jessa in rehab.

In the opening episode of the third series of *Girls*, named 'Females Only', the first Black female character, Laura (Danielle Brooks), is introduced to the show. Laura, like Glover in the second series, did not become a central character in *Girls*, appearing in only one episode, which focuses on the white character Jessa's stint in rehab. Laura is Black and fat and Dunham positions her in direct contrast with Jessa who is white and slim. Jessa uses Laura to get herself kicked out of rehab. In one scene, Jessa performs oral sex on Laura, ostensibly to help the latter come to terms with her homosexuality but really to ensure Jessa is finally removed from the facility. Jessa says: 'So I went down on fat gay Laura. It was basically charity.' Dunham utilises the body of a Black woman to further the characterization and plot of the central white character, once again invoking Morrison's notion of the 'serviceability of the Africanist presence.' Once this has been achieved, Laura is never mentioned again. The racial dichotomy of the scene is particularly uncomfortable when one considers the hierarchical relationship between white women and Black women that has been entrenched in American society

in slavery and beyond. Laura is, for example, often depicted physically below Jessa (Fig. 3.10).

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison analyses Willa Cather's novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940). In the novel, Sapphira, a disabled, privileged white woman, becomes obsessed with the idea that her husband is having an affair with Nancy, a slave. As a result of her jealousy, Sapphira abuses Nancy until Nancy finally escapes via the Underground Railroad. Morrison discusses Cather's motives as follows:

The need to portray the faithful slave; the compelling attraction of exploring the possibilities of one woman's absolute power over the body of another woman; confrontation with an uncontested assumption of the sexual availability of black females; the need to make credible the bottomless devotion of the person on whom Sapphira is totally dependent. It is after all *hers*, this slave woman's body, in a way that her own invalid flesh is not.⁴⁶

Sapphira needs the body of Nancy to define her own body, a body which feels as though it is no longer hers and no longer under her control through her disability. Jessa similarly needs Laura's body to confirm elements of her own identity. As she waits in rehab, bored and without the usual confirmation of her sexual power, she assumes the 'sexual availability of Black females', as Morrison writes, exploiting Laura to consolidate assumptions about her own identity.

In the episode, Dunham omits the scene where Laura consents to the sexual interaction between them. Instead, the narrative depicts only Jessa and Laura talking, with the next scene between the pair showing Laura on her back, and Jessa looming over her. While we assume that the interaction is consensual, the images further uphold the slave/master dichotomy that Morrison identifies, and that has

⁴⁶ Morrison, 23.

underpinned the depiction of Black people in art and the experiences of Black people in society since slavery. As Michael J. Dumas writes:

Afro-pessimist scholars contend that the Black is socially and culturally positioned as *slave*, dispossessed of human agency, desire, and freedom. This is not meant to suggest that Black people are currently enslaved (by whites or by law), but that slavery marks the ontological position of Black people. Slavery is how Black existence is imagined and enacted upon, and how non-Black people— and particularly whites— assert their own right to freedom, and right to the consumption, destruction, an/or simple dismissal of the Black.⁴⁷

Jessa's own freedom and potent sexuality is only defined by her sexual domination of Laura. She understands her power and agency only when she employs it to oppress another person.

Dunham's exploitation of Laura's body calls to mind the machinations of slavery. It positions Laura as disposable and replaceable, a body for the use of white people. The depiction of Hannah's body (and Dunham's more widely), however, is celebrated for its fatness and for its rebellion against the mainstream understanding of female body types. As bell hooks argues: 'In a white supremacist sexist society all women's bodies are devalued, but white women's bodies are more valued than those of women of colour.'⁴⁸ In both her television series and her film, *Tiny Furniture*, Dunham's work has centred on her body, and the way it fits or is made to unfit in society. While Laura is dismissed as 'fat gay Laura', Dunham is celebrated for her 'realistic' body. Claire Perkins celebrates Dunham's frank depictions of the female body, arguing that 'Dunham's candid presentation of her 'imperfect' body is taken as a defiant stance against unrealistic media images of women.'⁴⁹ While in *Girls*, three of

⁴⁷ Michael J. Dumas, 'Against the Dark: Antiblackness in Education Policy and Desire', *Theory into Practice*, 55:1 (2016), 11-19 (p. 13).

⁴⁸ hooks, *Yearning*, p. 62.

⁴⁹ Claire Perkins, 'Dancing on My Own: *Girls* and Television of the Body', *Critical Studies in Television*, 9:3 (Autumn 2014), 33-43 (p. 13).

the four central characters have slim body types, Hannah's larger body is positioned as the site for humour but also of body positivity. She is frequently nude, or in very little clothing, and depicted taking a shower, having sex and eating food naked. The defiance that Perkins notes, however, is crucially focused on the depiction of white, able-bodies cis-women and the stance Dunham takes is clearly in the preservation and celebration of this demographic.



Figure 3.11. Siri and Aura in bed.

The reverence for white female bodies is shown in the concluding scene of *Tiny Furniture*, where the bodies of Aura and her mother lie on the bed together (Fig. 3.11.). This quiet, tender scene contrasts with Dunham's depiction of Laura's Black female body, which is used as a site of pain and suffering, and for white woman Jessa to exercise her frustration, boredom and power. In the scene in *Tiny Furniture*, Aura has made her way back into Siri's bed. Siri is agitated and complains about the ticking alarm clock and the back pain that has caused her to take to her bed. The medium shot captures both women, and reflects the heaviness of their bodies, rooted in time and

space. The ticking of the alarm clock reminds Siri of her mortality, and of her daughter who is becoming like her. But in the moment in bed, there is no sense of time itself, only the knowledge that it is passing.

Aura listens as her mother recounts tales of her own bad relationships and career failures in her youth. Aura rubs her mother's back, locating the spot of pain. And Aura's movements push away the pain and encourage confession, confessions that help Aura understand her own life and identity. In Sarah Manguso's *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary* (2015), the relationship between a mother and her child is explored, particularly this relationship with time. She writes:

I used to exist against the continuity of time. Then I became the baby's continuity, a background of ongoing time for him to live against. I was the warmth and milk that was always there for him, the agent of comfort that was always there for him.

My body, my life, became the landscape of my son's life. I am no longer merely a thing living in the world; I am a world.⁵⁰

As Aura presses into her mother's back, she casts her as the background upon which she comes to understand herself. For Aura, Siri is a projection of the woman she could one day become, a portal into the past and into the future. But the scene also becomes an anticipation of what is to come for both women, as Aura is positioned as the carer and reliever of pain. The scene is a held breath before the eventual reality of Siri's old age and death. Aura uses her mother's body in this way to come to understand truths about her own identity and future. The tender interaction between these white female bodies serves to highlight the violence of the scene between Jessa and Laura, and how different the depiction of a Black female body is from a white female body in Dunham's work. The heaviness of Aura and Siri's bodies in bed roots them in time, connecting

⁵⁰ Sarah Manguso, *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary* (Minnesota, USA: Greywolf Press, 2015), p. 53.

them both to their shared history and future. The depiction of a fat Black female body, however, is completely different and instead bears the weight of racism.

If fat white bodies are devalued and derided, fat Black bodies are even more so. As Russell Meeuf argues, ‘the images of black obesity carry a more stigmatized set of signifiers.’⁵¹ While Dunham is celebrated for her body positivity, fat Black women are engaged in a white supremacist hierarchy that positions their bodies ‘as objects of revulsion and deploying their images to signify the horrors of low social class.’⁵² Through group therapy, Jessa learns that Laura had been sexually abused by her uncle. The history of abuse that Laura has faced in her childhood ties her to a sense of abject misery. Her life literally disgusts the members of the rehabilitation facility.⁵³ In the film *Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire* (dir. Lee Daniels, 2009), the depiction of Precious’s (Gabourey Sidibe) life is similarly defined by disgust. Precious is poor, living on welfare, frequently physically and sexually abused by her parents and already the mother of two children while at high school, conceived through rape by her father. The disgust at Precious’s life, while coupled with extreme sympathy for the character, nonetheless ties fat Black womanhood to revulsion. As Meeuf outlines, this process leads to mainstream culture ‘linking marginalized groups to seemingly revolting and disgusting imagery’, a process which seeks to and succeeds in rendering fat Black femininity as abject.⁵⁴

As Meeuf notes, the depiction of fat Black women in US culture usually falls within two images, ‘the loveable “mammie” figure and the gluttonous “welfare

⁵¹ Russell Meeuf, *Rebellious Bodies: Stardom, Citizenship, and the New Body Politics* (Austin, USA: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 64.

⁵² Ibid, p. 64.

⁵³ Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York, USA: New York University Press, 2004).

⁵⁴ Meeuf, p. 65.

mother.”⁵⁵ Mammification is used in a racist patriarchal society to uphold the white supremacist ideal of docile Black women. In Andrea Elizabeth Shaw’s book, *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women’s Unruly Bodies* (2006), the mammie figure is explored, specifically the way in which it presents an idealized version of unthreatening Black femininity. She writes that the asexuality of the mammie figure deflects ‘attention from sexually attractive black women’ and in doing so ‘modifies white female fears about white men’s interracial liaisons.’⁵⁶ Like Jessa, who needs Laura’s sexuality to bolster and confirm her own, the mammie figure is used to confirm white supremacist notions of attractiveness. Jessa positions Laura as an asexual body, as her submissiveness to Jessa’s sexuality confirms her control over her, exacerbated by the memory of the mammie figure that has been entrenched in American culture, and which defines the fat Black female body as submissive and there to serve white people.

The depiction of Laura is made all the more uncomfortable when compared with the depiction of fat white bodies in Dunham’s work. While the scene between Aura and her mother in *Tiny Furniture* helps show the transformation between these two women who have come to understand each other by the end of the film, the depiction of Laura in *Girls* is a scene of violence and suffering, which is used solely to better understand the white character of Jessa. Laura’s body is presented as a site of repulsion, contrasted with the so-called defiance of Dunham’s presentation of fat white bodies. Dunham’s political stance against the mainstream depiction of idealised femininity stretches only as far as whiteness.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 64.

⁵⁶ Shaw, p. 20.

ANXIOUS AND *INSECURE*: BLACK WOMEN AND WOODY ALLEN

Issa: *And tell your dad that black women aren't bitter.*

We're just tired of being expected to settle for less.

Student: *Her outfit settled for less.*

Insecure, 'Insecure as Fuck', 2016.

There are, of course celebratory depictions of fat Black women in art created by Black women themselves. Grace Nichols, for example, has a collection of poems named *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984). In her poem, 'Beauty', the mammification and exploitation of fat Black women is left behind as Nichols instead celebrates the beauty of a woman precisely because of her fatness and Blackness:

Beauty
is a fat black woman
Walking the fields
Pressing a breezed
hibiscus
to her cheek
while the sun lights up
her feet

Beauty
is a fat black woman
riding the waves
drifting in happy oblivion
while the sea turns back
to hug her shape.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Grace Nichols, 'Beauty', in *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (London, UK: Virago Press, 1984), p. 7

The freshness of the images ('breezed hibiscus', the sea, fields) contrasts with the racist misogynistic depiction of fat Black women in American culture which is so often tied to disgust.

In Issa Rae's television series, *Insecure* (HBO, 2016-present), the lives of Black women of varying sizes are depicted as they navigate the pressures of life and love in L.A. In the show, Kelli (Natasha Rothwell) is a fat Black woman who is successful in her career and has an eventful, fulfilling romantic life. Rather than provoking disgust, she is an attractive figure in the show as both a friend and sexual partner. Kelli's professional success does result in a materialistic excess, and Kelli's love of fine clothes, food and wine reveals an attachment to extravagant capitalism. This problematic connection between fat Black women and 'excess' is seen in contemporary film and television, *Insecure* included.⁵⁸ Kelli is contrasted to Issa (Issa Rae), whose awkwardness and neuroses see her lose friends, boyfriends and job opportunities. The series offers a more nuanced portrayal of Black femininity, shattering the dichotomy of asexual mammie and deviant hypersexuality. As Tameka N. Tounsel points out, Rae 'used her content to imagine a hybrid identity that could accommodate her experience' and 'embodiment of awkward blackness'.⁵⁹ This awkwardness, authorial voice, exploration of romantic turbulence, and sense of autobiography has led to Rae's comparison with Allen.⁶⁰ I am going to conclude by looking at *Insecure* which offers an insight into what an Allen-influenced artwork written for, by and about Black people might look like.

⁵⁸ Tameka N. Tounsel, 'Production Vulnerability: Black Women Writers and Narratives of Humanity in Contemporary Cable Television', *Souls*, 20: 3 (Jan 2019), 304-327 (p. 322).

⁵⁹ Tounsel, p. 317.

⁶⁰ Aamna Mohdin, 'The Rise of the Awkward Black Girl', *Quartz*, 27 Aug 2017 <<https://qz.com/1062383/issa-rae-and-michael-coel-with-insecure-and-chewing-gum-awkward-black-girls-are-finally-having-a-moment-on-tv/>> [accessed 18 Feb 2018].



Figure 3.12. Issa rapping towards the camera.



Figure 3.13. Alvy complaining towards the camera.

Allen's influence is shown most clearly during the bathroom scenes which occur frequently throughout the series. Alone, Issa raps about what she is thinking, be it about her friends, co-workers, a racist micro-aggression she might have experienced, or, as in the first episode, her feelings about her birthday and getting older (Fig. 3.12.). In the first episode, 'Insecure as F**k', it seems as though Issa is addressing the

audience, breaking the fourth wall and speaking directly to the audience like Alvy at the beginning of *Annie Hall* (Fig. 3.13.). The shot has a similar composition to Allen's scene. Alvy's upper body and face are also shown in the mid-shot that is both intimate but not intrusive. In both cases, the protagonists are confessing without an obvious person prompting that confession or listening in to what they say. While Alvy fidgets in the frame, uncomfortably shifting his weight while telling an unspecified audience about his relationship breakdown with Annie, Issa is similarly uncomfortable, awkwardly rapping about her feelings and inelegantly forcing words to rhyme ('Go shawty, it's my birthday, but no one cares because I'm not having a party, because I'm feeling sorry for myself').



Figure 3.14. Issa addressing her reflection.

The next shot, however, reveals that Issa is speaking into a mirror and is not addressing the audience (Fig. 3.14.). Unlike Alvy, she is not reaching out to another person to hear her thoughts, but is instead in the midst of personal, private creation. The mirror is significant as Issa's reflection acts as a confirmation of her subjectivity. The scene calls to mind Morrison's objective in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*: 'My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the

racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served.’⁶¹ The depictions of Black femininity explored in this chapter are ones which objectify, producing images of asexuality and hypersexuality and pejorative stereotypes that pander to white hegemony. In this scene, however, Issa is neither asexual nor hypersexual. She is comfortable in her private awkwardness. Her reflection in the mirror sends back the image she has created for herself. Images of Black women *by* and *for* Black women are therefore essential in the creation of images that resist the power of hegemonic whiteness. This includes images that might have been influenced by Allen. In fact, it is essential to ensure the images, while bearing Allen’s influence, are for Black women, and can thus side-step the repetition of harmful depictions that can be replicated through the process of influence, as seen in Dunham’s work.

The privacy of the bathroom also provides Issa with a safe space to escape the everyday racism she encounters in her workplace. The privacy of this space, away from her white co-workers, is an example of what bell hooks calls, the ‘homeplace’:

Throughout our history, African-Americans have recognized the subversive value of homeplace, of having access to private space where we do not directly encounter white racist aggression whatever the shape and direction of black liberation struggle (civil rights reform or black power movements), domestic space has been a crucial site for organizing, for formal political solidarity.⁶²

In the homeplace, Black women can create images of themselves that are outside of the white supremacist structure that have seen them rendered as symbols of asexual servitude and deviant hypersexuality. *Insecure* is clearly influenced by Allen, but has left behind his whitewashed world, creating images of Black women that are far from racist depictions like Cookie. The show’s location of L.A. takes the setting away from

⁶¹ Morrison, p. 90.

⁶² hooks, *Yearning*, p. 47.

Allen's New York, presumably deliberately, making its home somewhere else. In an interview for the *L.A. Times*, Rae admitted: 'I want to be like Woody Allen for L.A., and South L.A. specifically.'⁶³ Critically, Rae acknowledges the shift in location, and instead of attempting to wrestle the depiction of New York from Allen's vision, she opts to leave the city, to go West like Annie, and set up in L.A. instead. She takes the lessons she learned from Allen. As hooks writes: 'We can make homeplace that space where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole.'⁶⁴ By removing the series from Allen's world, Rae is able to suture the wound between depictions of Black women in Allen's films and Black women's own subjectivity.

It may seem unusual to consider what Allen's influence on Black female filmmakers might be and might become in the future, especially given the extensive whitewashing and racist portrayals Allen has himself been responsible for in his work. Dunham's perpetuation of these elements shows the risk of repeating Allen's world view without significant change. Rae's *Insecure* offers an example of what Allen's influence might look like in different hands. Issa's insecurity, unlike Alvy's and Harry's, is defined by and for herself.

⁶³ Angel Jennings, 'No Bullets or Body Counts: How 'Insecure' Creator Issa Rae is Portraying the Sexy Side of South L.A.', *L.A. Times*, 23 Jan 2017 <<https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-southla-perception-20170123-story.html>> [accessed 19 June 2018].

⁶⁴ hooks, *Yearning*, p. 49.

CHAPTER FOUR

DANCING, FALLING AND FAILING: *ANNIE HALL*'S INFLUENCE ON

FRANCES HA

Woody Allen's influence on Noah Baumbach and Greta Gerwig's film *Frances Ha* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2012) is clear from the very first shots. The New York streets are cast in nostalgic monochrome, recalling Allen's films *Manhattan* (dir. Woody Allen, 1979) and *Celebrity* (dir. Woody Allen, 1998), as best friends Frances (Greta Gerwig) and Sophie (Mickey Sumner) walk around the city. It is the influence of *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977) on the film, however, that is most keenly felt, especially in its exploration of a breakup. While in *Annie Hall* this breakup is between the romantic couple Annie (Diane Keaton) and Alvy (Woody Allen), *Frances Ha* explores the breakup of two platonic female friends. *Annie Hall*'s greatest influence on the film is paradoxically also its main point of deviation. While *Frances Ha*'s focus on a breakup recalls *Annie Hall*, the lack of a heterosexual love story in the film shows a split away from Allen's work which so often centres on the romantic relationship between a man and a woman.

Instead of a male romantic partner, Frances's main concern is Sophie. She is never very interested in men. In fact, the film begins with Frances breaking up with her boyfriend so she can carry on living with Sophie. But when Sophie decides to move out, Frances is left angry, unmoored and bereft. Consequently, Frances is forced to crash at friends' apartments, including rich-kid slackers Benji (Michael Zegen) and Lev (Adam Driver), both of whom show a short-lived romantic interest in her that fizzles away due to Frances's lack of reciprocation. As a single woman with two eligible men in her life, their romantic involvement could seem inevitable in another film, but

Frances is out of step with the beats of a conventional romantic comedy. She fails at these heterosexual romantic relationships, caring only for Sophie.



Figure 4.1. Frances at the end of her show.



Figure 4.2. Sophie at Frances's show.

Frances Ha centres on a protagonist who cannot quite succeed in her professional life, as Frances yearns to become a dancer, but is instead cast as a perpetual understudy. Ultimately, this failure leads her to choreograph her own show, in essence *writing* her own work that others will dance. Poignantly, Sophie attends the showcasing of Frances's dance piece at the end of the film. Their friendship has shifted dramatically, as Sophie now lives in Japan with her husband. But Sophie's presence at her show is the moment Frances has been dreaming of for the entire film. They smile at each other from across the room in a look that conveys affection and mutual understanding and recalls the memory of their intimacy and devotion depicted at the start of the film (Figs. 4.1. and 4.2.).

It is failure that defines Frances's most transformative and important actions (like the show at the end of the film) as Frances's failures become forms of movement, creativity and independence. *Frances Ha* also fails to repeat *Annie Hall*. Just as Frances's failure to become a dancer ultimately leads to her own much more creative expression, so the film that takes her character as its name is all the more subversive for its failure to copy Allen's work completely. Through this chapter, I will show that both Allen's influence on *Frances Ha* and the film's step away from his work is characterised by failure. I will look at the use of dancing and falling in *Frances Ha*, two acts that signal failure in the film in different ways. These acts will be analysed through the lens of dance theory which will be underpinned by Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) and an exploration of critical disability theory using Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013). This will reveal failure to be a creative act that defines *Frances Ha*'s relationship with Allen's influence. Through this focus on Frances's heterosexual failure, the film dances and stumbles away from Allen's

influence, creating a new space for itself amongst the plethora of films inspired by Allen.

FRANCES AND FAILING

Frances: *I'm so embarrassed. I'm not a real person yet.*

Frances Ha, 2012.

Halbertsam makes a similar claim for the redefinition of failure which they argue has always accompanied feminism. They claim that failure has often been a better option when 'feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure is often being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals', as 'not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures.'¹ *Frances Ha's* playful avoidance of patriarchal ideals of femininity, heteronormativity and a distinct focus on female friendship marks its deviation from Allen's cinema; these are also all traits that spring from Frances's failures. Her lack of heterosexual romantic success means that she is able to side-step the heteronormative storyline that is offered by Lev and Benji, a storyline she clearly does not want.

The clear deviation from *Annie Hall's* focus on a male perspective of a broken heterosexual relationship shows a shift towards centring female experience. In light of Allen's biographical scandals, which resurface and are revisited with the release of each new film, Baumbach and Gerwig's focus on a female experience reveals a conscious decision to rewrite *Annie Hall* for modern audiences, while still engaging

¹ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 4.

with the nostalgia for what I argue in this thesis is Allen's most memorable film. This is surely informed by the film's star, Greta Gerwig, and her involvement as co-writer.² The focus on a female story is notably absent from the majority of Baumbach's previous films. Baumbach's first film, *Kicking and Screaming* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 1995), centred on a group of friends who refuse to move on from their college days. The theme of nostalgia and its compelling pull to the past would go on to underpin many of Baumbach's films, again reflecting Allen's own oeuvre.

Baumbach's next film, *Mr Jealousy* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 1997), follows the protagonist who, wracked with paranoia, listens in on his girlfriend's psychoanalysis sessions. Allen's recurring motif of psychoanalysis is perhaps invoked here, for example Annie's and Alvy's therapy sessions in *Annie Hall*, where Alvy remembers his own in contrast with his imaginary version of his girlfriend's. Allen's *Another Woman* (dir. Woody Allen, 1988) is most strongly recalled in Baumbach's *Mr Jealousy*, as the film's protagonist Marion (Gena Rowlands) listens in on a stranger's sessions through a grate in the wall that separates them. In *Everyone Says I Love You* (dir. Woody Allen, 1996) Allen depicts another overheard analysis session, where DJ (Natasha Lyonne) eavesdrops on the appointment of Von (Julia Roberts) and passes on the intimate information, uncomfortably, to her father Joe (Woody Allen) who uses it to woo the patient.

In 2005, Baumbach went on to make the semi-autobiographical *The Squid and the Whale* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2005), a film about a married couple going through a divorce and the impact this has upon their two sons. Through the film, Baumbach

² I will be writing of *Frances Ha* as a collaborative work between Baumbach and Gerwig, whose joined and separate works, for example *Mistress America* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2015), are influenced by Allen. This is to acknowledge the discernible central female presence in the film. As I highlighted in the introduction, all the films analysed in this thesis are written by their director, and so this inclusion of Gerwig is also to keep a continuity in the way the films are framed here.

recalls the marriage breakdowns of several couples in Allen's oeuvre, for example in *Interiors* (dir. Woody Allen, 1978) and *Husbands and Wives* (dir. Woody Allen, 1999). In each of Allen's films, relationship strife is present in one form or another. Even in those films that depict an apparently happy relationship, for example *Everyone Says I Love You*, romantic happiness is never straightforward. In the film, Bob (Alan Alda) and Steffi (Goldie Hawn) have a very happy marriage, but Steffi's love and adoration for her ex-husband Joe still lingers. Joe frequently visits the couple for advice on his new relationships and maintains an intimate friendship with Steffi. In fact, the most romantic scene of the film is between Steffi and Joe, as they dance on the banks of the River Seine. Their love and chemistry literally sends Steffi flying, as her leaps propel her into the sky, magically suspended as we likewise suspend our disbelief in the magic of the scene. Their love for one another is never questioned or, curiously, made strange by her marriage to another man.

In *Husbands and Wives*, Jack (Sydney Pollack) and Sally (Judy Davies) visit the house of their friends, Judy (Mia Farrow) and Gabe (Woody Allen). Jack and Sally tell their friends that they have decided to separate, which Judy takes particularly badly, in part because it reveals her own unhappiness in her marriage to Gabe. The handheld camera follows the characters as they pace around the apartment, their bodies obstructed by pillars and tables, door frames and bookshelves that bifurcate the shots and separate the characters from one another. Judy's retreat to the bedroom signals her separation from the couple (and her husband Gabe), as she says the words, 'we were all so close', out of the shot. The handheld camerawork is characterised by an attempt to retain them all within the shot but, like Judy's fruitless protestations, it is unable to do so.

Baumbach's oeuvre similarly reveals a preoccupation with relationship troubles. In a scene in *The Squid and the Whale*, Bernard (Jeff Daniels) and Joan (Laura Linney) tell their sons that they are getting a divorce. As in *Husbands and Wives*, the camera is also handheld and the jerky movements capture a nervousness in the scene. *Husbands and Wives* is also evoked in the scene's setting of the middle-class Brooklyn apartment which is home to the two academics. Baumbach's characters act like Allen characters in Allen settings living out Allen-like stories, but in a distinctly Baumbach style characterised by off-beat humour. This humour can be seen during the arguments, for example, when the divorcing parents discuss the logistics of sharing custody of the family's pet cat. Baumbach revisited the theme of divorce in *Marriage Story* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2019), which explores the legal process of the end of a marriage, and the emotional ramifications it has upon those around the couple, including their son.

Allen's influence upon the film is never hidden by Baumbach and is instead made clear, with the use of actors Wallace Shawn and Alan Alda, both of whom have appeared in Allen's films. *Marriage Story*'s star, Scarlett Johansson, has featured in three of Allen's films, *Match Point* (dir. Woody Allen, 2005), *Scoop* (dir. Woody Allen, 2006) and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (dir. Woody Allen, 2008). She is also one of the few actors that has stood by her friendship with Allen and said she would work with him again.³ The central story of Charlie (Adam Driver) desperate to retain a connection with his son echoes *Deconstructing Harry* (dir. Woody Allen, 1997) just as Nicole's (Scarlett Johansson) cool collectedness around her decidedly flightier family members remembers Hannah in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. The influence of this film on

³ Andrew Pulver, 'I Love Woody and I Believe Him': Scarlett Johansson Defends Allen', *Guardian*, 4 September 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/sep/04/scarlett-johansson-defends-woody-allen>> [accessed 5 September 2019].

Baumbach is seen most straightforwardly in his 2007 film *Margot at the Wedding* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2007). Like Allen, Baumbach shifted his focus from heterosexual romantic love and strife to explore the tension between sisters. In the film, Margot (Nicole Kidman) visits her sister Pauline's (Jennifer Jason Leigh) home that she shares with her fiancé Malcolm (Jack Black) in preparation for their wedding. Old grievances resurface as the sisters negotiate their changing relationship under the shadow of abuses from the past. The exploration of the sisters' relationship calls to mind *Blue Jasmine*, and the claustrophobic depiction of the tight spaces of Pauline's home recalls *Interiors* and *September* (dir. Woody Allen, 1987).

Baumbach's films at the start of his career mirror the cynicism of some of Allen's late-period films about relationships. With *Greenberg* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2012), however, the influence of an earlier film, *Annie Hall*, is seen. Roger (Ben Stiller) spends the film coming to terms with his new life in L.A. after moving there due to a failing career and to recover from a resultant nervous breakdown. Roger's depression in L.A. invokes Alvy's own feelings about the city, especially as he frequents L.A. parties that resemble Tony Lacey's (Paul Simon) in *Annie Hall*. But it is in the character of Florence (Greta Gerwig) that the influence of *Annie Hall* is most clearly felt. Florence's ambition to become a singer is reminiscent of Annie's own ambition in *Annie Hall*. To pay the bills, she is the housekeeper at the Greenberg family home, which is where she meets Roger. Florence helps Roger learn to enjoy himself just as she simultaneously learns to realise her own talent, just like Annie. She is a gifted yet insecure singer and, again like Annie, struggles with the eventual realisation that her boyfriend might be dragging her down. Unlike Annie and Alvy, however, Florence and Roger do not end the film separate, but their future is nonetheless ambiguous. In the final scene, the pair are together but their differences and relationship difficulties remain unresolved. This

collaboration between Gerwig and Baumbach would go on to define his next two films, *Frances Ha* and *Mistress America* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2015) which are both co-written by Gerwig.

Gerwig's career began in the so-called mumblecore genre that came into being in 2002 with Andrew Bujalski's *Funny Ha Ha* (dir. Andrew Bujalski, 2002). The title *Frances Ha* rings with the echo of the title of Bujalski's film. Gerwig's career post-mumblecore is defined by a mixture of mainstream romantic-comedy movies (such as *No Strings Attached* (dir. Ivan Reitman, 2011) and *Arthur* (dir. Jason Winer, 2011), a remake of Dudley Moore's classic comedy), as well as acting in films directed by well-respected American auteurs. Gerwig worked with Whit Stillman in 2011 on his film *Damsels in Distress* (dir. Whit Stillman, 2011), Woody Allen in 2012 on *To Rome With Love* (dir. Woody Allen, 2012), Rebecca Miller on *Maggie's Plan* (dir. Rebecca Miller, 2015) in 2015 and with Todd Solondz in 2016 on *Weiner-Dog* (dir. Todd Solondz, 2016). Gerwig's collaboration with Baumbach led to a much more sympathetic and affectionate focus on female relationships, especially those which are platonic in nature, like best friends in *Frances Ha* and sisters in *Mistress America*. Before his collaboration with Gerwig, Baumbach's films often focused on the male perspective of a broken relationship and professional failure, and when his films did focus on a female perspective it was often a damning portrayal of femininity.⁴

In *Margot at the Wedding*, for example, Margot is cold towards her sister and overbearing with her son: she is an Oedipal nightmare of a mother that stifles her child's growth and pushes away her family. *Frances Ha* instead presents an affectionate focus on platonic love and female friendship from a sympathetic female

⁴ Baumbach's previous collaborating partner was Jennifer Jason-Leigh, also his romantic partner at the time, with whom he wrote *Greenberg*.

vantage point in *Frances*. Gerwig finally is now writing and directing her own films, films which explore platonic female relationships, for example a mother and daughter in *Lady Bird* (dir. Greta Gerwig, 2017) or between sisters in *Little Women* (dir. Greta Gerwig, 2019). Like *Frances*, who moves from dancing in other people's productions to finally choreographing her own show, Gerwig has become a filmmaker in her own right. This female focus in *Frances Ha* enables a more nuanced understanding of the character of *Frances* who, like *Annie* in *Annie Hall*, could be viewed as beautiful but ditsy, not taking her life or herself seriously. Both struggle with self-confidence and professional and career success. In forgetting some aspects of Allen's film, the focus on the male perspective in particular, a new vantage point is established, one that starts from the stand-point of failure. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam argues that '*forgetting* becomes a way of resisting the heroic and grand logics of recall and unleashes new forms of memory.'⁵ For Halberstam, the act of forgetting is necessarily a resistance to traditional masculine ideas of hard evidence which have relegated spectrality and lost genealogies.⁶ It is precisely this origin point of failure that allows for *Frances Ha*'s playful handling of Allen's influence. The film darts away from Allen's influence in its focus on decidedly female desires, all the while playing devoted homage to his cinema. The film's relationship with Allen's influence is a dance characterised by careful, deliberate mirroring and playful leaping away, a tension that is reverential and deferential, but also mischievous and creative.

This remembering and conscious forgetting is in its very nature nostalgic. As I have explored in previous chapters, nostalgia is inherent in the way the films in this thesis access Allen and handle his influence. While there is pain in this remembering,

⁵ Halberstam, p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 12.

there is, of course, pleasure too. In the psychological homesickness that is nostalgia, the desire to repeat past happiness means that references to Allen's oeuvre are particularly pleasurable in *Frances Ha*. Perhaps it is in its forgetting of Allen's biographical scandals that this pleasure is most keenly felt. In a way, *Frances Ha* is like an Allen film without the most controversial aspect of those films: Allen himself. In fact, so much of the pleasure of *Frances Ha* is in its remembering of *Annie Hall*, particularly the echoing of Annie and Alvy in the characters of Frances and Sophie.



Figure 4.3. Frances and Sophie ride the subway home.

Like Annie, Frances is talented but uncertain, tackling the same crisis of confidence in both her relationships and her career. Frances dreams of becoming a dancer, but her trepidation means that she never quite makes the cut. This is reflected in Frances's own dancing style which involves trips and falls, and her verbal mumblings show a lack of confidence whilst also mirroring Annie's speech style in *Annie Hall*. Frances is not a complete mirror image of Annie, however, as she also reflects Annie in her desire for the lost object, Sophie, whose oversized glasses, rigid

opinions and Jewishness recall Alvy (Fig. 4.3.). This mingling and mixing of the characters of *Annie Hall* as a whole permeates the creation of the characters rather than simply providing a blueprint (Fig. 4.4.).



Figure 4.4. Annie and Alvy sit on a bench in Central Park.

This process of nostalgic repetition is seen in Alvy's recollections of the iconic lobster scene in *Annie Hall*, where the couple hysterically laugh while collecting the freed, live lobsters that crawl on the floor of the kitchen. As I have shown in Chapter One, both Alvy and Annie return to this memory to access the previous happiness of their relationship. Alvy recreates the moment with a new date, but it is a failure as she doesn't get the joke, and the crucial element of the memory, laughter, is absent. For Alvy, reality is never as pleasurable as the past. His nostalgic memories are not the reality of the past but are remembered in a way that makes them bearable and as part of the story he tells himself. As he warns us at the beginning of *Annie Hall*, Alvy has always had trouble separating reality from fantasy. The lobster scene is important to Annie too, as we see her photographs of the event still hung on the wall. The repetition

of the lobster scene is echoed in *Frances Ha* with the repetition of Frances and Sophie's play fighting scene.



Figure 4.5. Frances and Sophie play fight in the park.



Figure 4.6. Rachel doesn't get the joke.

In the original play-fighting scene (Fig. 4.5.), the only sound is the pair's diegetic screams of joy and laughter, recalling Annie's and Alvy's often-incoherent delivery of lines as they attempt to tackle the lobsters. It is the first scene in the film, and establishes the pair's closeness, and the rituals of their friendship. During Frances and Sophie's estrangement, Frances instigates a similar fight with her colleague Rachel (Fig. 4.6.). Like Alvy's date, Rachel doesn't get the joke and the new friend shrugs away Frances's faux-aggressive lurches. Rachel's reaction shows both Frances's need to repeat past happiness like Alvy, and just how very different the present (Rachel) is from the past (Sophie). The difference only makes Frances miss Sophie more.

DANCE, FAILURE AND FEMINIST FILM THEORY

*'From the perspective of feminism,
failure has often been a better bet than
success.'*⁷

Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of
Failure*, 2011.

Frances's career as a dancer is another way through which patriarchal norms are queried. Dance destabilises Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze in so much as it complicates the apparent binary upon which the theory rests. According to Mulvey's seminal article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), woman 'stands in

⁷ Halbertsam, p. 4.

patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other.’⁸ In doing so the image of woman ‘always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified’, namely the threat of castration that is implied in her otherness.⁹ As feminist film theorist Jessica Benjamin attests, Mulvey’s theory proposed that to overcome this, woman’s ‘alien otherness is either assimilated or controlled, and that her own subjectivity nowhere asserts itself in a way that could make his dependency upon her a conscious insult to his sense of freedom.’¹⁰ Mulvey’s theory suggests that this assimilation and control of the woman is manifested in a rendering of her as an image, a site upon which the man ‘projects its fantasy onto the female figure’ who are ‘simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*’.¹¹ Through the apparently unmovable binaries of gaze theory (male/female, object/subject), Mulvey’s theory cements woman in a state of stasis: unable to progress politically, the spectatorship of women on screen is stuck in the unrelenting grasp of male desire.

That is, however, until feminist film theorists (including Mulvey herself), began to question the apparently unmoveable parameters of gaze theory. In 1987, Mulvey critiqued her own theory in the article ‘Changes: Thoughts on Myth Narrative and Historical Experience’ (1987). She acknowledged that gaze theory ‘hinders the possibility of change and remains caught ultimately within its own dualistic terms’, a restriction that is particularly problematic within a theory that is centred on the

⁸ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema’, in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Thornham (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 58-69 (p. 59).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65

¹⁰ Jessica Benjamin, ‘A Desire of One’s Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space’, in *Feminist Film Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. by Theresa de Lauretis (Hampshire, USA: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986) 78-101 (p. 80).

¹¹ Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure*, p. 65.

repositioning and progression of feminist thinking.¹² For feminist film theorist Ann Daly, another troubling notion was the type of theories Mulvey's theory inspired. In Daly's article, 'Feminist Theory Across the Millennial Divide' (2000), she notes the 'then flourishing "success-or-failure" brand of feminist criticism, whose brittle, reductive analyses were not only unconvincing scholarship but problematic politics as well.'¹³ For Daly, Mulvey's theory precipitates a win or lose mentality when it comes to female representation on film, and the inescapability of the gaze means an inflexibility of the theory which only ever ends in failure. Mulvey's gaze theory therefore proves to be contentious, and its apparently rigid binaries and boundaries provided an irresistible temptation for some feminist theorists to test, puncture and manipulate. I believe dance theory to be one of these.

Whether working with Mulvey's theory or outright denouncing it, dance theory is often concerned with *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. However, in her book *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture* (2002), Daly is critical of this use of Mulvey's theory when it comes to dance, stating 'I even dispute the very trope of the "gaze" as an adequate explanation of dance spectatorship.'¹⁴ According to Daly, the theorizing of the male gaze as unmoveable leaves no room for the dance scholar and choreographer, as they are expected to 'topple a power structure that we have theorized as monolithic.'¹⁵ Mulvey's binaries position dance, therefore, in a realm of success or failure, trapped by the omnipresence of the patriarchy which makes the match unfair: patriarchy holds a loaded dice. Dance as a means of feminist expression

¹² Laura Mulvey, 'Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience', *History Workshop Journal*, 23:1 (1987), 3-19 (p. 6).

¹³ Ann Daly, 'Feminist Theory Across the Millennial Divide', *Dance Research Journal*, 32: 1 (July 2000), 39-42 (p. 39).

¹⁴ Ann Daly, *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture* (Connecticut, USA: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 335.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 307.

can never succeed in overcoming these odds and is therefore always destined to fail. As a result, some dance theorists attempt to question the binary and aim to find breathing spaces between these ostensibly immovable positions that could place dance in a more favourable position.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty suggests that using Mulvey's gaze to critique dance cannot work because dance ultimately does not subscribe to gaze theory's notions of seeing. She writes: 'as a temporal art, disappearing even as it comes into being, dance resists vision.'¹⁶ The dancer, therefore, avoids the male gaze by resisting being captured in sight for too long, dancing around the scopophilic gaze that would render the dancer 'as bearer, not maker, of meaning.'¹⁷ Similarly, Adrienne L. McLean argues that the dancing body is a knowing party in the spectacle and therefore cannot be the body upon which the man projects his fantasy. She writes: 'A dancing body is not only the object of the gaze but also a subject who participates and presents chosen aspects of herself to that gaze, willingly and consciously.'¹⁸ Agency is therefore restored to the female figure through dance, something that is often theorised as impossible in Mulvey's gaze theory.

Sally Banes takes this argument a little further by positioning dance as an art that complicates the binary of man and woman, action and inaction. She argues that 'the distinction between *doing* versus *being looked at* is a category error, since with dance *doing* and *being the object of the gaze* are not opposites.'¹⁹ For Banes, the dancing body is looked at precisely because it dances, and dances because it is being

¹⁶ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Massachusetts, USA: Institute of Technology, 2008), p. 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ Adrienne L. McLean, *Dying Swans and Madmen: Ballet, the Body, and Narrative Cinema* (London, UK: Rutgers University Press, 2008), p. 16.

¹⁹ Sally Banes, *Before, Between, and Beyond: Three Decades of Dance Writing* (Wisconsin, USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), p. 327.

looked at. Dance, then, can offer an imaginative and compelling way into the discussion of feminist film theory, stretching the binaries and borders that can, at times, seem dishearteningly immovable. Out of an ostensibly impossible situation, dance offers a playful and creative means by which to, if not completely avoid the male gaze, at the very least restore agency in this gaze and therefore offer new ways of talking about feminist film theory. The focus on dancing in *Frances Ha* offers a way of expressing female desire that is neither shackled to traditional patriarchal norms nor to Mulvey's theory of the gaze.



Figure 4.7. Frances at dance practice.

In one scene of Frances practicing dancing, Baumbach uses a long shot that displays her entire body, framed by the angular architecture of the dance space and the intersecting straight lines of the dancing bar (Fig. 4.7.). Frances's body echoes the straightness of the *mise-en-scène*, as her extended arms and stretched legs transform her shape into angles, points, and edges. Her angles, however, are not perpendicular like the architecture and, while they are an aspect of the beauty of the composition on

screen, she is clearly separate, distinctly a moving body, a combination of straightness and bends. As she spins, she critiques herself in the mirror and adjusts her form, and in doing so Frances controls the look that exerts power over the body: we are simply witnessing it. We see the transformative power of looking when it is held by the subject as well as the object since Frances can adjust her body to how she wants it to be viewed. It is not the gaze that transforms Frances into art, but rather Frances's art that is transformed by her own gaze.

Through this process, Frances learns from each of her actions, changing and evolving, simultaneously avoiding or at least complicating the gaze as she develops her craft. This process is also an exercise in memory: Frances must remember where she has been in order to develop. In fact, the trope of memory underpins the very premise of dance theory. Lambert-Beatty considers memory to play an important role in dance spectatorship itself. She writes: 'All dance spectatorship relies on memory.'²⁰ This is because dance relies on the spectator's ability to 'hold the just-past in mind long enough to make connections across the ephemeral art form's temporal unfurling.'²¹ Remembering is therefore pivotal in both the theory and the praxis of dance.

In another scene, where Frances attends dance class, she copies the movements of her dance teacher while clearly struggling to keep up. Frances's identity as the perpetual understudy is marked both by her position behind Rachel (the first choice) and her partner-less state. While Rachel practices with her male dance partner, Frances is forced to imagine the male presence. We are reminded of Frances's lack of interest in men as she dances by herself with her eyes fixed on her female teacher who is the guiding, nurturing presence that offers so much more than a male partner. In

²⁰ Lambert-Beatty, p. 53.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 56.

the close-up shot, Baumbach prioritises Frances's face and facial gestures over her dancing body. In the scene, dance is presented as being about more than the body: it is through Frances's grimaces, exasperated puffed out cheeks and intense, concentrated stare that we understand Frances to be trying hard, but not quite getting it. Her failure is cemented with her dance teacher's words—'understudies out!'—and Frances's reluctant exit from the studio.

DANCE, FAILURE AND DISABILITY

Frances: *I like things that look like mistakes.*

Frances Ha, 2012.

For Daly, Lambert-Beatty and McLean alike, dance offers feminist film theory new angles into and out of Mulvey's pervading theory. This, too, has its restrictions and it is impossible for dance theory to hold the key to all female representation on screen. Dance, while offering a potentially fruitful avenue for feminist theory, does not hold the answers for *all* women, or non-males. For example, while disabled people can and do dance, barriers to this expression of art exist and present challenges that able-bodied people do not face. Many of these barriers are institutional, as Michelle R. Zitomer and Greg Reid highlight the unsuitability of the architecture of some dance schools. There is also the perception that the inclusion of disabled students in dance schools would reduce their training standards. These are all examples of barriers to

dance training for some disabled people that able-bodied people do not face.²² Sarah Whatley's article, 'Dance and Disability: The Dancer, the Viewer and the Presumption of Difference' (2007), explores these attitudinal barriers based on research with disabled dancers studying at Coventry University. She writes that 'training for the disabled dancer remains at the margins and therefore the disabled dance student is marginalised within a predominantly able-bodied community of learners.'²³ However, further exploration into the disabled dancing body reveals an attempt to renegotiate the terms that define 'a dancing body'. As Carolien Hermans argues, 'Dance mediates and has the power to construct and deconstruct social meanings; it has the potential to create spaces in which fixed identities and normative standards suddenly become unstable and uncertain.'²⁴ However, it is important to highlight the difficulties faced by disabled people who dance, difficulties that are the result of an ableist system (a tendency of society to compare people on the basis of cognitive and physical norms) rather than dance itself.²⁵ For in Western theatres, dancers have traditionally been determined by a set of narrow restrictions on the grounds of race and able-bodiedness, with dancers usually being 'white, long-limbed, flexible, thin, able-bodied', leading to a devaluation of those bodies (including non-white and disabled people) that do not fit within these narrow boundaries.²⁶ Changes began to be seen during the 1980s, where some professional dance troupes began to include dancers with disabilities.²⁷

²² Michelle R. Zitomer & Greg Reid, 'To Be or Not To Be-Able to Dance: Integrated Dance and Children's Perception of Dance Ability and Disability', *Research in Dance Education*, 12:2 (2011), 137-53 (p. 138).

²³ Sarah Whatley, 'Dance and Disability: The Dancer, the Viewer and the Presumption of Difference,' *Dance Education*, 8:1 (2007), 5-25 (p. 5).

²⁴ Carolien Hermans, 'Differences in Itself: Redefining Disability Through Dance', *Social Inclusion*, 4:4 (2016) 160-167 (p. 161).

²⁵ Zitomer & Reid, p. 137.

²⁶ Hermans, p. 160.

²⁷ Zitomer and Reid, p. 138.

Alison Kafer's book, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), advocates for the disabled body to be 'a potential site for collective reimagining', as she uses feminist and queer theories to query the ostensibly physical truth of disability.²⁸ Just as feminist theory dismantled the essentialist notions of 'natural' femininity and masculinity, so Kafer challenges similar assumptions made about the disabled body and its 'naturalness'.²⁹ For Kafer, this attitude assumes that 'a "good" future naturally and obviously depends on the eradication of disability.'³⁰ In challenging the discourse of inevitability, Kafer calls for the recognition that this rhetoric is borne of a history loaded with ableism and disability oppression.³¹ Kafer thus argues for a conscious unthinking of the ways in which disabled people have been viewed sociologically as 'defective' or 'sick', and how this has been historically used to justify disability oppression.³²

In Whatley's article, a prevalent theme amongst the disabled students was a rejection of 'fault' focused learning, where non-disabled students' tuition was focused on 'bodily control and aesthetic virtuosity.'³³ For the disabled students, however, there was 'a differently perceived starting point and expectation from class work'.³⁴ Failure is therefore recalibrated not as negative but more as a revelation and exposure of what insidious categories and discriminations are in play that would deem it a mistake in the first place. Dance, disability, failure and feminism converge here. Whatley's research led me to the discovery of the organisation, 'People Dancing: Foundation for Community Dance' and their art exhibition *11 Million Reasons to Dance* (2014) funded by Unlimited Impact and Arts Council England. Sean Goldthrope's photographs

²⁸ Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 9.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

³² *Ibid*, p. 5.

³³ Whatley, p. 5.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 10.

reimagine iconic dance moments in cinematic history across genres and world cinemas using disabled and Deaf subjects. The photographs include reworkings of *The Red Shoes* (dir. Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, 1948) (Fig. 4.8.) and *The Wizard of Oz* (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939) (Fig. 4.9) with disabled people who dance figured in the iconic dance moments in these films.



Figure 4.8. *The Red Shoes*.

The presentation of disabled dancers on film asks important questions about the nature of spectatorship and performance, as it is argued by Hermans that disabled people are already negotiating an experience of spectacle in their everyday public lives through the external gaze of ableist society.³⁵ This is supported by Whatley in ‘The Spectacle of Difference: Dance and Disability Onscreen’ (2010), where she suggests that ‘For people with disabilities, their experience of being “out of the ordinary” and “out of place” means that disability is already a kind of performance for them.’³⁶

³⁵ Hermans. p. 162.

³⁶ Sarah Whatley, ‘The Spectacle of Difference: Dance and Disability on Screen,’ *The International Journal of Screen Dance*, 1 (Jan 2010) 41-52 (p. 41).

Disability activist Catherine Long points out that people look at her when she is in public, and that this is an example of spectatorship that she is not in control of, but while performing in the theatre, she *encourages* and even *demand*s the look of spectators.³⁷ Just as dance destabilises the apparent binary of the male gaze by showing that the female body can be in *control* of the gaze when dancing, so dance redistributes power in the act of looking for disabled dancers on screen.³⁸



Figure 4.9. *The Wizard of Oz.*

The photographs in this series centralise the models' disability, a contrast to the many visual depictions of disabled dancers which, as Whatley writes: 'generate a different kind of viewing experience, determined by the viewer's perception of how far the disabled dancer appears to *bridge* the distance or *overcomes* disability in performance.'³⁹ In FX's *Pose* (FX, 2018-), which follows the lives of mostly trans people of colour during the New York ball scene of the 80s and 90s, the protagonist

³⁷ Ibid, p. 44.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 44.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 44.

Blanca (Mj Rodriguez) finally succumbs to illness following her AIDS diagnosis. She attends a ball in her honour in a wheelchair, a contrast to the world of ballroom which prioritises voguing, walking the catwalk, and extreme bodily movements in their dance performances. In the scene, Blanca lip-syncs Whitney Houston's rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner whilst in her chair but concludes the performance by rising and standing to the applause of her friends, 'children' and rivals alike.

The scene is an exhibition of Blanca *overcoming* her disability and an act of defiance. This is emphasised by the use of America's National Anthem, a striking choice considering that the show depicts the way American institutions such as the police, education and health care, have discriminated against people of colour, and trans people. The use of Houston's version of the Anthem undercuts the patriarchal and racist structures of America, putting a new emphasis and meaning on the lyrics 'home of the brave and land of the free.' In the scene, what Blanca is 'free' of, it is suggested, is her body that is failing her, free of her wheelchair and soon free of her life as an AIDS sufferer.

However, this depiction of Blanca plays into ableist notions of disability, particularly disabled dancers on film. While Blanca and her friends are brought together due to their shared sense of 'otherness' as enforced upon them by the transmisogynist and racist world outside the ballrooms, the 'otherness' of disability separates her from her friends in the ballroom. As Whatley argues, the presence of disabled dancers on screen can often enforce a feeling of otherness 'thus underlining a particular relationship between subject and viewer and that gives rise to a spectacle of difference.'⁴⁰ In standing up from her wheelchair, Blanca *overcomes* this difference,

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 50.

but essentially undermines any inclusion of disability to this otherwise groundbreaking depiction of trans women of colour on screen.

It is understandable, however, for disabled dancers to be cautious about foregrounding their disability. As Whatley highlights, 'Often very aware of the politics of representation and their own agency (or lack of) in how they are portrayed and interpreted in performance, dancers with disabilities frequently contribute to the discourse of 'difference,' performing their own identity, making work about their experience of disability.'⁴¹ That being said, the dancers in the photographs in the series analysed here certainly foreground their disabilities. This exhibition also reflects Kafer's aim in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, particularly the dismantling of apparently inevitable expectations: by querying and altering the goals of ableist dancing (as outlined in Whatley's article), the results are permitted to be surprising, creative and in abundant variation.

Carrying this logic to its natural conclusion then, it seems that Kafer, Whatley and *11 Million Reasons to Dance* make the claim that all bodies (disabled and non-disabled) can dance, something which is especially clear when one changes the ableist expectations of what dance is. By failing to adhere to the structures of ableism, something new is created. In these images, the dancers' disabilities are not side lined, obscured or depicted as something to be *overcome*, but rather the central and unique element of the images. Here, I will briefly analyse the photograph of the depiction of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Disability studies is a particularly fruitful tool for analysing dance, even elements of dance that initially do not seem to be concerned or involved with disability.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 43

Looking at dance and dance films through the lens of disability reveals new ways of looking at the apparent binary of able and unable, and who, exactly, we have been shown to be a 'dancer' through Western cinema. In analysing this image of Dorothy through the lens of disability, the role played by Judy Garland is thrown into new focus. We remember the pain and suffering of Garland through her acting career, as she was forced to move her body into a shape of conventional femininity, altered with corsets, eating disorders and medication.⁴² As an able-bodied woman, Garland was nonetheless forced to modify her body by the powerhouse MGM into an idealised version of femininity, so much so that her body underwent extreme suffering, and depression, which ultimately led to her death.⁴³

In 'Feeling and the Filmed Body: Judy Garland and the Kinesics of Suffering' (2002), Adrienne L. McLean highlights the 'way Garland's body expresses its own suffering, its own resentment, its own anger (or, conversely, its own resistance and happiness) at what it is being asked to do and at certain of the meanings it is being asked to produce.'⁴⁴ Ironically, the very body that MGM sought to modify (large torso and wide chest) was one of the reasons that Garland was able to produce the singing voice that she did.⁴⁵ In viewing Garland's performance of Dorothy in terms of disability theory, more light is shed on what bodies are deemed worthy of being shown to dance and to perform. The Dorothy of this image here, however, is free to express her dance in the body she has and without modification. She need only wear the costume for us to recognise Dorothy immediately.

⁴² Adrienne L. McLean, 'Feeling and the Filmed Body: Judy Garland and the Kinesics of Suffering', *Film Quarterly*, 55: 3 (Spring 2002), 2-15 (p. 4).

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 7.

This photograph brings together many of the ideas that underpin this chapter, that of engaging and navigating the city in new, subversive and different ways, of going off-road and of taking the path less travelled. The figure in the image is recognisably Dorothy, but her distinctive and iconic Ruby Red Slippers are not so visible, obscured instead by Dorothy's wheelchair which is made more important. The shoes are hidden by the shiny metal of the wheelchair and come to replace the shoes in importance: walking is therefore side-lined here. To emphasise this fact, Toto is also on wheels, as he is figured as a toy dog. In this iteration of *The Wizard of Oz*, walking is not the means by which Dorothy moves through the land. The other recognisable element of *The Wizard of Oz* along with the slippers is the Yellow Brick Road but, again, the road is only suggested in this photograph. Panels of yellow are seen on the ground, instead of the brilliant yellow of the film's depiction. In fact, the image does not have the same saturated colour and hyper-real colours of Oz, and is therefore recognisably 'our' world or the 'real' world, but hints at a half-way point and an echo of Oz. This reflects the part-way approach of steps taken to make society accessible to disabled people.

The UK Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act required public bodies to provide equal access to services for everyone and it became illegal to discriminate against a person on the grounds of disability.⁴⁶ Steps were therefore made to modify pedestrianised areas, for example the inclusion of dropped kerbs and tactile paving, to make these areas accessible for people who use wheelchairs.⁴⁷ However, this still presented the problem of how disabled people could access these areas themselves, as the routes to the pedestrianised hotspots were still inaccessible or

⁴⁶ Katarzyna Szczerbinska-Speakman and Bryan Matthews, 'Retrofitting and Accessible Highway: a User-led Approach,' *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers- Municipal Engineer*, 167: 4 (2014) 207-213 (p. 207).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 209.

unsafe for people who use wheelchairs.⁴⁸ This, in turn, limits choice for people in wheelchairs, and determines the roads and avenues for travel to access essential services and amenities.⁴⁹ The panels of yellow brick in the image reflect the islands of accessibility, separated by terrain that is inaccessible for people in wheelchairs.

This being said, while the Dorothy in the image is turned away from the camera, she is noticeably smiling. Moreover, she is looking off to the side, away from the implied road ahead. The implication is that, less than in the film's iteration of Oz, there is a choice to move in a different direction, to not only follow the road presented. Difficulties surely lie ahead for this Dorothy, each made more difficult by an ableist world that sets out obstructions to the way she lives her life. But these images all show a joyful expression of movement and dance by disabled people, and Dorothy is no exception: there is a specific joy in not taking the road followed or in the path laying ahead, and in the way that disabled people in these images engage in dance, which are all, due to the ableist framework that dance exist within, exciting, subversive and expressive of resistance to binary notions of success and failure, able and unable, dancer and non-dancer.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 207.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 208.

FALLING, TRIPPING AND GETTING LOST

*'Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production around which I would like to map a few detours.'*⁵⁰

Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2011.

In many ways *Frances Ha* is a film that advocates for the wrong turns, the missteps and the stumbles that shake us from the path well-trodden. In *Frances Ha*, Frances is a successful failure in that she is very good at failing. Halberstam's meandering book is also, in their own words, 'a stroll out of the confines of conventional knowledge and into the unregulated territories of failure, loss and unbecoming'.⁵¹ In doing so, it makes 'a long detour around disciplines and ordinary ways of thinking'.⁵² *Frances Ha* never punishes Frances's metaphorical wrong turns. Her lack of romantic and professional linearity is mirrored in Frances's movements across the city, which are sometimes aimless, sometimes disobedient, and sometimes meandering. Frances re-purposes the city. The streets become dance studios, the subway a makeshift toilet as she publicly

⁵⁰ Halberstam, p. 6

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 7.

⁵² Ibid, p. 7.

urinates on the subway tracks, and the roads become Sophie and Frances's stage and playground.

In failing to abide by the rules of the city, new possibilities are created. These city-based disobediences recall the work of sociological theorist Michel de Certeau, particularly his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Here, de Certeau outlines the 'multiform, resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline', acts which exercise transgression from commonly assumed rules of everyday life.⁵³ The city is the place where the masses are expected to operate according to established rules and norms but where, in fact, the individual wanderers make decisions that often rupture these supposed boundaries. For de Certeau, Charlie Chaplin is the disobedient everyday practitioner *par excellence*. De Certeau notes that Chaplin 'multiplies the possibilities of his cane: he does other things with the same thing and he goes beyond the limits that the determinants of the object set on its utilization' which is mirrored in the way that 'the walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else.'⁵⁴ Just as Chaplin goes beyond the use of his cane by changing his relationship to it, and therefore its relationship to his surroundings, so Frances and Sophie renegotiate the space of the city. De Certeau sees this as thrilling evidence of the individual's ability to create possibilities out of an ostensibly closed system:

And if on the one hand he actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order (he goes only here and there), on the other he increases the number of possibilities (for example, by creating shortcuts and detours) and prohibitions (for example, he forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). He thus selects.⁵⁵

⁵³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume One* (London, UK: The University of California Press), p. 96.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 98.

Failure to adhere to the city's rules, and failure to *use* the city in accordance with these rules, means new possibilities.

These possibilities are also explored in Lauren Elkin's book *Flâneuse: Women Walk in the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (2016) in which Elkin argues that the female flâneur (which Elkin names the *flâneuse*) engages with the city in a very different way to her male counterpart. For Elkin, 'Space is not neutral. Space is a feminist issue. The space we occupy—here, in the city, we city dwellers—is constantly remade and unmade, constructed and wondered at.'⁵⁶ One way that the space can be made and unmade is through this walking figure, through the paths she chooses, or refuses, to walk on, the detours and the trespasses. The *flâneuse* doesn't always take the path laid out for her, but sometimes explores outside its well-worn edges. As Elkin writes:

The portraits I paint here attest that the *flâneuse* is not merely a female *flâneur*, but a figure to be reckoned with, and inspired by, all on her own. She voyages out, and goes where she's not supposed to; she forces us to confront the ways in which words like *home* and *belonging* are used against women.⁵⁷

For Elkin, the city is an opportunity for women to disobey and to explore: to create a new space in which the definitions of femininity can be questioned and queried. The pleasures and creative potential of getting lost and taking the long way round are also supported by *Frances Ha*. Alternatives are constantly generated by the city wanderer as she navigates her way by ignoring maps and signs, just as Frances's often aimless meanderings around the city, as in many of Allen's films, are a moment of pleasure for both the character and the audience.

⁵⁶ Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk in the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London, UK: Chatto & Windus, 2016), p. 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

Allen's films that take place in the city include many scenes where characters walk and talk as they make their way along the streets. *Annie Hall*, for example, is a film where people have conversations in different places, from the sidewalk, to a movie queue, to the beach. And so many of the dates that Allen depicts feature a walk in the city (for example, Mary (Diane Keaton) and Isaac's (Woody Allen) iconic streetlamp-lit walk in *Manhattan*). The result is to weave the narrative of the characters into the city space itself, to complicate the relationship between the residents, visitors or inhibitors of the city and the space they wander. It is to make the two intertwined where the actions and relationships of one impacts the other. As Deborah L. Parsons writes:

The urban is not only a figure within a city: he/she is also the producer of a city, one that is related to but distinct from the city of asphalt, brick, and stone, one that results from the interconnection of body, mind, and space, one that reveals the interplay of self/city identity.⁵⁸

In *Annie Hall*, Annie comments on this very relationship between Alvy and the city he inhabits. She tells him, 'you're like New York City. You're just this person. You're like this island unto yourself.' Alvy and New York City have a symbiotic relationship, where each informs the other.

The same can be seen in *Frances Ha*, where the relationship between Frances and Sophie is a relationship defined by complicated feelings of jealousy, love, envy, betrayal and abandonment, all of which are reflected in the way New York is shot in the film. The opening sequence depicts Frances and Sophie spending the day together in the city, and it is through Baumbach's camerawork and mise-en-scène that their relationship (and its eventual unravelling) are suggested. I will analyse the opening

⁵⁸ Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

sequence of the film, a sequence that lasts little over a minute, but which sets up the intimacy and paradoxical distance between the two friends, and foreshadows the separation that will characterise the progression of the film.

Frances Ha opens with a two shot of Sophie and Frances play fighting. The long shot captures them both comfortably in the frame, the sequence punctuated with a few close-ups, still holding them both in the shot. The park surrounding them is the idyllic setting for their play. Their coupledness is seemingly secured in these establishing shots, but underpinning this notion is the strife implied in their play-fighting. At once innocent and child-like, their antagonism is nonetheless suggested by this act. However close they may be, they are individuals and, as we see through the course of this film, often on opposing sides. Finally, at the end of the shot, Frances kicks Sophie out of the frame, a foreshadowing of the breakup of their relationship, and the film's focus on Frances as a solitary protagonist, rather than one half of a pair.

In a later moment in the montage, Frances and Sophie run down into the subway, the tracking shot following them. Their dialogue isn't heard, but instead the French New Wave-style non-diegetic music is the sound we hear, and the camera is positioned from the other side of the tracks, at a distance. This gives Frances and Sophie privacy like Alvy and Annie at the end of *Annie Hall*. The cut to the two shot of the pair on the subway cements their coupledness, as Frances rests her head on Sophie's shoulders. The sweet moment of intimacy suggests the inequality of their relationship, however, as Frances is shown to rely on Sophie, whose attention is often elsewhere. In the two shot, Frances and Sophie are retained in the frame for only a moment, as Sophie leaves while Frances cooks. Sophie's phantom-like quality cements her out-of-reach-ness, recalling Annie and her ghost-like quality in the famous scene in *Annie*

Hall. In both cases, the inaccessibility of Sophie and Annie foreshadows their slipping away from the protagonists.



Figure 4.10. Frances watches Sophie exercise.



Figure 4.11. Sophie through the fire escape.



Figure 4.12. Frances leans out of the window to speak to Sophie.

Later in the opening sequence, various screens and furniture slice the shot and separate the pair in their two-shot (Fig. 4.10.). Sophie copies an exercise video in front of the mirror, a foreshadowing of Frances copying a dance tutorial later in the film. However, Sophie's technique is very different from Frances's as she follows the instructions of the exercise video, rather than interpret the instructions, tweaking her dancing in the mirror as Frances does. In her position, however, Frances can see Sophie's whole form. The audience will only ever see her through Frances's eyes. There is an echo here of Annie in *Annie Hall*, and the way she is only shown through Alvy's eyes throughout the film. This is emphasised later in the sequence as Frances and Sophie lean out of their window to smoke. Sophie is depicted literally behind bars (Fig. 4.11.), as the fire escape steps obscure her face from the camera and from Frances's gaze. Frances's reaction shot, however, depicts her unobstructed as the camera is on her side of the bars, and the narrative, figuratively, on her side of the story (Fig. 4.12.). *Frances Ha* is, after all, a film about Frances.

Montage is particularly suited for this opening sequence, a sequence which sets up the relationship between Frances and Sophie, and implies their eventual, gradual separation. It also recalls Allen, particularly the end of *Annie Hall* where Alvy remembers his relationship with Annie. According to David Bordwell, montage is a type of 'self-conscious narration' in that it ruptures the way time and space works: the montage can take the characters from different locales over a vast amount of time, often flying in the face of the progression of shots that come before or after it.⁵⁹ The montage's editing is not designed to mimic the realities of time and space, but rather 'will often violate verisimilitude for the sake of impact'.⁶⁰ In *Annie Hall*, the memory montage at the end of the film is less jarring than Bordwell's description implies however, as so much of the film uses self-conscious techniques to portray and reflect the disjointed nature of Alvy's psyche post-breakup. The montage's rupture of time and space maintains the verisimilitude of the film's own logic which has never followed events chronologically.

According to Bordwell, the defining feature of the montage is its 'function as a traditional summary, condensing a single causal development.'⁶¹ Neither Allen nor Baumbach's montages involve this 'single causal development', however, as no real summary is ever achieved through the process of the montage scenes in the respective films. This contrasts, for example, with the conventional, generic training montage in *Rocky* (dir. John G. Alvidson, 1976), a particularly famous Hollywood montage scene that sees Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone) build his skills and athleticism over the course of the sequence while Survivor's 'Eye of the Tiger' plays. The montage shows Rocky's progress over a period of time. Each shot in the sequence builds to the

⁵⁹ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, UK: Routledge, 1985), p. 271.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 158.

montage's conclusion which presents a result that is the culmination of these moments. In *Annie Hall*, on the other hand, Keaton's rendition of 'Seems Like Old Times' plays over Alvy's memories of Annie, but Alvy's desire for reconciliation is not achieved.

While Rocky becomes a champion, Alvy only has his memories. In *Frances Ha*, the montage at the beginning of the film shows the events of a single day (or maybe more, since the spatial and temporal characteristics of the montage do not allow us to know for sure), and nothing has progressed or been achieved. Tellingly, the film does offer a montage later when Frances finally takes a job at her dance studio and makes some new friends, achieving some creative development by choreographing her own work. I refrain from calling this montage a sequence of Frances's successes because of the complexities of success and failure that this film sets up. The opening montage, however, is purposefully empty of progression and success. According to Bordwell, this is a feature of the French New Wave:

Such a loosening of the traditional montage sequence can be found as early as *A bout de souffle* (e.g. when Michel searches for a car to steal); it reappears in almost every Godard feature. The meditative narrator inserts footage in a way that gives the segment an arbitrary autonomy with respect to the diegetic action that surrounds it: a poetic digression composed at the editing table.⁶²

The women idle away their time, first play fighting and dancing in Central Park, then meandering their way home, cooking dinner together, drinking, smoking, and finally going to bed. There is a feeling of inconsequentiality to the montage that chimes with Bordwell's description of the French New Wave's application of the technique. The scenes Baumbach selects for the montage feel like ordinary, quotidian moments, echoing Bordwell's words. The opening montage sequence of *Frances Ha* certainly has

⁶² Ibid, p. 329.

a poetic feeling to it. But just as I have argued that failure is not fatal but in itself creative, progressive and disruptive, so the montage's inconsequence does not mean it is not significant, for both the characters and the audience.

Two prescient points are also revealed through this comparison of *Frances Ha's* opening montage with *Annie Hall's* closing one. The first is what is ignored in the form of the montage itself. Montage by its very nature is a process reliant on forgetting in the diegesis. As Bordwell writes, it is a 'brief summary of a longer string of events, and again discrete (if not always exactly measurable) portions of fabula time are skipped over'.⁶³ In other words, the montage is compiled of selected moments, often moving the action from place to place, and over time. There are moments that according to the logic of the diegesis are forgotten by not being included in the sequence. Instead of an honest portrayal of a day Frances and Sophie spent together, the montage is a purposeful misremembering of time, with Frances forgetting the moments they were apart.

In both *Annie Hall* and *Frances Ha*, the montage proves an effective way to reveal the consequences of this misremembering, revealing the fundamental misreading and misinterpretation of relationships. In *Annie Hall*, Alvy's misunderstanding of Annie means that he doesn't fully understand their breakup or see 'where the screw up came'. In a similar way Frances's nostalgic memory of Sophie does not allow for Sophie's own complexity to be shown. The shot of Sophie exercising while Frances looks on is particularly telling of this: as Frances watches, Sophie's image is decapitated by the mirror, absent of subjectivity, and there solely for the gaze of Frances. Her body is not explicitly shown, therefore avoiding the male gaze, but

⁶³ Ibid, p. 82.

nonetheless is robbed of her own agency, this time by the overwhelming love of a platonic friend.

The second point is revealed through the placement of these montages in the films themselves. As the montage in *Annie Hall* comes at the end of the film, it more closely adheres to Bordwell's characterisation of it as a 'transitional summary, condensing a single causal development', albeit not completely.⁶⁴ The montage is a summary of the film itself, a set of highlights that define how we are to remember the film: it is a summary, but not transitional. In *Frances Ha*, the montage appears at the beginning of the film so does not have the same kind of summative function. Instead of showing what has been learned through the course of the film as in *Annie Hall*, what is shown instead is that Frances has already romanticised her relationship with Sophie, a romanticisation that is the starting off point for the film.

Like Alvy's memory montage, these shots are layered in nostalgic remembering: the French New Wave style immediately evokes a time gone by, and the skips in temporal and spatial location again position these scenes as a romantic, perfect memory of a probably imperfect day. After all, to be nostalgic is to misremember the past. The impact of Allen's cinema is shown from the offset and informs the opening images. It also shows that this film will take Allen as its starting point, and through the course of the film we see the differences that characterise its step away from his cinema, especially the focus on non-heteronormative romantic love. The position of the montage at the beginning of the film acts as Baumbach and Gerwig's manifesto, one that shows its homage to Allen, and its steps away. In *Frances Ha*, among these stumbles are also some falls. Frances's falls and silent movie-esque vignettes draw a comparison to Charlie Chaplin. This influence is made through a detour via Allen. Of

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 158.

course, many critics and Allen himself have noted the influence of Chaplin on Allen's cinema. For Neil Sinyard, 'Woody Allen is the most original and brilliant screen comic since Charlie Chaplin.'⁶⁵ Films like *Sleeper* (dir. Woody Allen, 1973) show Chaplin's influence in its comedic, silent movie-esque sequences. But as Sinyard argues, there are crucial differences between the filmmakers: 'Whereas humor derives from his being a poet of poverty, Allen's derives from his being an artist of anxiety.'⁶⁶ And for Julian Fox, Allen is 'a sort of hip, urban neurotic successor to Chaplin', rather than simply a reflection.⁶⁷

According to Dymphna Callery failure is the mark of a truly great clown, an art fundamentally underpinned by this failure:

The art of clowning is to realise that the vulnerability of the clown is what draws the audience. The clown wants to please, but rather than getting things right, gets them wrong. However, the clown tries very hard and very seriously to get things right, as Laurel and Hardy, and Charlie Chaplin demonstrate. It is the clown's failure, despite hard work, which seduces the audience into laughter.⁶⁸

One of the characteristic tricks up the clown's sleeve is surely the fall, a ubiquitous feature in Chaplin's routines. According to Kafer to fall as a disabled person is to fulfil a societal norm; it 'lives up to expectations about what *disability* does', even as it 'fails expectations about what the *body* does.'⁶⁹ For Kafer, 'failure and success thus coincide in the moment of falling.'⁷⁰ Here, the apparent rigidity of the success and failure binary of falling and not falling is complicated, exposing the mutability of the action.

⁶⁵ Neil Sinyard, *The Films of Woody Allen* (London, UK: Magna Books, 1987), p. 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁷ Julian Fox, *Woody: Movies From Manhattan* (New York, USA: The Overlook Press, 1996), p. 11.

⁶⁸ Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre* (London, UK: Nick Hern Books, 2001), p. 109.

⁶⁹ Kafer, p. 36.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

It is true that falling has had something of a bad reputation, synonymous with a loss of control and a stumble in moving forward. Friends fall out, and one falls sick. Success and pride come before the fall, as does a fall from grace. Lost things fall through the cracks or fall behind. But falling also evokes ideas of liberation, and of letting go of control. We fall in love, fall for someone, fall asleep, and let the chips fall where they may. For Frances, falling proves to be something other than a failure to remain upright. She stumbles on to the road less travelled and pursues professional fulfilment adjacent to the place she initially tried. She also falters in heteronormative relationships, instead focusing on her more nourishing love for Sophie.

At the end of the film, Frances's choreography reflects her relationship with falling. The piece begins with two dancers meeting in an embrace, only for them to separate and the attention to be focused on another set of dancers, of which there are three. The duo has now become a trio, reminiscent of Sophie's fiancé Patch's tumultuous addition to the harmony of Sophie and Frances's partnership. The next movement involves a collision between a pair of dancers, who represent the violence of Sophie and Frances's breakup. And of course, play fighting is a motif of their relationship in the film. Frances's romantic failures are shown when a dancer walks towards the sole male dancer in the troupe, only to turn abruptly to walk in the opposite direction. Not only does the dancing remember Frances's failures, but the very movements of the dancers embody and physicalize failure. Bounces, twirls and crawls quickly become trips, rolls and falls. The playful and surprising nature of Frances's choreography comes from the fact that at any moment a dancer can end up on the ground.

The destabilising and subversive power of falling is shown in a scene where Frances trips over while on a date with Lev. The fall is a manifestation of Frances's

failure to conform to the smooth, heavy force of heteronormativity, and instead acts as a bug in the system of heterosexual progression. As Halberstam attests, failure is an act which privileges the voices of women and queer people, and ‘can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary.’⁷¹ Frances’s forgetfulness jars the mechanics of patriarchal trajectories in *Frances Ha*, specifically the unspoken and gendered rituals of heterosexuality.

After receiving a tax rebate, Frances takes out Lev for dinner (even her indulgences are caused by a mistake of some sort). His clear interest in Frances is unable to progress undeterred. Frances’s disorganisation means that her card is declined, and she runs to the nearest ATM. The tracking shot follows her in a mid-shot as she darts down the street, but she trips and falls on the ground. Despite her heroic attempts, the smoothness of Lev and Frances’s interaction is shattered upon her return to the restaurant, ruptured by her bleeding arm. The presence of blood deters Lev from pursuing her as a viable love option. Lev’s repulsion at the site of Frances’s blood taps into long-held misogynistic notions of menstruation, and of the disruptive presence of menstrual blood in relation to sex. According to David D. Gilmore, ‘These universal male fears, again, centre on flesh, blood, bone and specifically on menstrual blood. Virtually every society in the world practices some form of menstrual taboo or recognizes some system of demonizing involving female effluvia.’⁷² The fears that Gilmore speaks of are usually that of contamination, specifically the transmission of disease through sex while menstruating.

As Lara Freidenfelds argues, these fears are based on historical, religious and scientific texts that have peddled the notion of menstrual blood as contaminating.

⁷¹ Halberstam, p. 12.

⁷² David Gilmore, *Misogyny: The Male Malady* (Philadelphia, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 43.

Religious writings during the Middle Ages decried intercourse during menstruation as both immoral and a potential health risk for men.⁷³ By the twentieth century, while some of these concerns were allayed and rejected scientifically, many of these notions remained. As Freidenfelds points out, sex education literature still cautioned against sex during menstruation, specifically due to its believed risk to sexual health, as the likelihood of the transmission of sexually spread diseases was believed to be linked to the proximity to menstrual blood.⁷⁴ Overall, even in the twentieth century, ‘self-appointed experts on sex and lay women and men agreed overall that sex during menstruation was not a good idea’ and that ‘abstaining was an appropriate way to show respect for the aesthetic, moral and health concerns of male and female sexual partners alike.’⁷⁵ There is a long history between the idea of menstrual blood and abstinence.

In Lesel Dawson’s book *Menstruation, Misogyny, and the Cure For Love* (2006), the sight of a lover’s menstrual blood as a cure for obsessive love is explored, specifically through the Roman poet Lucretius’s poem, ‘De Rerum Natura.’⁷⁶ According to Dawson, the influence of this conceit can be seen through the early to mid-first century BC, and continued to Jonathan Swift’s poem, ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room.’ In these works, the presence of the lover’s menstrual blood ‘cures’ the lovesick male as he realises that the object of his affections is not celestial, but bestial and he is revolted, curing him of his desire. As Dawson writes: ‘The lover’s misogynistic reaction to the female body reveals a deep-seated anxiety about the disruptive force of erotic

⁷³ Laura Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 27.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 29.

⁷⁶ Lesel Dawson, ‘Menstruation, Misogyny, and the Cure for Love’, *Women’s Studies*, 34:6, (Aug 2006), 461-484 (p. 464).

desire.’⁷⁷ The male revulsion at the sight of blood reinstates traditional gender power structures that, while certainly not upturned in the revering of a female love object (this of course is underpinned by its own misogyny), is destabilised. According to Dawson, the menstrual cure ‘seems to re-establish the traditional gender hierarchy, resolving anxieties about the power of love and restoring male sexual authority and self-mastery.’⁷⁸ Menstruation viewed misogynistically therefore has the power to infect and to cure men of their love of women.



Figure 4.13. Frances in Lev's apartment.

The power of this blood in a patriarchal world does, however, offer some opportunities for those who bleed. In keeping with the spirit of this chapter, the ostensible failure of understanding menstruation creates a space through which opportunistic people who menstruate can grasp control, however slippery. Male revulsion at the sight of menstrual blood allows an abstinence from sex that is

⁷⁷ Ibid, p, 465.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 464.

unquestioned, something that can be a useful tool for some parties.⁷⁹ And as Lauren Rosewarne points, clever high schoolers are able to dodge gym and swimming classes because of the presence of their periods or by pretending they are menstruating.⁸⁰ In *Frances Ha*, Frances's bleeding arm is enough for Lev to be repulsed as it reminds him of the presence of menstrual blood. His fear jams the heterosexual narrative being propelled forwards, something Frances herself is keen to avoid anyway.



Figure 4.14. Alvy in Annie's apartment.

The presence of the blood only halts Lev for a time as Frances joins him at his apartment and he tries once again to establish a romantic connection. The pair stand in a two-shot in front of a wall of framed photographs that Lev reveals are not of his family or even people he knows (Fig. 4.13.). Chosen for their aesthetic values, they promote the heteronormativity of *the* conventional family. In between the pair, a photograph of a man, woman and child looms, a visual reminder of heteronormative

⁷⁹ Freidenfelds, p. 29.

⁸⁰ Lauren Rosewarne, *Periods in Pop Culture: Menstruation in Film and Television* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 4.

time and the pressure and expectation of a fulfilment of this narrative. In the scene, Frances holds a camera, at once recalling Annie's love for photography in *Annie Hall*, and acting as a barrier between herself and Lev. The camera Frances holds is also a tool for surveillance and recording. When Lev places his arm on Frances's shoulder, she jerks it upwards mechanically, letting out a squeak of awkwardness and discomfort. This movement is a reminder of her position as a stick in the mud, of a bug in the system that halts the progression of heteronormative romance. Lev removes his hand, and the pair remain only friends.

The mise-en-scène in this scene is a persistent reminder of the rupture of time: the photographs that form the backdrop of the shot recall Annie's house in *Annie Hall* and the photographs of her brother Dwayne, other family members and, of course, Alvy with the lobsters (Fig. 4.14.). Annie's clothing is also recalled in Lev's as well as Frances's, and Lev's Jewishness recalls Allen too, especially in his attempted wooing of Frances, the Californian, here again cast as Annie. This is an example of the film being remembered in *Frances Ha* as a whole rather than in just specific characters. The black and white images invite the past into the frame. Heteronormative narratives are blocked, and therefore so are its markers of time (marriage, reproduction, death in old age), meaning that time itself jams.

This use of black and white reveals the influence of other auteurs. In recalling Allen in *Frances Ha*'s nostalgic depiction of New York, the Classical Hollywood Cinema era is also remembered. Allen does this in his own black and white movies, like *Manhattan* and *Celebrity*, which depict the city in the nostalgic light of the Classical Hollywood era. As Leonard Quart writes of Allen's black and white films:

These are contemporary, familiar New York images, shot in dazzling high contrast black and white rather than color, which Allen utilizes to project the

city's continuity with, from his perspective, it's more elegant and civilized past. These fabulistic images also act as a self-conscious reminder of the way many old Hollywood films once projected a portrait of a city that gleamed and soared.⁸¹

In many ways, *Frances Ha* is a film in conversation with the cinematic memories of its creators Baumbach and Gerwig, both Allen acolytes who, through their remembering of him, tap into the wider cinematic memory of Allen himself, too. More ostentatious than the influence of Classical Hollywood on *Frances Ha*, however, is the influence of the French New Wave. Baumbach and Gerwig reference this in the very first shots, as they do with Allen's influence. Over the black and white images of Frances and Sophie playing in New York City, Georges Delarue's 'Such a Gorgeous Kid Like Me' plays, referencing François Truffaut's film of the same title in which the song also featured. Frances's aimless meandering through Paris also remembers Antoine (Jean Pierre Leaud) in *The 400 Blows* (dir. François Truffaut, 1959). Against the Parisian backdrop, Frances cuts the same lost, solitary figure as Antoine does. Both feel abandoned and lost, and the grand iconic surroundings impress neither of them. Their connection is emphasised by a shared sartorial choice of oversized jackets and white shirts, and a glum expression that contrasts with the chiaroscuro of glittering lights and soaring buildings.

Frances leaves the city having not quite experienced the French New Wave film she had hoped she might, confirmed by a voicemail she receives upon leaving the city. It is from Frances's friend who wants to set her up with a man who 'looks like Jean Pierre Leaud'. Frances is too late, leaving the city at the moment her visit begins to look like the French New Wave film it remembers. She is always just out of time with

⁸¹ Leonard Quart, 'Woody Allen's New York', in *The Films of Woody Allen: Critical Essays*, ed. by Charles L. P. Silet (Oxford, UK: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), pp. 13-20 (p. 17).

its rhythm, for when she arrives, the bookshops are closed and her jet lag means that she sleeps through alarms, woken only by the bell of the school next to her apartment she stays in. In one shot, she struggles to light her cigarette and eventually gives up, perhaps abandoning the attempt to replicate a cool Parisian image. Instead, she spends most of her time in Paris asleep. The music that plays over her time in Paris is not Delarue as would be expected (and which plays over the earlier scenes in New York with Sophie), but rather Hot Chocolate's 'Every1's a Winner.' Here, the ironic lyrics remind Frances of her loser status. The cheery soul song plays while Frances is at a low ebb, reminding her that when everyone's a winner, nobody is.

It is through recalling both Allen and the French New Wave that *Frances Ha* achieves its particular tone, one that threatens at any moment to become too nostalgic and perhaps too conscious of its own cinematic influences to match the dramas of those films it remembers. Sophie Mayer argues that the overwhelming nostalgia is 'an irritant as Frances floats through New York', leaving the film 'feeling inconsequential'.⁸² She notes that 'there's a genealogy of smart-yet-melancholy American indie cinema in which *Frances Ha* is positioning itself', but that it fails to reach the heights of these films.⁸³ I disagree that this is the cause for the feeling of inconsequentiality in the film. Instead, this sense is because, while Frances experiences both romantic and professional failure, her privilege as a white middle-class woman means that nothing ever truly feels risked. Frances's economic and professional concerns are never critical even after losing her already paltry wage working as a dance apprentice, as the film shows her devoted and distinctly middle-

⁸² Sophie Mayer, 'Frances Ha', *Sight and Sound*, August 2013, p. 77.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 77.

class family back in Sacramento, who act as a perpetual economic and emotional safety net.

Class privilege is manifested as a safety net in *Annie Hall* too. When the couple move in together, the pair begin to argue after Alvy suggests they keep Annie's apartment, just in case. For Annie, the suggestion is an example of Alvy not taking her seriously as a legitimate romantic partner, and an exposure of Alvy's dismissal of her. For Alvy, the apartment acted as a 'free-floating life raft' that reminded them both that they were not married. Alvy is so certain of the need for this safety net that he offers to pay for it, proposing to write it off as a tax deduction. All this to shore up the raft that meant security, safety and stability for their relationship despite the apartment's 'bad plumbing and bugs'. Of course, like *Frances Ha*, the presence of this safety net belies Alvy's economic privilege, something Allen cements in the next scene depicting Annie's and Alvy's visit to his house in The Hamptons. The 'bad plumbing and bugs' becomes a hot pot of water and decadent lobsters.

The film's focus on this white middle-class experience is not itself concerning, but *Frances Ha*'s notable lack of people of colour in such a racially diverse setting as New York City shows a compulsion to repeat the white middle class New York featured in Allen's films and explored in the previous chapters of this thesis. *Frances Ha* takes place in the fantasy of Allen's version of a white-washed New York, a New York that is inherently nostalgic. Allen is not a filmmaker dedicated to presenting the realism of life in America, and his version of New York is a hermetically sealed world that forgets the racial tension and social sores of the city. Allen's characters have the time to dance aimlessly along its streets, peruse bookshops and have dinners with other educated middle-class people. The troubling aspect of this depiction of New York is that Allen's romantic version of the city is distinctly white, and people of colour are absent.

In remembering Allen's New York, *Frances Ha*'s version of the city is equally troubling. In *Frances Ha*, there are only two people of colour in the entire film; Frances's friend from Sacramento, who remains silent, and a Black woman who shows Frances around a theatre, who has one, very short, line. Their time on screen is less than ten seconds combined. Their presentation on screen is one of passivity and their presence only serves to highlight the ostentatious absence of non-white people in the film. As bell hooks writes in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (2015): 'If the many non-black people who produce images or critical narratives about blackness and black people do not interrogate their perspective, then they may simply recreate the imperial gaze—the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize.'⁸⁴ Baumbach's and Gerwig's version of the city repeats Allen's depiction of New York. It is a nostalgic memory of a nostalgic memory, and within these layers of romantic remembering, the reality of people of colour who live in the city are forgotten and erased. The result is a crystallisation of the city as middle class and distinctly white. It is true that Baumbach's and Gerwig's film is not interested in racial politics, but the repetition of Allen's portrayal of a largely white New York shows the shortcomings of its progression from Allen's cinema, including those elements that are uncomfortable and troubling.

This simultaneous copying and diverting is seen through *Frances Ha*'s explicit reworking of an iconic scene from *Manhattan*, where Isaac runs to meet Tracy (Mariel Hemingway) before she leaves for London at the end of the film. Allen's scene is itself a reworking of Antoine's run in *The 400 Blows*, once again showing the chain of influence that works through *Frances Ha*. In Allen's film, the run is entirely filled with

⁸⁴ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York, USA: Routledge, 2015), p. 7.

purpose and masculine drive to fulfil his Oedipal trajectory, namely the heterosexual romance that will stabilise the plot. Frances's run however is empty of any real purpose, but propelled by fun and the thrill of being in New York, the cinematic landscape that has been the home for Allen's films. This is a loving homage to Allen's cinema, but a defiant spring away that separates itself from his work.

In *Manhattan*, Isaac runs from left to right, following the Western practice of reading in this direction, and therefore fulfilling the notion of progression and moving forward on the page and the screen. Isaac runs with his face set forward with complete purpose and determination. Unlike Frances, who twirls and dances through the streets, Isaac's steady pace expresses a certainty of intent rarely seen from the indecisive character, marking a fulfilment of his own Oedipal trajectory. While the tracking shot in *Frances Ha* strains to retain her in the shot, often behind or in front, the largely perpendicular angled camera in *Manhattan* works with Isaac and is filled with the same intent to fulfil his Oedipal ambition.

Isaac's run towards Tracy in *Manhattan* reflects the so-called Oedipal trajectory (Fig. 4.15). This concept asserts that the male protagonist's resolution of a crisis reflects and fulfils the Freudian Oedipal Complex, wherein the male child moves to complete his trajectory by identifying with the father and finding a woman representing his mother. According to Freud, the 'liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development.'⁸⁵ This trauma is characterised by the male child's stabilising of his desire for his mother, the anxiety of castration that she symbolises, and hatred of the father by objectifying his

⁸⁵ Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works* (Middlesex, USA: Penguin Books), p. 221.

mother, thus making his anxieties safe, and finally identifying with his father.⁸⁶ His psycho-sexual journey is therefore complete, and his identity as a heterosexual man is confirmed.



Figure 4.15. Isaac runs towards Tracy in Manhattan.



Figure 4.16. Frances's run in Frances Ha.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 287.

The Oedipal complex is articulated in film through the male protagonist's overcoming of a crisis which usually culminates in a union with a woman who represents his stabilisation: objectification of the mother and identification with the father is therefore expressed as settling down. This trajectory is therefore by its very nature a propulsion forward, a progression from beginning to crisis to overcoming that characterises the narrative as a forward driving action. Isaac's run from left to right echoes this motion, especially as his movement is directed towards Tracy, a symbol of safe femininity as opposed to the more masculine destabilising Mary.

Frances, however, darts around lampposts and pedestrians, seemingly in a rush to get somewhere. But as the montage progresses, Frances begins to weave dancing into her movement (Fig. 4.16.). Smiling broadly, she twirls and leaps along the sidewalks, and it becomes clear that she runs purely for the fun of it. She acts as Halberstam advocates we should by dancing down the road less travelled and disregarding the conventions of walking through the city towards a conventional destination. Frances is not motivated by Oedipal notions like Isaac. The small successes gained at the end of the film are all due to her rejection of straightforward progression, acceleration forward, and conscious development. The digressions and detours from the social order that are mirrored in Frances's run are never punished, and the stability she enjoys at the end of the film is made possible because of these disobediences and not through a union with a man. Instead of the camera following her patiently as it does Isaac, Baumbach's style emphasises Frances's nowhere-ness. As she runs into the space in front of her, the camera's position waits there in anticipation and means that she runs into a space always made ready for her by the film.

Disrupting our spatial notions, this places the audience in front of her, but distinctly unaware of the diegetic space that we enter but cannot see. The implication is that Frances is not carving out a space for herself, but rather following a path already forged. Her way of walking that path, however, is distinctly her own. This conceptualises the way the film negotiates its relationship with Allen. The lack of representation of people of colour, however, highlights how *Frances Ha* does remember elements of Allen's cinema: in repeating the nostalgic depiction of the New York City of his films, Baumbach and Gerwig erase and forget the presence of people of colour once again. By using the same tools, similar images, themes and aesthetics, *Frances Ha* returns to Allen but uses those methods to arrive in a different way, be it dancing or falling. Through dance, Baumbach and Gerwig produce a creative and playful response to Allen's influence, an influence that (like Frances's own choreography) does not simply follow and mimic somebody else's act but rather uses it as inspiration for a dance that is their own. The focus on failure jams this progression of influence, enabling Baumbach and Gerwig to forget the focus on heteronormative relationships and masculine memory that Allen favours in *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*. Through its failing protagonist, *Frances Ha* remembers Allen, but falls away from him too.

CHAPTER FIVE

QUEER TIME, *ANNIE HALL*, AND *APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR*

Like *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977), *Appropriate Behavior* (dir. Desiree Akhavan, 2014) is centred on the breakup of a romantic relationship. The psychological effect of this on both the films' protagonists is shown through a ruptured narrative chronology as jumps back into the past are used to make sense of the present. While *Frances Ha's* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2012) greatest deviation from *Annie Hall* is its representation of the breakup of a *platonic* female friendship, in *Appropriate Behavior* it is the exploration of a *same-sex* romantic relationship that marks the most significant step away from Allen's oeuvre. Allen has depicted some queer relationships in his films, but few of these representations have been sensitive or nuanced.¹ Heterosexuality in films, including Allen's, are centralised as the organising force through which other sexualities are positioned and viewed. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue in 'Sex in Public' (1998), 'the givenness of male-female sexual relations is part of the ordinary rightness of the world' and is so invisible that 'Heterosexuality is not a thing'.² For Berlant and Warner, heterosexuality 'is neither a single Symbolic nor a single ideology nor a unified set of beliefs', but is rather held in place by an absolute privileging as the norm.³

¹ For example, in *Manhattan* (dir. Woody Allen, 1978), Isaac's (Woody Allen) hatred of his ex-wife is exacerbated by her homosexuality, enraged that his son now lives with two mothers. Her homosexuality is used to show Isaac's emasculation and to create humorous situations where his frustration erupts in comic ways, for example his attempt to run over his ex-wife's new partner with his car.

² Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry*, 24:2 (Winter, 1998), 547-566 (p. 552).

³ *Ibid*, p. 552.

The clear influence of *Annie Hall* on *Appropriate Behavior* makes the deviation from it even more ostentatious. Allen's focus on heterosexuality (as well as whiteness as shown in Chapter Three) is an artistic *choice*, something which is exacerbated by the fact that Allen's films take place, like *Appropriate Behavior*, in New York, a city known for its cultural, ethnic, gender and sexual diversity. Johan Andersson et al. looked at New York through the lens of sexuality, particularly the intersection of religion in gay communities. The fact they were able to locate their studies in 'gayborhoods' such as Manhattan's West Village, Park Slope in Brooklyn and Hell's Kitchen proves the visibility of gay areas of the city.⁴

Allen's films are mostly focused on romantic stories between men and women, and therefore actively forget the very real and historic presence of queer people in New York. *Appropriate Behavior* tackles the absence of bisexual and queer sexuality not just in Allen's films but in film culture more generally, particularly the genre of the romantic comedy. Claire Mortimer outlines in her book *Romantic Comedy* (2010) that 'The Hollywood romantic comedy continues to be transfixed by love between white, heterosexual couples, as it has also been reluctant to tackle relationships beyond the heteronormative.'⁵ In *Appropriate Behavior*, the film's protagonist, Sirin (Desiree Akhavan), must come to terms with her breakup from Maxine (Rebecca Henderson), all the while grappling with her sexuality as a bisexual woman, her reconciliation of this with her Iranian heritage, and the rejection of her parents' heterosexual hopes for her future.

⁴ Johan Andersson, Robert M. Vanderbeck, Gill Valentine, Kevin Ward, Johanna Sadgrove, 'New York Encounters: Religion, Sexuality, and the City', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 43: 3 (2011), 618-33 (p. 620).

⁵ Claire Mortimer, *Romantic Comedy* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2010), p. 142.

In this chapter, I will argue that, like all of the films explored in this thesis, the influence of Allen can be clearly seen. In *Appropriate Behavior*, this is specifically apparent in Akhavan's use of flashbacks and ruptured chronology, and how these are used in the film's depiction of the memories of a broken relationship. I will further argue that the deviation from *Annie Hall*, namely the focus on a queer couple, can change the reading of this narrative structure. *Appropriate Behavior's* ruptured chronology is an example of the performance of queer time as explored in Jack Halberstam's book, *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005). They describe queer time as 'in opposition to institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction', all avenues that conventional notions of time have been organised around.⁶ To examine queer time in *Appropriate Behavior*, specifically its rejection of linearity, I will also draw on Sara Ahmed's book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) to define this rejection as necessarily queer. I am not arguing that Akhavan has intentionally implemented queer time in her film but rather that its presence is a result of the film's decidedly non-heterosexual focus. While the film is clearly influenced by Allen's rejection of a non-linear narrative, the queer characters in Akhavan's film open up a new reading of this non-linear narrative and the argument for queer time becomes compelling.

In Sara Ahmed's book, *Queer Phenomenology*, orientations and objects are queered, as is the direction from which we approach and engage with them. According to Ahmed, direction is not a casual occurrence but rather organised in accordance with convention: the objects we reach for, the orientations we experience, and the directions we face, align us to conventionality. She argues that:

⁶ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place; Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (London, UK: New York University, 2005), p. 1.

The lines we follow might also function as forms of “alignment,” or as ways of being in line with others. We might say that we are oriented when we are in line. We are “in line” when we face the direction that is already faced by others.⁷

According to Ahmed the more that a line is followed, the more attractive it becomes, the choice becoming ‘sticky’ as a result.⁸ This stickiness is in part because of the figurative gravitational pull of more bodies because conventionality, especially in terms of sexuality and the very real threat of homophobic and queerphobic violence, can also mean safety in numbers. Ahmed also describes the converse, and the possibility of invisibility when a path becomes unpopular:

I have always been struck by the phrase “a path well-trodden.” A path is made by the repetition of the event of the ground “being trodden” upon. We can use the path as a trace of past journeys. The path is made up out of footprints—traces of feet that “tread” and that in “treading” create a line in the ground. When people stop treading the path may disappear. And when we see the line of the path before us, we tend to walk upon it, as a path “clears” the way. So, we walk upon the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition.⁹

As Ahmed argues, the line of conventionality is attractive because it is well-trodden. At the same time, the line is also attractive because of what it (however deceitfully) promises.

The promised reward for toeing the heteronormative line is happiness, which really means the fulfilment of the heteronormative success story. As Ahmed points out in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), ‘Heterosexual love becomes about the possibility of a happy ending; about what life is aimed toward, as being what gives life direction

⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientation, Objects, Others* (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 16.

or purpose, or as what drives a story.¹⁰ The alternative life as a queer person is therefore implied to be unhappy by default: ‘the queer life is already constructed as an unhappy life, as without the “things” that make you happy, or as a life that is depressed as it lacks certain things: “a husband, children.”’¹¹ As Ahmed outlines, the linearity of the heterosexual line acts as a straightforward cause-and-effect mechanism that promises heterosexual happiness (which, of course, means conventional happiness) if it is followed. If one strays from the linear path, stops, or turns back, there is no longer a promise of happiness since it is a conditional phenomenon, one dependent on the subject’s heterosexuality.

The alternative, the queer life, is thus nearly always imagined to be unhappy. In *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), Ocean Vuong presents the life of the Vietnamese-American protagonist, Little Dog, and his relationship with trauma, sexuality and memory. Little Dog’s queer sexual relationship ends in tragedy, as his partner succumbs to addiction against the backdrop of the opioid epidemic in the US. In an interview with *The Paris Review* in June 2019, Vuong grapples with his responsibility as an artist to represent ‘queer joy’ in his writing, and to diversify the representation of queer stories so they are not seen as inherently and inevitably unhappy.¹² Vuong argues, however, that this aim is complicated by the homophobia and queerphobia that have an impact on the real lives of non-heterosexual people:

There is a call, rightfully, for literature to make room for queer joy, or perhaps even more radically, queer okayness. But I did not want to answer that call by creating a fake utopia—because safety is still rare and foreign to the experiences of the queer folks I love, who are often also poor and underserved.¹³

¹⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 90.

¹¹ Ahmed, *Happiness*, p. 93.

¹² Spencer Quong, Ocean Vuong, ‘Survival as a Creative Force: An Interview with Ocean Vuong’, *The Paris Review*, 5 June 2019, <www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/06/05/survival-as-a-creative-force-an-interview-with-ocean-vuong> [accessed 03-07-2019].

¹³ *Ibid*, N.P.

For Vuong, there is a heavy burden placed on literature about queer people to represent queer happiness, but also a simultaneous responsibility not to erase the reality of oppression on those marginalised in a heteronormative society.

The conclusion to *Appropriate Behavior* is not straightforwardly unhappy. While Sirin and Maxine do not end the film together, the final scene shows that they are content in their separate lives. Our interpretation of this ending is made more complex by *Annie Hall*'s influence on the film, specifically the influence of the film's own ending. Tamar Jeffers McDonald defines *Annie Hall* as 'a radical romantic comedy' in her book *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (2007), unconventional in its rejection of the traditionally 'happy' ending where the couple are reconciled in romantic heterosexual coupledness.¹⁴ Like *Annie Hall*, *Appropriate Behavior* ends with the romantic couple separated but content. To call *Appropriate Behavior* an example of the 'unhappy queer' would therefore be reductive since the film it most resembles is a film about unhappy straight people, or at least an unhappy straight person. Of course, nobody defines *Annie Hall* in these terms. As a result of compulsory heterosexuality, *Annie Hall*'s representation of relationships and sexuality is accepted as the norm, the straight line against which other romantic comedies define themselves or deviate. Ignoring the influence of *Annie Hall* on films like *Appropriate Behavior* thus unintentionally supports the stereotypical view of queer relationships and failure. This is a heavy and unfair burden for films like *Appropriate Behavior* to shoulder. Films about queer love like Akhavan's should not have to speak for a nonheterosexual community, the converse not levelled at heterosexual stories, for

¹⁴ Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (London, UK: Wallflower, 2007), p. 59.

example those made by Allen. It raises the question of how films about queer relationships can end in failure while keeping queer joy alive.

Heterosexuality does not only promise abstract ideas like happiness and success, but also material and tangible objects: inheritance of property is underpinned by the maintenance of the heterosexual line, as marriage and children are prerequisites for the very *straight* vertical line of passing down property. In other words, the family tree is often made up of very straight branches. As Ahmed writes:

For the boy to follow the family line he “must” orientate himself toward women as loved objects. It is the presumption that the child must inherit the life of the parent that requires the child to follow the heterosexual line. Inheritance is usually presented as a social good: we inherit our parent’s assets, after all, and if we inherit their debts then this is a sign of bad parenting and a threat to the line of descent. When parents imagine the life they would like for their child, they are also imagining what they will “give” to the child as a gift that becomes socially bonding.¹⁵

The socialising power of inheritance therefore has the propensity to bring anyone ‘in line’ and in doing so aims to maintain convention. While structural and ancient hegemonies are responsible, the might of capitalism and social and political hierarchies are also complicit. Elizabeth Freeman notes that this heteronormative timeline of marriage, birth and death serves the nation’s economic and political interests:

In the United States, for instance, states now license, register, or certify birth (and therefore citizenship, eventually encrypted in a Social Security ID for taxpaying purposes), marriage or domestic partnership (which privatizes caretaking and regulated the distribution of privatized property) and death (which terminated the identities linked to state benefits redistributing these benefits through familial channels), along with sundry privileges like driving

¹⁵ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 85.

(to jobs and commercial venues) and serving in the military (thus incurring state expenditures that often serve corporate interests).¹⁶

The line or descent of inheritance is straight both symbolically as a singular vertical passing down, and in its compulsion to repeat and propagate heterosexuality.

This repetition is, according to Adrienne Rich, a result of the enforcement of heterosexuality through both state and domestic forces.¹⁷ For Rich, compulsory heterosexuality has manifested itself through a coupling of imbedded structural systems that present heterosexuality as the norm with active and very real (and often very violent) punishment. Rich focuses on oppression levelled at lesbian people, which 'has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women, yet everywhere women have resisted it, often at the cost of physical torture, imprisonment, psychosurgery, social ostracism, and extreme poverty.'¹⁸ The intersection of gender and sexuality means abuses are motivated by both homophobia and misogyny, and the consequence is the prevalence of heterosexuality in both the professional and personal lives of women. As Rich posits:

The lie of compulsory female heterosexuality today afflicts not just feminist scholarship, but every profession, every reference work, every curriculum, every organizing attempt, every relationship or conversation over which it hovers. It creates, specifically, a profound falseness, hypocrisy, and hysteria in the heterosexual dialogue, for every heterosexual relationship is lived in the queasy strobe-light of that lie.¹⁹

While the 'strobe-light' of compulsory heterosexuality may be 'queasy', it nevertheless illuminates heterosexuality which is consistently and effectively presented as the

¹⁶ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 4.

¹⁷ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5: 4 (Summer, 1980), 631-60 (p. 653).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 653.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 657.

given, the norm and the standard form sexuality takes. It is the straight line from which other sexualities must bend or deviate from to define itself.

Heterosexuality is often colloquially referred to as 'straight.' This straightness is clearly not a coincidence but rather brings together notions of rigidity and following the path already laid out. Queerness is thus inevitably always in conversation with ideas and images of straightness. Ahmed instead explores the imagery of queerness being 'offline.' She argues that queerness involves a departure from this straight line, where to 'go "offline" is to turn toward "one's own sex" and away from "the other sex"'.²⁰ 'To turn away from "the other sex" is also to leave the straight line'.²¹ This queerness characterises the progression in *Appropriate Behavior* as the narrative frequently moves 'offline'.

QUEER ANNIE HALL

'You could call it a queer Annie Hall.'²²

Desiree Akhavan, *Varsity*, 2015.

There is a risk that in highlighting the influence of *Annie Hall* the essential queerness of Akhavan's film might be obscured or erased. *Appropriate Behavior's* nonchrononormative narrative and ambiguous (un)happy ending emblemise the queer aspects of the film as I have argued; they are also the aspects that bear Allen's greatest influence. Ignoring the significance of queerness to the structure of

²⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 71.

²¹ Ibid, p. 71.

²² Will Hutton, 'In Conversation with Desiree Akhavan', *Varsity*, 4 March 2015, <<http://www.varsity.co.uk/culture/8406>> [accessed 7 June 2016].

Appropriate Behavior would be a ‘straightening’ act, since, as Ahmed writes: ‘The straight reading, in other words, “corrects” the slantwise direction of queer desire’.²³ In recognising the influence of queer time on the film *alongside* the influence of *Annie Hall*, my argument reveals the characteristics of *Appropriate Behavior*’s relationship with Allen’s oeuvre. The film is not a direct descendent, but moves away from Allen in a distinctly queer, non-linear and unrigid way. The moments that most clearly reflect *Annie Hall*, for instance various scenes walking along New York streets and dates in bookshops, can be viewed as queered responses to *Annie Hall*. Instead of a vertical straight line of inheritance down, *Appropriate Behavior* speaks up and across to *Annie Hall*. As Akhavan said of the film in an interview with Will Hutton: ‘You could call it a queer *Annie Hall*’.²⁴



Figure 5.1. Brooklyn in the morning.

²³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 72.

²⁴ Hutton, N.P.

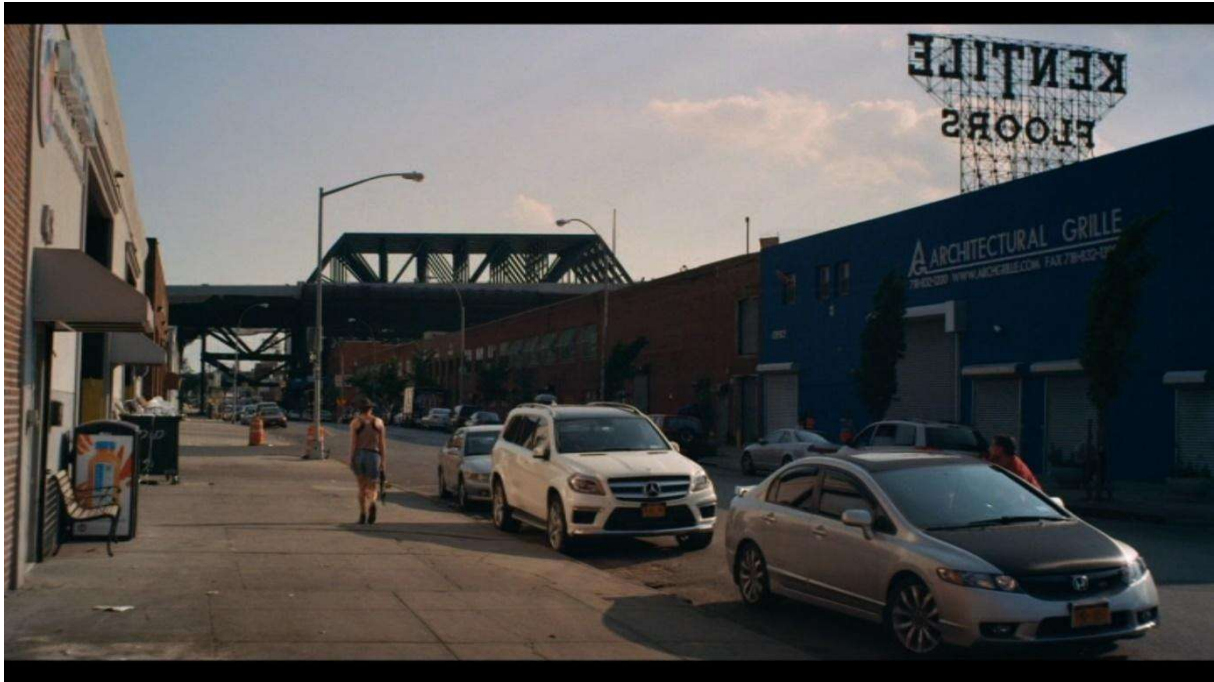


Figure 5.2. Brooklyn in the afternoon.

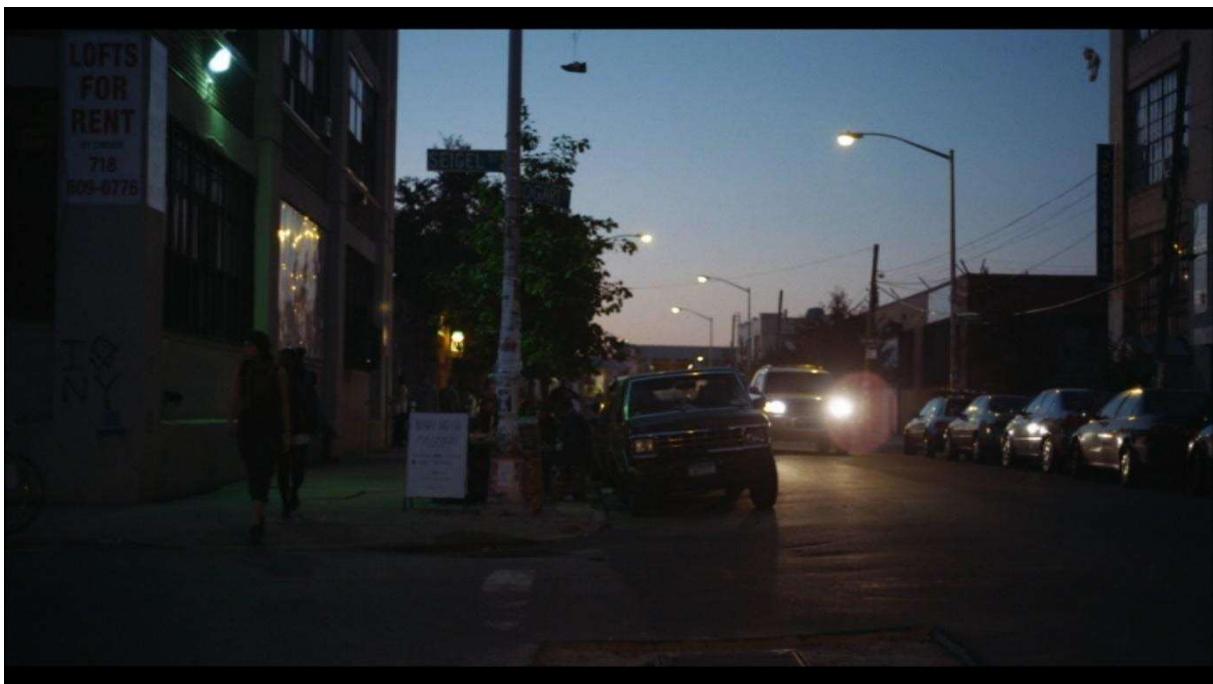


Figure 5.3. Brooklyn at night.

Before exploring queer time, I am going to show the influence of *Annie Hall* on *Appropriate Behavior*, an influence that is playfully handled by Akhavan. The film's location of Brooklyn for example acts as a nod to Allen's *Manhattan* (dir. Woody Allen,

1979). While Allen's films mostly take place across the Brooklyn Bridge on the island of Manhattan, Akhavan's film instead focuses on the twenty-somethings who cannot afford to live in that most famous and exclusive of boroughs. The majority of Allen's films instead leave Brooklyn behind: in *Annie Hall*, Brooklyn is only visited in Alvy's memories.

Allen's black and white opening montage in *Manhattan* is recalled in the opening images of the Brooklyn streets in *Appropriate Behavior*. Whereas Allen's monochromatic images invoke a romanticised Manhattan of the past, Akhavan's Brooklyn is distinctly contemporary. Unlike Allen's images which come at the beginning of the film, Akhavan's stationary shots also punctuate the film's narrative. The first shots are bright, lit with morning sunshine (Fig. 5.1.). As the film progresses, these establishing shots reflect the passage of time and mark the afternoon, late afternoon (Fig. 5.2.) and eventually evening (Fig. 5.3.). In a film where time is ruptured and memory largely determines its plot, these images root the narrative in a time and place as Sirin flits between the past and the present. They are distinct parts of the day and show locations that are recognisable as being in Brooklyn. When they are shown, we assume Sirin is in the present and not in her memories. For Alvy, and Allen more generally, Brooklyn marks the exact opposite.

The opening shots of *Appropriate Behavior* recall *Manhattan*. They bear Allen's influence but also playfully challenge it. This is shown in the shot of garbage bags in the opening sequence of Akhavan's film (Fig. 5.4.), a shot that engages with a similar shot in Allen's *Manhattan* (Fig. 5.5.). In Allen's film, the garbage bags fill the bottom left of the shot, and they are emphasised by Isaac's (Woody Allen) voiceover: 'How hard it was to exist in a society desensitized by drugs, loud music, television, crime, garbage.' The juxtaposition of the garbage and the illuminated images of the

street in the background show the contrast of glamour and decay in Manhattan. In *Appropriate Behavior* however, Akhavan's shot is the garbage.



Figure 5.4. Garbage bags line the streets in *Appropriate Behavior*.



Figure 5.5. Garbage bags in Manhattan.

While Allen's garbage resides in the corner of the shot, in *Appropriate Behavior* Akhavan makes it central. The stationary camera focuses and celebrates the messiness

of the city in much the same way as the film refuses to flinch from the messiness of Sirin's career and relationships, as well as the film's own distinctly 'messy' chronology. Sirin also contributes to the trash in the opening scenes of the film. After her breakup, Sirin throws away the dildo Maxine bought for her into the trash on the street. Regretting her decision, she goes back to retrieve it, apparently not quite ready to be separated from an artefact that symbolises her sexual relationship with Maxine. Sirin is only able to throw away their dildo at the end of the film once she pieces together the memories of her relationship with Maxine, just as Alvy is finally able move on from Annie. The tongue-in-cheek symbolism of the left behind prosthetic penis perhaps invokes Akhavan's leaving behind of Allen too, another masculine presence in the film.



Figure 5.6. Annie and Alvy on their bookshop date.

Annie Hall is remembered and queered in another scene, when Sirin recalls a bookshop date with Maxine. Maxine chooses some books for Sirin, telling her 'I'm broadening your horizons,' which directly references Annie's and Alvy's date, where

Alvy buys Annie books on death. Ostensibly Alvy buys them to educate Annie on literature and philosophy, but he surely also buys them to educate her on his own morbid outlook, saying: 'I have a very pessimistic view about life, you should know this about me if we're going to go out.' In *Annie Hall*, one continuing shot captures the bookshop scene (Fig. 5.6.), first focusing on Alvy's recommended books on death, and then following the pair as Alvy directs Annie towards the counter. The camera is then revealed to be positioned behind the counter itself, creating the impression that it is waiting for Annie and Alvy to approach it. Alvy's control of the conversation and situation is made explicit as his movements are anticipated by the camera. It is his memory after all, and Allen's camerawork reflects his control over the action. In *Appropriate Behavior*, however, the camera remains still and at a distance, observing the pair as they go about buying their books (Fig. 5.7.). It is as though the camera has been set up to record this replaying of Allen's scene with new players. Here, however, no character's memory is prioritised over the other, but rather the memory of *Annie Hall* itself is centralised.



Figure 5.7. Sirin remembers her bookshop date with Maxine.

The book Maxine chooses for Sirin is the novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) written by activist Leslie Feinberg, depicting the life of a butch lesbian in 70s New York (perhaps *Annie Hall* is recalled here as another cultural object from the 70s). The book choice queers the memory of *Annie Hall*, diverting it from the heterosexual path of inheritance. Alvy's books do not really teach Annie about death. Similarly, Maxine's purchase of *Stone Butch Blues* does not really broaden Sirin's horizons on queerness. What it does is define the characteristics of their new relationship (Maxine is positioned as teacher and gatekeeper to queer experiences) and, crucially, influence how Sirin will remember it. Alvy recalls that he introduced Annie to his philosophy on life, just as Sirin remembers that Maxine showed her more about the recent history of lesbianism in New York. The remembered *Annie Hall* scene is queered, the influence of *Annie Hall* still visible, but slanted and changed.

While Sirin is clearly influenced by Alvy as seen in her neuroticism, flashbacks of memory, and desire to figure out 'where the screw up came', it is Maxine that visually reflects Alvy. Like Sophie and Frances in the previous chapter, Maxine and Sirin cannot be mapped onto specific characters. Rather they represent *Annie Hall* as a *whole*. There are, of course, several versions of Alvy in *Annie Hall* itself, each sharing a neurotic view on life and Allen's iconic black rimmed spectacles. There is the cartoon Alvy, the actor playing Alvy in his play, and the child Alvy, whose existential crisis leads him to the conclusion that homework is pointless in the face of inevitable apocalypse. Doomed humanity is not enough to deter him from girls, however, as Alvy says: 'In 1942, I had already discovered women.' In one scene, present day Alvy returns to a memory from his childhood where a classroom scene plays out. After he kisses a girl on the cheek, she shrieks. Perhaps Alvy remembers that she was a recurring victim of his prepubescent harassment. Acting as a mouthpiece for Alvy's present day

understanding and psychoanalytic knowledge, the schoolgirl says: 'For god's sake Alvy, even Freud speaks of a latency period.' Present day Alvy, sticking up for his former self, says: 'Well I never had a latency period!' Alvy's concern with his childhood years reflects the film's ruptured chronology. Claire Mortimer notes the depiction of his child-self and how it reveals the film's interest in chaos:

At times of stress Alvy retreats into a pre-Oedipal state, demonstrating a childlike propensity for chaos and rebellion in the scene where he confronts the cop in Los Angeles, as is made clear in the intercutting to the bumper-car scene from his childhood.²⁵

While Mortimer argues that the bumper car scene reflects chaos, its symbolism also highlights Alvy's proclivity for returning to the past: each hit or bump in the road (or on the car) sends Alvy backwards, retreating into memory to make sense of the present, including memories from childhood. Here, unlike in *Appropriate Behavior* where the ruptured chronology is informed by the queerness of the narrative, for Alvy, the return to childhood memories and subsequent fractured timeline is motivated by his preoccupation with memory and the past itself. Alvy's different versions of himself, in different time periods, and even different mediums, reflect this fractured and fragmented sense that underpins *Annie Hall*.

Maxine and Sirin can also be described as female versions of Alvy, or as an example of drag-kinging. Halberstam defines drag-kinging as a performance of masculinity 'from earnest repetition to hyperbolic re-creation, and from quiet understatement to theatrical layering.'²⁶ Halberstam argues the purpose of drag-kinging is to deconstruct dominant masculinities through parodied performance and humour, and in doing so reveal the prosthetic and artificial nature of the

²⁵ Claire Mortimer, *Romantic Comedy* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2010), p. 88.

²⁶ Halberstam, *Queer Time*, p. 129.

characteristics of the dominant gender. As Halberstam writes of the most popular drag-king shows:

spectators will see comedic acts outnumbering sexy acts ten to one, and while certainly this has something to do with the influence of drag queen models of camp performance, it also seems to appeal to the spectators' desire for a deconstruction of maleness rather than a reconstruction of masculinity elsewhere.²⁷

Halberstam appeals for the recognition of drag-kinging's influence on mainstream culture. Identifying the 'kingy' characteristics of male fragility and male stupidity in Laurel and Hardy, Jerry Lewis and, of course, Allen's characters, Halberstam calls for the acknowledgement of the drag-king presence in these performances of masculinity.²⁸ Halberstam argues that this deconstruction of masculinity is only visible once it is overtly performed. As Halberstam writes:

sometimes it is difficult to see or appreciate the kingy effects of the classic comedy act until it is reproduced in a counter public sphere. So, for example, Laurel and Hardy may not immediately shout male parody, and yet, when we see Beryl Reid and Susannah York dressing up as Laurel and Hardy in *The Killing of Sister George*, the kingy effect comes to the surface. In much the same way as the image of a gay man impersonating Bette Davis makes Davis herself into a camp icon, so the image of lesbians impersonating Laurel and Hardy can transform them into king icons.²⁹

The 'kingy' effects of Allen's characters are revealed when they are taken on by his female characters, for example in *Everyone Says I Love You* (dir. Woody Allen, 1996), when Joe (Woody Allen) and ex-wife Steffi (Goldie Hawn) attend a Marx Brothers New Year's Eve Party in Paris. Their shared costume choice highlights the 'kingy' aspects of both Groucho Marx and Allen's character. The pair wear false moustaches and eyebrows to recall Marx, with Joe's dark rimmed glasses completing the impression,

²⁷ Ibid, p. 134.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 129.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 128.

reminding us that Allen's idiosyncratic and iconic glasses are themselves a reference to his comic hero (Fig. 5.8.). Steffi's prosthetic facial hair paradoxically exposes the prosthetic nature of Marx's masculinity (a masculinity that is already tested and punctured throughout the Marx Brothers' oeuvre as distinctly silly) and Joe's 'kingy' masculinity. This, in turn, exposes the 'kingy' nature of Allen himself, as a figure that reflects, refracts and reduces elements of masculinity which can be easily paraded and parodied.



Figure 5.8. Joe and Steffi as Groucho Marx.

While I am not (necessarily) calling for an identification of Alvy Singer as a drag king icon, it is significant that the queer Maxine's costume and neurotic performance can be so effectively compared to Alvy Singer. This is not the only time Alvy has been parodied and performed by a woman. In Fox's *New Girl* (Fox, 2011-2018), Jess Day (Zooey Deschanel) dresses as a zombie Alvy Singer (Fig. 5.9.) in the episode 'Halloween'. Her friend Schmidt's (Max Greenfield) response to her costume is also to reperform Alvy Singer as a zombie, saying, 'These brains are terrible, and such small portions,' in an Alvy-esque voice. Jess's friends immediately recognise Alvy in her

performance which illuminates an inherent 'kingy' presence in Allen's own performance of Alvy.



Figure 5.9. Zombie Alvy Singer Drag King.

Another of Jess's friends, Winston (Lamorne Morris), has a different response. As the only Black man in an apartment of white people, Winston is often used in storylines to expose and perform questions about race and racism in the show. While Nick (Jake Johnson) and Schmidt perform Allen-esque phrases in the scene, Winston responds with the words, 'I have nothing to add to this.' The idea of Allen's films being enjoyed by mostly white audiences is employed here, and perhaps also the sense that only white audiences find them funny. While Nick and Schmidt join in with the impressions of Alvy, Winston is initially lost amongst the parodies. But the breaking of gender boundaries in this scene destabilises other boundaries (zombies themselves occupy a site in between life and death, human and monster), allowing Winston to join in as a result. He chimes in with an impression, and says, 'I couldn't afford my therapist, so I ate his brains,' drawing upon general cultural knowledge of Alvy as a character (for example, his penchant for jokes, psychotherapy and complaining)

without ever having watched Allen's films. While Winston's impression shows both his lack of knowledge and interest in Allen and the whiteness of Allen's fanbase, I also see it as a 'kingy' moment. As Halberstam argues, drag kinging takes elements of masculinity and parodies them, just as Jess, Nick, Schmidt and eventually Winston parody Alvy's dominant traits. Therefore, Maxine's 'kingy' characterisation both remembers Alvy and reveals the 'kingy' elements of his character in *Annie Hall*. Jess's drag-kinging not only as an Alvy Singer but as a dead, zombified Alvy Singer, along with the men's zombie centred Alvy impressions, exacerbates the queerness of the scene, to the point where Winston can join in too. Like *Appropriate Behavior*, the episode of *New Girl* reveals a queerness of *Annie Hall* that may not be immediately apparent. This allows fresh perceptions that are more inclusive of different races, sexualities, and genders than the white heterosexuality of *Annie Hall*.

QUEER TIME

Maxine: *You know what, don't bother telling your parents about us. I know you, and the more I think about it, this is probably just a phase.*

Appropriate Behavior, 2015.

In *Annie Hall*, Alvy sifts through his memories with the intention of knowing the reasons for his breakup with Annie. But in *Appropriate Behavior*, objects in Sirin's present jolt her back to the past and to memories of her relationship with Maxine. Sirin is not as in control of her flashbacks as Alvy is of his. In one scene, for example, Sirin and her friend Crystal (Halley Feiffer) sit discussing her breakup. When the waiter

places a candle on their table, the scene jump-cuts to another table and another candle, one in the past that held significance for her. The shot of a candle on a bedside table in the past establishes a shift in location, and when the scene of Sirin and Maxine in bed together unfolds, the temporal shift is also revealed. In another scene, as Sirin unpacks her books in her new flat, the sight of *Stone Butch Blues* nestled in the dark corner of the cardboard box (Fig. 5.10.) triggers a rupture in the narrative's time and space. The scene cuts to the narrative past and to the bookshop date from Sirin's memories (Fig. 5.11.).



Figure 5.10. Sirin's copy of *Stone Butch Blues*.

While these memories are provoked by matters outside of Sirin's control, in Alvy's case the sifting through memory is a conscious decision, a method through which he comes to understand his breakup with Annie. In short, whereas in *Annie Hall* Alvy's memories are utilised to fulfil the heterosexual narrative, a narrative that has become synonymous with success and happiness, in Akhavan's film the nonchrononormative structure reflects Sirin's queerness. As Ahmed outlines in *The*

Promise of Happiness: ‘Heterosexual love becomes about the possibility of a happy ending: about what life is aimed toward, as being what gives life its direction or purpose, as what drives a story.’³⁰ The drive of *Annie Hall* is this drive of heterosexuality. Even when the couple are not able to reconcile in romantic partnership, Alvy must create a story in which they do through his new play based on their relationship. The queer story of Sirin and Maxine necessarily has different objectives. Unlike Alvy, Sirin is not propelled by a desire to fit the pieces of a broken relationship together to realise ‘where the screw up came.’ For Sirin, the movements in time and space are a response to the lack of a propulsion forward in pursuit of heterosexual happiness, and rather take the form of a temporality not concerned with matters of heterosexual maturity, for example a husband, a wedding, and children. *Appropriate Behavior* is informed by queer time, which offers an alternative to the futures reliant upon a temporality beholden to heterosexual notions of time. As Halberstam writes: ‘Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction.’³¹ Unlike Alvy, Sirin is not beholden to a heterosexual conclusion and is therefore free to explore her memories without a pre-determined purpose.

While queer temporalities are forged by a negation of heterosexual time markers, queer time is also informed by death, as the AIDS epidemic drastically restricted and refigured notions of mortality during the 1980s. Halberstam notes that for queer people the ‘constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment.’³² In other

³⁰ Ahmed, *Happiness*, p. 90.

³¹ Halberstam, *Queer Time*, p. 2.

³² *Ibid*, p. 2.

words, queer time offers an alternative to futures reliant upon a temporality bound to heterosexual notions of time. The presence of heterosexuality as the dominant force, however, acts as a reminder of the deviation of queer time.



Figure 5.11. Maxine picks up Stone Butch Blues in Sirin's memory of their bookshop date.

Sirin's queer temporality is emphasized by the omnipresence of its opposite, the reminder of heterosexual time keeping in the form of Sirin's family. Her brother is celebrated in the family as an example of successful assimilation into American culture while still retaining his Iranian immigrant status. As a doctor about to marry an Iranian-American woman, his heterosexual success narrative is about to be consolidated in his marriage, which is also tied up in assimilation goals. He is often held up in comparison to Sirin, whose singleness and aimless professional career trouble her parents. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that this dependency on heterosexuality for the assimilated and therefore 'good' immigrant is manifested in the most potent of American symbols, the Statue of Liberty. They outline that:

Immigration crises have also previously produced feminine icons that function as prosthesis for the state—most famously, the Statue of Liberty, which symbolizes seamless immigrant assimilation to the metaculture of the United States ... it is not symbolic femininity but practical heterosexuality that guarantees the monocultural nation.³³

The femininity of the figure of the Statue of Liberty welcomes immigrant people but this welcome comes at a price, and by passing into the country, compulsory heterosexuality is demanded.

In Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness, Bend it Like Beckham* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, 2002) is analysed to explore this point. The film follows Jess (Parminder Nagra), the football obsessed daughter of Indian parents, and the struggle she faces living up to familial expectations while merging her heritage with her Britishness. The film concludes with her success playing for England in the women's football team and her father's eventual pride. The film also concludes with a romantic relationship with her white Irish coach Joe (Jonathan Rhys Meyers). Crucially, it is this relationship with Joe that is presented as the cure to the 'injury' of the racism that underpins the film:

The acceptance of interracial heterosexual love is a conventional narrative of reconciliation, as if love can overcome past antagonism and create what I would call hybrid familiarity: *white with color, white with another*. Such fantasies of proximity are premised on the following belief: if only we could be closer, we would be as one. Proximity becomes a promise: the happiness of the film is the promise of "the one," as if giving love to the white man as the national subject, or the ideal subject of the nation, would allow us to have a share in this promise.³⁴

Chadha's original queer storyline of lesbian love involving Jess and her teammate Jules (Keira Knightley) was unsurprisingly dropped and rewritten.³⁵ In the end, *Bend it Like Beckham* only allows for some line bending. As Ahmed argues, 'you can bend

³³ Berlant and Warner, p. 550.

³⁴ Ahmed, *Happiness*, p. 145.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 144.

only insofar as you return to the straight line, which provides as it were our end point', as 'Narratives of rebellion can involve deviations from the line if they return us to this point.'³⁶ Heterosexuality is therefore inextricably tied to the expectation of immigrant assimilation.

This fact is explicitly portrayed in *Appropriate Behavior*, so much so that Sirin's parents wilfully ignore her queerness. Maxine is unquestioningly accepted as Sirin's 'friend' when they attend Sirin's family parties, and when her parents visit the couple's apartment, they are content with Sirin's explanation that their sharing a double bed 'saves money' and is simply 'European.' Finally, towards the end of the film, Sirin builds up enough courage to tell her mother that she is recovering from a breakup with a woman. Sirin's mother calmly but firmly insists that it is not true. Sirin's queer narrative does not allow for closure with her family, and her coming out story is far from finished.

QUEER CHILD

'Over the years in films we've had so many men be flawed, multi-dimensional characters who can be mature in some avenues and fall apart in others and the women are just there rolling their eyes and supporting them. But when I look around at the films that are coming out now by female directors we're seeing women

³⁶ Ibid, p. 145.

characters go through a stunted adolescence where they're able to fuck up just as much as any dude would. I hear about this "new wave" of slacker female films and I think it's just women getting the opportunity to tell stories. I'm not ashamed to talk openly about my flaws like what, only Woody Allen gets to do that?'.³⁷

Desiree Akhavan, *Grazia*, 2015.

When conventional time markers like heterosexual marriage and reproduction are unwanted or unachievable, new temporalities, like queer time, are created. Queer time necessitates a different relationship to time for the non-heterosexual young person, the person whose future is also beset by these markers. In *Appropriate Behavior*, Sirin's queerness is sometimes depicted by Akhavan as stunted adolescence. How does the child 'grow up' when these markers are unachievable? After all, as Kathryn Bond Stockton outlines in *The Queer Child: Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009), the child's growth to adulthood 'unhelpfully, has been relentlessly understood as vertical movement upward (hence "growing up") toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness.'³⁸ The child's life is defined by its destiny to eventually 'grow up,' to become 'adult,' to achieve its prophesised potential

³⁷ Jess Commons, Desiree Akhavan, 'Desiree Akhavan Talks Women on Screen, Being The 'Bisexual Spokesperson' And New Film *Appropriate Behavior*', *Grazia*, 4 March 2015 <<https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/music/desiree-akhavan>> [accessed 7 June 2016].

³⁸ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child: Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Mood and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham, UK: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 4.

to produce and reproduce in the proper capitalist and heterosexual manner: growing 'up' is a progression, a linear narrative of time and advancement. For those that do not or cannot engage with these markers of time, then, their growing 'up' cannot happen in the same way. The queer child's development necessarily involves other directions than simply 'up.'



Figure 5.12. Sirin and Crystal on the train.

Of course, not all non-heterosexual people live with their lives reflecting the motions and movements of queer time but in *Appropriate Behavior* Sirin's rejection of heteronormativity and resultant embrace of non-normative chronology underpins her character. It also informs another of her characteristics, namely her silliness. Sirin is in a childlike state as the film positions her as unable to 'grow up' in heterosexual terms, that is until she is finally able to 'grow sideways' later in the film. As Bond Stockton argues: 'By contrast, "growing sideways" suggests that the width of a person's experience of ideas, their motives of their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing

“adults” and “children” into lateral contact of surprising sorts.’³⁹ Sirin’s ‘growing sideways’ allows for her to sidestep the heteronormative markers of time and enables her to find new paths through time.



Figure 5.13. Sirin alone in the frame.

Sirin’s ‘growing sideways’ is conveyed most explicitly in the final scenes of *Appropriate Behavior*, where she glimpses Maxine for the first time since their breakup. Sirin sits on the train travelling into Manhattan while Maxine waits at a train stop on the other side of the tracks. Like Annie and Alvy, this final interaction in the film offers the protagonists a way to understand their relationship and their breakup. Unlike in *Annie Hall*, however, this conclusion is wordless: Sirin’s exchange with Maxine is merely a handwave, and the look the pair exchange is ambiguous. Sirin sits next to her friend, Crystal, the two-shot bifurcated by a vertical pole that splits the frame in half and separates the two friends for a moment (Fig. 5.12.). As the shots of

³⁹ Ibid, p. 11.

New York flash behind them, Sirin's attention is diverted from Crystal, marked by the cut to her on her own in a one-shot (Fig. 5.13.), and Crystal's chattering is quietened and muffled. The earlier slicing of the shot is a precursor to Sirin's inevitable solitude when she catches sight of Maxine across the tracks.

When the train briefly stops and Sirin sees Maxine, she tentatively holds up a hand in greeting. It is reciprocated by Maxine who is cast in shadow. The chance meeting recalls *Annie Hall* in the ex-couple's cathartic encounter. The glass that separates Maxine and Sirin is also reminiscent of *Annie Hall*, as the camera similarly remains outside the café where Annie and Alvy talk about old times. While Annie and Alvy chatter animatedly together, we do not hear their conversation and are only permitted to wait outside the café until they are finished. When they leave, the camera cuts to the inside of the café, once more on the other side of the glass to the couple. Of course, we are always on the 'other side of the glass' to these characters, as the camera lens is invoked in these moments of separation by glass. Just like Annie's and Alvy's, Sirin's and Maxine's exchange is kept private, and verbal communication is never revealed to the audience. *Frances Ha* is also invoked here, as the wordless, ambiguous looks over an uncrossable space between the two women concludes the film.

The significance of orientation is foregrounded as, while the train moves forward, Sirin's angle on the seat means that she is travelling sideways. Orientation has the power not only to alter the direction of movement, but also what we see, as how we view an object can be altered by this positioning. Our perception is affected by our engagement with the object within its context. As Ahmed writes: 'Perception hence involves orientation; what is perceived depends on where they are located, which gives us a certain take on things.'⁴⁰ The perception of objects is necessarily informed by the

⁴⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 27.

way in which they are engaged with, in how we come to perceive them, and what it says about their and our positionality. As Ahmed outlines:

In perceiving the object as an object, I perceive it *in a certain way*, as being some kind of thing. Perceiving an object involves a way of apprehending that object. So, it is not just that consciousness is directed towards objects, but also that I take different directions towards objects.⁴¹

The orientation of the object therefore affects how the object is viewed, which in turn affects the subject's response to it. In these concluding scenes of *Appropriate Behavior*, Sirin's sideways orientation enables her to see the (lost) object Maxine in a different way.



Figure 5.14. Maxine backlit by the window.

When Sirin first sees Maxine, the train slows, and the shot settles on her. Maxine's silhouette is centralised in the one shot, backlit by a window behind her (Fig. 5.14.). This backlighting simultaneously casts Maxine's body in shadowy darkness,

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 27.

while the bright light behind her presents her as angelic and celestial, the mysterious but perfect object of Sirin's affections. Her dark figure reflects Sirin's confusion over their breakup, as well as her lack of access to Maxine now: she is unknowable, distant and bewildering, but nonetheless beguiling. When the train starts to move again, however, Sirin's progression sideways changes her perception of Maxine, just as she raises her hand in greeting, and becomes knowable and understandable once again. As the train moves, Sirin's point of view shot moves sideways, altering the perception of Maxine. No longer central in the shot, the camera moves sideways with the train, and Maxine leaves the shot (Fig. 5.15.).



Figure 5.15. The shot of Maxine changes as the train moves.

Moreover, she is no longer encased in the shot by layered frames, as the movement sideways alters the angle at which she is viewed. The bright window that casts Maxine in shadow is also shifted by the changed perspective of Sirin's movement, meaning that Maxine is no longer shrouded completely in darkness. Here the shift in perception allowed by Sirin's 'growing sideways' enables her to look at Maxine, and

their relationship differently. Sirin's 'growing sideways' is demonstrated in these closing shots as something that enables her to engage with her past differently. It offers a new perspective for her and highlights the fact that her relationship with time and progression is not simple, not heteronormative, and not simply 'forward.'

Her sideways growth is also depicted in the film through her childishness, or perhaps her non-adulthood. This is seen most clearly in a particularly ambiguous scene where Sirin watches her mother and father sleep as she observes them from the doorway. The longing with which she watches her parents is similar to Aura's (Lena Dunham) passion for her mother (Laurie Simmons) in *Tiny Furniture* (dir. Lena Dunham, 2010) where she climbs into bed with her at the film's end. The shot and reverse shot of Sirin and her parents shows her looking down at her mother and father who are cast in shadow, her mother slightly lit by the glow from the doorway (Fig. 5.16.). Sirin's mother is her model for female heterosexuality. As she sleeps next to her husband, she completes the picture of successful heterosexuality for Sirin to observe. The quietness of the scene is disturbed by Sirin's mother, who tells Sirin to 'stop breathing so loud.' While Sirin's breathing was not distinguishable in the scene, for Sirin's parents, the sound is unsettling.

The scene reflects how Sirin's queerness disturbs her parents. As Ahmed argues in *The Promise of Happiness*, heteronormative structures set up a world in which queerness can only ever mean unhappiness in the eyes of those that uphold and perpetuate these paradigms. As she notes: 'The queer child fails to inherit the family by reproducing its line. This failure is affective; you become an unhappiness-cause.'⁴² Sirin is absolutely an unhappiness-cause for her family. As her brother fulfils respectable heterosexual destiny by marrying a woman, Sirin holds her parents in

⁴² Ahmed, *Happiness*, p. 95.

stasis as they wait for her to ‘grow up,’ a state that would be marked by a similar arrangement. In this scene, Sirin’s breathing is metaphorical of her sexuality, something she cannot and should not help, but something that nevertheless keeps her parents awake.



Figure 5.16. Sirin’s parents, asleep.

Sirin’s childishness is shown in this scene with her parents, but it also expressed in her silliness. Silliness, unlike nonsense, is a concept that has been relatively neglected in academic discourse. Nonsense verse and nonsense writers, in particular Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, have of course been studied extensively, however. Recent books focused specifically on nonsense include Jamie Holmes’ *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing* (2016). Research on nonsense often includes some reference to silliness, for example in Susan Stewart’s book *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (1989). Research dedicated entirely to silliness, however, is not as widespread. One of the few examples is Peter Timms’s *Silliness: A Serious History* (2019), which charts the progression of silliness, though its satirising of

politics, child's play and performance.⁴³ And Sarah Ahmed, in her book *The Promise of Happiness*, defends silliness from its association with triviality, charting its history from a word that once meant happiness. She outlines that:

Some forms of happiness are viewed as less worthy because they do not involve the accumulation of point, creating a line that can be followed. Silliness might be another example of worthless happiness. The etymology of silliness is striking. It comes from the word *sael*, originally meaning blessed, happy, or blissful. The word mutates over time; from blessed to pious, to innocent, to pitiable, to weak and feeble. From the blessed to the feeble: we learn from the depressing nature of the genealogy of silliness.⁴⁴

Ahmed shows that the meaning of 'silly' has experienced a mutation over time, a mutation that degrades the word that once meant happiness to one that, misleadingly, suggests lightness and weakness. I argue, following Ahmed, that silliness is not necessarily weak, particularly when one interprets it as a method of avoiding rigidity and straightness. Silliness instead bends the line, just as Akhavan's film, while bearing Allen's influence, does not adhere to it. It misbehaves.

Childishness and silliness are some of Sirin's most dominant and transgressive characteristics. Seen in a queer light, they are attributes of queer living and queer life. While she has no steady job (a capitalist marker of adulthood), her freelance work teaching very young children the art of filmmaking defines immaturity as a creative asset rather than a restrictive deficit (for example, *not* adult, *not* grown up). Her proximity to the children foregrounds her childishness when, after desperately trying in vain to get the four-year olds interested in stop motion animation, she finally joins them in their childishness by helping them create a movie about farts and zombies. At the premiere of the children's films, her work is contrasted with the other filmmaking

⁴³ Peter Timms, *Silliness: A Serious History* (Adelaide, Australia: Wakefield University Press, 2019).

⁴⁴ Ahmed, *Happiness*, p. 90.

group, where the children have been working on a shot for shot remake of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), using their honed talents to create a black and white masterpiece. While the children's parents are not necessarily impressed with the group's decidedly silly film, *The Curse of the Fart Zombie*, Sirin's childlikeness does achieve creative results, and the children learn from their experience.

Sirin's silliness also bears the influence of Allen. Many of Allen's most beloved characters are silly, from Miles Monroe (Woody Allen) in *Sleeper* (dir. Woody Allen, 1973), who wakes up from his cryogenic sleep in the future drooling and falling, to the nebbish, dancing Russian pacifist Boris Grushenko (Woody Allen) in *Love and Death* (dir. Woody Allen, 1975). In *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (dir. Woody Allen, 1982), the hapless inventor Andrew (Woody Allen) harnesses himself to a flying contraption that repeatedly fails to launch him even a few feet from the ground but does succeed in making him look like a giant bug. Huge, chemically enhanced chickens terrify Miles in *Sleeper*, and in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (*But Were Afraid to Ask)* (dir. Woody Allen, 1972) decidedly silly vignettes feature Allen dressed as a sperm cell and Gene Wilder as a doctor in love with a sheep. Silliness is an important factor in Allen's cinema, especially these earlier films, but that is not to say that silliness is not present in his later ones too. Silliness is certainly present in *Annie Hall*'s lobster scene, where Annie and Alvy grapple with the live freed animals, and in *Mighty Aphrodite* (dir. Woody Allen, 1995) where the despairing Greek chorus is forced to leave Zeus a voicemail after he doesn't answer their prayers.

While the silliness of Allen's films has certainly influenced the silliness of Sirin, it is perhaps another way through which Akhavan distinguishes her film from Allen's oeuvre. This somewhat paradoxical position is better understood through Akhavan's own words during a press interview for the film in *Grazia* magazine, where she

acknowledged a trend of films about young women who are silly and childish, and do not necessarily live up to heterosexual markers of success. In the interview, she says, 'I hear this "new wave" of slacker female films and I think it's just women getting the opportunity to tell stories. I'm not ashamed to tell stories. I'm not ashamed to talk openly about my flaws like what, only Woody Allen gets to do that?'⁴⁵

Akhavan's words bring together several strands that are explored in this chapter, namely the notion of 'stunted adolescence,' and the inevitable influence of Allen, an influence which is invoked here as a measure of separation and distance. The films she alludes to initially are films where flawed, multidimensional men are helped along by mature-minded women. David Denby discusses that 'For almost a decade, Hollywood has pulled jokes and romance out of the struggle between male infantilism and female ambition.'⁴⁶ The premise of these films is predicated on the contrast but apparently essential balance of ostensible male immaturity and female maturity. In fact, in his article, "'I Love You Man": Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Confronting Evolution of the Romantic Comedy' (2013), John Alberti argues that these men are chronically undatable, 'not just positioned as ugly ducklings or diamonds in the rough; they are aggressively unattractive, personally dedicated to rejecting qualities that would render them as good candidates for any kind of stable long-term relationship.'⁴⁷ These films usually centre on intense homosociality as a symptom of the protagonists' childlikeness, for example in the film *Step Brothers* (dir. Adam McKay, 2008), where two adult men (Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly) must learn to get along and share a room (and a bunkbed) after their parents start a relationship and move in together. The chaos that ensues is a result of their infantile reliance upon

⁴⁵ Commons, N.P.

⁴⁶ David Denby, *Do the Movies Have a Future?* (New York, USA: Simon & Schuster, 2012), p. 158.

⁴⁷ John Alberti, "'I Love You Man": Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy', *Quarterly of Film and Video*, 30: 2 (2013) 159-172 (p. 165).

their parents and territorial demand for their attention. Later, their eventual best-friendship becomes another indicator of their childlikeness.

The intense homosociality that underpins these films is always positioned as the attractive alternative to heterosexual commitment, the mundanity of which is represented in the character of the beautiful but serious girlfriend or wife. In Judd Apatow's film *Knocked Up* (dir. Judd Apatow, 2007), sweet stoner Ben (Seth Rogan) must leave his band of loyal but immature friends (including their love for weed and porn) after he and the career-driven Alison (Katherine Heigl) have unprotected sex one night, and find out that she is pregnant. Her seriousness and dedication to work is always in conflict with the men's slacker lifestyle, positioning Ben's decision to become a father as 'growing up.' According to Alberti, the prevalence of these stories belies an anxiety over the shift in gender conventions, conventions necessary for the functionality of traditional romantic comedies, from the 'screwball comedy through the masquerades involving gender and sexuality in the Doris Day/ Rock Hudson sex comedies to the pessimism of the nervous romances.'⁴⁸ By charting the significance of gender from the screwball comedy in the early 1930s through to the 'nervous romance' (of which *Annie Hall* is the epitome) in the late 1970s, Alberti describes the foundation of the romantic comedy that these so-called 'bromances' follow.

In his book *Masculinity in the Contemporary Romantic Comedy: Gender as Genre* (2013), Alberti posits that these bromances are a response to the anxiety of the destabilisation of gender after the nervous romances, and the resultant crisis of millennial masculinity. The movies are:

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 161.

Nervously trying to preserve binary genres of gender even as the ground shifted beneath them—and the contemporary examples of movies anxiously negotiating postbinary genres of gender.⁴⁹

This crisis leads to an overreliance on male homosociality, and suspicion of heterosexual commitment, at least until the films' inevitable heteronormative conclusion. This confusion and fear at the state of modern masculinity results in the childlikeness of its protagonists: men who are yet to 'grow up' by conventional heteronormative and capitalist standards as many of these characters are under or unemployed.

As a result of the heterosexual narrative at the end of these films and the longing and romanticising of these sacrificed homosocial bonds, women are annexed, indicative of 'a trend to isolate and even banish women from romantic comedies.'⁵⁰ This displacement of women in the genre has led to a sideways step away from these 'bromance' comedies, and a greater prevalence of films that centre on female friendship and women that have not achieved those markers of heterosexual and capitalist success. Attempts have been made to group these films together, for example Akhavan's mention of 'slacker female films' and Alberti's definition of the 'womance'.⁵¹ In opposition to Judd Apatow's 'bromance' comedies, Sady Doyle prefers the term 'Lady Loser Comedy'.⁵² According to Doyle, these films rectify the imbalance of comedy along gendered lines, and the rewards that come from it (for example, the male actors in these films always shine by getting the laughs which will disproportionately help their careers).⁵³

⁴⁹ John Alberti, *Masculinity in the Contemporary Romantic Comedy: Gender as Genre* (New York, USA: Routledge, 2013), p. 47.

⁵⁰ Alberti, "I Love You Man", p. 163.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁵² Sady Doyle, 'Lady Loser Comedy', *In These Times*, 35 (2011), 44, 33, 27 (p. 43).

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 44.

Whatever the terminology, these comedies are certainly defined by the characteristics Akhavan invokes in her interview: women who mess up, who *are* messy, whose inattention to heteronormative markers mean that their purpose isn't to coach husbands and boyfriends along this timeline. This leaves them in a 'stunted adolescence'. Despite the negative connotations of these words, 'stunted adolescence' grants its protagonists freedom from the restricting enforcement of heteronormativity, as Akhavan's film shows.

The female slacker-comedies that Akhavan mentions certainly include Lena Dunham's *Girls* (HBO, 2011-2017) and successful blockbuster movies like *Bridesmaids* (dir. Paul Feig, 2011) and Apatow's *Trainwreck* (dir. Judd Apatow, 2015) which celebrate the comedy of immature women who are messy both literally and in their careers and romantic lives. *Bridesmaids* and *Trainwreck*, however, are examples of female-driven so-called 'slacker-women' comedies that inevitably return to the heteronormative fold. While depicting women who do not have everything figured out, the films present this fact as a problem for their protagonists.

Here, I will briefly examine Gillian Robespierre's film *Obvious Child* (dir. Gillian Robespierre, 2014) to exemplify how these comedies work. This film is also a romantic comedy about a female protagonist experiencing a stunted adolescence that rejects heteronormative narratives about love, relationships, adulthood and procreation. The film, like *Appropriate Behavior*, bears the influence of *Annie Hall*. The film's protagonist, Donna (Jenny Slate), is a Jewish stand-up comedian in New York who begins dating the WASP Max (Jake Lacy). The name 'Max' recalls *Annie Hall* in which Alvy's best friend, Rob (Tony Roberts), decides that 'Max' suits Alvy better.

The film begins, like *Annie Hall*, with the protagonist analysing a recent breakup. Alvy's audience at the beginning of the film is unknown, perhaps a therapist,

perhaps the film's viewers, or perhaps a stand-up comedy audience. *Obvious Child* references this ambiguity, as Donna confesses the details of her breakup while drunk on stage at a comedy night. Unlike Alvy, she handles the breakup by self-medicating with alcohol, stalking her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend, and casual sex, the latter of which results in an unwanted pregnancy. Upon this discovery, Donna returns home to her mother and climbs into bed with her, a moment of childlikeness that is seen in both *Tiny Furniture* and *Appropriate Behavior*. Donna's childlikeness, which in Apatow's bromances would signify an inevitable (if reluctant) maturation of their protagonist through heterosexual romance, is here left as an essential aspect of Donna's character, an aspect that is not removed by the end of the film. After her abortion, Donna continues to be silly and childlike. The final shot of the film captures Max and Donna on the sofa watching television, not necessarily in a relationship. Donna's decision to terminate the pregnancy disrupts the heteronormative trajectory that Donna seemed destined to follow. By rearing her own child and joining with its father, Max (a very respectable and appropriate figure of benign masculinity), Donna's own childishness would have been rectified, cementing her in the heterosexual narrative of reproduction and child-rearing as promoted and protected by the stringent bounds of heteronormativity. As Ahmed posits in her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2015):

The reproduction of life—in the form of the future generation—becomes bound up with the reproduction of culture, through the stabilisation of specific arrangements for living ('the family'). The family is idealisable through the narrative of threat and insecurity; the family is presented as vulnerable, and as needing to be defended against others who violate the conditions of its reproduction.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion: Second Edition* (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), p. 144.

These so-called ‘female slacker films’ puncture this notion of ‘growing up’ by refusing to adhere to the capitalist and heteronormative categories through which this success is measured. In *Appropriate Behavior*, Sirin’s childishness can continue like Donna’s, as she refuses to take part in these markers of success. By the end of the film, Sirin is still single and still underemployed. The fact that these markers are unattainable or unacceptable to these protagonists, shows that new kinds of growing are possible. Alvy and Annie, after all, are also permitted to remain single by the end of the film, as the lessons they learned are not confirmed by their eventual romantic partnership, but precisely by their single-ness.

Their failure or refusal to adhere to the heteronormative line and sideways growing therefore necessitates an alternative orientation, a step away from the conventional line which manifests in Sirin’s character as a distinct awkwardness. In fact, all of the women studied in this thesis are awkward in some way; from Frances in *Frances Ha* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2013) whose length of limb renders her ‘too tall to marry’, and whose general awkward demeanour brands her ‘undatable’ by her friends. Aura in *Tiny Furniture* muddles along in social situations with varying success, and Dunham’s character Hannah in *Girls* is entirely defined by her awkwardness. In terms of body shape, Sirin’s contrasts with conventional notions of femininity. In one scene, for example, Sirin’s mother points this out with the well-intentioned and poorly received words, ‘This body was made for swimming, look at these shoulders.’ Sirin’s tall frame and strong features are commented upon throughout the film, and are coupled with her general gawky demeanour, making her distinctly awkward. Of course, this awkwardness recalls the awkwardness of Allen’s characters too.

In one of the few texts on the phenomenon of awkwardness, *Documentary’s Awkward Turn: Cringe Comedy and Media Spectatorship* (2013), Jason Middleton

notes that during the paranoia and nihilism of the 1970s American culture, it is ‘unsurprising that Woody Allen emerged as one of the most prominent filmmakers of this period.’⁵⁵ Allen’s humour is in part a reflection of the awkwardness of the times, and in other ways successful precisely because of the uncomfortable nature of the times themselves. In another text written about awkwardness, William Blackwood, in his eponymous magazine in 1828, wrote that ‘Man is naturally the most awkward animal that inhales the breath of life’, taking the view that awkwardness is a fundamental characteristic of life.⁵⁶ He goes on to write, ‘Is it not quite absurd that a man can’t take even a glass of wine without an appearance of infinite difficulty and pain?’⁵⁷

This perhaps underpins an awkward moment in *Appropriate Behavior*, where Sirin misses her mouth while drinking a cosmopolitan, the drink famously favoured by Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) in *Sex and the City* (HBO: 1998-2004). This moment of visual humour is a sight gag that punctuates the coolness that Sirin is attempting to portray. The iconic cocaine scene in *Annie Hall* is a similar moment of punctuated coolness, where on being presented with cocaine at a friend’s house Alvy sneezes the powder into a puff of expensive smoke.

⁵⁵ Jason Middleton, *Documentary’s Awkward Turn: Cringe Comedy and Media Spectatorship* (London, UK: Routledge, 2013), p. 7.

⁵⁶ William Blackwood, ‘Awkwardness’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 24 (Aug 1828), 211-17 (p. 211).

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 212.

CONCLUSION: QUEER FUTURES?

*'Twenty-five years and my life is still,
Tryin' to get up that great big hill of hope
For a destination.'*

'What's Up?', 4 Non Blondes, 1992.

This chapter has shown that the orientation and the position of these 'female slacker films', including *Appropriate Behavior*, in relation to Allen's oeuvre can change the way we view his influence. Influence, which is often understood as a straight line of inheritance, is manipulated in the case of *Appropriate Behavior*, as its protagonist and the film itself are informed by queer time, a chronology that is offline. This off-beatness results in an awkwardness and a silliness which, while still bearing Allen's influence, simultaneously reveals its separation, defined as they are by the film's focus on non-heteronormative romantic relationships. While periodically returning to Allen as Sirin returns to her parents' bedroom, the film sets off sideways. In conceptualising Allen's influence on the film as a line, this chapter has shown it to be a line that at once leads from Allen and bends and twists away: a silly, squiggly, sideways line that queers Allen's influence.

For the conclusion of this chapter, I am going to briefly examine Akhavan's second film, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (dir. Desiree Akhavan, 2018), which I think explores the relationship between queerness, time, memory and children further. On the surface, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* tells the story of Cameron, an American teenager who is sent to a religious gay conversion camp after being caught

having sex with her female best friend. At the camp, 'God's Promise', Cameron is expected to take part in group therapy and prayer to 'cure' her 'same sex attraction.' In her one-to-one therapy sessions Cameron is encouraged to fill in a diagram of an iceberg, where the tip is symbolic of her deviant sexuality, and the larger section below the water are the possible and imagined reasons for her attraction to other women. The pseudo-therapy eventually runs its course for Cameron who, at the film's conclusion, leaves God's Promise with her two friends from the camp and into an uncertain future. Like *Appropriate Behavior*, the film's protagonist experiences flashbacks where her past crosses over into the present, rupturing the film's chronology. In fact, the past is invoked throughout the film, for example in its 1990s Montana setting; the diegetic use of the 90s 4 Non Blondes song 'What's Up?' that the friends dance to; and even in Cameron's last name, 'Post', which always evokes the feeling that what she is doing now is affected by an event she will be perpetually looking back upon. Even the conversion therapy itself, which Anna Coatman defines as 'backwards' in her review of the film, feels as if belongs to another time.⁵⁸ This is only a feeling, however, as conversion therapy, of course, continues to this day.

While Akhavan plays with the form of the romantic comedy in *Appropriate Behavior*, the coming-of-age genre is equally negotiated and worked over in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. The teenagers are expected to leave the camp when they become heterosexual and conventional members of conservative American society or, in other words, when they have fulfilled the criteria of appropriate adulthood defined by the camp, and in the homophobic world beyond. The camp's notion of childhood and adulthood is flawed from the offset, as Peter Bradshaw notes in his review of the film, that *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* is a 'coming-of-age

⁵⁸ Anna Coatman, 'Dire Straights', *Sight and Sound*, October 2018, pp. 36, 36-38.

movie where nobody comes of age. They have all pretty much come of age before the film starts'.⁵⁹ But, of course, according to the homophobic imbedded psyche of God's Promise, they still need to 'work through' their same sex attraction to reach the marker of conventional adulthood: heterosexuality. Unlike other films in its genre that follow the trajectory where teenagers learn lessons about love and relationships, for example *The Graduate* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1967), *The Breakfast Club* (dir. John Hughes, 1985) and more recently *Boyhood* (dir. Richard Linklater, 2014), in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, the teenagers have already learned these lessons. Instead they are told to revisit the past and relearn, re-grow up in the 'correct' way.



Figure 5.17. Cameron and her friends leave God's Promise.

As I have shown in this chapter, the notion of 'growing up' is necessarily tied to heterosexuality, meaning that those who do not or cannot fit this chronology are

⁵⁹ Peter Bradshaw, 'The Miseducation of Cameron Post review- coming-of-age in the glare of prejudice', *Guardian*, 5 September Lady Loser Comedy' 2018
<<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/sep/05/the-miseducation-of-cameron-post-review-coming-of-age-in-the-glare-of-prejudice>> [accessed 7 September 2018].

rendered anachronistic, out of time, off the line as Ahmed writes, and in a perpetual childlike state. Like Sirin at the end of *Appropriate Behavior*, Cameron ends the film in transit, nonetheless. After she and her two friends escape God's Promise, they sit in the back of a truck, facing forwards, as it moves along the road into their uncertain future (Fig. 5.17.). With their backs to their destination, and to their future, the trio are fixed on the road they have travelled: as the film has explored, and like in *Appropriate Behavior*, the past is where the attention of the protagonists is focused. The friends' direction and movement means that by looking in front of them, they are paradoxically looking to their past and to God's Promise. As the truck moves forwards, they move backwards. The importance of the past, of what is behind, is foregrounded.

Moreover, the motif of political progression implied in this image is also ruptured by the position of the characters. The blues and reds in the shot pick out and emphasise the 'Clinton and Gore' sticker in the truck's window, a time marker that roots the scene in the 90s. The sticker denotes hope for the future and a desire for change, a change that came in 1993 when the Clinton administration began, ousting the conservative Republicanism of George H. W. Bush. But the promise of this change strikes something of a hollow note, as the hindsight of the film's audience understands the lack of change that the administration brought. Further, the presidency of Donald Trump, which began during the making and release of the film, adds a melancholic note to the end of the film in the knowledge of the president's homophobia, and Vice President Mike Pence's support for conversion therapy in the USA today.

The relationship Akhavan has depicted with time and memory in both these films reflects and is informed by her relationship with Allen's influence. In both films, Akhavan depicts her protagonists moving, travelling and progressing. For Sirin, it was sideways, rejecting both the linear forward trajectory of heterosexual maturity that I

argued tapped into Kathryn Bond Stockton's notion of the queer child, and growing sideways. And in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, Cameron and her friends move backwards, paradoxically, into their future, their eyes facing forwards but looking backwards from where they came. In both cases, Akhavan's relationship with Allen is reflected: not a straightforward influence, but rather a sideways, and backwards engagement. The importance of Allen's influence cannot be separated from Akhavan's work. In its progression forward into new material and new voices and ideas, Allen's impact is referenced and acknowledged: looking back while moving forwards; sideways but always away.

CODA

FORGETTING WOODY ALLEN

This thesis has been the first comprehensive study of Woody Allen's impact on contemporary cinema. It is an influence that is complicated by the nearly 30-year old accusations surrounding Allen's personal life, which continue to resurface with the release of each new film, and in a contemporary climate that seems, for the time being at least, to be reassessing the work of men in the film industry that have been accused of or in many cases found guilty of sexual violence. The approach of this thesis has been to acknowledge this discomfort, in particular the way in which filmmakers influenced by Allen have responded with unease. This has been done through a focus on Allen's most influential film, *Annie Hall* (dir. Woody Allen, 1977). I argue that contemporary filmmakers' return to the film in some way mirrors Alvy's own compulsion to return to Annie, or at least his memories of their relationship.

In the first chapter, I considered how memory and nostalgia functions in *Annie Hall*, using psychoanalytic theory to unpack Allen's presentation of these issues. Chapter Two highlighted the compulsion of nostalgia by analysing Allen's post-*Annie Hall* films, *Anything Else* (dir. Woody Allen, 2003) and *Whatever Works* (dir. Woody Allen, 2009), and the peculiar state of Allen being influenced by his own work. The three chapters after this looked beyond Allen to contemporary American filmmakers who have all acknowledged Allen's impact on their work. I presented different examples of how Allen's influence is manifested. Chapter Three posited that Lena Dunham's *Tiny Furniture* (dir. Lena Dunham, 2010) and *Girls* (HBO: 2012-2017) figure Allen's influence in terms of a series of literal and metaphorical heavy objects while repeating Allen's depiction of racialised characters as 'other'. The fourth chapter

showed a more successful handling of this impact, with an exploration of Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach's *Frances Ha* (dir. Noah Baumbach). I suggested that their combination of copying and distancing themselves from Allen's work is best imagined in terms of a dance and employed dance scholarship to explore this idea. The film's most progressive and radical departure from *Annie Hall* is Frances's failure as a heterosexual lead, failure being interrogated as another way to understand Allen's influence. Desiree Akhavan's *Appropriate Behavior* (dir. Desiree Akhavan, 2015) was explored in Chapter Five: its embrace of queer time shows the most successful handling of Allen's influence.

The Me Too era has seen the tide turn once again against Allen, and the continuing momentum of the movement suggests that there will be little or no chance of a return to grace for the filmmaker, at least in the US. While it is true that Allen continues to make films, there has been unprecedented action taken against him and his work. Allen's most recent film to date, *A Rainy Day in New York* (dir. Woody Allen, 2019), while still showing in continental Europe— Europe continuing to be something of a safe port in the middle of a storm for Allen—was shelved by Amazon, its distribution company. Likewise, it is unlikely that his upcoming venture, *Rifkin's Festival* (dir. Woody Allen, 2020) starring Gina Gershon and Christoph Waltz, will be released in the US. Moreover, Allen's memoir, *Apropos of Nothing* (2020), was dropped by its publisher, Hachette, following a walk-out of staff and a public outcry. One of these voices was Ronan Farrow, Allen's son, who had published his book on his breaking of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, *Catch and Kill* (2018), with Hachette. Ultimately, the memoir was published by Arcade Publishing, provoking a journalistic frenzy based on Allen's accounts of what happened in the early 1990s and the inevitable taking of sides as to whose account was to be trusted.

In her review for *The Guardian*, Hadley Freeman condemns those who distance themselves from Allen, including publishers, writers, and actors, arguing that this ‘bulldozes through any concept of due process.’¹ But she also notes how obtuse Allen can be as he continues to make films and jokes about older intellectual men sleeping with young (and sometimes very young) women. *A Rainy Day in New York*, for example, features such a relationship. The *New York Times* review by Dwight Garner described the autobiography as ‘incredibly, unbelievably tone deaf on the subject of women.’² Equally, Ryan Gilbey of the *The New Statesman* hails the autobiography as the finest of Allen’s works in 20 years, whilst acknowledging the ‘dismaying lapses of tact, taste and judgement’ that he suggests will ‘sway anyone still on the fence about loathing Allen.’³ Such lapses include the repeated description of actresses in his films as ‘beautiful’, and lamenting the halted career of comedian Louis C. K (who briefly left comedy after admitting to sexually harassing many young female comedians). The reviews seem to suggest a sense that Allen is his own worst enemy; that his words, while often witty, cement him as, at least, an old-timer caught in a changing Hollywood cultural landscape.

His best jokes in the memoir are often thought-provoking and frequently poignant, reminding me of why I love so many of Allen’s films: I felt that familiar urge to return to my favourite ones. But, as is the case with nostalgia, I am reminded that I am not remembering clearly. I have become accustomed to the feeling of contradiction

¹ Hadley Freeman, “‘Do I Really Care?’: Woody Allen Comes Out Fighting”, *Guardian*, 29 May 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/may/29/do-i-really-care-woody-allen-comes-out-fighting>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

² Dwight Garner, ‘Woody Allen’s New Memoir is Sometimes Funny- and Tone Deaf and Banal’, *New York Times*, 26 March 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/books/review-apropos-of-nothing-memoir-woody-allen.html>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

³ Ryan Gilbey, ‘Woody Allen’s Memoir Is As Witty As It Is Problematic’, *New Statesman*, 20 May 2020 <<https://www.newstatesman.com/Apropos-of-Nothing-woody-allen-review-memoir>> [accessed 21 May 2020].

and disunion when engaging with Allen's work, with the dichotomous experience of simultaneous pleasure and discomfort, of pleasant familiarity with queasiness. Despite any hopes I had to the contrary, Allen's autobiography embodied this very combination. Clearly, Allen is still as funny, poignant and intriguing as ever, but his words do nothing to help erase the discomfort some of us have with his work in retrospect.

Given the vast amount of writing about Allen's life, in particular the accusations against him and the question of his guilt, it is right and fair that he should be able to speak back. Allen is under no obligation to make anyone feel comfortable about an event he continues to deny happened. He is within his rights to log his life in any way he chooses. It is not his job to be conveniently silent. But as I finished reading *Apropos of Nothing*, I admit that I was disappointed that he wasn't able to finally make me feel comfortable, to make me feel less shame and less guilt about watching his films. The autobiography, in the end, did exactly what it said it would on the front cover, it addressed nothing, or at least changed nothing about how I (and it seems many reviewers too) feel about him. But even though Allen's work is struggling to find a home, his influence pervades.

While Allen's films are unlikely to be released in the US again, let alone be nominated for any major awards, their influence was certainly felt in Noah Baumbach's Academy Award-nominated *Marriage Story* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2019). Baumbach's film tracks the divorce of Charlie (Adam Driver) and Nicole (Scarlett Johansson), and the pain, humour, sadness and absurdity that arises from their separation of assets and the legalisation of child custody. Echoes of two of Allen's more recent break-up stories, *Deconstructing Harry* (dir. Woody Allen, 1997) and *Husbands and Wives* (dir. Woody Allen, 1992), are clearly felt. The contrast between

Charlie's beloved New York and Nicole's favoured, glamorous yet vapid L.A. evokes much of Allen's oeuvre, particularly *Annie Hall* itself. The presence of actors used by Allen, like Wallace Shawn, Scarlett Johansson and Alan Alda, is familiarly and comfortingly Allenesque. *Marriage Story* feels, looks and sounds like an Allen film with Allen players, but crucially without Allen himself.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons the film was so successful: it has all the best parts of an Allen film without the element that cinemagoers and reviewers now find uncomfortable, the presence of Allen himself. In a *Guardian* review of *Marriage Story*, Peter Bradshaw alludes to Allen's influence on the film, an influence that he calls 'overwhelming.'⁴ Perhaps it is overwhelming because to engage with Allen now is too awkward an experience, one with too many unanswerable questions. This is reflected, Bradshaw notes, in the way *Marriage Story* has been written about, in particular the way critics have often side-stepped the clear, unavoidable and pervasive presence of Allen:

It is only a few microseconds into the film when you realise who it's indebted to, whose DNA it's built around. A funny movie about divorce, about movies, TV, theatre? About the contest between New York and LA? With elegant, souffle-light montages showing men moving into sad apartments or shopping with their kid? And ageing showbiz-veteran parents hosting soirees with people singing? When I saw this first, I scribbled down a quote from Play It Again Sam: "My lawyer will call your lawyer"; "I don't have a lawyer – have him call my doctor." It could be that the disputed status of Woody Allen may create a crisis of critical sayability about *Marriage Story* and its antecedents, and other movies besides, a problem concerning the implied approval of a mention.⁵

Bradshaw's words imply that even mentioning Allen in reference to influence is an issue for contemporary filmmakers. The films I have chosen to explore in the second

⁴ Peter Bradshaw, 'Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Divorce,' *Guardian*, 15 November 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/nov/15/marriage-story-review-noah-baumbach-adam-driver-scarlett-johansson>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

⁵ Ibid.

part of this thesis are examples of what Allen-esque films look like without him at the auteurist centre. As this thesis shows, this is tricky work. While Allen's films have recurring themes, motifs and even recognisably re-appearing actors, the most pervasive element is the presence of Allen as actor, walking and talking on the screen, or Allen as director, directing the camera in ways that have become synonymous with his work. We are, after all, always aware of Woody Allen while we are watching a Woody Allen film: he is there from the very beginning of his films in the classic Windsor font, more often than not accompanied by the jazz music that signals his presence.

The films analysed in this thesis remove Allen from the centre and replace him with a young woman. After *Frances Ha*, Gerwig went on to co-write *Mistress America* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2015), again with Baumbach. The film focuses on a lonely college student, Tracy (Lola Kirke) (perhaps a reference to *Manhattan's* (dir. Woody Allen, 1979) young woman) who is finding life in New York difficult until she is taken under the wing of her would-be step-sister Brooke (Greta Gerwig). After this, Gerwig made her directorial debut with *Lady Bird* (dir. Greta Gerwig, 2017) (which she also wrote), about the strained, painful, and close relationship between strong-willed adolescent, Christine 'Lady Bird' McPherson (Saoirse Ronan), and her equally resolute mother, Marion (Laurie Metcalf). She then wrote and directed *Little Women* (dir. Greta Gerwig, 2019), the adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's novel of the same name, which depicts the life of the four March sisters, as they negotiate love, loss and growing up against the backdrop of post-Civil War America. Akhavan's first film after *Appropriate Behavior* was *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (dir. Desiree Akhavan, 2018), where Cameron (Chloë Grace Moretz), a young lesbian woman, is forced to go

to 'God's Promise', a conversion therapy camp for young people, until she finally escapes with her two friends upon the film's conclusion.

It may initially seem strange to register Allen's influence on stories about young women, especially when one considers Allen's current reputation. But who better to speak of stories of failure, of anxiety, of the problems of identity, assimilation, fear and sexuality than a young woman? In Allen's films, they are almost always seen through the fetishizing eyes of his male protagonists: be it the college professor as in *Husbands and Wives* and *Irrational Man* (dir. Woody Allen, 2015); or their partner, who acts as a quasi-father figure, for example in *Manhattan*. Even in seemingly benign relationships, such as Cliff (Woody Allen) and his niece Jenny (Jenny Nichols) in *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, the adolescent girl is depicted as precocious and with an uncomfortable knowledge of adult life. After spending a day together at the cinema, Cliff confides in Jenny about his love life and sexual relationships. Despite young women featuring so heavily in Allen's films, we know little if anything about the reality of their lives, but only about how men see them. Gerwig and Akhavan's depictions of young women, however, allow them to be silly, to fail, to make mistakes and to be childish. In placing young women's lives, including their failures, at the centre of their films, Dunham and Akhavan demonstrate a leap away from Allen.

Over the last few years, and especially in the years that I have been writing this thesis, the significance of the figure of the young woman has risen: the cultural, social and environmental shifts experienced through the 2010s has prompted a number of activists, mainly young women, to mobilise others and draw attention to the challenges our world is encountering. One of the most prominent is Greta Thunberg, the climate activist, who at aged 17 was the youngest ever *Time* person of the year in 2019 and has already had a book published about her activism, called *No One is Too Small to Make*

a Difference (2019), as well as creating and spear-heading the global Youth Strike For Climate protests. Human Rights advocate Malala Yousafzai was the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2014 at age of 17. At age 18, Arielle Geismer founded 'Team Enough', a political campaign that works with American state lawmakers on gun control, and Aaron Philip, aged 18, is a Black trans disabled model who rose to prominence for her activism on social media, and advocacy for trans and disabled representation in the fashion industry. The recent Black Lives Matter protests saw many demonstrations organised by young women, including the march in Nashville that was organised by six freshman girls aged 14 to 16. This thesis is, of course, haunted by the presence of another young woman, Dylan Farrow, whose accusations against Allen when she was a child, while not proven in court, nevertheless permeate every page of this work.

I want to end this thesis hopefully by gesturing towards all of the new works written by these and other young women, women that take the greatest things about Allen's films and leave behind characters, attitudes, and narrative conclusions that we frequently find limiting or uncomfortable. Allen's transatlantic influence can be seen in Phoebe Waller Bridge's *Fleabag* (BBC Three: 2016-2019) and is certainly a fruitful area for further study. Like Alvy, the protagonist frequently addresses the camera and an unnamed audience. She confesses her complicated, messy thoughts about her romantic relationships, and in the second series she explores religion, faith, and death in a deeper way. While Allen's influence is keenly felt here, it is Allen via a detour of Dunham, and perhaps even contemporaries Gerwig and Akhavan. *Fleabag* is therefore an example of how Allen's influence can be mediated through this chain of influence of female filmmakers, pointing towards a fertile future of these films. It is time, perhaps, to look forward and not back at Allen, just as Annie walks away from Alvy,

intent on her new destination, but carrying with her with the lessons learned and, of course, the memories.



Figure 6.1. Annie leaves behind Alvy.

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