The Tension Between Modernity and Nostalgia: New York City Through the Black-Rimmed, Rose-Colored Lenses of Woody Allen

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**Introduction**

Filmmaker Woody Allen crafts his films in order to articulate the modernity present in New York City, but he pines for the modern moment of the past and thereby submerges his narratives in nostalgia for a period not yet lost. In constructing his pictures, Allen creates his own version of reality wrought from the tension between modernity and the past. This period is distorted by the ambiguous historical context and exists somewhat fantastically. A filmmaker by trade but magician by reputation, Allen also plays with spectator perception by employing tactics of misdirection in his films.

A Brooklyn-born filmmaker, Allen treaded across the East River to make films commemorating Manhattan. But in his pictures, Manhattan exists as much more than a mere locality. Rather, the city is included within the films throughout the entirety of the filmmaking process. Beginning with the drafting of the screenplay and through the capturing of the metropolis on film, New York City does not go unacknowledged. The urban space interacts with the film on multiple levels, existing as a member of the cast, as a vehicle through which thematic meaning is created and presented, and as a stage on which symbolic imagery rests and serves the foundation of story. Allen as he is known today cannot exist without New York, and the city’s feelings are indeed mutual.

A unique and specific conception of modernity serves as the backdrop for Allen’s films. His modern moment exists in New York City and features an idealized version of this reality. English professor and scholar Susan Friedman contends that varying definitions of modernism “reflect the standpoint of their makers” (Friedman 497). Allen’s modernity is certainly an expression of the artist himself, a romanticized portrayal that plays with the boundary between
reality and fantasy. This cinematic and historical moment is realized on film and is embedded in the narrative, providing a pathway through which the characters may develop assertions about themselves and their surroundings with regard to their particular period.

A parataxis\(^1\) exists in Allen’s employment of modernity. Initially confusion surfaces in his use of the modern when he is so overtly nostalgic. Why dub a film as modern? Why not make a period piece and dress and title the picture accordingly? However, Allen’s modern space is arguably an investment in and portrayal of the historical period the term suggests. But this is not an accurate representation of such a moment; this is not New York as it once existed in reality. In an interview with journalist Eric Lax, Allen describes his childhood disposition for “the fantasy of sophistication” that he envisioned at the site of the New York City skyline.\(^2\) Allen longed for access to the routines of Park and Fifth Avenue residents, punctuated by butlers, fancy clothing, nightclubs, cocktails, and piano bars. The contention that art in general must be superior to life “is one of the central tenants of modernism,” explains Peter J. Bailey, author of *The Reluctant Film Art of Woody Allen*, and he continues, “a concept which, in a roundabout way, assumes the compensatory capacity of aesthetic creation and the superiority of crafted art to gratuitous inchoate existence” (Bailey 47). Allen adheres to this modernist code in his art. His

\(^1\) Friedman discusses parataxis and forms definitional conjectures, “Parataxis—the juxtaposition of things without providing connectives. *Parataxis*: a common aesthetic strategy in modernist writing and art, developed to disrupt and fragment conventional sequencing, causality, and perspective. *Parataxis*: the opposite of hypotaxis in linguistics, thus the opposite of hierarchical relationships of syntactic units. *Parataxis*: a mechanism of the “dream work” in Freud’s grammar for the unconscious processes of disguised expression of the forbidden, indicating unresolved or conflicting desires” (Friedman 494). Allen’s temporal settings are socially and artistically placed beside the literal time periods of the filmmaker’s productions. Nonetheless, this actual reality goes largely unacknowledged in his films. A tension therefore arises between the seemingly modern era and its instinctive cling to the past.

\(^2\) Allen recalls his childhood to Lax in an interview, “The fantasy of sophistication gripped me early. Why, I can’t tell you. When I was a very young kid, it was not the pirate pictures I liked or the cowboy pictures, which thrilled my friends. I fell asleep at them. What turned me on at the youngest age was when the credits finished and the camera panned the skyline of New York. I imagined people in these Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue houses, involved in their lives, with their butlers and their valets and their breakfast in bed, dressing for dinner and going to nightclubs and coming back late at night. Supper clubs, cocktails, piano bars. That world for some reason, I don’t know what it was, clicked in for me, and that’s what interested me” (Lax 120).
city is idealized in his novel and imaginative way because this is how he knows it to be true; as scenery and subsequent interactions that trump real (Brooklyn) life, a lifestyle that exceeds actual reality in both glamour and practice.

But to implore the modern moment and to harbor nostalgia are not essentially mutually exclusive ideals. However, a tension nonetheless surfaces between the temporal and aesthetic constructs. Allen places himself at odds with time by making seemingly contemporary films and placing them in his fabricated moment. An amalgam of truth and fiction, the backdrop his characters occupy is at odds with actuality.

Allen also infuses narratives with nostalgia, which again becomes problematic as the filmmaker longs for an age that is seemingly ahistorical. Nonetheless, the auteur investigates the period by creating contemporary characters who share his devotion to the setting of old New York. Allen by design extends this window in time to his audience in order to strengthen his cavalry of retro proponents. Author and theorist Pam Cook investigates memory and nostalgia in cinema and suggests that such wistful films serve “to bring spectators closer to the past, to produce a kind of second-hand testimony that includes the audiences as witnesses to reconstructed events,” while also providing a “powerful emotional effect” for the viewer who becomes invested in the picture (Cook 2). Allen’s outlook is somewhat melancholy and his relentless fascination with death cannot help but provoke speculation from observers. Does Allen fear his own demise? Or is it the loss of his precious moment in time (or, in his mind) that he dreads? Allen can continue to extend his cultural and metropolitan epoch by perpetuating the setting on film. And though the filmmaker’s lens is not without a filter of anxiety and worry, Allen remains optimistic for the future of New York.
Furthermore, aspects of Allen’s stories are often not as they seem, beyond the questionable authenticity of the setting. Through his application of character, theme, and symbol as literary devices in his screenplays and as formal devices in his films, Allen leads the spectator down one path of understanding, before developing another avenue that will deem the former belief to be invalid. This notion of misdirection infuses each aspect of the filmmaker’s pictures by focusing the audience’s interest on one piece of the plot, be it a person or place or object, in order to distract their attention from another.³ This brand of deception may be attributed to Allen’s experience with magic. So, as a magician offers his bare hands to the audience before pulling a coin from the ear of unsuspecting participant, Allen toys with protagonists, underlying messages, and imagery in his films to suggest this before revealing that. Furthermore, the dialogue written by Allen, namely of comedic intent, also employs the strategy of misdirection. The comedian begins a joke and when it seems that the punch line has been reached, a sub-quip arises and the gag is now funnier and for a different reason than before. Misdirection inflates Allen’s narratives with intrigue and depth, while also supplementing the hilarity of the already humorous exchanges.⁴

Allen’s films, set in New York City, rely on the past but take place nowhere near that moment in time. The filmmaker gracefully executes nostalgic tales that masquerade as modern. Or, is it the other way around? New York City rests in the heart of the auteur, and so his films are x-rays for the public.

³ The auteur is notorious for capturing long sequences of dialogue and action with a single take. Though a seemingly realistic formal enterprise, such uninterrupted moments are read as unusual by spectators and challenge their temporal ability to concentrate on the subject matter. Moreover, long takes force the viewer to observe a certain, typically extended, portion of the narrative. This augments a potentially misleading story by investing screen time in one idea, rather than another.
⁴ *The New York Times* chief film critic A. O. Scott admires Allen’s uniquely magical filmic accents, “And there is that kind of patented fantasy stuff that Woody Allen does that no one else really does quite as well that you have to call a sort of absurdist intellectual vaudeville” (Scott 2009).
Character
New York City as a character in *Manhattan*

Woody Allen is indeed a highly innovative and unique filmmaker, an auteur with distinctive techniques and a fluid filmic ideology. The way in which Allen constructs his narrative and develops characters is progressive and reflects the thoughtful creativity of the auteur.\(^5\) Allen’s films are novel and original, but they are also highly invested in the past. Often recalling creative influences, both visual and auditory (musical) alike—from Ingmar Bergman to Groucho Marx to George Gershwin—Allen situates his films in the past, regardless of the literal chronological moment. The artist is inherently old-fashioned and so his films are cloaked in nostalgia as well. Thematically, Allen’s screenplays feature characters bound by routine and ritual. Such figures express an inability to change and, furthermore, a desire to remain the same, despite the evolution and development of those around them.

Beyond the stunted nature of the scripted narrative, the way the film is set (beyond the actual setting, which in many cases—and for the purposes of this exploration—is the city of New York) is highly nostalgic. Though a seemingly modern space, Allen captures the city in such a way as to characterize its timelessness. Iconic architectural images play as a lesson in history, and not as a contemporary showcase of an updated New York City.

As the urban center may be viewed as a seat of great enterprise and perpetual advancement, it seems that to film through a metropolitan lens is to explore that which is modern. This perspective, with a focus on the city itself, may be read as uniform with the

\(^5\) In *Annie Hall* (1977), in particular, Allen gracefully obliterates the proverbial fourth wall by looking into the lens of the camera and speaking directly to the spectator, and incorporates animation within his otherwise live-action film.
construct of the contemporary metropolis. Rather, Allen rejects development and change, like the characters he creates and often portrays. This disparity between the setting and the narrative, between the backdrop and the characters, allows for the creation of a poetic juxtaposition within the mise-en-scène of the films. New York represents modernity and evolution, while the development of the remaining characters—particularly and typically the protagonists of the films—are often psychologically delayed and cling to the past. In this way, New York functions as a banal antagonist, but also as the protagonist’s most loyal confidant. The modernity of the city is a betrayal to some, but Allen is continuously able to excavate and harness the nostalgia his loyal friend (the city) is capable of offering. A companion and eternal friendship is born.

To exist as a character in Allen’s films, a figure must embody both conviction and ideology. This personal fortitude will aid in the achievement of a developed being and soul. Even certain characters who appear not to possess such qualities ultimately do demonstrate themselves to be principled figures.

Allen’s characters are well-defined, as realized by the director’s carefully selected actors. In his article “From the World Viewed” (1971), scholar Stanley Cavell endorses the strength of on screen performances, “For the screen, a performer takes the role into himself,” and he then adds, “The screen performer is essentially not an actor at all: he is the subject of study, and a study not his own” (Cavell 346). This assessment makes way for the characters Allen creates. While they are not always entirely realistic, they certainly reflect a very specific subject, carefully crafted by the screenwriter.

As a writer and director, Allen is afforded the unique position of envisioning the ultimate portrayal of the character on screen as he conceives the role on paper. Furthermore, his artistic manifestations of New Yorkers and outsiders alike are significant and help to mold the story
accordingly. Chief film critic of The New York Times A. O. Scott recognizes Allen’s apt incarnation of metropolitan citizens and beyond, observing that the director offers “very precise insights into different kinds of people in New York and elsewhere” (Scott 2009). Allen’s characters are realistic, by virtue of their thoughtful and consistent characterization; they are “not the kind of character an author creates, but the kind that certain real people are: a type” (Cavell 347). Always apt and occasionally peculiar, Allen’s cast exists in the reality of the auteur’s body of work.

Allen is recognized for casting a particular troupe of actors and actresses—Diane Keaton, Mia Farrow, and Tony Roberts, among others—but in his films, the director’s most revered thespian is the city of New York itself. The characterization of the city facilitates complex interactions between the films’ protagonists (often played by Allen himself) and the metropolis. While it is difficult to outwardly observe Manhattan’s behavior, the city’s intentions and treatment of its citizens, and closest friends, are made clear by the dispositions and conduct of the characters.

German sociologist Georg Simmel theorizes of the way individuals interact with the metropolitan city in his article “The Metropolis and the Mental Life.” Simmel claims, “The nineteenth century may have sought to promote, in addition to man’s freedom, his individuality (which is connected with the division of labour) and his achievements which make him unique and indispensable but which at the same time make him so much the more dependent on the complementary activity of others” (Simmel 11). Despite striving for autonomy, the modern era demands a reliance on others, and likewise an investment and dependence on the city itself. This is exhibited in Manhattan (1979) by Allen’s protagonist Isaac Davis.
Allen himself portrays divorced television writer Isaac Davis in *Manhattan*. The city is introduced at the very beginning of the picture with iconic, black-and-white images of Manhattan’s most notable landmarks, interspersed with less famed locations; though the localities are nonetheless revered by devoted city dwellers like Isaac who are able to view the beauty rendered by, for example, The Empire Diner on 10th Avenue, or the Downtown fish market when it opens at dawn, or the Peter Pan cleaners in Midtown that promises reliable one-hour service. The diverse collage of images is synchronized with George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue,” classical tunes used to complement the likewise timeless imagery. By displaying an image of Central Park in the spring before he shows a side street blanketed with snow, Allen comments on the assortment of landscapes available and the audience each selection is meant to attract. While the Park may be a symbol within the borough of tranquility, a public backyard, it extends beyond the city as a recognizable locale to non-New Yorkers as well. The anonymous road, however, is a beacon of intimacy in the fast-paced metropolis of Times Square, the Empire State Building, and the Statue of Liberty, and is reserved only for those capable of developing this type of relationship by virtue of their local address. These citizens appreciate the beauty of the seemingly banal.

The filmmaker employs the montage effect as an expression of modernity, and to engage with residents and out-of-towners alike in a conversation about the significance of the locales. Allen also expresses through filmmaking the relative importance of the relationships between the array of images depicted. New York University Cinema Studies Professor Robert Stam explains, “The alchemy of montage, for the Soviet theorists, brought life and luster to the inert base materials of the single shot. The montage-theorists saw the filmic shot as being without intrinsic meaning prior to its placement within a montage structure. The shot gained meaning, in other
words, only relationally, as part of a larger system” (Stam 38). The use of seemingly similar imagery is itself a gesture toward those privy to the variety of pictures displayed. A New York resident views the images present in the montage as clashing, whereas a tourist sees the sequence as harmonious. Thus, the resident reaps the psychological and emotional benefits of the editing. Each image is different and intends to elicit a certain response. The montage functions to “strategically [manage] the spectator’s cognitive and visual processes through the analytic segmentation of partial views” (Stam 38). In contrast to the New York City resident, the tourist sees the totality of the frames as a single nod to the city they visit. Furthermore, the employment of the technique itself weaves the modern moment with the frames in black-and-white, an aesthetic practice of yore. Due to the method of manufacturing the cuts used between images, this editing technique becomes apparent, as compared to the effects of more seamless editing strategies, which usher the viewer into a more fluid display. By revealing the transitions, the spectator becomes aware of the mechanism needed to create the art. The mechanical focus includes the apparatus within the image, and thereby infuses the pictures with modernity. Allen opens his film with this conjecture and makes use of the practice in many of his pictures. That which is seemingly banal, but is nonetheless urban, is in fact a movement towards modernity and to old New York. Isaac then adds words to the visual poetry.

Isaac dictates the opening chapter of his new novel over the monochromatic images of the city. The writer struggles to appropriately articulate his read of and dedication to New York:

“Chapter one. He adored New York City. He idolized it all out of proportion.” Uh, no. Make that “He romanticized it all out of proportion. To him, no matter what the season was, this was still a town that existed in black and white and pulsated to the great tunes of George Gershwin.” Uh, no. Let me start this over. “Chapter one. He was too romantic about Manhattan, as he was about everything else. He thrived on the hustle, bustle of the crowds and the traffic. To him, New York meant beautiful women and street-smart guys who seemed to know all the angles.” Ah, corny. Too corny for a man of my taste. Let me try and make it
more profound. “Chapter one. He adored New York City. To him, it was a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture. The same lack of integrity to cause so many people to take the easy way out was rapidly turning the town of his dreams.” No, it's gonna be too preachy. I mean, face it, I wanna sell some books here. “Chapter one. He adored New York City, although to him it was a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture. How hard it was to exist in a society desensitized by drugs, loud music, television, crime, garbage…” Too angry. I don't wanna be angry. “Chapter one. He was as tough and romantic as the city he loved. Behind his black-rimmed glasses was the coiled sexual power of a jungle cat.” I love this. “New York was his town and it always would be.”

Isaac settles on a romanticized, nearly fictitious,\(^6\) rendition of the city, making a declaration of strength and passion. In wavering between scrutiny and praise, Isaac must traverse time and space and decide where he would like to position himself chronologically in New York. The writer resolves to define the city through his rose-colored corrective lenses, forsaking that which is real and current. The romantic view for which he campaigns can be located only in the past and only on screen, a superlative image offered to the old Hollywood actors and actresses featured against the idyllic backdrop of the often swanky and always sophisticated New York, New York. Simmel, a social theorist, offers an evolved approach to the consideration of man in the city, “Man is a creature whose existence is dependent on differences, i.e. his mind is stimulated by the difference between present impressions and those which have preceded” (Simmel 11). Simmel suggests that man is highly invested in variation and change. Isaac, an author of a different order than Simmel, deviates from this assessment of the metropolitan man and instead exploits his own ideology in the city. His existence is solely invested in the past. Historical representations of Manhattan and, likewise, dated portrayals of life in the metropolis are of paramount significance and should serve as models for contemporary citizens, as they do

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\(^6\) Woody Allen recognizes the fantastical metropolitan portrayal that exists in his films, “I feel I owe nothing to reality in my movies in that sense. That's my vision of the city and I’m creating a work of fiction, and that’s what I want to create” (Lax 218). Peter J. Bailey agrees, “The Manhattan of Manhattan turns out to be a fantasy projection so narcissistically magnificent and pure that it can live on only in art” (Bailey 57).
for Isaac. Thus, Isaac’s emotional and psychological development is hindered, and he remains uninspired by more modern representations.

And so, a relationship of dependence is born: New York cannot exist without Isaac, and Isaac cannot exist without New York. Without the words of the author (and moreover, the vision of the filmmaker) this version of the metropolis, perhaps idealized beyond recognition, remains hidden in the depths of nostalgia. Isaac injects life into Manhattan with his words and by adopting the city as his own. Or is it the city who adopts Isaac? In the absence of Isaac’s interpretation and subsequent portrayal of New York, the more angry landscape he describes prevails, allowing for the decadence of the metropolis to surface. “Chapter one” serves as a reminder of what once was, and what always will be in the eyes of Isaac. Without the protagonist, old New York fades into a historical abyss and becomes a fleeting memory, rather than Isaac’s reality.

The inverse exists as well: Isaac needs the city in order to secure his own survival. This is most aptly articulated through the protagonist’s relationships and the success, or lack thereof, of these unions. Isaac is introduced alongside seventeen-year-old Tracy (Mariel Hemingway), a high school student and the writer’s current girlfriend. Isaac’s friend Yale Pollack (Michael Murphy) and his wife Emily (Anne Byrne Hoffman) join the couple at a nightclub, clad in dim lighting and cigarette smoke. The nightclub setting, as formatted by Allen, radiates the essence of the old New York that the filmmaker and protagonist strive to resuscitate and sustain. The

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7 Woody Allen’s New York is unrecognizable to real-life-city-dwellers. The director acknowledges more realistic portrayals of Manhattan but asserts his own vision, ‘‘Well, I love the city and have always loved it, and whenever I have a chance to show it in a flattering way, I do. People have said to me, ‘We don’t know New York as you show it to us. We know the New York of Scorsese; the New York of Spike Lee we understand.” I selectively show my New York through my heart. I’m always known as a New York filmmaker who eschews Hollywood and in fact denigrates it. No one sees that the New York I show is the New York I know only from Hollywood films that I grew up on—penthouses, white telephones, beautiful streets, waterfrevts, going through Central Park on carriage rides. Locals say to me, ‘Where is this New York?’ Well, this New York exists in Hollywood movies of the 1930s and 1940s. The New York that Hollywood showed the world, which never really existed, is the New York that I show the world because that’s the New York I fell in love with” (Lax 218).
cinematography and space are dynamized by the smoke that pervades the lounge, surrounding the patrons enjoying the retro atmosphere. Furthermore, the use of black-and-white film bestows the setting with character and elucidates the materiality of the process, as with the use of montage editing at the onset of the picture. Black-and-white cinematography has been relegated to near obsolescence with the advent of more advanced—and vivid—materials. Likewise, New York as a site of jazz, cigarettes, and late nights will fade without continued use. Allen and Isaac work together to ensure the relevance of the medium and the midnight locale.

While socializing in the nightclub, Emily extols the young Tracy’s beauty and Isaac retorts with a historical, rather than superficial, assessment, “But she’s 17. I’m 42 and she’s 17. I’m, I’m older than her father. Can you believe that? I’m dating a girl wherein I can beat up her father.” Tracy is included in the outing perhaps to aid in the campaign for old New York. She is a young spirit, as the protagonist reminds his friends. Later, Isaac begins dating Yale’s former Philadelphia-born mistress Mary Wilkie (Diane Keaton), who, by the film’s conclusion, reconciles with Yale and leaves Isaac emotionally stranded. In an act of desperation and romantic affirmation, Isaac too attempts to reunite with his former flame and (literally) runs to Tracy.\(^8\) The now-18-year-old is still invested in Isaac but she leaves him for an opportunity abroad, though she promises to one day return.

More than 30 years her senior, Isaac seems to be an unlikely suitor for the adolescent Tracy. Mary, conversely, is of Isaac’s generation and thus is most fundamentally presented as an appropriate companion in the wake of Tracy’s blind youth. While the pair often express conflicting opinions regarding literature and art, Isaac and Mary’s conversations are stimulating and age-appropriate. Outwardly, Mary is certainly a seemingly more proper mate for Isaac.

\(^8\) The extended shot that tracks Isaac’s sprint to Tracy formally resembles a similar concluding sequence in François Truffaut’s *Les quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*, 1959). In this way, Allen continues to reference the past in any manner at his disposal.
However, their incompatibilities grow to outweigh their superficial harmoniousness. Upon their first meeting, Mary cites her (inferior) urban origins as cause for her views that conflict so drastically with Isaac’s. “I’m just from Philadelphia, you know,” Mary explains. Through her defense, Mary separates herself from New York and from the values and ideals of the city; and in this respect she separates herself from Isaac, too. This distance is asserted throughout the film, further developing the character of New York. Isaac’s relationship with the city is one of longevity and deep kinship. For Mary to invest so much of herself in a locale other than New York suggests an egregious fracture from Manhattan and from Isaac. This introduction of conflict foreshadows the demise of their eventual relationship.

Aesthetically, the mise-en-scène presented in *Manhattan* lends to Isaac’s immersion within the metropolis and likewise facilitates Mary’s departure from the island. The role of Isaac as a New York resident is one of passion and devotion. The writer harbors an undying love for the city and he is featured as subordinate to extravagant images of his surroundings in order to aesthetically illustrate this relationship. After going for a midnight walk, Isaac and Mary sit on a bench overlooking the 59th Street Bridge. The structure trumps the frame and dissects it horizontally, underscoring its presence and its ability to welcome visitors and residents alike into the city. Tranquility prevails. Though commotion inevitably exists on the bridge and around the figures who admire the structure, a harmony (and symphony, performed by the New York Philharmonic) encapsulates Isaac in the city that belongs to him. Isaac looks ahead in awe, but the audience does not see his face; for the subject of the frame (and film) is not Isaac and his love interest Mary, but rather the film’s true protagonist New York, the genuine object of Isaac’s affection. Isaac and Mary are dwarfed by the grand structure, and the Manhattanite would prefer no other proportion.
Mary’s inorganic relationship with the city to which Isaac is devoted is evidenced by her behavior and by the way she is observed against the backdrop of Manhattan, presupposing the fracture of Isaac and Mary’s bond. While Isaac perpetuates an undying unity with New York, Mary often reminds him and those around her that she is from Philadelphia and thus functions on a different cultural and intellectual wavelength than that of the Big Apple residents. Mary confirms her assertion by meeting Isaac’s illustrious imagery with a collision of chaos and disorder. Their relationship is destined to fail. The representations of the characters indicate their compatibility—or irreconcilable differences—with New York City and with Isaac, alluding to their propensity for success.

As Isaac travels through Manhattan’s Central Park with Tracy at his side in a horse-drawn carriage, grandiose images of the New York City skyline decorate the frame. The carriage rides off into the metropolitan expanse as orchestral music swells. However, this moment of intimacy, both with the city and with Tracy, is abruptly obstructed by a cut to a scene in Mary’s apartment where she argues with Yale to the tunes of a ringing phone and barking dachshund. Mary begins in the kitchen where the right half of the frame is masked by the wall, leaving her illuminated in the doorway, underscoring her irritation and symbolizing her inability to “fit” within the confines of the island. The absence of a musical backdrop accentuates the rather callous language heard as Mary and Yale argue. Mary scurries back and forth around her apartment. With a single uninterrupted take, the camera tracks and chases the Philadelphian as she darts off screen, nearly escaping the enlightening grasp of the lens.

The lighting techniques used also help to substantiate the discrepancy between the characters. Isaac and Tracy are seen under dark, homogeneous light, creating a romantic and intimate mood. In opposition, Mary and Yale fall victim to high contrast lighting, featuring
harsh, severe shadows. The former couple embraces whereas the latter deteriorates. Mary’s life as it is told to the audience is one of pandemonium and disruption. The organization of the frame that encapsulates Mary indicates her inability to coexist with the metropolis and, by extension, with Isaac.

Mary, too, falls victim to Simmel’s classification of the dependent effects of the 19th century metropolis. While she aims to escape the clutches of the urban space, she cannot overcome the mental and psychological facets the city provokes in its residents (loyal or not). Mary’s character arc is punctuated by a chronic attraction to superficial relationships with fleeting men in her life. While she is certainly very self-assured and poised, this ability to define herself and to find comfort in that definition is not done so without the presence of a man; initially, that man is Yale, and soon after Isaac follows. Furthermore, Mary often refers to two other significant figures in her life: her ex-husband Jeremiah (appearing only for a moment as Wallace Shawn, and described as “devastatingly handsome”) and her analyst Donny, whom we never see. Mary invests herself greatly in these men, and in their attention and seeming affection for her.

Moreover, Mary clings to Philadelphia and to the notion of home as a life preserver. In times of trouble or discomfort, Mary regresses and reverts to her origins (“I’m from Philadelphia”), separating herself from the city to which she has committed herself. Each character in Manhattan is nostalgic, but Mary’s sense of longing is misdirected. Mary yearns for Philadelphia and not for New York, and so her nostalgia conflicts with Isaac’s. Mary is a product of the metropolis and despite her profound individuality and sense of self-worth, her emotions and actions are ultimately dictated by the behavior of those around her. New York and
its social and mental affectivities are injected into each component of Allen’s films, as seen through the characterization of Mary.

Mary is seen as a disruptive character, perpetually at odds with Manhattan, while Tracy’s interactions with the city are in the pursuit of the life and development of the metropolitan character, aiding in Tracy’s own growth and presence within the story. The audience meets Tracy early in the film when she sits in a nightclub with Isaac, Yale, and Emily. This scene is preaced only by the opening montage and introduction to the character of New York, as narrated by Isaac. Tracy’s closeness to Manhattan is indicated by this sequential proximity; it is as if Tracy is worthy of being uttered in the same breath as “Manhattan,” whereas Mary is not introduced until considerably later in the first act of the story and must be kept at a distance from the city, for she is capable of spoiling it. Isaac’s selection of Tracy may not be so ill-fitting or unusual, after all. Tracy may be an adolescent, but New York has supervised the entirety of her development, psychologically and emotionally. She attends a prestigious Manhattan private school and it can be assumed that she has lived her entire life on the shores of the Hudson. When depicted, Tracy is seen with Isaac doing as New Yorkers do: the couple eats Chinese food in bed out of take-out containers, they browse at a museum, and—in a more unusual activity and at Tracy’s request—they ride in a horse-drawn carriage through Central Park. Swelling orchestral music follows the young girl, and she too is idealized.

Tracy loves New York and, by extension, Isaac too. Isaac’s interest in Tracy may also be derived from the girl’s association with New York. Their relationship is symbiotic in this way, rather than mature and healthy. Isaac’s feelings waver, however, and he tries to push Tracy away in order to make room for Mary. In doing so, Isaac distances himself from Manhattan. Tracy reveals to Isaac that she has been offered an opportunity to study acting in London, but
that she would rather stay with him in New York. In an act of metropolitan-denial, Isaac encourages Tracy to leave him and to leave the island. After a tumultuous period with Mary, Isaac recognizes his error and attempts to rekindle his relationship with Tracy. However, when he reaches her, he discovers that it is too late; Tracy has accepted the opportunity abroad and will depart for six months. Tracy has reluctantly consented to leave Manhattan, only at the behest of Isaac. But her hiatus is only temporary, for not even Isaac’s moment of metropolitan disloyalty could dissuade her for good. Tracy is a New Yorker at heart, and loves the city that raised her. For this reason, she will never really leave. Isaac feels similarly, though he lost sight of himself briefly and risked tarnishing this relationship. But Manhattan is as forgiving as it is true, and Isaac will always have a place in the city.

Isaac cannot separate himself from the city of New York, and, when he tries to, he ultimately crumbles at the hands of the metropolis. Isaac’s relationship with Mary is secondary to the story told about New York. His story is New York’s story, as told by Isaac. In ending his relationship with Tracy in order to be with Mary, Isaac nearly obliterates his bonds with both Tracy and Manhattan. Ultimately, however, he concedes in realizing that he does not want to remove himself from the security of his city, emotionally or physically. After defining the modern metropolitan resident’s grappling with individuality and dependence, Simmel suggests that “the relentless struggle of the individual [is] the prerequisite for his full development” (Simmel 11). Isaac’s selection of Mary rather than Tracy is indicative of his internal battle. Isaac must first traverse the mental and emotional complexities of living in the city before he may be fully developed in this way. Upon reconciling with Tracy, Isaac’s metropolitan maturation has taken place. His return to Tracy is a return to New York. Yale says of his close
friend, “He can’t function anywhere other than New York, you know that.” And so, Mary proves to be dysfunctional, as is Isaac away from the safety rendered by the city.9

Alvy Singer as New York City in Annie Hall

In Annie Hall (1977), the title character responds to comedian Alvy Singer (Woody Allen) at a health food restaurant in Los Angeles after he has asked her to move back to New York with him and get married, “Alvy, you’re incapable of enjoying life, you know that? I mean, your life is New York City. You’re just this person. You’re like this island unto yourself.” Alvy’s life as New York City and his relationship with the metropolis is marked by an asocial philosophy on life, placing Alvy at odds with the personable Annie Hall (Diane Keaton), his (now) ex-girlfriend, and with those who surround him. Alvy is an island, and he is New York.

As a result of his metropolitan immersion, Alvy creates a defensive layer to protect him against anything that may interfere with his status as a New Yorker. Simmel describes the method of protection adopted by the city resident, “Thus the metropolitan type – which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications – creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it” (Simmel 12). Alvy’s mental and emotional characteristics are indicative of a city-

9 Annie Hall (1977) protagonist Alvy Singer (Woody Allen) also interacts with the character of New York and thereby represents the personality of the metropolis to the audience. While walking down the city streets distraught over lost love, Alvy approaches and is approached by citizens who offer him unsolicited advice to aid his troubles. The residents Alvy interacts with do not need contextual information; they know the details of Alvy’s past and present and are disinhibited about lending their opinion. New York City born author Samuel Delany reverses this type of contact in his article Times Square Red, Times Square Blue (1999), “Visitors to New York might be surprised that such occurrences [of contact] are central to my vision of the city at its healthiest. Lifetime residents won’t be” (Delany 126). The mutual support rendered from unconditional communication is integral to the foundation of the city. Allen in his creative way exaggerates this point and uses the tool to showcase a literal conversation with New York City. But, as Alvy may be read as a human incarnation of the city itself, a surrogate for New York City, the lovesick character’s dialogue is really an internal monologue made audible for the spectator.
dweller. Though due to the intensity of his outward fear for and repulsion towards that which is non-New York, it appears that the character of Alvy and the character of New York City in Annie Hall are one in the same. Alvy’s protective organ is so profound an aspect of his being that it interferes with his growth entirely.

Annie Hall presents an apt text through which to consider both Alvy and the city, and their interaction (or, as I will argue, their unified being). Throughout the film, Alvy narrates portions of his past and his subconscious. In one flashback in particular, Alvy attempts to define the cause of his peculiar personality:

My analyst says I exaggerate my childhood memories, but I swear I was brought up underneath the roller coaster in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn. Maybe that accounts for my personality, which is a little nervous, I think. You know, I have a hyperactive imagination. My mind tends to jump around a little, and have some trouble between fantasy and reality.

Alvy blames his personality disorders on his environment, though he later concedes, “I’m comparatively normal for a guy raised in Brooklyn.” Alvy suggests that New York City is responsible for his behavioral abnormalities, and thus he exploits the metropolis as a method of defense. Furthermore, to suggest that he is relatively normal given his roots, Alvy again adopts a defensive stance and thereby uses New York as a form of security. Alvy’s fickle stance with regard to the city is representative of an internal battle with himself.

Alvy overexerts his metropolitan protective organ when he and Annie fly to Los Angeles, indicating the comedian’s mental and physical inability to leave New York. Alvy is asked to appear on a television program in Los Angeles and, despite his aversion to the west,\textsuperscript{10} he and Annie fly across the country. However, Alvy’s forces of resistance surface; he becomes ill and is forced to cancel his television appearance. According to Simmel, the metropolitan resident is

\textsuperscript{10} In Annie Hall, Alvy complains to a friend about the unfulfilling life that exists in Los Angeles, “I don’t wanna live in a city where the only cultural advantage is that you can make a right turn on a red light.”
highly sensitive to variations in stimuli. The theorist elucidates the consequences of such overstimulation and explains that when rapid shifts between milieus occur, the nerves respond violently and, as a result of remaining in a foreign environment, there is not “time for new reserves to form.” Simmel continues, “This incapacity to react to new stimulations with the required amount of energy constitutes in fact that blasé attitude which every child of a large city evinces when compared with the products of the more peaceful and more stable milieu” (Simmel 14). Los Angeles presents a sensory-overload for Alvy, and so he vomits at the thought of making any sort of cultural contribution while in the western city. Whereas a common New York resident may be merely put off by the very notion of vacationing and working in Los Angeles, Alvy, a human incarnation of this city, becomes utterly repulsed (and literally nauseated). Alvy’s heightened sensitivity displays his heightened relationship with his origins, and is thereby indicative of the true identity of his being.

Alvy’s demonstration of metropolitan mannerisms suggests a stronger association with New York City than a common resident may exhibit, particularly through the character’s attitude of indifference. Simmel argues that residents of the metropolis are inherently blasé with regard to their outlook on life and the way they consider “things.” The sociologist explains, “The essence of the blasé attitude is an indifference toward the distinctions between things. Not in the sense that they are not perceived, as in the case of mental dullness, but rather that the meaning and the value of the distinctions between things, and therewith of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless” (Simmel 14). Alvy is blasé to the point of morbid negativity. His

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11 “Just as an immoderately sensuous life makes one blasé because it stimulates the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all, so, less harmful stimuli, through the rapidity and the contradictoriness of their shifts, force the nerves to make such violent responses, tear them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserves of strength and, remaining in the same milieu, do not have time for new reserves to form” (Simmel 14).
air of indifference extends beyond material things to life. Everyone will die, he rationalizes, so what is there to be happy about?

The script exposes the protagonist’s removed and cynical nature early in the character’s life. Alvy’s mother brings the then-elementary-school-student to the doctor and cries over her son’s depression and refusal to do homework, chores, or anything at all. The doctor asks Alvy why he is depressed. “The universe is expanding,” he replies firmly before he elaborates, “Well, the universe is everything, and if it’s expanding, someday it will break apart and that would be the end of everything.” Alvy’s mother gestures frantically as she cries, “You’re in Brooklyn! Brooklyn is not expanding!” The doctor encourages Alvy to enjoy himself and to enjoy life.

Life is essentially meaningless to Alvy, in that it will all end soon. Alvy is unable to distinguish value between things, as Simmel describes, for he focuses only on the pain and suffering of others and on his eventual (and inevitable) demise. His pessimism may be attributed to his condition as the city, and Alvy’s melancholy perspective alienates more positive characters, like Annie.

Alvy and Annie argue about New York and about Alvy’s ideologies (which, to Alvy, are really one in the same). Annie asks, “What’s so great about New York? I mean, it’s a dying city. You read ‘Death in Venice.’” The book Annie refers to was a gift to her from Alvy, who only gives his girlfriend books with the word “death” in the titles. For Alvy, death is an important issue that forever rests on the forefront of his mind. The protagonist’s awareness of and fascination with death acts as a defense mechanism, as Simmel explains. Alvy not only

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12 Alvy leaves no room for questioning his personal ideologies, and opens Annie Hall with an old joke and philosophy on life: “Uh, two elderly women are at a Catskills mountain resort, and one of ‘em says: ‘Boy, the food at this place is really terrible.’ The other one says, ‘Yeah, I know, and such small portions.’ Well, that’s essentially how I feel about life. Full of loneliness and misery and suffering and unhappiness, and its all over much too quickly.”

13 In Annie Hall, Alvy explains his attitude towards life to Annie when she accuses him of being unable to enjoy his own existence: “I can't enjoy anything unless everybody is. If one guy is starving someplace, that puts a crimp in my evening.”
harbors this morbid outlook, but he imposes such negativity on others as well. He campaigns for the metropolis and exercises his role as the personification of New York City. These pessimistic personal philosophies contribute to Alvy’s fear of intimacy, another attribute embodied by metropolitan residents.

In Annie Hall, the protagonist showcases and considers his past relationships. As a New York intellectual, Simmel suggests that Alvy’s companionships are invested in the metropolitan rationale. Simmel lends to the categorization of the mental life of the city citizen, as compared with that of the small town resident, “The essentially intellectualistic character of the mental life of the metropolis becomes intelligible as over against that of the small town which rests more on feelings and emotional relationships” (Simmel 12). Alvy’s relationships are logical and not emotional. In examining Alvy’s former love interests, the spectator may detect that each is an apparent union of convenience. Alvy, consciously or not, strives to ensure that his romantic endeavors do not succeed, and therefore he continues to contribute to his own morbidity and depression. Alvy’s relationships are poisonous chicken soup for his self-tormented soul.

Alvy first revisits his relationship with Allison Portchnick. Upon meeting Allison at an event in New York City, he evaluates her immediately to determine their compatibility, “You, you, you’re like New York, Jewish, left-wing, liberal, intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, the socialist summer camps and the, the father with the Ben Shahn drawings, right, and the really, y’know, strike-oriented kind of, red diaper.” In objectifying Allison, Alvy—a self-proclaimed “bigot for the left”—dispenses a stereotype that ultimately appeals to him; he fragments the politically active young Jewish girl, stripping her down to only that which is entirely superficial. Allison is a logical companion for Alvy. He need not speak to her or spend time with her (and though perhaps he does, the audience does not see this), as he can already
determine that, based on his first-impression-assessment, Allison “makes sense” and is a rational partner for the likewise Jewish left-wing liberal intellectual. It is acceptable to the audience to not see interactions between Alvy and Allison beyond their first meeting because their companionship is logical, by virtue of their parallel intellectual, religious, and social ideologies, as Alvy determines. And so the film immediately skips ahead to their already established relationship. This makes sense and does not require a leap of faith on behalf of the spectator who, like Alvy, deems this pair valid. Alvy, as any other metropolitan member would, evades emotion by dissecting Allison and determining the rationale behind their union. But despite their kinship, Alvy will soon sabotage his relationship with Allison for the sake of the city.

Alvy’s subsequent two relationships, the first with the intellectual Robin and the other with an unnamed entertainment journalist, are practical but fleeting. Both Robin and the journalist are intelligent and, like many other Allen-written characters before and after them, display their knowledge with a linguist prowess (a good vocabulary with a lot of big words). While this is initially indicative of like-mindedness, each woman proves to be an unbecoming mate for Alvy. While having difficulty in bed one evening, Robin becomes agitated and tells Alvy that her analyst suggests that she should live in the country and not in New York. Alvy, frantic at the thought of living outside the city, outlines his fear of the country, crickets, and of not having a place to walk after dinner. Robin’s request is traumatic for the city-bound (and moreover selfish) Alvy. The journalist also proves to be too abrasive for the smoothness of Alvy’s narcissism and cynicism.14 The New Yorker copes by mocking the precocious reporter.

14 The journalist likens musical artists to God, and Alvy is left bored and uninterested. Allen, greatly influenced by filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, certainly does not attribute any characteristics of divinity to Bob Dylan or Mick Jagger, and so the journalist character is formatted to be an ultimate nemesis for Alvy. However, her initial over-articulated vocabulary may suggest that they will be well suited. Allen and Alvy work quickly to dispel this perception.
When Annie calls for help with a large insect who is holding her bathroom hostage, Alvy jumps at the opportunity to leave the journalist behind. All of Alvy’s relationships explored in *Annie Hall* are the products of rationale and not of emotion (perhaps this in part accounts for the reason they all end), except for Alvy’s relationship with Annie. Alvy and Annie prove to be a most perplexing pair, and the script reveals that she is highly dissimilar from the other women Alvy has been with. Annie says to Alvy, “You really like those New York girls,” recognizing his romantic patterns. In addition to her Midwestern (Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin) upbringing, Annie also does not possess the intellect typically harbored (and readily displayed) by Alvy’s previous companions. As a result of these inconsistencies, Alvy departs from his sensible foundations as a New Yorker and behaves irrationally: Alvy and Annie play with live lobsters, they fly to Los Angeles together, Alvy later flies to Los Angeles again on his own to retrieve Annie, he rents and drives a car in order to see her, and finally, Alvy proposes marriage at a health food restaurant on Sunset Boulevard (and is rejected). Alvy’s abnormal behavior is provoked by his irrational choice of Annie.

Annie is also seen as a romantic anomaly for Alvy as a result of her kind, sociable, and outgoing personality. Annie is interested in meeting new people and forging emotional connections. After performing at a nightclub one evening, Annie is approached by Tony Lacey (Paul Simon) who invites Annie and Alvy to join him to “go meet Jack and Angelica at the Pierre” to have a drink.¹⁵ When Annie attempts to accept the invitation, Alvy reminds her that they have a “thing.” Annie’s extroverted conduct makes her a prime candidate for the type of socialization that torments Alvy. Likewise, while in Los Angeles, Annie marvels at the scenery and the cleanliness of her surroundings, while Alvy mocks the contrived and inconsistent

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¹⁵ The audience joins Alvy in the dark upon receiving Tony’s invitation. Who are Jack and Angelica? What is the Pierre? Tony manages to make a foreigner out of the city to Alvy, who is not familiar with these terms. Alvy panics while Annie is intrigued by the proposal.
architecture. \(^{16}\) Annie’s disposition clashes with New York as it clashes with Alvy; and so, she moves to Los Angeles, the city of angels that has made Alvy physically ill. Annie’s Chippewa Falls upbringing is representative of a more peaceful milieu than that of Brooklyn or Manhattan (or the remaining boroughs of New York City); her comfort in Los Angeles stems from her environment of origin. Throughout the film, despite their affection for one another, Annie is continuously placed at odds with Alvy and with New York. As a result, their relationship must fail.

As the film ends, so does Alvy’s chapter with Annie, and he is alone. All of Alvy’s relationships end ultimately as a result of his narcissism. Alvy portrays this inability to give of himself emotionally through encounters with both Annie and Allison. Annie is first introduced to the audience at a movie theatre where she is meeting Alvy. She arrives late and is ill tempered, explaining that she overslept, which caused her to miss her analyst appointment. As a result, she feels depressed. Irritated, Alvy replies, “You know what a hostile gesture that is to me?” Annie swiftly identifies the ridiculousness of his response, “You know, you’re so egocentric that if I miss my therapy you can only think of it in terms of how it affects you.” Alvy can only think of himself and lacks the capacity to consider another person in his life as a result of his relationship with New York City, which reigns supreme over anyone and everything else. He is consumed by New York and that is who he is; thus he is consumed by himself.

Later in the film Alvy reflects upon Allison and the deterioration of their relationship that he ultimately caused, conveyed on screen by a flashback. Alvy returns to an evening in which he interrupts a moment of intimacy with Allison. Alvy fixates on the conspiracy theory revolving the assassination of President Kennedy. Allison asserts herself and pleads with Alvy for his attention. A rant ensues until finally Allison confronts Alvy, “You’re using this conspiracy

\(^{16}\) “French next to Spanish, next to Tudor, next to Japanese,” Alvy observes.
theory as an excuse to avoid sex with me.” Alvy turns to the camera to address the audience, “Oh, my God. She’s right. Why did I turn off Allison Portchnick? She was beautiful. She was willing. She was real...intelligent.” In his soliloquy, Alvy begins to recognize his inadequacies as a person and as a companion. Why did he alienate such a seemingly suitable match? Unlike Annie, Allison is a good match for Alvy. To counteract this harmony, Alvy dismisses Allison in favor of political scandal. He lacks the ability to love another sincerely. Emotionally, Alvy is an island, and is at full capacity with love for himself (New York).

Ultimately, Alvy seeks to destroy any and all manifestations of intimacy that he encounters by either instigating conflict, as seen with Allison, or by selecting an inappropriate partner, like Annie. In essence, Alvy sabotages himself and removes any outlet for happiness that he may encounter.¹⁷ He does so in order to maintain a strong relationship with New York; but as Alvy is New York, a walking, talking, breathing metropolis, the maintenance of this bond is purely narcissistic and selfish. Fundamentally, he avoids relationships in order to avoid people. If Alvy can damage each of his relationships, then he can solidify his solitude in the city of eight million people. This inability to connect with others is a product of the city and a trait Alvy strives to perpetuate. So, why does Alvy continue to have relationships if he knows that they will not last? Because he needs the eggs.¹⁸

¹⁷ Alvy’s interference with his own happiness is not unlike the subconscious dynamic portrayed in Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960) between Norman and his late mother. Hitchcock’s film concludes with an assessment of the grim and destructive relationship, as assessed by psychiatrist Dr. Richmond: “And because [Norman] was so pathologically jealous of [his mother], he assumed that she was as jealous of him. Therefore, if he felt a strong attraction to any other woman, the mother side of him would go wild [and kill the girl].” Norman had suppressed the existence of his mother and eliminated (killed) opportunities for happiness and love when they arose, in order to protect his mother, who, to Norman, was still living. Alvy’s existence, though less violent, is similar. He intentionally disrupts periods of contentment for the sake of preserving his relationship with New York City and with himself.

¹⁸ Alvy concludes Annie Hall with a voice over narration regarding life and love: “I thought of that old joke, you know, this guy goes to a psychiatrist and says, ‘Doc, uh, my brother’s crazy, He thinks he’s a chicken.’ And the doctor says, ‘Well, why don’t you turn him in?’ And the guy says, ‘I would, but I need the eggs.’ Well, I guess that’s pretty much how I feel about relationships. They’re totally irrational and crazy and absurd, but I guess we keep going through it because most of us need the eggs.”
Manhattan is ultimately a ploy, a ruse of a film, that allows Allen to capture New York City as he knows it to be true, and disguise the picture as a romance. Isaac’s beloved, however, is not Tracy or Mary, but the metropolis itself. Cook proposes that historical pieces “claim to educate us about the past itself, imposing narrative order on chaotic reality” (Cook 2). Rather, Allen’s model of history casts the frenzied filmic plot over the tranquility of natural history. In this film, the real—as Allen conceives it—succeeds over the scripted story, which is subservient to the city. Author Peter J. Bailey contends with this assessment of Allen’s negotiation of the real and the cinematic, “The capacity for which Allen is indicting art in Manhattan is its ability to transform reality into something more morally coherent, harmonious, and beautiful than it actually is” (Bailey 57). Manhattan poses as a love song to a historical romance lost, but in reality is an anthem to the fantastical magnificence of New York, as told through images of opulent architecture, as well as more intimate, precious venues.

Likewise, Annie Hall, an earlier film and perhaps less ambitious in this way, personifies New York City with Alvy, rather than appointing the locale in its own role. Nonetheless, Alvy serves his agenda, the agenda of New York, throughout the picture. Moreover, the film presupposes the metropolitan debut in Manhattan when Alvy speaks to the locality via city citizens who stroll the streets. Alvy thereby locates the pulse of the metropolis that exists in each of its inhabitants and reveals a universal devotion on each of their behalves. As with the character of Manhattan, Alvy’s identity is misleading. Though his true soul is soon made clear and his intentions apparent. Alvy lives to serve Manhattan, and Manhattan in turn obliges Isaac.
Theme
The agony and the ecstasy; home in *Radio Days*

New York City is, in the cases of certain films, used as a vessel to convey a certain theme. Woody Allen’s films may be seen as similar in their use of recurring motifs and settings and, in some films, certain thematic commonalities surface. This method of self-reflexive reexamination further articulates Allen’s yearn for the past. Not only does the director assemble his films with metropolitan history in mind, but also with his own personal history alongside New York, which serves as a template for his stories. Despite frequent artistic consistencies, the setting and the theme are presented in a unique manner in each picture. These aspects of the narrative interact in a way that caters specifically to the story told by Allen, as it exists in New York.

*Radio Days* (1987) employs the setting of New York City as a means of exploring the notion of home through varying perspectives and specific locales within the metropolis. A nostalgic narrative, *Radio Days* recalls the golden age of radio in New York City as told through a series of vignettes, allowing for the investigation of multiple interactions with the medium of entertainment and with the city.

The film opens with two crooks (Mike Starr and Paul Herman) as they burgle the Rockaway Beach home of Mr. and Mrs. Needleman (Martin Rosenblatt and Helen Miller) while the couple is out at a movie. The phone rings and, to avoid unnecessary attention and commotion, one of the robbers answers, only to discover that he (well, Mr. Needleman) has been selected at random to participate in a segment called “Guess That Tune.” The burglars are
successful in identifying the melodies and win the grand prize. That night, Mr. and Mrs. Needleman return home to discover their apartment looted. The following morning, a truck arrives with their radio show winnings.

The narrative initially presents the home as vulnerable, introducing the private space as susceptible to intrusion and vandalization. The proprietors have left the home in favor of the theatre, an escapist activity, and so the residence is in turn disloyal to the couple. The radio, however, offers salvation for the couple and retribution for the (albeit financially minor) losses they incur; the radio show responds and acts as a courier, bearing a selection of prizes that the couple receives as a result of the burglary.

The location of Mr. and Mrs. Needleman’s abode is not inconsequential; the setting is Rockaway Beach, a neighborhood in Queens, New York, and the home neighbors the protagonist’s (and narrator) own digs. The introductory sequence in Radio Days sets the tone for the remainder of the film, which will navigate New York City on a larger scale and pay homage to the plentiful locales, which comprise the city and help to define residents.

The story’s protagonist Joe offers a particularly nostalgic portrait of home, as he narrates the film as an adult (whom we never see) reflecting on a time and setting that resonated profoundly with him; while in many ways the now grown man views his childhood home as an antagonist, the setting ultimately remains as a positive image in his mind. Joe introduces the setting of his story, “The scene is Rockaway. The time is my childhood. It’s my old neighborhood. And forgive me if I tend to romanticize the past. I mean, it wasn’t always as stormy and rain-swept as this. But I remember it that way. Because that was it at its most beautiful.” Joe presents the physical location of his account, as well as the time period in which it takes place, and situates both aspects in terms of himself. The narrative takes place in and

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19 The theatre may be read here as radio’s antagonist, and so the Needlemans are punished for their infidelity.
around 1942. This epoch is historically significant, and while history certainly invades the story—the audience witnesses a radio broadcast in the midst of the Pearl Harbor attacks, thereby showcasing an entertainment panic, rather than social or civil—that is not the designated moment; instead, it is Joe’s childhood. The story he will tell is in many ways, and certainly ostensibly, his story. Despite the fact that Joe explores the age of radio through the eyes and circumstances of others, his voice remains intertwined with these internal and personal accounts. The story of home is a story about Rockaway.

While the plot surrounding the radio may largely be attributed to Joe, the narrative also remains a universal story for everyone and by everyone, by virtue of the way it is told and the messages conveyed. The script boasts the name of the narrator on only occasion. Otherwise, his moniker goes unacknowledged. Therefore, Joe reigns as a banal narrator for the home and his notion of this entity transcends identity and location, though the importance of New York remains within this particular tale. Joe’s story is all encompassing and applicable to the collective. So, Joe is the orator of everyone’s story. Through his presentation, Joe seeks to reveal that while everyone may find their situation to be unique—and perhaps uniquely horrible and painful—things are never as they appear, particularly when dealing with the benevolent beast of the home. While agony may exist on the surface, it only serves to cloak the love, devotion, and care that rest beneath it. Joe’s home is his home, regardless of how torturous it may be at times, as he poetically portrays. His home is Rockaway. These are his introductory words and a declaration of what is his. Joe is comfortable calling Rockaway his own. And it is.

Joe’s Aunt Bea (Dianne Wiest) lives in the home of her sister (Joe’s mother), and while she is without a romantic companion and without a home of her very own, she is comfortable with her family in Rockaway but continues to excavate the city in search of a mate. One evening
in particular, Aunt Bea is very eager to go on a date with Sydney Manulis, who she met in the Catskills. While preparing for the date, Aunt Bea asks her sister if she may borrow her pin, which is designed to look like an anchor. Joe’s mother immediately condones the rental and encourages her sister to enjoy herself. Mr. Manulis arrives and takes Aunt Bea to Coney Island where they go roller-skating. However, the evening ends abruptly when Aunt Bea and her beau run out of gas while conveniently parked at Breezy Point. A radio broadcast announces that an alien invasion is taking place. Frightened by reports of interstellar domination, Mr. Manulis runs off, leaving Aunt Bea stranded.

Aunt Bea makes good use of the geography at her disposal in her brief relationship with Sydney, however those same surroundings ultimately cheat her, leaving her at home in Rockaway where she began. By meeting Sydney in the Catskills, Aunt Bea is satisfied by his state-sprawl and countryside activities. But perhaps their introduction outside of the city was an omen to be reckoned with. Aunt Bea dresses herself for the occasion of her first date with Sydney and accessorizes very thoughtfully, affixing an anchor pin to her lapel. The pin does not belong to her, as if to suggest that Aunt Bea has never considered setting sail without a mate, nor has she made such a daring ornamental insinuation. But Aunt Bea is optimistic, and now that she has met someone she has the confidence she requires to make the bold fashion statement. The anchor pin suggests her willingness to travel beyond the confines of her sister’s home in Rockaway and to explore the—ideally romantically fruitful—New York destinations before her.

A romantic hopeful, Bea continues to stretch her city legs while in Coney Island with Sydney. She once again attempts to assert herself by exploring the city before her, but becomes lost in the depths of the fog at Breezy Point. Initially this change of luck (and loss of fuel) seems to be an impetus for intimacy. But soon, aliens invade Aunt Bea’s date and she is no longer
secluded, but simply lost. Although she was once confident and her anchor pin is nearby, Aunt Bea overexerts herself geographically and is swept away by the current of the universe. In the comfort of Rockaway, Aunt Bea is invincible and well protected. However, upon her attempted escape she is harshly reminded of the sanctity of home, and of her home in particular. She need not explore the Catskills or Coney Island or the outer limits. Aunt Bea is safe and loved at home, and the anchor emblem need be her only outlet for travel.

Aunt Bea also explores the ever-trustworthy Manhattan when on a date with a man named Sy, but brings Joe along as a reminder of home. While in the heart of the city, Aunt Bea is the recipient of great success: she wins a radio contest, purchases a chemistry set (the most expensive one in the store!) for Joe, and treats her boyfriend and young nephew to a Broadway dance palace. The night is perfection and ideally is a sign of things to come for Aunt Bea, though she soon discovers that things are not as they seem. Sy is married but assures Aunt Bea that his commitments will soon end, leaving the optimistic couple free to be together. To Aunt Bea, Sy is trustworthy but she is represented as naïve. After their day together in Manhattan, Sy remains married to his wife and never rekindles with the falsely encouraged Bea.

Furthering her exploration and quest for love, Aunt Bea relies on the romantic Manhattan and her uneasiness is portrayed through her secondary companion Joe. The radio is instrumental in her enjoyment that day and allows for the group to engage in special activities by awarding Bea a cash prize for her participation. Aunt Bea exploits the radio to create and ideal backdrop for love and entertainment. Furthermore, she uses her winnings towards the purchase of a chemistry set for Joe, signifying the presence and use of science and the unknown. Aunt Bea will explore any and all devices in order to ensure her happiness; if she cannot sway Sy with love, romance, entertainment, or dancing, surely the science rendered by the chemistry set will
succeed in coming to her aid. Ultimately, Aunt Bea remains without a romantic companion, though with a great deal of love in her home. Aunt Bea’s tale is sad, but the comfort rendered by her family and home in Rockaway is optimistic and encouraging of the importance of one’s roots.

Sally White (Mia Farrow) also finds salvation in her home in Brooklyn. Sally’s origins ultimately save her life when she shrieks at the wrong place at the wrong time in the presence of the wrong (but ultimately right) Brooklyn-bred mobster. While working as a coat-check girl in a nightclub run by a member of the mob—as narrated by Joe—Sally is the witness to a hit on the club owner. Assassin Rocco (Danny Aiello) captures Sally and explains that she must too die in order to keep his illicit activities confidential. While riding in Rocco’s car en route to her demise, Sally complains of her bad luck. Rocco expresses similar sentiments and they soon discover that they share a past between 85th and 86th Streets in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Rocco laments over his obligation to kill someone from the old neighborhood. Nonetheless, Rocco invites Sally into his home where his mother reminisces about life in Canarsie and feeds the witness fresh Italian fare. Rocco’s mother asks her son where he will discard Sally’s body. In Jersey, of course. Rocco’s mother redirects her son, “Dump her in Red Hook [Brooklyn].” In the end, however, Sally is saved by her home and is given a new home on the radio. The former coat-check girl expresses her interest in entertainment and Rocco is able to offer her a connection in the radio industry. Sally lives on, and so does her career in entertainment.

Sally’s Brooklyn roots save her life. Had she been unable to reminisce with Rocco regarding their homes in Canarsie, she would be left to sink in Red Hook, or worse, New Jersey. Prior to Rocco’s concession, he strategizes with his mother, regarding the removal of Sally’s body. Rocco would like to “dump”—to use the parlance of the practice—the carcass in New
Jersey, outside of his comfort zone and away from his home. Rocco’s mother, feeling sympathy
for the Brooklyn-bred Sally, instructs her son to lay the young girl’s body to rest in a
neighborhood in Brooklyn instead, as if to grant Sally the respect she deserves as a Brooklynite.
Though upon further review and after pleading from a high-pitched Sally, Rocco’s heart softens.
Their common ground is enough to inspire trust in the witness, and so Rocco spares her.

Furthermore, Rocco aids Sally in expanding her home by offering her a spot on the radio.
As a radio personality, Sally not only establishes a new home based on her hometown—her new
home is on the radio and her hometown, and Rocco, have allowed for her to make this career
leap—but she also becomes a fixture in the homes of those within the radius of the radio
frequency. Sally’s success can be attributed to Rocco and thus to Brooklyn, and she is able to
share the importance of home with those who tune in to her broadcast.

From their elegant and sophisticated home in Manhattan, uptown residents Irene Draper
and Roger Daley (Julie Kurnitz and David Warrilow) host a posh radio show from their home to
the homes of others, including Joe’s residence where his mother listens intently. Aptly titled
“Breakfast with Irene and Roger,” the duo discusses the dealings of the local glitterati,
themselves included over breakfast. Joe describes the program and his mother’s relationship
with, or lack thereof, the posh pair, “There were two completely different worlds. While my
mother stood over the dirty plates in Rockaway, Irene and Roger ate their elegant breakfast over
the air from their chic Manhattan townhouse while they chatted charmingly about people and
places we only dreamt of.” Irene and Roger engage in activities reserved only for the elite and
dine on delectable meals over articulate (British accented) conversation, none of which Joe’s
mother can relate to imagine. Nonetheless, she listens.
Why is Joe’s mother so enamored of Irene and Roger? In her admiration, Joe’s mother questions the stability and legitimacy of her own home, though ultimately finds peace and happiness in Rockaway. “Breakfast with Irene and Roger” is of the first radio shows introduced in the film and is therefore used as a narrative plot point as well. In opening with “Breakfast with Irene and Roger,” the film questions the sanctity of one’s own home and offers an aptitude for comparison with the residence of another. The film ponders this matter throughout the entirety of the narrative. Is Rockaway valid? Is it important? Is it worthy? The method of examining one’s self and home is used as a narrative bookend; Radio Days begins by questioning the home, first regarding safety and then in terms of significance, and ends with an answer. The home of any individual or family is worthy, if for no other reason than that it is their own.

Radio Days also investigates worth and possession in conjunction with private and public spaces. Joe’s family owns his home, but do they want to? Is this space valuable? Furthermore, their home as a residence in New York City is significant as well, insofar as their physical notion of home extends beyond their four walls in Rockaway and to the metropolis proper. So, Joe and his family own New York City, and so do each of its residents. While the home is a private, privileged space that offers protection from the public world, New Yorkers are of a different breed and thrive on the integration of the two spaces. This perspective harbored by the citizens is progressive and modern and is indicative of their appreciation of their home (be it a brick house or over 300 square miles of land).
Mirror, mirror on the wall, who am I, after all? Identity in Alice

Allen explores and comments on identity, as manifested in relation to the metropolis, through characters’ affiliation with and feelings towards New York City. In Alice (1990), the protagonist’s placement in the city as chronicled by the New York filmmaker indicates her relationship with her surroundings and with herself. The character’s trajectory of self-discovery serves to influence and condone certain behaviors, which will ultimately lead her to salvation (in downtown Manhattan).

Alice (1990) observes the existence of Upper West Side Manhattan housewife Alice Tate, an image of wealth and superficiality. A mother of two, Alice consumes herself with myriad activities in efforts to maintain clean cuticles and manicured nail beds, a toned physique, and an adequate backhand swing to bolster her tennis game. The Tate family’s payroll also affords them a clean and well-decorated home and a table dressed with a home cooked meal every evening. Despite Alice’s perceived comfort within her luxurious milieu, she soon finds herself riddled with back pain and is directed to the services of Dr. Yang, a witch doctor of sorts living in Chinatown. After hypnotizing an ambivalent Alice, Dr. Yang offers his patient medical advice and a prescription of herbs, which he believes will cure an ailment that exists not in Alice’s back, but rather in her mind and heart. Alice soon embarks on an herbal journey of self-discovery and affirmation around the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

The mise-en-scène created in Alice is adorned with a carefully constructed wardrobe for the insecure protagonist, windows, mirrors, and other obstructions that intrude on the frame. These visual devices ornament the setting and convey a visual chronicle of self-enlightenment with New York City serving as the vehicle for this path. The images provide a story of
uncertainty and help to pave the way for Alice, who will reach conclusions about herself and about life; ultimately she will reroute her course.

The child of uncertainty, Alice is the daughter of an actress who had supported herself and her children by masquerading as others; Alice too does as she sees and behaves as she is directed. She asserts herself superficially, standing out as an individual only as a result of material possessions and appearance. Alice’s sense of self is indiscernible, as she delegates hired help to satisfy her duties as a mother and wife. When she complains of soreness in her back, she is sent to Dr. Yang’s Chinatown dwelling to seek his services. Dressed in red, Alice is hypnotized by Dr. Yang after she gazes into his black and white pinwheel. Alice’s wardrobe juxtaposes the earth tones that decorate Dr. Yang’s office, but she aligns herself with lampshades, curtains, and other such accents positioned within the space. Alice attempts to underscore her being with her rouged getup to secure her identity and to be recognized and known. Alas, Alice fails to be considered as anything other than an insignificant detail amongst the landscape of her life, just as the lampshades and curtains in the doctor’s office. Furthermore, Alice’s red accents greatly contrast the monochromatic pinwheel through which her mental state is altered. Here and throughout her life Alice is not highlighted, but rather she is at odds with her surroundings and with herself.

After visiting Dr. Yang, Alice is encouraged to go about her daily routine as usual. While waiting to pick up her children from school, Alice sits beside a man wearing a red tie and the two begin to interact. The man is Joe Rufallo and he plays the saxophone. The pair engages in conversation and Alice is unusually forward and direct. The housewife impresses Joe with her music savvy discourse and her ability to discuss the complexities of reeds and the harmonics of Coltrane.
Alice is superficial upon her cinematic introduction, and so she identifies with a man based on his wardrobe; both individuals wear red. Alice’s clothing is arguably her sole outlet for expression in the frivolous life of conformity that she has helped to create for herself (with the help of her husband, friends, and Manhattan’s Upper West Side). But even this mode of articulation is rooted in materiality, and thus is rendered disingenuous and shallow.

Alice approaches Joe as a result of his likeminded accessory selections. An image in red, Joe is deemed familiar to and compatible with the newly assertive Alice. They met previously with Alice dropped her book by Edna St. Vincent Millay, though the housewife was without the confidence needed to confront the man. Furthermore, the couple engages in conversation of a foreign subject matter to Alice; though, as a result of the herbal remedy prescribed by Dr. Yang, she is outwardly learned in the dealings of sopranos and tenors. Alice cannot and does not select to connect with an individual who shares her interests. Perhaps this is because she is unaware of her own values and ideals, and so she blindly goes along for the ride, be it to the Blue Note or to Bergdorf Goodman. Rather, Alice must find companionship through superficiality. While Alice may hope for an intellectual or spiritual connection with Joe, it is soon confirmed that the pair have little in common. Nonetheless, she pursues his company and prompts conversation, all based on the scarlet fabric hanging from Joe’s innocuous neck. After accepting an invitation from the musician to meet the following day to discuss harmonics and various jazz philosophies, Alice dissects the conversation with her friend, as she is perplexed by her bold behavior and influx of musical knowledge. Alice frets, “I have nothing to wear.” Alice is

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20 British poet Thomas Hardy once said that America had two great attractions: the skyscraper and the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay. The Englishman aligns the American poet with architectural modernity and arguably with the Manhattan cityscape, which is decorated with skyscrapers. Alice thus immerses herself in superficial aspects of the city.
motivated by material items and lacks emotional or intellectual depth. Her behavior is a product of her environment, so she does as the Upper East Siders do.

Joe invites Alice to attend the circus with him, an event to which she dresses in black and white; but upon their return to the city, Alice retreats to her crimson cloak. Alice’s outfit exists beyond the parameters of the visible color spectrum and so she too rests outside her comfort zone in black and white. This instance of physical alteration is indicative of Alice’s first attempt to change and take hold of her identity. Or, perhaps Alice is not comfortable in her non-metropolitan surroundings and no longer wants to be noticed as usual in her brightly colored clothing—and so, she blends. Later, when Alice and Joe are in Manhattan visiting Central Park, Times Square, and other logos of the city, she revives her red garments as a sign of her comfort in the city and as a return to habit, a habit of superficiality and insecurity.

The film concludes with a variation in red accents; Alice no longer aims to stand out in costume, but rather more important aspects of life are reserved for emphasis. While volunteering her time in downtown Manhattan, Alice dresses modestly, and the doors of residences and businesses of purer means and motivations are now highlighted in red, a far more deserving denotation than Alice’s four-figure wardrobe. Furthermore, Alice now elects to spend time with her children in hopes of providing them with the strength, security, and understanding their once unsure mother lacked (like Alice’s own mother). Alice plays with her children at a playground where a red swing set obstructs the frame, underscoring the significance of youth, leisure, and pleasure, attributes that Alice once neglected in her uptown existence. Alice’s consistent wardrobe attests to the question of identity present within the film, and her occasional modifications suggest an uncertainty that is negotiated upon the picture’s conclusion.
The composition of the frame in *Alice* further condones the ambiguity the protagonist experiences with regard to her sense of self; and so the picture is often obstructed, offering further detachment and separation between the camera and the wavering subject. Alice is thereby captured not as an organic citizen of Manhattan, but rather as a figure of uncertainty in uncomfortable surroundings.

Alice is a patient not only to Dr. Yang’s hypnosis but also to Dr. Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage through her cinematic development. Mirrors often impede the frame in *Alice*, acting as a mediator between the subject and her filmic rendering. Alice also spends a collection of on screen moments looking at herself in a mirror. This reflective (both with shiny glass and contemplation) journey literalizes the stage of human development and also imitates it by suggesting that Alice, an adult woman, undergoes growth at this time. French film theorist Christian Metz describes that the child, when experiencing the mirror stage, “above all perceives its own image. This is where primary identification (the formation of the ego) gets certain of its main characteristics” (Metz 822). Alice’s negotiation of her mid-life-mirror stage concludes with her discovery of a self. However, before reaching this point of growth, Alice must gaze into her compact mirror and reflective surfaces around town to truly gain an understanding of who she is. In this way, Alice is a child. The child identifies with itself as an object, Metz explains, and so Alice too begins to understand the fiber of her being. The mirror also separates Alice from the camera until she has completed her maturation.

Joe and Alice sit together in a café and drink coffee. As they discuss their respective passions, Alice focuses on her insecurities, rather than on her strengths and her abilities. Joe is encouraging and offers his own insights and motivations. The camera captures the couple’s reflection in a mirror throughout their exchange and does not rest directly upon the figures. But
when Alice accepts a proposal from Joe to spend an evening with him, the camera repositions itself. The lens falls upon the characters and away from the artifice of the reflective glass.

Only when Alice decides to take her life into her own hands and select her own path (rather than mindlessly following the one that has been paved for her on Madison Avenue) does the camera consider her worthy of capturing directly and without the mediation of another material object or surface. The reluctance of the camera coincides with the ambivalence of Alice. The two become one following Alice’s gesture of inner-strength and understanding. Alice’s consent to Joe signifies a greater awareness of the protagonist’s self. As she traverses the demands of the mirror (stage), she develops into an object. This growth condones her unmediated filmic appearance.

Contrary to the bravado Alice exhibits in the café when she agrees to spend a night with Joe, she weakens her grasp of control and, likewise, the camera places the subject at a distance once again. Alice panics when she pursues her plans with Joe and is upset and frazzled upon arriving at the agreed meeting place. Alice and Joe exchange words of distress and comfort, respectively. As the pair goes back and forth, rain falls on the dark night on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The camera rests before the subjects facing them at eye level. However, Alice and Joe are seated in the musician’s car and the windshield of the vehicle, splattered with precipitation, acts as a barrier. The windshield protects both the New Yorkers from the weather and the camera from the uncertainty and irrationality of Alice. The camera (and the spectator) is capable of withstanding the storm and the brutality New York occasionally administers. Alice, however, must be perpetually sheltered and protected, lest she loses composure.

Later, Joe kisses Alice. This moment of intimacy is realized on film from behind a barred fence. The strong, dark verticals interfere with the image and fracture the frame into
geometric renderings, rather than a complete picture. Alice too is incomplete and broken apart amongst her superficiality and indecision. This aesthetic division depicts Alice’s entrapment in her life and the imprisonment of her true identity, which remains to be discovered. Joe’s romantic gesture indicates his ability to offer Alice salvation, while the placement of the camera conveys Alice’s inability to be free and happy.

Joe ends his relationship with Alice, retreating to his original identity and life shared with his ex-wife. The pair, Joe now as a self-assured figure and Alice still a wealth of uncertainty, stands in a nightclub where Joe rehearses with a jazz ensemble. He leads Alice to an area where they speak privately. The wall behind them is painted to imitate a tropical beach setting. Joe’s confession is made before the exotic background so as not to betray the city. Joe explains to Alice that he had rehearsed his speech in front of a mirror. Previously, Alice had offered Joe invisibility herbs administered to her by Dr. Yang. Upon achieving transparency, Joe separates from Alice on Madison Avenue and goes to 96th Street to sit as a fly on the wall (an invisible man in a chair) in his ex-wife’s analyst appointment. He learns that she still cares for him, and he chooses to return to his life with her.

Joe’s confession is revealing, indicating both his uncertain sense of self and his security in redefining his identity, a course that Alice too must navigate. Joe returns to the mirror motif, which punctuates the story and his relationship with Alice. Joe stands before a mirror in order to determine who he is. What decisions will he—must he—make in order to achieve self-enlightenment? How will he explain himself? Who is he? Neither Joe nor Alice is quite sure. Furthermore, in outlining his dishonest activities, Joe provides the street address for the doctor’s office he visits. In doing so, Joe hopes to displace blame and implicate the city as a culprit and as an accessory to his deceitful behavior.
When Alice and Joe are invisible, they each attempt ascertain their senses of self, whether or not they are truly cognizant of this exploration. Alice elects to remain on Madison Avenue where she is familiar with her stylish surroundings, due to the amount of time and money spent on the upscale street. Joe, however, is more aware of his desires and opts in favor of emotion, rather than glamour. But while the intentions dictating Joe’s excursion may be more thoughtful than Alice’s relatively mindless adventure, his actions are suspect. Joe’s account of his incognito afternoon suggests the musician’s inability to discover himself without infiltrating the identity of another. By entering his ex-wife’s analyst appointment, he audaciously exposes himself to information that is not intended for his knowledge. Joe treats his identity crisis with a dose of existentialism and, ultimately, this is all he requires to reach a conclusion. Joe perpetuates this deception by making his farewell declaration to Alice not in New York City where they meet and reside, but rather in an ambiguous, foreign setting against a backdrop decorated with sunshine and blue skies. Alice must now return to the land of skyscrapers, rather than palm trees, and determine who she is.

Upon Alice’s introduction, she is figuratively alone in New York, though she is more literally constantly surrounded by others who tell her what to do and who live Alice’s life on her behalf. The spectator first meets Alice alongside a babysitter, housekeeper, masseuse, trainer, and decorator. The protagonist’s identity is not immediately revealed. The Manhattanite—this geographical information is clear, a facet perhaps more readily significant than the woman’s identity—shops on Madison Avenue, clad in fur, and gives her purchases to her driver to carry for her before continuing down the street. Only for a moment is Alice seen alone, but she never occupies the frame without the company of mannequins posing in store windows, her comrades of clothing. Then, while receiving treatments at a spa, Alice and her posh peers gossip about
others. When Alice complains of a sore back, both her trainer and her friend recommend the services of Dr. Yang, who she soon visits. Alice is presented at the onset of the film as always occupied and in the company of others (paid companions or otherwise).

Alice’s New York citizenship trumps her actual identity. Her initial behavior and communication with others signifies her characterization as a lost and unsure individual. In lieu of leading a life of fulfillment and purpose, Alice hires staff members to perform tasks which would otherwise shape her life and daily routine. So, instead, Alice only engages in activities that offer her pleasure and leisure. While at the spa, Alice is surrounded by likeminded contemporaries. The image of Alice with her friends directly follows the sequence featuring mannequins in store windows on Madison Avenue. And so, a comparison and pun of sorts is born. While Alice’s friends are living, breathing human beings, they are not unlike the fiberglass renderings living in the store windows. They share motivations that revolve around their appearances and engage in a perpetual visual conversation about wealth and fashion. Alice’s friends further display their lack of character when speaking disparagingly of others while at the spa. The women talk about other people in order to avoid investigating themselves. As a result, Alice is completely unaware of her own being. When visiting Dr. Yang, Alice attempts to resist his diagnosis and explains that she is a poor subject for hypnosis. Dr. Yang encourages Alice to rest her eyes on the pinwheel he has placed before her. The patient soon discovers that she is an incredibly apt candidate for such therapy, and she falls under Dr. Yang’s trance. Alice’s aptitude for hypnotism is fitting, as the subject lacks the stability and strength of mind to dictate her conduct, but she is unable to recognize this.

After undergoing Dr. Yang’s procedures, Alice applies makeup while gazing at herself in a compact mirror; she is then instructed to go about her day as planned. The Doctor’s orders are
clear (and kosher), “Mrs. Tate, Dr. Yang would like you to go through day as planned. Sudden changes are too impulsive. Mrs. Tate should take lunch with no shellfish. Then, at 2:30, she will take herbs.” Alice complies. That afternoon, while shopping at Valentino, she takes her herbs with a glass of water. Though her behavior is seemingly typical, Alice’s diagnosis and subsequent treatment provoke variation in her routine.

Dr. Yang speaks to Alice in third person, as if he is not addressing her directly. This format of communication differs drastically from the treatment Alice receives uptown. In Chinatown, a downtown territory, Alice is no longer an individual worthy of identifying. Rather, she is a patient and an unsure soul in need of discovering. Alice consumes the potion of herbs in hopes of connecting to her mind and heart, as Dr. Yang diagnoses deficiencies with these organs. A retail associate offers her a beverage with which to take her medicine, “Mrs. Tate, you wanted some water.” At the hands of Mrs. Tate on the Upper West Side, the Valentino employee meets every desire of her client. In Chinatown, however, Alice is the recipient of instructions.

Alice is outwardly the same as she was prior to her visit to Dr. Yang. She occupies the same metropolitan sphere and continues to dress her Uptown part, but now she behaves differently and is attractive to Joe. When picking up her children from school, Alice and Joe sit on a bench beside one another. Alice is incredibly forward and touches Joe’s face gently as she speaks to him in a soft whisper. Joe introduces himself at the beginning of their conversation and Alice continues to repeat his name throughout the exchange. Despite Alice’s vivaciousness and temporarily bold disposition, she maintains her insecurities and fails to introduce herself to the man; not once does she utter her own name, as compared to the nine times she articulates his identity. She may be forward, but she is no more confident. When later recalling the conversation with a friend, Alice insists that she was not speaking. “Coltrane. Who’s Coltrane?”
Alice ponders. “What’s that?” solicits her friend. “That’s what I want to know!” Alice remains perplexed by herself, maintaining her state of ignorance as introduced in the beginning of the film.

Alice again becomes insecure when informed of the professional success of a friend. As a result, she experiences feelings of remorse for an education not received. This un-intellectual metropolitan characterization is incongruous with Allen’s filmic New York identity. Alice reports of her friend’s success to her husband Doug (William Hurt), “Nancy Brill has been made a big deal on a TV show. She buys scripts now. I sent her flowers. I’m happy for her because she’s a friend, but I must admit I’m a little envious. How about if I took some kind of a course or a class or something? Now I regret I never went to college.” Alice’s husband is mostly unresponsive to his wife’s plea for wisdom and scoffs at her suggestion to attend classes.

Through Alice’s cry for knowledge, she seeks to define herself through a comparison with others, which leaves her disappointed and unfulfilled. Alice is still lost and timid, trapped in the blankness of her mind, though she attempts to move forward. Furthermore, Alice’s intellectual character arc is of great literary significance. Allen typically crafts the portrayal of his Manhattan residents as figures of intelligence and creative intent. Alice’s lack of collegiate enterprise and outward intellect is at odds with this depiction, and so she must transform herself to better suit her environment (and her creator).

Dr. Yang gives Alice invisibility herbs to allow her to exist in secret in the city, and while such a state of anonymity is not unfamiliar to the timid Alice, she may now pursue her desires privately. “Best way to get to know strange man is to observe,” explains Dr. Yang. “[Herbs] will enable Mrs. Tate to observe without being observed.” Alice is at first startled by her transformation. Her disbelief is logical, though she will soon realize that invisibility herbs or
not, her presence often goes undetected or ignored. In facilitating Alice’s disguise, Dr. Yang obliterates his patient’s identity so that she may develop a more extensive knowledge base and understanding of those she surrounds herself with, in order for Alice to reconstruct her sense of self.

Alice’s invisibility manifests itself figuratively in the face of stronger-minded individuals prior to her consumption of Dr. Yang’s herbs, which literally cause her to disappear. Alice and Joe make plans to meet and, in a moment (lifetime) of insecurity, she elects to remain in the safety of her Upper West Side home. Joe later calls Alice to confront her absence, and in doing so he encroaches on the privacy of her home, causing her to become flustered. Alice fields the musician’s phone call in the company of her husband. While she goes to great lengths to be stealth and to leave her activities undetected, Alice’s efforts are rendered fruitless; her husband is entirely unfazed by and uninterested in her conversation, adulterous or otherwise. Alice seeks to maintain the purity of her high-end home and to separate the less-refined Joe from her dwelling. Joe is forward and direct, like Alice under the influence of the herbs. But without the mediation of her medication, Alice is no match for Joe’s sense of self. So, she excludes him from her home.

Similarly, when Alice visits television executive and friend Nancy Brill (Cybill Shepherd) and suggests a semi-autobiographical plot for a television show, she is met with rejection. Alice proposes a plot revolving two sisters who were close as children but have since grown apart in adulthood. “Like you and your sister,” Nancy observes. Alice replies that this connection had not occurred to her. Nancy interrupts and tells Alice that her company is interested in less subtle “blood-and-guts stuff.” “They want sexy, unscrupulous, rich, [and] melodramatic,” she explains. Nancy is dismissive and harsh. But she is successful, an
achievement for which Alice harbors admiration and envy. Alice is completely unaware of herself, as exemplified by her pitch that she is unable to recognize as a (mundane) memoir. Those around Alice will not begin to notice or respect her until she provides herself with the same brand of consideration and attention. Through her attempts to manifest her identity through writing, as well as in her quest for approval and affirmation, Alice is again rejected. Society deems her life to be uninteresting. Alice’s New York City life is not gritty and thus is boring, a betrayal of Alice’s wealth. Her existence plagues her.

Invisibility becomes a physical reality for Alice upon her submission to Dr. Yang’s treatment. While under his herbal spell she witnesses both the rise and fall of man and experiences personal growth, as the Doctor intended. The rationale behind the invisibility herbs, Dr. Yang explains to the Upper West Sider, is to aid Alice in getting to know Joe. As the ultimate voyeur, Alice will gain access to information that may otherwise go unknown. For her first stop? The office of Joe’s ex-wife Vicki (Judy Davis), where Alice observes the former couple make love. This first dose of invisibility proves to be painful for Alice who later complains, “She’s a genius and I’m nothing.” Following her surveillance of Joe, Alice feels inferior and is no longer interested in pursuing a relationship with this man, as a result of her own lack of self-confidence. Despite the anguish Alice feels, she continues to exploit the herbs and her own curiosity by exploring the city.

Following an influx of confidence as a result of Joe’s continued interest, Alice resumes her relationship with the saxophone player and invites him into her world in which everything is transparent. Alice finds clarity through truth but quickly becomes invisible to Joe, who deviates from their romantic path. Upon consuming the herbs, the couple enters a taxi and they exit on Madison Avenue. The driver does not question his elusive passengers (“Jeez! Nothing shocks
New York cab drivers,” Joe contends declares). Alice harnesses her increasing self-awareness and, as a true Allen protagonist, she explores the city of New York at her disposal, before following her friends into a Ralph Lauren store.²¹ Alice and Joe then separate to realize their respective fantasies, eavesdropping and watching a woman change, respectively.

It is in the changing room of Ralph Lauren and in the company of her two friends that Alice gains access to the harsh truth she needs to provoke her development and sense of self. The ladies gossip, “Doug has been such a run-around for years.” “You say that, but I don’t know anyone who’s had an affair with him.” “He’s careful, but I’ve heard the stories. He’s a good-looking, rich, athletic man. You think he’s going to be satisfied with Miss. Mouse?” Alice’s life and marriage as she knows it to be true is utterly false and has been artificial for years, according to Upper West Side buzz. Doug has made aspects his identity invisible, like Alice, and he engages in adulterous activities covertly. However, the women are still able to define Doug superficially, rendering these traits of the utmost importance. Likewise, they provide Alice with a similarly surface-level designation. It is also at this time that, unbeknownst to Alice, Joe’s interest in the housewife goes awry in favor of his successful and intelligent ex-wife. Both Joe and Dr. Wang’s herbs betray Alice. But the city remains her oyster, or some kind of twisted playground through which she may inflict the pain that comes with knowledge upon herself in the pursuit of self-discovery.

Finally, Alice is innovative with her invisibility and acts upon the information she received from her friends in the changing room. Alice, clad in invisibility, attends a party at Doug’s place of business. There she follows her husband and another woman into the good-looking-rich-athletic-man’s office and watches them embrace. Alice reveals herself and

²¹ This excursion may be read as a nod to Annie Hall (1977) and likewise to the metropolis of that period, as clothing designer Ralph Lauren designed the wardrobe for the award winning film.
confronts the pair, who deny their actions. Doug cannot escape Alice’s knowledge, nor can he dodge the logic behind her attack, “The question is, why did you marry me?” Alice now understands who she is. Her feelings for Joe are a subconscious response to Doug, who is romantically an inept companion. Alice now has proof of his inadequacy and she may begin to move forward. The Upper West Sider is able to transcend the dishonesty she witnesses while she is invisible. She directs this knowledge towards a newfound power and self-enlightenment and towards downtown Manhattan, where she will be pleased to discover a community who shares values more akin to her own.

Following her adventures in herbs and stint with the saxophone, Alice is left alone in Manhattan. Dr. Yang closes his practice and returns east, a geographical opposite of the Upper West Side, offering Alice the utmost isolation. Likewise, Joe departs for the emotional inverse of the high school-graduate and retreats to his successful ex-wife. Alice’s metropolitan existence has been altered throughout her course with both men. With the departure of both Joe and Dr. Yang, Alice must now complete her metamorphoses and use her placement in the city as inspiration and motivation.

Alice walks alone down the streets of Madison Avenue, cloaked in fur and deep in thought, prime for an existential intervention. Now what? Fellow New Yorkers follow the path of the pavement and walk both behind Alice and towards her, but she pays them no mind in her pensive state. But when two women approach her as they exit their luxurious apartment building, visions in brilliant colors, discussing the nuances of their friend’s multiple liposuction surgeries, Alice halts in a moment of clarity. Alice is for a moment transported outside of herself, much like her spells of invisibility, and is able to witness her surroundings not as an Upper West Side resident, but rather as a foreigner in her own world.
Alice’s insightful moment is existential, as pioneered by French philosopher and playwright Jean-Paul Sartre. Scholar Stuart M. Brown, Jr. discusses the ideological application of Sartre’s contentions in the arts in his article “The Atheistic Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre” in the Journal of Philosophic Review, “Here and here only is located ‘the absolute truth of consciousness becoming aware of itself’; and ‘every theory which takes man out of the moment in which he becomes aware of himself is, at its very beginning, a theory which confounds truth’” (Brown 159). It is at this moment of identification that Alice becomes cognizant of what she has been and of what she now must become. “Existence precedes essence,” explains Sartre, and with the assistance of Dr. Yang, Alice is now equipped with the skills and experiences needed to adequately investigate herself and harness her essence (Brown 159). Brown elaborates on Sartre’s contention:

In a state of immediate apprehension, a self becomes aware of itself as conscious in and through the directly given presence of other selves. Such a significant moment has two dimensions: one dimension is defined by the limits of mere consciousness on the one hand and self-consciousness on the other; the second dimension is defined by the limits of the self whose moment it is and of the other selves directly confronted in the moment. The immediate quality of the moment as felt is anguish, forlornness, and despair. The suspension of the moment between the limits described is this quality of feeling, and the feeling is just this structured awareness. In the immediate awareness of such a moment, existence is apprehended to precede essence. Here consciousness is aware of creating itself, of coming to be what previously it was not. (Brown 160)

Alice exhibits this form of existential awareness in her encounter. She departs from her previous state of ignorance and is startled by her behavior. Throughout the film, she alludes to her desire for a more fulfilling breadth of activities through which she may express herself and aid others. She sees herself—without the use of a mirror on which she once relied—and recreates her character based on the obliteration of what she once was. Alice secures her happiness and
success as a human being—and apparently a philanthropist, as Alice is shown providing community service in downtown Manhattan at the end of the film—with this new insight.22

It is difficult for Alice to truly consider her state of being as it exists in Manhattan, as her lifestyle and the lifestyles of those around her are products of their environments. Allen tends to create characters who function in this way. What separates Alice thematically and structurally from Allen’s preceding and subsequent protagonists is her journey. She cannot leave Manhattan; Allen would never allow it. Rather, she must separate herself from her setting in order to achieve lucidity of mind, body, and soul. Alice’s superficiality and address are interchangeable, which requires an existential, critical lens on behalf of the New Yorker. As the narrative of self-discovery concludes, so does Alice’s previous Upper West Side chapter affixed adorned with furs, caviar, chauffeurs, maids, shopping, an unfaithful husband, and vacuous friends. A malevolent conversation between two such friends of Alice’s plays as a voiceover atop the image of the former housewife volunteering in downtown Manhattan with her children. “She's living downtown with the kids. You're not going to believe this. She does everything herself. Penny Gates said she spends all her free time with her kids, and she looks great.” “No cook or maid? Did she have a mental breakdown?” “That's my thought.” “Someone said she's a changed woman.” “Speaking of changed women, Gloria Phillips had face work.” “She's having an affair

22 The women who prompt Alice’s grand reassessment of herself are of Asian decent, suggesting a post-colonial layer to her stride towards the sanctity of a more modest and charitable personal ideology. Cinema scholar Richard Dyer offers “a study of dominance by the dominant” in his dissertation “White” (2000), by dissecting the culturally constructed category of whiteness. Fundamentally, Dyer proposes that whiteness is nothing and everything simultaneously. While black, for instance, is always identified as a color (see: “colored”), explains Dyer, white does not bear nor connote such an identity, and therefore it is everything, but also is nothing). This makes it difficult for white people to view whiteness, in the absence of a comparison. Alice is able to observe her materialistic tendencies, as they now appear in a foreign context, separated in this way from New York. Thus, a comparison is drawn, whereas the superficiality she surrounds herself with prior to this encounter blends harmoniously with the white women who are near copies of Alice herself. The foreign notion of the unknown is physically manifested here and Alice sees herself as independent from New York.
with her astrologer, isn't she?” “But she's a changed woman. Because you can't tell it's Gloria.”
Ironic prevailing and so does Alice.

**Love, or something like it in *Everyone Says I Love You***

Allen explores the theme of romance in *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996) through a transnational lens, and juxtaposes the beauty of New York with the pain of the city’s amorous residents.

*Everyone Says I Love You* offers an aesthetic forecast to the love and romance that infiltrates the New York narrative, as well as to the subsequent confusion that will also ensue. The film begins with music to the ears and flowers in sight. Both the musical genre and the floral motif punctuate the film and surround the characters. An opening montage\(^{23}\) satisfies the viewer’s attention amidst a musical interlude during which the voices of lovers Holden Spence (Edward Norton) and Skylar Dandridge (Drew Barrymore) are silent. Later, while seated in her bedroom, Skylar is placed before flower-patterned wallpaper, mimicking the previous montage.

The presence of flowers at the onset of the picture and then once again in Skylar’s room implies a historical significance and pattern associated with the characters and settings, while also suggesting the versatility (and deception) of the plants. The painted flowers that decorate Skylar’s walls link the character directly to her introduction and establish a relationship between the sequences. This connection, however, is capricious and irresolute. As the narrative progresses, Skylar will accept a marriage proposal (à la mode) from Holden, only to later reject the proposition in favor of another, and finally then to return to Holden once again. The

\(^{23}\) The montage that opens *Everyone Says I Love You* and ushers in the film also introduces the city of New York. As a setting and as a character once again, the role of the city in this film is similar to the way the metropolis is conveyed in *Manhattan* (1979). Moreover, the images that open *Everyone Says I Love You* function like those in *Manhattan*. This montage, dressed in flowers and love, is the romantic version, rather than romanticized, of the black-and-white *Manhattan* sequence.
decorative flowers on the wall—as opposed to those present in nature adorning springtime in New York City—are two-dimensional, simulated renderings. Their lack of authenticity is misleading, as is Skylar to the doting Holden. The flowers continue to betray the viewer who is provoked to read the imagery as affectionate, rather than as devious, and the complexities of romance are soon elucidated. Furthermore, flowers continue to obstruct the frame throughout the film and encroach on the positioning of the characters. This hindrance presents a playful, perhaps satirical reminder of both the underlying subject matter of the film, but also of the volatility of the emotion.

Beyond the suggestion of love and romance, the flowers that invade New York and the frame of Everyone Says I Love You serve as a reminder of the life of the city, with the added support of other likewise symbolic images. New York is alive with love, and likewise living figures appear on screen. The flowers and trees and other such scenery usher in the more figurative imagery of life. Like the flowers in bloom, a fountain aids in masking a portion of the frame, and the water that dances from the concrete brings the ornament to life. Also, the water, much like the flowers in the spring, proposes the notion of rebirth, new beginnings, and of life in the city. Furthermore, citizens who stroll down avenues and side streets burst into song and sing along with Skylar and Holden, as if members of a city-wide chorus. All are invited to attend the springtime celebration of love, and so they sing. Inanimate objects are also awoken for the festivities; mannequins in store windows perform at the sight of Skylar and Holden, dancing to commemorate their love. However, like the floral wallpaper, the mannequins attest to the artificiality of the emotion and to the hypocrisy of the display. Thus, the Manhattan frame throughout the film both demonstrates the romance that defines the characters, while also demolishing the notion that will ultimately lead to confusion for subscribers to the charade.
The flirtatious lens of the camera is coy in photographing the characters as they interact romantically with one another. In the opening sequence and song, Skylar and Holden sing merrily beneath a fountain. The camera peers from behind the fountain and steals glances of the couple. Later, in Paris while attending a Groucho Marx-themed Christmas party at the Cinémathèque Française, Joe Berlin (Woody Allen) and his ex-wife Steffi Dandridge (Goldie Hawn), clad in exaggerated mustaches and eyebrows, reminisce of past intimacy while in the company of a Christmas tree. Once again, the camera plays a proverbial game of cat-and-mouse with the couple and allows for the evergreen to mask half of the frame.

The camera in *Everyone Says I Love You* acts as a voyeur when capturing subjects on film, presupposing the games the characters will play with each other and exploiting the gaze of the camera, spectator, and figures on screen. The application of such an observant lens is highly invested in psychoanalysis and is most adequately explored by film theorist Laura Mulvey. Influenced by the philosophies of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Mulvey investigates the visual pleasure derived from film with an emphasis on feminist film theories in her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). Mulvey articulates the interest of cinema and spectator with the human form:

The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic. Here, curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world. (Mulvey 836)

Despite the fact that *Everyone Says I Love You* is overtly a musical by genre, and moreover a musical about musicals, Mulvey’s observations continue to reign true even in such moments of excessive rupture. Skylar and Holden, appealing human forms, exist on screen as subjects for
the gaze. Mulvey contends that narrative films reward the voyeuristic urge and in turn reward the spectator’s sense of likeness to the characters on screen. A perspective offers Skylar and Holden as the means of primary identification for the spectator. But the viewer soon finds the harmony of Skylar and Holden’s relationship in *Everyone Says I Love You* to be tainted, and so a refocusing or reevaluation of the subjects must take place.

The look cast upon Joe and Steffi differs in intent, though the functionality of a voyeuristic lens remains. Mulvey expands on scopophilia as an artistic and subconscious practice: “[Freud] associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. His particular examples center around voyeuristic activities” (Mulvey 835). To examine Joe and Steffi as they wax nostalgic provokes not a longing or narcissistic desire as with Skylar and Holder, but rather it addresses true voyeuristic tendencies in which one observes something private. Steffi has since remarried and leads a blissful life with an adoring husband. For the former couple to reflect on intimate times past is inappropriate and inherently private, not to be captured by the camera. The documenting of such a moment, as well as the soon-to-be-negated affection shared by Skylar and Holden, joins the tradition of confusion associated with love throughout the musical. Joe and Steffi’s love is resurrected while in Paris, a city defined by its passion, though their Manhattan origins contribute to the oddity perpetuated by the exchange. New Yorker love is not without complication, as told by the candid camera.

The look formatted by the subjective camera incorporates an element of reality to an otherwise fantastical spectacle. Mulvey delineates the gazes associated with the art of filmmaking:
There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. Without these two absences (the material existence of the recording process, the critical reading of the spectator), fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth. (Mulvey 843)

As a musical romantic comedy, Everyone Says I Love You must overcome added hurdles in order to convey reality. The use of the voyeuristic lens incorporates the viewer within the spectacle and inspires consent on behalf of the spectator. Manhattan is not typically in bloom with song. However, the fanciful plot is given agency by the camera, which assumes the eye of the trusting spectator. It’s New York, anything can happen.

Skylar succumbs to the oppressive gazes on screen and in doing so facilitates a conversation (or song) about the inadequacies of love in New York, as depicted by her relationships. Skylar declines Holden’s proposal in favor of a relationship with former convict, Charles Ferry. Skylar’s relationship with Charles commences on the balcony of her family’s Park Avenue apartment, with a view of Manhattan before them. Charles admires Skylar:

Been a long time since I smelled perfume. You smell like what I think heaven would smell like. When you shook my hand I thought my heart would stop. I used to lie in my cell and dream of someone like you. You got very sensual lips. Can I smell your hair? If you were my girl I’d make love to you in every room in the house. On every bed. On every rug. On every tabletop. Let’s go for a drive. I haven’t seen the ocean or been to Harlem or Chinatown in years.

Skylar quickly rejects Charles’s proposition, not wanting to encounter further romantic peculiarities the city may provoke. However, Skylar soon surrenders to Charles, after which she returns to Holden, on a Coney Island rollercoaster of emotion.

Skylar falls victim to the three “looks” in narrative cinema, as Mulvey explains, and therefore is objectified as the female image. The female exists only as a signifier of castration
for the male, who will respond to the threat by imposing his will upon her through rescue or punishment, says Mulvey. The man may also counter the woman as a lingering threat of castration by constructing her as a fetish object. This connotation differs directly from the portrayal of the male figure, who is active and three-dimensional. Whereas the representation of the male is one of depth and development, the woman is contrived. A nearly stereotypically attractive, large-busted, and sensual woman, Skylar is threatening to men. She succeeds in castrating Holden through her preference for another man. Charles, however, escapes castration by fetishizing Skylar. The young woman transforms into a female object when Charles fragments her body. He addresses her not as an individual but rather as perfume, lips, hair, and sex. Mulvey describes the narrative potential associated with such deconstruction of the female figure: “Conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. 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 or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen” (Mulvey 838). To fracture the woman is to interfere with the Renaissance space occupied by the characters, and so Skylar is stripped of her dimension. In turn, Charles disarms the weaponry of the female form and is protected. However, Charles later removes Skylar from her environment and employs her as an accessory to robbery. She immediately regains control of her depth and redirects the criminal to the Upper East Side of Manhattan. “Charles, let me out at Park Avenue and 93rd,” Skylar demands. Soon after, Skylar and Holden reunite. Skylar is wrongfully objectified and so is New York, which is presented as a site of pure, unproblematic love. Skylar works to dispel these false

24 “In contrast to woman as icon, the active male figure (the ego ideal of the identification process) demands a three-dimensional space” (Mulvey 838).
representations. She succeeds in asserting her depth as a woman and revealing the commotion of New York.

*Everyone Says I Love You* continues to showcase the misrepresentation of intimacy in New York City beyond the appearance of the film, by showcasing characters utterly lost in translation. The cast of hopeless romantics (and some who are just hopeless) struggles to communicate the not-so-universal language of love, and though their linguistic failures are great, they redeem themselves with their actions.

Holden takes Skylar to Le Cirque where he will propose to her by placing an engagement ring in a dollop of whip cream resting atop a peach parfait, a recipe for disaster and indigestion. Holden attempts to foreshadow his proposal by offering insight into their future together. Chaos ensues. Each of Holden’s predictions are met with disagreement from Skylar. Holden imagines that they will live in the country, but Skylar says she must remain in the city. Holden’s desire for four children is too ambitious for Skylar, who wants no more than a pair of offspring. Skylar will not stay at home, she says, but rather will work as an architect, despite her degree in journalism, much to Holden’s confusion. Moments before his proposal, Holden gains access to the incongruous mind and mouth of his imminent fiancé. But this incompatibility does not trouble Holden, as he will accommodate Skylar emotionally, linguistically, and entirely. The diamond-encrusted dessert arrives and an elated Skylar consumes the entire dish instantly. To Holden’s horror, Skylar swallows the ring. Upon confronting her with this information, Skylar is

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*25 “Can I tell you how I see us?” asks Holden. “How?” Skylar replies. “We get married and we live by my parents in Sharon.” “I could never leave New York.” “We leave my parents in Sharon, right? We live in New York. It’s just that we may want more space if we have four kids.” “I want two children.” “Two is perfect. Two is perfect for me, because four is really a lot and you’ll stay at home—” “No, I’ll be working.” “When not working full-time. You’ll have a career. Journalism.” “Architecture.” “Architecture? Since when?” “I don’t know, just some thoughts I’ve had.” “I mean, you majored in journalism, but the important thing is that we agree on just about everything, it seems.”*
aghast by her ingestion ("I’m dying!" she shouts) and confused as to why Holden thought it would be romantic to put a ring on ice cream.

Holden and Skylar’s use of language exemplifies the collapse of communication and the subsequent loss of inherent companionship typically wrought from intimacy. Despite the foundation of their relationship and the affection they feel for one another, love is blind, deaf, and oppositional. In his article “Post Modernism and Consumer Society” (1988), American critic and theorist Fredric Jameson considers a fall from language, “Supposing that in the decades since the emergence of the great modern styles society has itself begun to fragment in this way, each group coming to speak a curious private language of its own, each profession developing its private code or idiolect, and finally each individual coming to be a kind of linguistic island, separated from everyone else” (Jameson 16). The theorist dissects the possibility of decay of contemporary communication and suggests the potential for individualized tongues, which would render citizens speechless—for lack of comprehension—in the company of one another. A post-modern ideal, Jameson’s intimation is pertinent to the confused community of lovers in Upper Manhattan in *Everyone Says I Love You*. Each individual digresses away from the collective, yet they continue to strive for unity.

By way of the spoken word, Holden is dishonest with himself; though, ultimately, this is his preference, as such a sham will deliver him love and maintain the order of disorder present in New York City. Author J. D. Connor explores Sartre’s relationship with language and the cinema in his article “Sartre and Cinema: The Grammar of Commitment” (2001). Conner elucidates Sartre’s linguistic contentions, “In his description of the language becoming film, becoming an aesthetic object for the linguist, Sartre provides an outline for the broader question of how it is that one’s life can seem to be external to oneself; how one can lie to oneself”
Connor’s commentary on Sartre acknowledges Holden’s internal deception. Holden makes concessions for Skylar in the pursuit of love. He cheats himself out of four children and a stay-at-home-wife living in the suburbs. Holden’s delusions are apparent to the spectator through language, as they would be to Skylar if she were to listen. However, Skylar’s ineptitude is an everlasting certainty. Without her ignorance, the marriage of confusion and love in New York City may fade into mutual understanding and appreciation.

Overlapping dialogue, an occupational hazard of having a large family such as the Dandridge-Berlins, functions in Everyone Says I Love You as a mode of expression, mitigating the importance of what is being said while emphasizing the manner in which it is uttered. This battle for audibility is a symptom of the disorder present in New York, and with the inability to communicate surfaces a failure to participate in productive. All eight members of the Dandridge-Berlin family erupt boisterously and simultaneously when matters of the heart arise. Such a stream-of-consciousness repartee ignites when D.J. (Natasha Lyonee)—the story’s omniscient narrator—informs her siblings, mother, and stepfather that Holden intends to propose to Skylar, her stepsister.

The trajectory of the conversation regarding Skylar’s engagement begins with excitement, then to bragging by the patriarch Bob Dandridge (Alan Alda) (“And I introduced them!” he gloats), to complaining to the cook about the lack of sauce on the pasta (“Bavarian pasta doesn’t need sauce! Italian pasta needs sauce. The Italians were weak!” she shouts), to Steffi protesting for the parole of a convict (Skylar’s eventual boyfriend Charles Ferry), to

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26 Susan Friedman describes the definitional inconsistencies of her theoretical and temporal vocabulary, “As terms in an evolving scholarly discourse, modern, modernity, and modernism constitute a critical Tower of Babel, a cacophony of categories that become increasingly useless the more inconsistently they are used. We can regard them as a parody of critical discourse in which everyone keeps talking at the same time in a language without common meanings” (Friedman 497). Such incongruity in communication in Everyone Says I Love You therefore mimics the battle to categorize conceptions of modernism.
Grandpa (Patrick Cranshaw) announcing that he will be going to the Polo Grounds (despite the fact that the locale closed years ago), and back to Skylar and Holden. All the while, the physical space on screen is dynamized by constant movement by each of the family members present, captured in a single take. Both an auditory and visual exercise for the spectator ensues.

Regarding the same subject of Skylar’s suitors, further linguistic confusion follows when she tells her parents that she has decided to end her relationship with Holden to pursue an affair with Charles Ferry. In this sequence, the chaos is more physical and the ranting is more hysterical. The dialogue involves Skylar, Bob, and Steffi, but the action extends to D.J., her stepbrother Scott (Lukas Haas), and the family’s housekeeper Frida (Trude Klein), who play hockey in the main hallway of the Manhattan townhouse. Skylar’s parents continue to try and reason with their daughter’s romantic crusade while traversing the athletic demonstration that has taken over their foyer. The tirade moves through the sporting event and into the kitchen, where the couple’s youngest daughter Laura (Natalie Portman) sobs over a love lost. “I’m Through With Love,” Laura chants, and Skylar concurs before exiting the room and ending the verbal and physical activity of conversation, as it exists in their Park Avenue home.

Laura interrupts the intersecting discourse in tune with Ella Fitzgerald’s “I’m Through With Love.” The content and manner of conversation exhibited by the family is so absurd that to seize the drama with theatrics, or a lyrical declaration of solitude, is the only method capable of defeating the pratice. Members of the Dandridge-Berlin family utilize language as an outlet for creativity and for the expression and definition of one’s self. Connor campaigns for the facility of semantics:

Sentences, then, must be incarnated (spoken, written) in order to substantiate the speaker’s freedom. But the incarnating function of the sentence makes the sentence ‘appear as a free invention of its own laws.’ That is, the speaker, as a kind of meaning-projector, disappears, and the sentence stands on its own, the
‘product’ of certain rules of linguistic assembly. In the repetitions of these quasi-freestanding sentences, the linguist sees a pattern. He or she ‘juxtaposes the instantaneities’ and concludes that the given produces the sentence. Semantic film. (Connor 1049)

The family’s spoken words transcend age and household hierarchy and allow for, say, Skylar to elope with a perverted criminal and for a prepubescent Laura to declare celibacy. Communication in the Park Avenue home may be perplexing and unruly, but indeed the language serves to promote clarity of being for each individual. The way in which the characters communicate with one another is indicative of their characterizations. Connor channels Sartre and says: “Sartre’s subordination of language to ontology requires that the speaker be the ‘concrete foundation of his speech’” (Connor 1048). This variety of speech is expressive, furthering the plot and enhancing the inherently fantastical musical genre. The dialogue is confusing to those involved in the treacherous conversations, as well as to the spectator. And, in this way, the method succeeds. Bob, Steffi, Skylar, and Laura speak with (albeit chaotic) conviction.

Irregularities in language also develop out of transnational uncertainties, promoting confusion. Characters are hopeful in the dealings of transnational romance but soon find that love lives in on the shores of the East River, and not near the Seine or the Adriatic Sea.

Joe is unclear about his own geographic affiliation and this confusion manifests itself romantically. When love interest Von (Julia Roberts) asks Joe what part of New York he lives in, Joe replies “Paris.” Joe, a writer, lived in New York but has since moved to Paris. Despite his relocation, Joe has not developed a sense of community or security in France. Von is also a source of confusion to Joe and to herself. She would like to fall in love in Paris and live there. Yet she longs to travel to Bora Bora. Von’s inability to remain static is difficult for Joe with regard to both the travel and the romantic ideologies associated with the varying locales. This
constant movement, along with Von’s erratic emotional decisions, ultimately leads to the end of their fling.

As depicted by the romantic tribulations that consume the characters in *Everyone Says I Love You*, love in Manhattan is inherently confusing and deceptive. Outwardly, romantic imagery permeates the metropolitan setting. The story chronicles the better part of a year in Manhattan (with vacations to Venice and Paris) beginning in the spring. The season dresses the city with flowers in bloom. Moreover, when an attractive young man passes sisters Laura and Lane (Gaby Hoffmann) on the street as they sit on a city stoop, the girls are sent into an adolescent frenzy of adoration. “Who is he?” a friend squeals. “We don’t know,” Lane replies excitedly. “We always see him around here.” Another adds, “She’s in love from afar!” The girls plot a way for the geographically compatible lovers to meet, as they continue to admire the imagery (the boy) from their concrete altar.

Later while shopping for a wedding dress, Skylar stands in the window of a store looking down upon the city from the multistory retailer. Flowing white chiffon fills the glass showcase and graces the city with its elegance. The placement of the dress is of ideological importance, as vertically it supersedes the citizens and lesser merchants alike below. Jameson’s conception of the postmodern city supports the contention that physical placement and physical use of space is indicative of status, significance, and importance. The wedding dress and all that it represents—love, the conventions of a heterosexual union, wealth, and beauty—is positioned to dominate that which rests below it.

These intimate icons coat the city with love, but soon dupe admirers. The flowers, which were once in bloom as an indicator of life and romance, now fill the coffin of the Dandridge children’s Grandfather. The boy on the street who the young girls marvel at is the source of
heartache for Laura (hence her declaration “I’m Through With Love”). And the wedding dress, a symbol of purity existing above the grime of the city, is for naught; Skylar cancels her engagement for marriage with Holden and courts a criminal, a physical embodiment of the filth that she previously rose above while shopping for her gown.

The passionate paradox that exists between the seemingly romantic symbols that eventually go sour is indicative of the perpetual and pervasive confusion found in Manhattan, with regard to matters of the heart. The only certainty in the city of “I Heart New York” is that nothing is certain. Flowers mean death and not love, boys are mean, and wedding dresses go unworn. However, each of these tricks on mind and heart take yet a second turn towards love, whether or not it meets the expectations of the beholders. The flowers will bloom once again the spring, and the same feelings of hope and pleasure will return as well, particularly to the young Laura. Likewise, Skylar recognizes her error in judgment and returns to the wholesome Holden.

New York is cluttered with love and, moreover, with pain disguised as romance. The subsequent experiences of the citizens with the enterprise are full of frustration and despair. In the end, however, New York is where love is; if not of the romantic variety, certainly the type found in families who care genuinely and unconditionally for one another. The sanctity of these familial relationships is displayed throughout the picture and if not for such an ideal, these lovesick Manhattanites would in fact be through with love. But with the support and encouragement found at home, the members of the family can be merely lyrical rather than literal in their claim of defeat.

Joe moves from New York to Paris. He explains to Von that as a writer he is unappreciated in the United States, but is celebrated in Paris.27 (Communicative confusion

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27 “In the United States I’m considered controversial, but in Paris, where they have an ear for literature, they were quick to recognize the genius of Poe and Faulkner and myself,” Joe explains.
prevails.) Joe believes that Paris may agree with him, and while intellectually that may be the case, he finds that his New York-bred heart is no match for the clarity found in romances of the Left Bank. Joe cries to Steffi and Bob (his ex-wife and her new husband), “I can’t believe it. Giselle left me. She suddenly left me with my best friend.” “No warning?” Steffi asks in disbelief. “Nothing.” “You didn’t see the signs. She must have given you some signs.” Joe continues to rant, “You think I’m an idiot? What kind of signs? Finding his photo in her underwear drawer? Or saying his name as she climaxed?” Steffi softens her diction, “I don’t mean that.” “No, that’s what happened. I just couldn’t put it together.”

Joe has been conditioned to respond only to romantic chaos and confusion. He is unable to interpret his girlfriend’s behavior for what it is: forthright and uncomplicated. Instead he assumes that this is a language worthy of deciphering and is surprised to find that her shrieks of passion for another were in fact just that. Furthermore, Joe brings Von to Paris in order to fulfill her romantic fantasy. She abandons Joe and retreats to New York, fulfilling her native code of misdirection and neuroticism. Joe would be apt to join her and remain in the city that created him, in spite of his lack of literary success.

D.J. travels to Venice with her biological father Joe. While touring the dying city, D.J. finds romantic success and begins dating gondolier Alberto. A sensitive child, D.J. is stricken with guilt upon her father’s failure to find a mate. Joe points out Von to his daughter and admires her beauty. Incidentally, Von’s therapist is the mother of D.J.’s friend. As a result, D.J. has access to all of Von’s thoughts and desires. “Trust me,” D.J. assures her father, “before we leave Venice, your lips will be pressed to hers.” “Unfortunately, I left my Chapstick in New York,” he regrets. Moisturizer or not, a reproduction of Cyrano de Bergerac ensues and Joe masquerades as Von’s ideal companion, as scripted by D.J. Joe and Von spend time together in
Venice. A happy couple solicits the assistance of New Yorkers and asks them to take their picture. Joe tries to operate the camera, but it breaks in his hands. The trip ends well, and Von is in love with Joe and D.J. is engaged to Alberto.

In Venice, D.J. feels culpable for her father’s romantic shortcomings. Romance cannot be inherently blissful and simplistic, even when one is happy; this would be too easy and very non-New York. Everyone must say, “I love you” in order for likewise uniform happiness to exist. The agony D.J. experiences for her father supports the notion that family reserves the upmost importance, a value held by the New Yorkers. Joe’s initial negativity regarding the pursuit of Von (“I left my Chapstick in New York”) offers a flicker of his longing for the metropolis. Chapstick thereby takes the place of Joe’s heart (in his quip, anyway). Like the dog to Pavlov, Joe’s negativity towards love is a conditioned response, and New York is the scientist who conducts the experiment. Furthermore, Joe’s inability to capture the happy couple in Venice with photography suggests that such permanence does not exist, particularly not in the mind of divorcée Joe.  

Upon returning to New York, D.J. swiftly terminates her agenda to return to Venice and marry Alberto when she meets Ken, the son of a Columbia University professor. Likewise, Joe’s Venetian ties are severed as well when Von concludes that she no longer desires her fantasy (that D.J. created in Joe) and their affair comes to an end. Confusion ensues.

Despite a quest for love beyond the boundaries of New York, the characters find that there is no need to leave the city they love looking for romance, lest the disorder of the metropolis will become lost in translation over seas. The family may share eternal love in the privacy of their home and in the company of their relatives. The conversation of confusion in

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28 However, in New York where love exists—but not without anarchy—pictures of Steffi and Bob decorate their home. But such documentation cannot exist abroad.
New York cannot exist elsewhere, as showcased by the characters’ travels. Love in the metropolitan locality is inherently painful and often incomprehensible, but it is this bedlam that bolsters the bonds the characters share with one another. They are thereby infused with the city’s rendition of love.

The themes created by Allen in his films interact with New York City, which is essential to the illustration and explanation of the intended message. The urban space is, in this way, a stage on which the performers become their characters and demonstrate the metropolitan moral. The involvement of the city and the filmic manifestation of the theme often go astray before returning and concluding at the intended idea. In Radio Days, the city home is at first inhospitable and strenuous for the young Joe. But as he recalls his past the audience grows too, and a more mature lens is used. The home is therefore welcoming and moreover is a private place of affection and mutual understanding. Likewise, Alice initially presents a figure at odds with herself, at least in part as a result of her environment. Just as Joe becomes an adult with perfect hindsight vision, Alice too develops as an individual and learns how to make better use of the metropolis that surrounds her. Everyone Says I Love You also prompts uncertainty for the spectator who is witness to the utter calamity wrought by love in Manhattan. With time and travel, it is understood that this disarray solidifies the love the characters give and receive in New York City. As advocated in Everyone Says I Love You, life in the metropolis is not simple. But this mystifying misdirection always leads to love at home, regardless of where one lives in the city.
Symbol

The car
Do you need a lift? in *Annie Hall*

Woody Allen employs symbolic imagery that conveys the modernism of New York City, while harnessing the nostalgia of a moment he longs for. The presence of cars and theatres both serve as visions of modernity and of machinery; the car outwardly embodies the construction and application of mechanics, whereas the cinema more circuitously arrives at the apparatus of the camera and serves the utilitarian function of projecting images for the spectator. Furthermore, the car and the cinema are each a medium for escape, though each manifests the notion of departure differently, and therefore Allen expresses the constructs accordingly.

The automobile is a source of negativity for the filmmaker and for his characters, as it grants the pilot the tool to physically leave the island of Manhattan, or even worse, the entirety of New York City; such an exit is antithetical to Allen’s raison d’être. So, the car becomes a visual metaphor for the decadence of contemporary society for the director.

The cinema, rather, offers a mental transportation; a relocation of mind, not body. This method of egress is thus designated as acceptable and is encouraged by Allen. With the explosion of technology and the advent of present-day New York, citizens seek a means of escape and the ability to retreat to a time of greater purity and substance. Allen condones the use of the cinema in metropolitan life because of its ability to transport the spectator through time. Conversely, he condemns the use of the car for the facility in which it dispatches passengers out
of town. The theatre succeeds in balancing modernity with the proper dose of nostalgia; the car, a purely modern figure, is a vessel for the destruction of New York.

Cars often symbolize disorder, or serve as a bad omen. In Allen’s films, to own and drive in a personal vehicle is inherently in direct opposition to life in the city. In *Annie Hall* (1977), Annie (Diane Keaton) and Alvy (Woody Allen) are introduced at a sports club where they play tennis. They then drive home in Annie’s car, a Volkswagen Beetle, with Annie behind the wheel. The couple meets their near-demise as a result of Annie’s poor and treacherous maneuvering. It is unsettling for the viewer and passenger (Alvy) alike, as the car lurches and swerves down the city street.

This unharmonious beginning helps to foreshadow the chaos and turmoil that will ultimately characterize Annie and Alvy’s relationship, particularly with regard to the city of New York. Throughout the picture, Alvy explores the many romantic avenues of his life up until his moments with Annie, including the automotive development of their relationship. The time spent in the Volkswagen, a matter of moments on screen, articulates quite clearly the behavioral tendencies of the two characters and provides adequate insight into their rapport. Annie’s car and the way in which she operates the vehicle reveal her lighthearted, carefree disposition. She navigates the streets of Manhattan in an erratic and jolting manner. So, too, she is irrational and inferior in the hands of a more self-actualized Alvy.

Though the spectator and protagonist learn that Alvy, while very intelligent, is not more developed after all. Or, perhaps he was, but upon the story’s conclusion Annie has grown and is a higher functioning human being than the overanxious Alvy. While his intelligence is of a higher degree than Annie’s, Alvy’s neuroticism proves to be debilitating. Annie’s street smarts and gentle demeanor provide her with a greater degree of pleasure than Alvy’s brain can afford.
him. As the audience eventually learns, these respective strengths are best suited for different locales. Annie’s kindness may not be an inherent virtue of New York City, and so she leaves. Likewise, the fact that she drives is sensible and convenient, but ultimately is an odd way to get around in the boroughs. “I was going to take a cab,” Alvy explains to Annie before she offers him a lift. Both the act of driving and the type of automobile itself (a Volkswagen Beetle, made in Germany29) that relocates the couple are indicative of Annie’s cultural ideologies that are diametrically opposed with those of Alvy.30

The plague of the Porsche in Manhattan

Furthermore, while visiting Los Angeles, Annie and Alvy drive in Max’s (also referred to as Rob, played by Tony Roberts) car down the main drag in Beverly Hills. Alvy comments on the mode of transportation, “Hey, don’t tell me we’re gonna have to walk from the car to the house. Geez, my feet haven’t touched the pavement since I reached Los Angeles.” His facetious quip indicates his disdain for the automotive practice and a preference for the city stroll. In an earlier scene, Alvy argues with his ex-wife who wants to move out of the city. Frantically he retorts, “[But] there’s no place to walk after dinner!” The city streets are essential to the architectural and social fabric of Manhattan, pavement and practice New York protagonists cannot live without.

In Manhattan (1979), Yale contemplates the purchase of a Porsche, an expense that upsets Isaac (Woody Allen). Isaac pleads to Yale, “Is there nothing I can do to dissuade you from this? It’s so crazy. They should ban all cars from Manhattan.” Isaac regards his friend’s

29 Germany as a once-anti-Semitic society and, perhaps, forever anti-Semitic to the anxious Alvy.
30 The question of the car is also posed in Allen’s Stardust Memories (1980). After viewing a retrospective of the films of Sandy Bates (Woody Allen), a journalist says to another “What do you think the Rolls Royce represented?” The other responds, “I think it represented his car.”
interest in automobiles as a personal attack. Later, Yale drives in his new luxury vehicle with his wife and she begins to detect his odd (and ultimately unfaithful) behavior. Yale’s betrayal extends beyond his spouse to Isaac. He becomes a catalyst in the dissolution of Isaac’s relationship with Mary. Yale tells Mary that he is in love with her, and she leaves Isaac. Yale abandons his wife and Isaac, and they are left in his proverbial dust.

Yale is a Manhattanite at heart, or so it seems. He is first introduced to the audience while in nightclub with Isaac, perpetuating an aura of loyalty to the traditions of the city that Isaac strives to maintain. Later, the friends walk the streets of New York following dinner, an inherently metropolitan activity that works to dispute the necessity for a personal vehicle. These sequences lead to the conception of Yale as a worthy figure, though as the film progresses, he proves otherwise. Yale is misguided and frivolous; he purchases a costly car impulsively and holds two romantic relationships simultaneously. Yale is selfish and therefore cannot accommodate others in his two-seater sports car.\footnote{Like the Volkswagen Beetle Annie drives, German manufacturers assemble and distribute the Porsche. The Volkswagen and the Porsche corporations also have a professional relationship. This establishes another tradition of conflict for Allen, as the Eastern European state becomes a site for the production of chaos. The German nationality is also a bed for more literal brutality, and Allen often satirizes the Nazi movement and the atrocities of World War II in his films.} His desire for, and ultimate purchase of, a car is symbolic of refusing Isaac and his ideals.

**Criminal carpool in Radio Days**

In *Radio Days*, after witnessing a mob hit on her boss, Sally (Mia Farrow) drives with the assassin Rocco (Danny Aiello) in his car to what she believes will be her death. In this way, cars are colored as nefarious, necessary only for evil functions and escape. Rocco uses the vehicle to flee the scene and to save himself. This salvation can only be delivered by total departure from
the metropolis and by driving Sally to her death to ensure her silence. The car in New York City is thereby illegitimate and criminal.

The car is symbolic of incongruity with life in New York City, and so those affiliated with such a practice often end up failing somehow. These vehicles are also representative of the opposing ideologies of the characters and in this way work to dismantle their relationships with the metropolis.

The theatre
Reality bites in Crimes and Misdemeanors

Allen sets scenes in movie theatres in order to symbolize the need for and the achievement of escapism on behalf of his characters. The director also comments on conceptions of apparatus theory, modernism, and a longing for the past by way of the cinema setting.

Apparatus film theory suggests that cinema is ideological by virtue of the function of the machinery,\(^{32}\) which produces the representation on screen for the audience. The positioning of the spectator within the cinema is significant as well, as such a perspective and subsequent interpretation is theoretically formatted for the experience. Theorist Jean-Louis Baudry says that the cinema gives a sense of mastery over the story world and thus rewards this expertise with a sense of freedom for the spectator.

Baudry extends his analysis and incorporates the allegory of Plato’s Cave into his conception of the cinema, offering a transition from ideology to the unconscious of the viewer.

\(^{32}\) Allen’s Interiors (1978) alludes to the presence of the apparatus in a sequence in which Eve (Geraldine Page) attempts to asphyxiate herself. Eve meticulously applies black tape atop every crevice in her apartment. She lines all of the edges of each of the windows that decorate the walls of her home, and treats the doors using the same method, before turning on her gas stove. Eve’s practice of sealing her apartment emulates the procedure one must complete before operating a motion picture film camera. Eve seeks to eliminate the entrance of air into her dwelling, while filmmakers must ensure that light does not enter the camera by covering seals with black gaffer tape, lest it will expose the film and destroy it.
Plato imagines a collection of prisoners positioned to face a blank wall in a cave. They are chained, unable to move, and as a result cannot see one another. The prisoners watch shadows projected on the wall, serving as their sole images of reality. A prisoner is then released and taken outside, where the individual is able to view the world as it truly exists. Upon reentering the cave and describing this existence to the others, the released individual is met with disbelief and is unable to convince his peers.

Brigitte Peucker, author of “The Material Image” (2007) explains that even if the remaining prisoners were to be freed, they would remain in the cave, such is the power of the images to enchain them. Baudry thereby equates the spectators in Plato’s Cave to the spectators entranced by the cinema. Peucker describes, “Cinema, too, is an apparatus that promotes simulation. In both of these scenes of looking, Baudry suggests, the spectators are victims of an illusion of reality, they are the ‘prey of an impression, of an impression of reality’” (Peucker 6). Cinema intends to offer an imitation of reality for the spectator. While those positioned in the theatre may be aware of the artifice, the motion picture employs techniques from a lexicon of visual strategies for such transcendence. So, the cinema manifests itself as a scientific, mechanical process, seeking to replicate the human eye by way of invisible editing and other such methods used to eliminate the presence of the machine. Allen’s films are congruent with this premise and promote the notion of spectatorship and submission to the theatre. However, exploiting a varying ideological contention, the filmmaker celebrates the machinery in a stride towards modernism. This is not to suggest that Allen does not execute invisible editing techniques, but rather an indication of his sanctioning of the apparatus.

Baudry also argues that the physical placement in the cinema and the environmental conditions are apt for surrender to the machine. The darkness of the theatre fosters regression to
a dreamlike state and provides the opportunity for the spectator to cathect energy into the images on screen. This entrancement plays with fantasies of the spectator by offering a venue for such suppressed desires to be realized. Allen, a proponent and patient of psychoanalysis, appreciates entrance to and understanding of dreams for their ability to provoke comprehension of the self. The ideological representations of reality rendered by the cinema are activated in Allen’s *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989).

Allen’s anxiety-ridden film *Crimes and Misdemeanors* employs the setting of the movie theatre in New York City to symbolize an escape from the reality of one’s life, by way of nostalgia, to the reality of another time and place. The story unfolds the infidelities of two married men living in Manhattan. The mistress of ophthalmologist Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau), Dolores Paley (Anjelica Huston), threatens to reveal their affair to the doctor’s wife, while documentary filmmaker Cliff Stern (Woody Allen) pursues television producer Halley Reed (Mia Farrow). Judah has Dolores killed in order to conceal their relationship.

Cliff visits the theatre throughout the film to see matinée shows of old movies that mimic Judah’s illicit activities. Cliff first attends a screening of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941) with his niece. The narrative features a couple whose relationship has gone awry. Following the film, Cliff discusses the picture and the period of production with his niece, “That was great; the tuxedos and the evening gowns and everything. God, it was wonderful to live like that. This is awful.” As Cliff and the young girl stand outside in the wind and rain, large white pillars grow from the concrete to the roof of the building to surround and protect the patrons. When Cliff returns home to his wife, she is hostile. “You probably took your niece to the movies again,” she says spitefully.
The conflict present in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* imitates the reality of Judah’s quarrels with Dolores. Cliff and his niece enjoy the picture, and the uncle finds pleasure in exposing his impressionable niece to the arts. Despite the paralleled catastrophe concerning Judah, Cliff is able to derive pleasure from the narrative, as this reality is not his own.  

Cliff attends the cinema as a means of escape and aims to submit himself to the portrayal of reality offered by the ideological apparatus that rests behind him. As a filmmaker, he is aware of the mechanical processes involved in the reproduction. Nonetheless, this spectator would like to retreat to the time and place of another. Cliff marvels to his niece at the lifestyle of Mr. and Mrs. Smith. He longs for a life of the past, rather than the misery of the present, and the theatre is capable of offering him this gift. The physical structure of the theatre façade also offers shelter and security to the relatives from the ruthlessness of the inclement exterior. Furthermore, the comment made by Cliff’s wife indicates both her husband’s propensity for theatre outings (“again”), while also providing an explanation for his need for escape; she is unpleasant, hence Cliff’s pining for Halley and his desire to exist in another realm of the real.

Later, Cliff goes to the theatre with Halley where again the narrative impersonates Judah, this time by describing the murder of a woman made to appear as suicide. Cliff turns to Halley and assures her, “This only happens in the movies.” Hally, bothered by the fact that she will now arrive late for work, says, “I never should have told you that my weakness is going to the movies in the daytime.”

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33 Cinema is a copy of reality, as Baudry contends. *Crimes and Misdemeanors* extends this notion by presenting movies within the movie that replicate the plots of Cliff and Judah. In a sense, this display recalls Fredric Jameson’s explication of the postmodern world. In this social and economic moment, as Jameson describes, nothing is original or unique. The postmodern sphere, particularly with regard to the arts, is a site of perpetual replication of the past; pastiche. Here, a story about infidelity and murder is presented in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Within that presentation, the spectator is shown other films that offer similar narratives, suggesting the lack of originality of the filmic text.
Through dialogue, it is revealed that the spectators harbor different investments in the images on screen. Cliff, as a filmmaker, recognizes the materiality of the construct and is able to designate the narrative as artifice. Though also perhaps he needs to convince himself that such deception and violence cannot be real, when surely he knows that it is, or can be. Hally, rather, is unable to refuse the proposition for an afternoon escape from the daylight into the darkness. Her surrender is seemingly involuntary; she cannot say “no.” Her unconscious obedience attests to the power of the theatre as an ideological and psychological construct.

In a screening of *Murder, He Says* (1945), directed by George Marshall, an expressive female dancer sings the title song enthusiastically on screen before Cliff and his niece one afternoon. “That wasn’t such a good movie,” Cliff admits to his niece, “but it was fun.” The music from the film follows the pair outside by way of a sound bridge, playing softly before fading into silence. Cliff is unhappy with the film. The simulation of reality invades the streets of New York for a moment as the uncle and niece exit the theatre. In the actual reality of *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, murder has in fact spread into the public space of the city through Judah’s acts of brutality, and thus Cliff’s private life is now vulnerable.

In the film’s final scene, Judah describes to Cliff his notion of the perfect murder, recalling the death of Delores, as told as a third person fictional account. Judah describes the killing of an individual and the freedom of the assassin, indicating his return to “his protected world of wealth and privilege;” though Cliff is dissatisfied with this tale. Judah meets Cliff’s criticism of the plot, “This is the real world. We rationalize.” Cliff, an expert, retorts, “You’ve seen too many movies. I’m talking about reality.” Judah’s behavior is beyond the comprehension of what is real. Cliff immediately rejects the story in suit with his prolonged
denial of the cruelty of man. He relegates the account to the theatre and away from New York City.34

**Duck noodle soup, or: How a mustached man at the movies saved my life, in Hannah and Her Sisters**

_Hannah and Her Sisters_ (1986) follows the lives of three sisters and their coinciding romances over the course of one year. One evening, former television writer Mickey Sachs (Woody Allen) reconnects with former flame Holly (Dianne Wiest), and the two discuss their respective pasts. Mickey recalls having attempted suicide. Upon failing to end his life, Mickey reports, he leaves his home in hopes of clearing his head and wanders on the Upper West Side. In need of a comfortable place to sit, he enters a movie house, eager to gather his thoughts and “[be] logical, and to put the world back into rational perspective.” Unbeknownst to Mickey, the Marx Brothers’ _Duck Soup_ (1933) is scheduled, and so Mickey watches the film that defined his childhood.

In his explanation to Holly, Mickey describes that the movie engages him, prompting him to reevaluate his life and his thoughts of ending it. Mickey regains reason and the world once again becomes logical, as he had hoped it might. “How can you even think of killing yourself?” he recalls wondering. Mickey decides to end his self-loathing and to appreciate life while it

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34 Cliff is a stand in for Judah; they are different sides of the same coin. Richard A. Blake asserts this notion in his book _Woody Allen: Profane and Sacred_ (1995) and makes note of the psychoanalytic aspect of the filmic text. Like Cliff, Allen “fragments his own character into several others, such of whom represents a facet of his own personality. The characters, many of whom appear in pairs, become different, even antagonistic sides of Allen’s character that he tries to explore, understand and reconcile” (Blake 175). In this way, Cliff goes to the theatre to escape, but also as a figure of escape for Judah, which is why his explanation of the story seems fanciful to the theatre-bound Cliff. His scoff at the New York reality (“this is awful”) stems from his knowledge of the misery and pain infesting the streets, namely Judah’s attack on Delores. Moreover, this means of escape from a criminal reality is not unlike the plot depicted in _Bonnie and Clyde_ (1967). Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow commit murder—a great number more slays than the doctor in _Crimes and Misdemeanors_—and retreat to the theatre in seek of refuge. While on the run from the authorities, Bonnie, who dreams of life as a celebrity, reads articles in newspapers that account of her behavior. She is excited to see herself in print. The same sort of self-reflexive behavior exists for Cliff, who is an image of Judah. The films Cliff attends are Judah’s stories, and so he is able to see himself in the pictures. Bonnie would be terribly envious.
lasts. And so he enjoys the film. With nowhere else to turn, Mickey seeks the protection of the theatre as the ultimate outlet for escape. In doing so, Mickey evades his present state of being in favor of his past theatric indulgences. Groucho Marx’s comedic prowess inspires the spectator to succumb to the pleasure available in the dreamlike environment offered by the theatre.

**Blind ambition in *Hollywood Ending***

Flailing filmmaker Val (Woody Allen) is hired by his ex-wife Ellie (Téa Leoni) to direct a movie; Ellie is now dating Hal (Treat Williams), the head of the studio financing the picture, in Allen’s *Hollywood Ending* (2002). But when the production of the film begins, Val is stricken with psychosomatic blindness and attempts to direct the film without revealing his loss of sight to his co-workers and superiors, alike. Both Val’s regressive condition, as well as the conflict that provoked his hindered state parallel claims regarding apparatus theory and spectatorship in cinema.

Val’s sensory deterioration offers a psychological rendering of the regressive dreamlike position offered by the cinema. By assuming a constant state of darkness, Val is permanently apt for the pleasures rendered by spectatorship by virtue of his limitations, despite his physical lack of sight; however, the pretenses are similar. While Val cannot actually see, his vulnerability subjects him to the trance presented by the cinema. His perception of his surroundings is lost and so he focuses on what is available to him; in this case, his hearing and other such sensory acuity allow him to engage with his environment. Val is an eternal spectator and, like Mickey’s (*Hannah and Her Sisters*) Marx-induced-epiphany, the filmmaker is given a venue to reevaluate his present condition and make necessary alterations that will bring him happiness. As a result of his state of spectatorship, Val may now enjoy life.
The cinema, as Baudry explains, is a manufactured version of reality. The picture Val is hired to direct resonates too strongly with the hypochondriac director. While many spectators find such filmic imitations to be appealing, Val, a filmmaker who is overly aware of and involved in the materiality of the process, struggles with the similarities present and falls into psychosomatic blindness due to stress. Val explains to his analyst that the film is a remake of a movie about a father and son who do not get along. The analyst reminds Val of the director’s own estranged son and suggests that to live with the plot of the movie each day that parallels his life is stressful. This is the culprit that activates the patient’s blindness. Val’s lack of sight is a symptom of his life. The film Val directs concurs with Baudry’s contention regarding cinema and reality, through its imitation of Val’s life. Moreover, the construction of the remake further accentuates this notion. Not only does the film replicate reality, it also imitates another movie as well. This perpetual reexamination of real life afforded by the cinema is daunting for Val who resides too close to both the artifice and the screenplay.

When Val becomes blind, his agent reassures him of his ability to direct the film. “Nobody knows!” he says. As in cinema, Val’s agent aims to offer those on set a version of reality. His version depicts Val with full sensory capabilities; in a second rendition of the real and in actuality, Val cannot see. Furthermore, the film alludes to Val’s loss of vision throughout the first act of the picture. The director explores his former marriage with his ex-wife. Val is astonished by his inability to see that Ellie was having an affair with Hal. Ellie complains, “You don’t see what you don’t want to see.” Ellie is correct. Val does not want to see his life as performed by the actors on set, so he loses his sight. As a spectator at the cinema, Val may simply exit the theatre if needed. But as a director, he is always a spectator and is forced to compromise his senses in order to avoid the brutality of his life.
Val rectifies his relationship with his son and soon regains his vision, as a result of repairing this conflict. Val is then able to see what he has created on film, his rendering of the script that once imitated his life, as told through the eyes of a blind man. Val is disappointed both professionally and artistically with the product, but is no longer tormented emotionally by the reality of the images. He may resume his position as a common spectator in the theatre and derive banal pleasure (or, in this case, benevolent but financial disappointment) from the apparatus.

*Crimes and Misdemeanors, Hannah and Her Sisters, and Hollywood Ending* each aptly portray the modernity of cinema while maintaining an investment in the past. The setting of the theatre offers an escape for characters, allowing them to explore their unconscious by either viewing it literalized on screen like Cliff and Val, or by ignoring it entirely in favor of a less cerebral cinematic acquiesce, as Mickey chooses to yield to Groucho Marx and snub suicide.

Allen’s use of symbols to suggest the propensity for escape further defines his characters with reference to New York City. Those eager to buckle their seatbelts are punished, while others commissioning popcorn vendors and catching a flick are offered redemption. This imagery is well suited for the filmmaker’s poignant and ubiquitous conversation about the modern, albeit chronologically stunted, city. The city, to Allen, must remain in a very specific light. Within this historical sensation, true residents are not to leave, lest they were never really citizens at all.

Furthermore, these illustrative machines (both the car and the theatre) are used as tools to guide the audience’s perception of the characters. Yale, for instance, is a seemingly righteous resident. However, as his relationship with his car develops, his investment in metropolis deteriorates. The theatre, similarly, works to classify Cliff as a realist of sorts; he negates the
authenticity of what he views on screen. But Judah’s actions bestow the cinema with validity
and Cliff is dubbed a dreamer, as the darkness of the theatre aims to establish. While the
symbolic significance of the car and theatre may be connotatively fluid—bad and good,
fundamentally and respectively—their interactions with the characters expose uncertainty;
though these machines ultimately lead the way to meaning and understanding for the spectator.
La di da, a conclusion
Changing lenses

Woody Allen’s gait is characteristic, as he shuffles out on stage at the Kodak Theater with an expression registering either apprehension or bemusement (probably both). Despite a track record of skittishness regarding travel to Los Angeles, it is the 2002 Oscar ceremony’s commemoration of New York in the wake of the events of September 11 that brings the filmmaker to the Academy Awards. Allen explains in his speech, and to those surprised to see the filmmaker dressed as a penguin and present at such an event (he seldom attends the Oscars, even when nominated for an award), “For New York City, I’ll do anything.”

With his speech, Allen continues his lifelong campaign for New York, this time specifically as a site for filmmaking. Allen reminds his fellow filmmakers of the strength, excitement, and romance of the city. “It’s a great, great movie town,” he says and recalls metropolitan movies he grew up on as a child. He thereby attempts to appeal to the crowd with nostalgia, as he has succeeded in doing with his films and audiences throughout his career. While New York is most assuredly Allen’s town, he never hoards the city. Rather, he offers it on a pedestal to as vast an audience as he can gather in hopes of inspiring others in the way that he has been moved by the metropolis.

Following the attacks on his city, Allen is forced to reexamine not his love for New York (which remains unconditional), but his consideration of the metropolis as a construct—as his construct. Previously Allen has situated the city in a wrinkle in time that does not truly exist. This romanticized setting is beautiful, but ultimately indulgent. Perhaps a new perspective is required to protect the city from artistic abandonment by luring fervent filmmakers to excavate
the town for new forms of unique splendor and construction. Allen must now implore others to find in New York what he has already discovered.

Susan Friedman writes that definitions of modernity “emerge out of the spatio/temporal context of their production. They serve different needs and interests. They accomplish different kinds of cultural work. They change dramatically over time and through space. Definitions wear the mask of synchronic abstraction, but they are always subject to the diachronic histories and spatial geographies of continuity, change, and difference” (Friedman 497). So, Allen need not neglect his nostalgic modernity, but rather recalibrate his portrayal of the city in his forthcoming pictures to better suit the altered context of New York City.

Can the seemingly tainted metropolitan milieu still act? Of course. As in Manhattan (1979) and Annie Hall (1977), the pulse of New York City will continue to echo in the hearts of residents; and, if Allen’s plea resonates with his contemporaries, filmmakers working in the city will also feel the beat of the city. The majesty of the New York becomes art in Manhattan and is precocious at the hands of Alvy Singer, a proxy for the city, in Annie Hall. Each incarnation is as inspired as it is apt, and so Allen offers a venue for a perpetual conversation with New York, New York.

And although the theme of the city is made melancholy due to its flirtation with destruction, the landscape is resilient, as are those who call the metropolis home. Joe and his family in Radio Days (1987) serve as a reminder of the importance of home, despite moments of doubt or disenchantment. A new sense of identity arises amongst residents and a shift in perspective and value evolves. Suddenly, superficial aspects of life are trivial and genuine relationships offer certainty at the hands of widespread confusion. In unison with these ideals, Alice (Alice, 1990) and Skylar (Everyone Says I Love You, 1996) detect that they have erred
somehow and quickly rectify their affairs to better outfit their senses of self. City dwellers are reassured by their town and feel comfortable seeking guidance and redirection when needed, as these characters display.

New York City will always be emblematic. But, of what? In his new phase of modernity, Allen must continue to endorse the city and dissuade departure from the metropolis. Cars will forever connote physical hiatus, but the theatre remains a beacon of wonder and mere mental deportation. With reference to Allen, New York City and moviemaking are interchangeable expressions.

So, a reluctant filmmaker, Allen approaches his Oscar audience with trepidation disguised as optimism. New York City will remain forever, he hopes, lest it doesn’t expand with the rest of the universe. And with the camaraderie and patronage of filmmakers like him, the city can exist in a variety of forms: as a cast of sundry characters, to transmit messages of hope and despair and love and tragedy and longing, and as an icon of life and death and everything in between. “I selectively show my New York through my heart,” Allen has said. New York is his, and it is everyone’s.
Works Cited


