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**A Inter-Relação da Arte e da Vida nas Comédias de
Woody Allen (1972-1998)**

**The Interpenetration of Art and Life in the Film
Comedies of Woody Allen (1972-1998)**

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palavras-chave

arte, vida, Judaísmo, autor, Nova Iorque, show business, *persona*, comédia

resumo

A presente dissertação tem como objectivo investigar a inter-relação da arte e da vida nas comédias de Woody Allen, incidindo particularmente no período compreendido entre 1972 e 1998. Este trabalho analisa o papel de Woody Allen enquanto *auteur*, a importância da fantasia na sua obra e a sua relação com a realidade, a forma como as suas raízes Judaicas influenciaram a sua concepção de arte, o abismo entre Woody Allen e a indústria cinematográfica americana e a complexa relação estabelecida entre o verdadeiro Woody Allen e a sua *persona*. A tese é composta pelo estudo de filmes particularmente relevantes no que diz respeito à temática arte/vida, por uma lista bibliográfica, por uma filmografia do autor (Woody Allen) e por uma lista de filmes de outros autores igualmente importantes para o estudo em causa.

keywords

art, life, Jewishness, auteur, New York, show business, *persona*, film comedy

abstract

The present dissertation aims to investigate the interpenetration of art and life in the film comedies of Woody Allen, focusing particularly on the period between 1972 and 1998. This work analyses Allen's role as an *auteur*, the importance of fantasy in his work and its relationship with reality, the way his Jewish roots have influenced his conception of art, the gulf between Woody Allen and the American film industry and the complex relationship established between the real Allen and his onscreen *persona*. The thesis comprises the study of important films concerning the art/ life thematic, a consulted bibliography, a Woody Allen's filmography and a list of films by other authors equally important for this study.

Índice / Contents

Agradecimientos / Acknowledgements	iii
Resumo	iv
Abstract	v
Índice / Contents	vi
Introduction	1
1. Allen's Cultural Background and Career	2
2. Main Influences and Features of Allen's Work	5
3. Aims and Approaches	10
Chapter I - Woody Allen as an <i>Auteur</i>	15
1. Considerations on the <i>Politique des Auteurs</i>	16
2. The Implications of <i>Auteurism</i> for Allen's Films	23
Chapter II - Behind and in Front of the Camera	33
1. Fiction and Reality	34
2. Film Analysis	35
. <i>Play It Again, Sam</i> (1972)	
. <i>The Purple Rose of Cairo</i> (1985)	
. <i>Stardust Memories</i> (1980)	
Chapter III - Ironising Show Business	60
1. Allen vs. Hollywood	61
2. The Jewish Heritage	64
3. Film Analysis	67
. <i>Annie Hall</i> (1977)	
. <i>Broadway Danny Rose</i> (1984)	
. <i>Bullets over Broadway</i> (1994)	

Chapter IV - Authenticity and <i>Persona</i>	89
1. Allen's <i>Persona</i>	90
2. Film Analysis	94
. <i>Zelig</i> (1983)	
. <i>Deconstructing Harry</i> (1997)	
. <i>Celebrity</i> (1998)	
Conclusion	111
1. General Considerations	112
2. Future Research	119
Bibliography	121
Filmography	126

INTRODUCTION

*All art is autobiographical; the
pearl is the oyster's autobiography.*
Frederico Fellini

Allen's Cultural Background and Career

Over the past decades, Woody Allen's films have awakened the attention of film critics and several studies have been conducted to unveil the work of a man who has enjoyed a dual status and a singular place in the history of the American cinema. American Jewish born,¹ Allan Konigsberg would be consecrated as one of the most prolific independent American directors and would establish his own production unit away from the tentacles of the Hollywood monolith. His filmography comprises thirty six feature films, which were not blockbusters but which nevertheless allowed him to develop a solid and respected reputation as a filmmaker, especially in Europe. Before undertaking the task of analysing Allen's films and his career as a filmmaker, it is important to offer a brief overview of his cultural background as well as of the evolution of his career.

Allen's parents belonged to a generation of Jewish immigrants haunted by the memories of their parents' escape from Europe and who inevitably faced the burden of their ancestry. Although Allen was raised in a typical Jewish family and in spite of having attended Hebrew school before he moved to Midwood High School, he has never felt attracted to Judaism or to other religion. As the author states in *Woody Allen – A Biography*,

I was unmoved by the synagogue, I was not interested in the Seder, I was not interested in the Hebrew school, I was not interested in being Jewish. It just didn't mean a thing to me. I was not ashamed of it nor was I proud of it. It was a nonfactor to me. I didn't care about it. It just wasn't my field of interest. I cared about baseball, I cared about movies. To be a Jew was not something that I felt 'Oh, God, I'm so lucky'. Or 'Gee, I wish I were something else'. I certainly had no interest in being Catholic or in any of the other Gentile religions. (Lax, 40-41)

¹ Woody Allen is the pseudonym for Allan Stewart Konigsberg, who was born on December 1, 1935 in the Bronx, New York. Allen's childhood and upbringing were partly connected to Europe since his parents' roots were European. Like most American-Jewish people, Martin Konigsberg and Nettie Cherrie were born in the Lower East Side of Manhattan but their families came from Russia and Vienna respectively.

Paradoxically, Allen's films reveal a strange obsession with themes like the existence or non-existence of God, the meaning of life and the necessity for a moral order and moral integrity. The characters of Allen's films often search for a substitute for religion to fill the spiritual vacuum of modern life, a space which is often occupied by art, as it will be discussed further on in this thesis. With regard to the fact of being a Jew, the author also attests that it has never influenced his artistic consciousness. As he explained to Natalie Gittelson,

It's not on my mind; it's no part of my artistic consciousness. There are certain cultural differences between Jews and non-Jews, I guess, but I think they're largely superficial. Of course, any character I play would be Jewish, just because I'm Jewish. (Woody Allen quoted by Nancy Pogel, 25)

In spite of denying the influence of Jewishness on his work, much of Allen's humour emanates from his urban Jewish background and the persistence of Jewish themes is a constant in his films. Furthermore, Allen's *persona* finds its roots in a typical figure of the Yiddish tradition, the *schlemiel*, which is a popular stereotype of the guilt-ridden and anxious Jewish mentality. In spite of having never directly felt the burden of being a Jew, Allen's cultural heritage probably accounts for the fact that his *persona* is constantly haunted by the spectrum of 'outsiderdom'. Allen's character type represents a stranger within his own society, a man whose inability to fit in reflects his frustrations and his anxieties. In this context, by invariably playing and portraying Jewish characters, the figure of the outsider reflects the figure of the artist himself. *Radio Days* (1987), for example, recollects the childhood of a young red-haired Jew patterned after Allen himself and the everyday life of a Jewish family, which in many aspects resembles Allen's own family. In this context, the echo of past memories builds "a portrait of the artist as a young man". The author himself attests for this when interviewed by Stig Björkman in *Woody Allen on Woody Allen*:

STIG BJÖRKMAN: How close is the story in *Radio Days* to your own childhood?

WOODY ALLEN: Some things are very close and some things are not. But a lot of it is based on an exaggerated view of my childhood. I mean, I did live in a family with many people present in the house: grandparents and aunts and uncles. And a certain period of my childhood I did live in a house right by the water. In Long Beach. But I didn't want to travel all the way to Long Beach to shoot the film. Yes, many of the things you see in the film

did happen. My relationship to the school teachers was like that. My relationship to radio was like that. The same with the Hebrew school. And we used to go out to the beach and look for German aircraft and German boats. And I did have an aunt who was forever getting into the wrong relationships and unable to get married. She never did get married. And we did have those neighbours who were communists. Much of all that was true. I was taken to New York to the Automat and to radio programmes. My cousin lived with me. We did have a telephone line where we listened in on the neighbours. All these things occurred. (Björkman, 158)

A deeper examination of Allen's comic *persona* as a reflex of the artist is going to be expounded in the upcoming chapters of this thesis.

Woody Allen came into film from writing. He started writing jokes for newspaper columnists such as Earl Wilson and Walter Winchell at sixteen. After this, he started writing comic material for several entertainers, including Bob Hope and Arthur Murray. When Allen left Midwood High School, he enrolled on a film course, "Motion Picture Production," but he failed it and he dropped out of university after the first semester. In 1955 he was hired to make up part of NBC's writer development program and he started contributing with comic material for *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, *The Show of Shows*, *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *The Tonight Show* and for comics such as Sid Caesar. It was in 1960 that along with his written contribution for *Candid Camera*, he began his night-club circuit act and his career as a stand-up comedian. With the support of Jack Rollins and Charles Joffe, his managers to date, Allen performed in several cafes in Greenwich Village², including the Duplex and The Blue Angel. Allen's stand-up routines stem from the tradition of the Borscht Belt Circuit³ and therefore, Mort Sahl, Sid Caesar and Danny Kaye who regularly performed in Borscht Belt resorts, served as models for Allen's performances. Finally, in 1964, Allen was given the chance to write the screenplay of *What's New Pussycat?* The film was the biggest-grossing comedy of that time and Allen was recognized as a credible screenwriter. Nevertheless, it was an unpleasant experience for Allen not only because he spent a disagreeable six months in Paris during the production of the film, but also

² Greenwich Village is known as an important landmark of bohemian culture. It has been a point for the development of new cultural ideas and during the 50s, 60s and 70s dozens of icons got their start there.

³ The Borscht Belt Circuit was the Jewish summer resort in the Catskill Mountains where Jewish entertainers who worked on TV used to perform. Borscht is a sort of beet soup popular in Eastern Europe.

because Charles K. Feldman, who had hired Woody Allen, changed almost completely his original script. *What's up Tiger Lily?* (1966), a Japanese James Bond imitation movie, would become the first film directed by Allen and the first sign of autonomy in his career as a filmmaker. In addition to this, Allen began writing essays and short stories for newspapers and this material was gathered in three books: *Getting Even* (1971), *Without Feathers* (1975) and *Side Effects* (1980)⁴. Although Allen has built a prolific career as a writer and filmmaker, it should be emphasized that Allen is a largely self-educated person and that he does not possess any formal training in filmmaking. Rather he belongs to the tradition of Preston Sturges and Billy Wilder: writers of genuine wit who found other (often humourless) people mangled their work, and so took up directing as the best way of allowing their work to retain its essential spirit of comedy.

Main Influences and Features of Allen's Work

Regarded by many as an eccentric, Woody Allen is a man of contrasts, and so is his work. Seeing his films can be a protean experience because the audience never knows what to expect from them. Allen has written and produced comedies (*Take The Money and Run*, *Bananas*) dramas (*Interiors*, *Another Woman*), romantic comedies (*Annie Hall*, *Anything Else*), pseudo-documentaries (*Zelig*), futuristic fantasies (*Sleeper*), comedies of (bad) manners (*Deconstructing Harry*, *Celebrity*), and musicals (*Everybody Says That I Love You*), creating a body of work which Eric Lax classifies as “an eclectic *mélange* of subjects and styles” (Lax, 274). Allen's “quasi-hybrid”, schizophrenic style also intertwines aspects of popular culture with elements of high culture in a game dominated by a reversal strategy: the filmmaker intellectualizes aspects of popular culture and trivializes aspects of high culture. Since he parodies serious intellectual subjects, his body of work is structured upon the struggle between intellectuality and popularity, the humorous and the serious. With respect to this, Sam Girgus affirms in his essay “Woody Allen and American Character in *Deconstructing Harry*” that “[m]any have

⁴ *Getting Even*, published in 1971, is a collection of Allen's 60s magazine pieces. *Without Feathers*, written between 1972 and 1975, features two one act plays (Death and God). *Side Effects* is an anthology of 17 comic short stories written between 1975-1980 which were previously published in newspapers like *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*.

compared the social and moral dimensions of his comedic brilliance in film to Mark Twain's contribution to American humor and American literary realism. Like Twain, Allen melds aesthetic complexity with popular culture" (King, 143), offering up a portrait of the modern American way of life, its complexities, its anxieties and its contrasts.

One important aspect of Allen's artistic approach lies in the dialogic, self-reflexive and intertextual nature of his films, a key practice of artistic postmodernism. As Nancy Pogel acknowledges,

The dialogues Allen creates utilize a sense of play with verbal and visual language that is typical of densely intertextual postmodern films: self-reflexive imagery (cameras, mirrors, etc.); retrospective structures; autobiographical allusions; appearances by the filmmaker in his own films; casting based on an actor's or actress's earlier films or personal life; use of real-life, theatrical, and nontheatrical figures in the midst of fictional film; narrative frames; discussions of art and filmmaking; and allusions to plays, novels, cartoons, short stories, television, and especially to other films. (Pogel, 12)

Allen becomes an artist studying his own art in a broad context. Allen's films cannot be analysed in closed systems because ignoring the wide variety of texts they allude to, would be undermining an important part of their richness and legacy. Allen's films are full of literary, filmic and philosophic references which take the form of postmodern strategies, such as homage, pastiche and parody. *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982) is one of the films that best epitomizes Allen's intertextual style. Needless to say, Allen's film makes reference to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Apart from the similarity of the titles, both stories revolve around couples who switch partners and both of them oppose the natural and the civilized worlds as well. *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* is also indebted to Ingmar Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), where shifts between partners also lead to a final re-established order. Another example of Allen's intertextuality is *Annie Hall* (1977) where direct references to Freud, Fellini and Disney's *Snow White* (1939) are made. Moreover, *Annie Hall* is consistent in its use of parody to portray New York intellectuals, who are represented by Alison and Robin (Alvy's former wives) and Jewish immigrant families (like Alvy's family). Generally, the structure of Allen's films is fragmented and exposes discontinuities

between screen-time and narrative-time, suggesting that fragmentation is a condition for living in a postmodern world.

To a limited extent, the distinctiveness of Allen's creations lies at the intersection of the wide range of traditions which permeate his films. In this respect, Eric Lax acknowledges the following:

Among Woody Allen's many talents is his ability to incorporate mimicry with creativity. He learned the cadences of Bob Hope, the language of S. J. Perelman, the style of George Lewis, the outlook of Mort Sahl, the obsessions of Ingmar Bergman, the zaniness of the Marx Brothers, the soulfulness of Buster Keaton, the existential dilemma of Jean-Paul Sartre, the exaggerated exoticness of Federico Fellini, along with a score of additional influences...(Lax, 273)

By enumerating some of the sources which influence Allen, Eric Lax not only insinuates the diversity of his work but also declares its complexity. One of the reasons why Allen's films resist any sort of categorization and classification is precisely because of the diverse sort of influences that they mirror and which include comedy (Bob Hope, Buster Keaton), existential philosophy (Jean-Paul Sartre) and drama (Federico Fellini and Ingmar Bergman). For film critic Foster Hirsch, however, "foreign" influences are so obvious in Allen's work that he is tempted to observe that Allen is not an original, a pioneer. As he affirms in his study *Love, Sex, Death and the Meaning of Life in Allen's Films*, Allen is "[a] brilliant borrower and adapter rather than innovator" (Hirsch, 153). In my opinion, such a statement fails to take account of just what a contested area innovation occupies in the theory of art and presents too limited a perspective on Allen's work. Allen's many influences reveal that he is a *connoisseur* of cinema, literature, philosophy and art in general, which adds complexity to the meaning of his films. Furthermore, I would argue that Allen blends several traditions with his own creative genius. On balance, I definitely agree with Eric Lax when he states that "he mixed their essences [referring to Allen's influences] with his own to produce a unique sensibility" (Lax, 273). Taking into consideration that Ingmar Bergman, for example, is regarded as one of Allen's major influences, critics tend to forget that while the former has always worked in serious drama, Allen is essentially a comic artist. There is no doubt that Allen's films were highly influenced by several

traditions, but the analysis of his work should not be circumscribed by those source traditions.

Allen's career has evolved through different stages and has been marked by increasing ambition and ingenuity. The first stage of his career followed the traditions of the Jewish popular entertainment and of the American burlesque with roots in Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Notwithstanding the fact that Woody Allen is widely known for his comedies, being a comic was just the first step in his career as a filmmaker. After the first openly comic stage of his career, Allen was seduced by a more serious tone which drinks in the tradition of European art cinema, where Allen finds motifs that carry an important thematic weight, paying tribute to the pantheon of European masters notably Fellini, Bergman and Fritz Lang. From European art cinema Allen absorbed intellectual depth, character complexity and ambiguity, preoccupation with metaphysical questions and the curiosity to enlarge the potential of audiovisual language to explore internal and external spheres like human psychology and society.

The self-reflexivity of his cinema, the combination of serious questions and comic absurdity, his passion for art and his interest in metaphysical questions allowed him to develop a personal style and to be regarded as an *auteur*. Allen is considered an *auteur* not only because he was able to create a personal style, imposing his personal *Weltanschauung* on a public medium, but also unusually he seems to possess complete control over his work: thematically, aesthetically and technically. The brilliance of Allen's direction *per se* consists in the control he exercises at every stage of the filmmaking process. His work exhibits a very high level of craft in the making of the film. He controls everything: the sets, the costumes, the music, the sound and the editing, providing an extraordinary sense of delight in cinematic design. Content-wise, Allen's films are haunted by the same recurrent themes from different perspectives: the struggle to live in a world without God, the quest to find the meaning of life, the disintegration of relationships and the fragile essence of love, the lack of morality in a dehumanized society, the relationship between art and life, the confusion between them both and the role of

the artist in art and life. Allen's films are never predicated on tame assumptions nor do they reach easy conclusions. His body of work takes the form of a work-in-progress, self-reflexive and dialogical. Allen's films talk to each other and constitute private conversations between the filmmaker and the audience, which often assume an intimate style. One of the reasons why Allen's films constitute private conversations is because Woody Allen does not speak to a very wide audience. Allen is arguably a caricaturist who has built a new portrait of the professional American-Jewish intellectual. Thus, his films are targeted at the metropolitan middle-classes of America and Europe which respond to his neuroses. Allen's art functions in closed worlds which talk to each other. He talks to a group of creative and gifted people who also shares Allen's concerns: the New York *intelligentsia* in the first instance and other intelligentsias after that. Therefore, the author feels comfortable in following the impulse to explore in film the fears that (apparently) dog him in real life.

However, the secret of Allen's success seems to be directly connected to the creation of a screen *persona* he has inhabited over the years, a *persona* that showed many facets while maintaining its originality. As I see it, the Allen *persona* "inhabits" most of the films he produces since he has played a part in almost all his films until quite recently. Perhaps his most remarkable feature is that unlike Chaplin or Keaton he does not wear a disguise. When the audience encounters Woody Allen in a film, identification between the onscreen character and the real man is immediate: Allen uses the same clothes and the same glasses he uses everyday. By adopting the same look on-and-off-screen, his private world inevitably merges with the public macrocosm. For all these reasons, the public image of Allen, the artist, tends more probably than in the case of other film directors to converge around the figure he presents on screen. Allen and his *persona* share the same look and the same existential doubts, they like the same places and they even date the same women. In this context, Allen's *persona* becomes the artist's *doppelgänger*, fostering the confusion between art and life even if the audience senses that Allen's *persona* must be "an exaggerated version

of himself”, “one that blurred the line between autobiography and comedy” (Meade, 54).

Over the years, the consistency of Allen’s *persona* and the game it has played between the real and the fictional has helped him to sustain an unusually long and solid career. In the nineties, however, changes in his reputation due to the Mia Farrow and Soon-Yi scandal contributed to the emergence of a new approach to filmmaking. As Sam Girgus points out,

In Allen’s case, the fusion of the public and private selves helped him achieve success, but as it turned out, the same merger of the public and private in life and work increased his vulnerability to painful exposure concerning his private life. He has not been able to inoculate his public image against an association with his private behavior. (Girgus, I)

Sam Girgus acknowledges that the fusion between Allen and his own *persona* was both the cause of his success and the cause of his recent fall from popularity. The unexpected shift in Allen’s public image was decisive for the emergence of a more bitter and assertive Allen. At the same time, this decade is marked by a (sometimes) desperate attempt to dissociate his onscreen *persona* from the real Allen and to scrutinize the condition, status and angst of being a celebrity by onscreen deconstruction. In the last few years, Allen has devoted himself to a more commercial and lighter type of film, where he no longer plays his former screen self (*Small Time Crooks*, *Melinda and Melinda*). In itself, this suggests that he has not been overly successful in making that dissociation. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that his struggles to create his screen *persona* and to maintain it in the face of a hostile or, more recently, a younger disengaged audience has definitely contributed to the interesting diversity of independent American filmmaking and has presented a highly individualistic view of modern America.

Aims and Approaches

Generally speaking, this thesis will focus on the interpenetration between art and life in Allen's films, which is both a broad and a challenging theme. Therefore, the theme will be divided into subsections which will in turn take up the following aspects: the construction of Allen's *persona*, Allen's establishment as a film *auteur*, the self-reflexivity in Allen's films, the felt difference between art and show business in his work and the problematic issues which centre on questions of *persona* and authenticity.

In the first part, this thesis aims to examine the construction of Allen's *persona* and its influence on his work, focusing on the way Woody Allen deals with the question, "to be or not to be an auteur". This will obviously include a review of the development of the *auteur theory* and the utility and relevance of its application to Allen's life and work.

Secondly, it is widely recognized that the power of Allen's films is closely connected to their clever interplay between art and life. Since art and life are permanently interlocked in Allen's universe, there is a wide range of interesting questions to be answered: what is the balance between lived experience and imagination expressed in Woody Allen's films? Is it art that imitates life or life that imitates art? Do films and art serve any valuable purpose or do they mislead us about life? Should films primarily be a form of entertainment or should they pursue any other specific social goals? What is the role that mass media in general play in our lives? These are some of the questions this study will focus on and try to examine in some detail.

The integrity of the artist in relation to his art and his social role in relation to the exterior world will also be discussed throughout this study. Thus, this thesis also aims to understand the moral implications of being an original artist in Allen's universe and the conflict between show business and art, as Allen represents them in his films.

The issue of artistic *persona* and personal authenticity is also one of the points this study will focus on. How can we distinguish between art and life, *persona* and authenticity? What are the implications of confounding these two in Allen's life and work? This question establishes a link with another of the themes explored by Allen in his films and that too is central to this particular study: the power of the cinematic image and its wider influence on society. This thesis will analyse the construction of these images and the web of implications that spread out from them. All in all, this thesis aims to provide some orientation on these critical and difficult points, taking into consideration the various factors which make up the cinematic process and serve to determine the relationship between life and art in Allen's universe.

This thesis is motivated by the conviction that film studies have become a legitimate part for the understanding of the cultural constructions and history of the twentieth century. In the first instance, these questions arose from the fascination I have with Allen as a filmmaker. But further study has revealed that these are questions which have historically troubled artists and entertainers from a very wide social and artistic prospectus. I believe this project to be important because Woody Allen's cinema is as personal as that of acknowledged masters like Fellini and Bergman. Moreover, he has been prolific over a sustained period of time and produced a homogenous and challenging body of work, when many writers and directors have anonymously buried themselves in the profitable cinema of popular genres. Furthermore, I believe this project will be able to shed some light on the uses and abuses of mass media in our lives.

I appreciated the difficulty of my task from the very beginning, since the research area of this thesis covers a wide range of interconnected and complex themes. On the other hand, given the great number of films directed by Allen, it would be impossible to proceed to a succinct analysis of them all, and therefore, a selection was made according to the thematic concerns of this research study. This thesis is divided into five different sections. The first chapter reviews the

arrival of the *auteur theory*, its evolution and purpose in film theory and practice. The chapter continues with an analysis of the application of the *auteur* theory to Allen's work. This chapter also examines the nature of Allen's *persona* and the general features which have contributed to the positioning of Allen as one of the few American *auteurs*. Each one of the three following chapters engages in the analysis of three feature films directed by Woody Allen. The second chapter, which explores Ross's film version of *Play it Again, Sam*⁵ (1972), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) and *Stardust Memories* (1980), is devoted to the analysis of something that most critics consider to be a conundrum in Allen's work: the relationship between art and life, fiction and reality. The chapter discusses the way Allen's films blur the line between art and life and the implications of this for the reception of his work. It also examines the role films play in people's lives and it focuses on the 'spectator-character' identificatory relationship. In addition, the chapter also raises the question of the purpose of art and of the role of the artist, an issue which recurs in both chapter three and chapter four. The chapter concludes with an overview of the meanings conveyed by these three films and with some general remarks on the topic.

Show business and art are compared and contrasted in chapter three, which focuses on *Annie Hall* (1977), *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984) and *Bullets over Broadway* (1994). The chapter starts with a general comparison between Allen's work and that of one of his American contemporary filmmakers, in order to establish the difference between Allen's films and the business-minded films of Hollywood. Then, the chapter contextualizes Allen's work within the Jewish tradition, offering a retrospective view of Jewish assimilation into American culture through the world of show business. After analysing the Jewish inheritance in Allen's work, the chapter continues with the analysis of the three above-mentioned films. At the end of the chapter, some conclusions are drawn with respect to the topic of discussion.

⁵ Allen originally wrote *Play it Again, Sam* as a play which opened at the Broadhurst in February 12, 1969. The play was the eleventh most popular play on the American amateur stage and it was translated to several languages. The film version of *Play it again, Sam* was directed by Herbert Ross and inspired in the original play written by Allen.

Zelig (1983), *Deconstructing Harry* (1997) and *Celebrity* (1998) are objects of analysis in chapter four, which addresses the problematic authenticity vs. *persona* dichotomy. This chapter raises again some of the questions that were already focused on in the preceding chapters, such as the interpenetration between art and life, but in a more personal context. The chapter also presents a reflection of the perils and consequences of confusing character and man / artist. Furthermore, this chapter also examines the precarious status of being a celebrity and the power the media exercise over people's lives.

At the end of the thesis, a general conclusion about the fate of people who live in the public eye is drawn. I also offer a critical appraisal of Allen's body of work and of his achievements. Suggestions for areas of further study on Woody Allen's films are also included in this section.

Chapter I:

WOODY ALLEN AS AN AUTEUR

“Where artist and art intersect, they reveal the man”.
Eric Lax

Considerations on the “*Politique des Auteurs*”

The *cinéma d'auteur* ideologically underpinned the elevation of cinema to an art form. Its function was to appropriate classical types of prestige for cinema, by associating filmmaking with other traditional forms of artistic creativity. Painting, writing and composing, for instance, were all produced by individuals whose works were gathered by an “intellectual quorum” into its classical canons of excellence. Film aspired to that level of prestige and to public recognition of artistic excellence and it aimed to personalize the artistic achievements, creating its own Tolstoy, Mozart and Leonardo da Vinci.

In 1948, French film critic and filmmaker Alexandre Astruc wrote an article entitled “Naissance d'une Nouvelle Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo” (“The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo”)⁶ in which he writes that

the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel. After having been successfully a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of *caméra-stylo*. (Alexandre Astruc, quoted by John Caughie, 9)

Alexandre Astruc foresaw the emergence of cinema as a medium of self-expression “as subtle as the written word”. He believed that cinema was an art form like painting or novel, and therefore, he conceived the camera as a pen with its own language, a form by which the artist expressed his thoughts like in a novel. Astruc’s conception of cinema as a language and Bazin’s opinion that film should reflect the director’s personal vision are reflected in the core ideas of the *cinéma d'auteurs*.

⁶ Astruc’s article was originally published in *L'Écran Français*, on March 30, 1948.

It was between the 1950's and the 1960's that French film critics started to give shape to the *politique des auteurs*, as an attempt to trace the personal style of directors through their films. The term *auteur* was officially used in an article that François Truffaut wrote in January 1954 entitled "Une Certaine Tendence du Cinéma Français" ("A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema"), which was published in the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. In the 1960s Andrew Sarris introduced and developed this concept into American criticism, translating it as "*the author theory*" in an essay entitled "Notes on the Author Theory in 1962"⁷. Nevertheless, this movement was never a theory in its essence. The critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* always talked about the *politique des auteurs*, a policy which set out to provide a critical tool. As John Caughie explains it in the introduction of his book *Theories of Authorship: a Reader*, the conundrum of film theory had always focused on "the relation between the representation and the real thing, and had not developed an aesthetic to explain the place of the artist in film art" (Caughie, 10). The elevation of cinema to an art hastened the question of the place of the artist in the art of film since, it is claimed "art is the expression of the emotions, experience and 'worldview' of an individual artist" (Caughie, 10). In the first chapter of *Cinéma d'Auteur, une Vieille Lune?*, André Prédal explains that the term *auteurism* finds its origin in literary criticism, a fact that is reminiscent of Caughie's opinion that this *politique* imposed on the cinema a figure that the other arts had already adopted and that was based on the concept of the "romantic artist, individual and self-expressive" (Caughie, 10). So, certain studies on the author that were made in the field of the literary criticism may be useful to understand the application of this role to the world of the cinema. In the essay "The Death of the Author", Roland Barthes affirms that,

The author is a modern figure, a product of our society (...) it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the "human person" (...) The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* "confiding' in us. (Caughie, 209)

The emphasis of this *politique* lies on the creative genius of the artist and therefore this movement proposed to study films through a director-centred analysis, so that

⁷ First published in *Film Culture*, 1962.

a standard of reference and a distinct personal style could be found in and traced from film to film in the work of selected directors. In general terms,

Film criticism became a process of discovery, a process which, while it remained firmly within the hermeneutics of romantic criticism, forced a more precise attention to what was actually happening within the film than had been customary for a traditional criticism which tended to be satisfied with the surfaces of popular films, assuming that the conditions of their production prevented them from having depths. (Caughie, 12)

On the other hand, the *politique des auteurs* assumed from the beginning that despite of the constraints of the cinema industry, personal works of art might be found everywhere, including in the highly commercial industry of Hollywood. In an article entitled "The Author Theory Revisited", published in *American Film*, Andrew Sarris explains that,

The French critics tended to brush aside the distinctions between cinema as a medium and cinema as an art form. "The cinema is everything", Godard declared. And he meant it. Every scrap of film was grist for his sensibility. The cinema was no longer a holy temple to which only certain sanctified works were admitted. Cinema was to be found on every movie screen in the world, and Hollywood movies were no less cinematic than anything else. (*American Film*, 53)

The *politique des auteurs* aspired, as René Prédal points out, to legitimate the cinema as a high standard art, showing precisely that in the film industry, as in the other arts it is possible to find authenticity in which is expressed the author's deepest or most intimate thoughts or recollections:

L'idée était de démontrer que dans l'industrie du cinéma, celle des producteurs, des genres et des équipes de techniciens, reste quand même place pour d'authentiques artistes imposant leur regard, proposant leur propre vision du monde, exprimant leurs préoccupations personnelles et même intimes. (Prédal, 52)

On these grounds, the ultimate goal of this policy was the establishment of a canon in film, the creation of a pantheon of filmmakers as it had already happened with literature and which allowed the distinction between the *cinéma commercial* and the *cinéma artistique d'auteur*, the *metteurs en scène* and the *auteurs*. The first step to recognizing an *auteur* consisted in creating a pattern of recurrent themes which expressed the author's concerns. However, due to the visual nature of cinema, this was not considered enough. Attention was then paid to the aesthetic value of the *mise-en-scène* as the "stylistic signature of the director"

(Caughie, 12). Prédal understands the notion of *auteur* in its global context and so he describes it as a

synthèse articulant diverses composantes professionnelle (celui qui écrit aussi son scénario), thématique (des thèmes privilégiés, un regard et pour certains même une morale, c'est-à-dire une vision du monde) et enfin esthétique (un ton personnel, un mode de récit reconnaissable, des constantes plastiques au niveau du choix des objectifs, du cadrage, de la lumière, des mouvements d'appareil, du montage...), bref une éthique et un style". (Prédal, 58)

Following on from this, it can be inferred that the true *auteur* is the one who exercises the fullest control over filmmaking: thematically, aesthetically and technically, such as for example Hitchcock. The concept of the film author was developed in America by Andrew Sarris who, according to Edward Buscombe in an article entitled "Ideas of Authorship", transformed the *politique des auteurs* into "a cult of personality" (Caughie, 26) unconstrained by the author's historical context. Indeed, Andrew Sarris did develop the idea of the *auteur* in America and introduced the English term 'Author Theory' but he was aware of the fact that this was "a pattern theory in constant flux"⁸.

While it is true to say that the *politique des auteurs* contributed to the greater knowledge of films in depth, and therefore of the film artists who made them, it also presented some perils and limitations from its conception. Firstly, sceptics of this theory point out that making a film is by no means an individual act of creation but instead, a largely cooperative endeavour. In most cases, the *auteur* does not fully control all the required techniques of light, sound, special effects, editing, and so on. Although the contribution of the director is definitely crucial because he holds the overall task of coordination of skills, ignoring all the other people involved in filmmaking is to ignore several vital creative elements in it, for without them, the film could neither be produced nor possess the features that it does. After all, as Peter Wollen writes in the essay "The Auteur Theory"⁹, it is important to retain the idea that in comparison with other arts, the relationship between artist and work in the cinema is very different and peculiar. While in the

⁸ Information taken from "The Author Theory Revisited" in *American Film*, 50.

⁹ Published in John Caughie's *Theories of Authorship: a Reader*.

other arts the author projects a “dream” and the work is created, in cinema it requires a myriad of people to transform a script into a film.

Secondly, *auteur* criticism tends to schematize defined patterns, but using such a formalist/ structuralist approach may endanger and contradict the whole purpose of film criticism. Art does not have a set of stable assumptions and formulating a list of specific characteristics of the different *auteurs* presents a reductive perspective on film. In this case, and taking into consideration the idea that *auteurs* must conform to certain specific and fixed characteristics, all their films would be reduced to an approved sameness. On this issue, Peter Wollen states in “*The Auteur Theory*” that,

[s]tructuralist criticism cannot rest at the perception of resemblances or repetitions (redundancies, in fact), but must also comprehend a system of differences and oppositions. In this way, texts can be studied not only in their universality (what they all have in common) but also in their singularity (what differentiates them from each other). (Caughie, 139)

Such observations can only confirm the idea that art is a spontaneous flow of thoughts and inspiration and consequently, a true *auteur* is not predictable and should not be recognized by a set of invariable motifs. As Peter Wollen further acknowledges: “The great directors must be defined in terms of shifting relations, in their singularity, as well as their uniformity” (Caughie, 143). Furthermore, Wollen cites Lévi-Strauss for whom “myths exist independently of style” (Caughie, 144), and states that the great *metteurs en scène*, as arguably in the case of Vincente Minnelli should not be undervalued for not being an *auteur* because that would be ignoring the stylistic and expressive dimension of film, a dimension which the author is free to concentrate entirely in. Besides, some studies on *auteurism* suggest that *mise-en-scène* may be very valuable to reveal the author. According to John Caughie,

It is with the *mise en scène* that the *auteur* transforms the material which has been given to him; so it is in the *mise en scène* - in the disposition of the scene, in the camera movement, in the camera placement, in the movement from shot to shot - that the *auteur* writes his individuality into the film. (Caughie, 12-13)

To a certain extent, the attention *auteurism* focuses on *mise en scène* may contribute to an authentic and accurate film criticism that is concerned with the mechanisms of visual discourse and not with literary patterns.

In addition to this, there are several factors that act upon a subject to make a film. A film need not be the predicament exclusively of an internal artistic motivation. The individual can be rather impelled by several external factors that affect the final product of a film. In the essay "Ideas of Authorship", Edward Buscombe proposes the analysis of the effects of cinema on society, society on the cinema and the effects of films on other films. In my personal view, and because film is a melting pot of ideas and perceptions of reality from innumerable centres of culture, film analysis should not be restricted to an appreciation of the personal universe of the author. To reinforce this position, in the essay "Comment on the Idea of Authorship" Stephen Heat considers that the author is regarded as the creator of discourse but a language is by definition social "*beyond any particular individuality*" (Caughie, 215). In this context, it makes no sense to dissociate films from all the other factors to which they are exposed and from this perspective Buscombe's proposal is of major importance.

There is also another side of the issue which concerns the reception of the film. Recent studies demonstrate that the nature of film is closely related to the interpretation that an audience makes of it. The scope of film interpretation should not be restricted to its *auteur*. In relation to this, Roland Barthes developed some ideas in the field of literary criticism which can be applied to film. He declared that "to give a text [film] an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Caughie, 212). In the light of the evidence, it is clear that in some points although it greatly increased the status of film art, the *auteur* theory presents a reductive perspective on film analysis. The interpretation of film includes much more than confining its meaning to the perspective of its author. In fact, the artist has no monopoly over the meanings which his / her work of art generates. It is therefore something of an absurdity to propose that all signification is cooked up inside the artist's head. Meaning in the cinema (itself a

social milieu) is a complex negotiation between form, social context, individual experience and audience reception.

Certainly in film everything depends on the viewer's vantage-point and it is in the audience that a consensus view lies. Yet, this reception is also influenced by the audience's historical and social background and it is not possible to create stable and universal ideas about a film or an *auteur* because interpretation itself is formed by questions, doubts and contradictions. In 1968, Roland Barthes had already come to the conclusion that any given text consists not of one authorial voice, but of external influences, subconscious drives and pre-existing texts which shape signification. Barthes's theory proclaimed the death of the author in favour of the reader's free interaction with the text: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author"¹⁰. Speaking about cinema in an era in which the audience is expected to have an active role in constructing meanings in films and culture in general, it makes sense to state that "the birth of the [viewer] must be at the cost of the death of the Author". In this context, it is important to emphasize that while film culture was struggling to assume the director as an author, literature was shedding the author as autonomous creator. Thus, modern theory was deconstructing *auteurism* in all its applications, including its traditional, secure heartland. John Caughie acknowledges that

the critical shift which *auteurism* effected within the history of film criticism can be seen as a step backwards to a romantic conception of the artist as it is described by Abrams: a regressive step precisely at the moment at which romanticism was becoming less secure in other branches of criticism, and in a medium in which an aesthetic of individual self-expression seemed least appropriate. (Caughie, 11)

To sum up, I believe that the *auteur* theory presents both advantages and drawbacks. At a primary level, it acknowledges filmmaking as an art and recognizes the talent of new artists within a hitherto despised commercial industry. However, in choosing to ignore that films are a collaborative endeavour and by isolating them from their historical / social context, *auteurism* risks missing an important part of the richness of a mechanical-era art form. It is of crucial importance to understand that films are not products of a single controlling entity;

¹⁰ Taken from Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" in John Caughie's *Theories of Authorship*, 213.

instead, they are products of their times and they cannot be separated from their universal context. I recognize the importance of the *auteur* theory but I believe that it should be just one critical tool among many others in order to enlarge our understanding of films and cinema in their total context. One of those contexts is that *auteurism* has been usurped cynically by the film industry as a marketing tool for promoting films. When the lights go down and the screen says “A Martin Scorsese film”, this is very far from meaning that Martin Scorsese had total control over it: it works rather as something like a brand name, like Nike or Hugo Boss, to be a minimum guarantee of quality rather than a critical description.

The Implications of *Auteurism* in Allen’s Films

In the epilogue of Nancy Pogel’s *Woody Allen* she writes: “Since the release of his early comedies *Take the Money and Run* and *Bananas*, Woody Allen has developed into American cinema’s most renowned auteur”. In fact, after the overview offered in the previous section, there should be little doubt that Woody Allen meets the conditions for being considered an *auteur* in the classical sense of the word, since his unifying presence is crucial to the plot, tone and success of his films. His first step towards a career as an *auteur* has to do with the establishment of his onstage *persona*, which finds its genesis in Allen’s early comedies. In this context, to understand how the status of *auteur* arose and developed throughout his work, it is important to make a brief retrospective of his career, focusing on the influences on and function of his early little-man *persona*.

During the period of time between the 1950’s and the 1980’s, the United States witnessed the arrival of a wave of Jewish entertainer writers who emerged as artists, such as Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner and Neil Simon. Following a similar trajectory, only after having established himself as a comic writer and entertainer, did Woody Allen start his career in film. Moreover, Allen’s experience as a stand-up comic and the ability to transform his diffidence into the key to his success allowed him to develop his stage *persona* and to become familiar to the public.

It was around 1965 that he engaged in filmmaking, starting his career as screenwriter and performer in *What's New, Pussycat?* According to Nancy Pogel “[n]either the critics nor Woody Allen considered *What's New, Pussycat?* an artistically important movie” (Pogel, 34). Nevertheless, the film was commercially successful enough to project Allen as the director of his own films. Besides, while the film is not an artistic achievement, it already reflects some of the themes developed in greater depth by Allen in later works. *What's New, Pussycat?* reflects the changes caused by the sexual revolution that took place in the sixties and this is probably the reason why the film's prevailing themes are related to the longing for romantic fulfilment and the desire for sexual accomplishment, which already focuses on Allen's tendency to analyse modern relationships. Meanwhile, he had written two stage plays: *Don't Drink the Water* (1969), a comic espionage story of the Cold War / iron curtain period and *Play it Again, Sam* (1969), whose film version is going to be analysed in a further section of this thesis. By this time, Woody signed a contract with United Artists to write whatever he wanted and make whatever film he wanted to make. Although *What's New, Pussycat?* marked Allen's *entrée* to the world of film, it was his next film, *Take the Money and Run* (1969) that marked the beginning of his directing experience. Consequently it was at that time that Woody felt his career in film had really began. Likewise, most of his critics agree that with *Take the Money and Run* Allen gave the first step towards becoming a renewed auteur. *Take the Money and Run* recreates the typically American gangster myth film such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and subverts its conventions. Virgil Starkwell (Woody Allen), the leading character is not as tough as a criminal is expected to be. To achieve a desirable comic effect, Allen deconstructs formulaic genres and stereotypes of “macho” ideals and portrays a clumsy incompetent gangster whose nervous mannerisms would be perpetrated by Allen's comic persona. Curiously, at the same time the audience laughs at Allen's little man comic disarticulation, Virgil Starkwell reveals Allen's preference for casting sympathetic anti-heroes as leading characters. In effect, Allen's films facilitate the spectator-character identification because Allen avoids models of heroism and portrays human, imperfect people. As Nancy Pogel

remarks, “Virgil Starkwell’s disorderly ineptitude signifies antistructure and makes us laugh at our reluctance to acknowledge our own very human flaws” (Pogel, 38).

One of the greatest ironies about Woody Allen’s career is that “[w]hile the character has almost no control over what happens to him, the man has almost complete control over what he does” (Lax, 11). From the very onset, it is Allen who makes the key decisions about the script, the acting, the sets, the camera-work, the cast, the direction, the editing and even the music. Strategies such as minimal lightning in close shots, direct addresses to the camera, voice over, black and white credits, flashbacks, visual images and the use of jazz as background music are recurrent in his films. The fact that he often employs the same crew - cinematographers Sven Nyquist, Gordon Willis, Carlo Di Palma and that he works with a reduced cast of friends and intimates, often featuring the same actors (as is the case of Diane Keaton, Mia Farrow, Dianne Weist, Judi Davis and Tony Roberts) helps to create an intimate approach of filming and one that has much in common with the serious theatre.

The setting of Allen’s films is also very familiar since most of them take place in New York, something that reveals a lot about the urban mentality of the artist. Allen has a cerebral love relationship with city spaces and this becomes evident through the constant homage he pays to New York (a subject which will be analysed in a later section). In his films, Allen throws a seductive look at his beloved Manhattan. Although Allen is a caricaturist who builds a specific portrait of the Jewish intelligentsia, he does not caricature New York; he romanticizes it in all its glamour and mystique. Eric Lax acknowledges that

New York is never dirty or decayed in a Woody Allen movie. Instead it glimmers and soars, it moves at an invigoratingly frantic pace and seems the apotheosis of cosmopolitan living. As he showed through George Gershwin’s music in *Manhattan*, New York, to him, is a rhapsody. (Lax, 20)

On the other hand, it is undeniable that personal concerns and life experiences do go into his films, exposing the self-reflexive nature of his works. Themes like the difficulties of living in a world without God, the fragility of romance, the fear of death, the purpose of art, the importance of moral awareness and the dangers of

lacking it are recurrent in his work. In fact, his whole career is marked by the search for a suitable personal model of artistic creation that can express his view of life. Although Allen's themes remain more or less the same from the beginning to recent times, his ingenuity in expressing them has developed through time. Themes like the fragility of romance and the longing for human connection accompany Allen's whole body of work. The audience finds them in the early films, like *Take the Money and Run* (1969) and in more mature works as is the case of *Annie Hall* (1977). The difference is that while in the early films Allen expands serious themes in a comic perspective, in later works he reveals a complex sensibility in their treatment.

It is not difficult to show that Woody Allen's career has passed through different stages. His early films were markedly comic and used the structure of *Bildungsroman*. These first comic films which include *What's up Tiger Lily?* (1966), *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Bananas* (1971), *Everything you Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (1972), *Sleeper* (1973) and *Love and Death* (1975) are a mixture of influences: his urban Jewish middle class humour, the tradition of the little-man humour and the very texts they mock. *Love and Death*, for example, has literary antecedents because it is based and influenced by the 19th Russian novel. In the first instance, Woody develops the figure of the *schlemiel* which belongs to the Yiddish folklore. According to Mary Nichols in *Reconstructing Woody: Art, Love and Life in the Films of Woody Allen*, "the *schlemiel* is a loser (especially in love) who is victimized whichever way he turns but nevertheless converts his weakness into strength by means of his wit, his intellect, and his humour" (Nichols, 19-20). In fact, Woody Allen recreates with sophistication the figure of the "loser-as-a-hero" *schlemiel*, transforming him into an ironic analyst of the human condition. The *schlemiel* is an outsider, a misfit in an odd society, who suffers from the Jewish syndrome of guilt about material success. In this sense, the *schlemiel* mirrors the frustrations of the modern American *modus vivendi*: the claustrophobic urbanization, lack of communication and the division of people in ethnic ghettos. According to David Desser and Lester Friedman in the second chapter of *American-Jewish Filmmakers: Traditions and Trends*, the *schlemiel*

becomes the modern philosopher by mocking serious institutions, and by raising intimate meditations on controversial and recurrent themes such as sex, love, religion and art. In effect, as Irving Howe points out

As a possible mirror to the self, the *schlemiel* has a deep attractiveness at every point of our existence, for surely everyone holds a deep persuasion – and with sufficient basis, too – that he or she is indeed a *schlemiel*. (Howe, 571).

Consequently, more than fulfilling the mere function of an entertainer, the *schlemiel* becomes a tool for criticism of serious themes and this is perhaps the most striking and innovative feature of Allen's comedy. Perhaps he is a modern Jewish version of the Shakespearean Fool-made-hero, one that makes us laugh at ourselves, using parody to criticise society.

The second great focus of influence in his early films is the tradition of little-man humour, which appeared in America in the 1920s and which has as its main representatives bittersweet and self-aware comic genius such as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Groucho Marx and J. S. Perelman in the literary tradition. In *Woody Allen*, Nancy Pogel explains the origin of this comic tradition:

Modern humorists find their world bewildering and unreliable rather than stable; rapid changes constantly threaten their values, the environment often seems overwhelming. As a result, their tone is often anxious, neurotic – even hysterical; they sometimes retreat into “inner space,” into fantasy worlds of impossible dreams and self-denigrating nightmares. (Pogel, 2)

Nancy Pogel also quotes the words of Hamlin Hill who says that “urbane humour...reflects the tinge of insanity and despair of contemporary society” (Pogel, 2). From this humoristic tradition Allen took the distrust of and distaste for the fast pace of modern society and all its underlying phobias, a sense of mischief towards technology and the longing for close companionship. There can be no doubt that Woody Allen is an excellent observer of the “human comedy” and therefore his jokes stem directly from his close observations. His great dilemma is related to his apparent unfitness for society and to the need to try to be morally consistent in a dehumanized society. As Nancy Pogel states,

Despite the fact that conventional meaning and value systems no longer offer solace, the little man tries to remain a basically ethical character, one whose attempts to be honest set him apart from the modern mob and serve

as a positive contrast to the modern environment in which he tries to maintain his sanity. (Pogel, 3)

Notwithstanding this, Allen's little-man is well-aware of the oppressive ways of the world and becomes a master of irony at all levels. Nancy Pogel acknowledges that,

The little-man becomes the focus of Allen's existential predilection for dismantling monologic belief systems and social conventions with a greater tenacity than most early little-man humorists or filmmakers were willing to pursue. Allen has no sure solutions, but he effectively questions our most comforting cultural norms or fundamental beliefs and lays doubt on the claims of those concepts that pretend to offer meaning, and prevent people from facing the crucial problems of existence. (Pogel, 8-9)

Woody Allen is a thinker and he wants people to think. Consequently, he challenges codes as well as he overthrows established assumptions, assuming the role of a countercultural figure in a hostile society.

Widely regarded as one of the most important influences on Allen's work, Charlie Chaplin is also the main representative of the little-man tradition in film. In real life, both Allen and Chaplin write, play a part and direct the different stages of the filmmaking process. In fiction, most critics seem to agree with the fact that Chaplin's little tramp and Allen's little-man share many resemblances. Firstly, since they represent solitary figures their *personas* are simultaneously victims and fierce critics of the hostile world which surrounds them. Secondly, in their longing for human connection, they both provide a human alternative in the dehumanized and impersonal world they inhabit in. Another common feature of Chaplin's little fellow and Allen's little man is that in difficult or unpleasant circumstances, both of them retreat into imaginary or fantasy worlds. An example of this, is that at the same time Allan Felix seeks advice in Hollywood imaginary figures (*Play it Again, Sam*) or Sandy Bates escapes from reality into childhood recollections, (*Stardust Memories*) the little tramp falls asleep and introduces a dream sequence in which he imagines New Year's Eve party in "his" cabin and the famous dinner rolls dance or try to eat his shoe's laces as substitute for spaghetti (*The Gold Rush*). Curiously, both filmmakers are aware of the fact that fantasy does not always offer solace for reality demands. As Nancy Pogel observes, "[I]ike Allen's films,

Chaplin's often reflexive art is ambivalent about the powers of imagination, holding faith and scepticism in delicate balance" (Pogel, 6). Apart from this, artistic creativity is something for which both Allen and Chaplin find no rational explanation. In *Limelight* (1952), clown Calvero (Charlie Chaplin) becomes the embodiment of the intuitive artist before entering the stage for his final performance:

Calvero: This is where I belong.

Terry: I thought you hated the theatre.

Calvero: I do. I also hate the sight of my blood, but it's in my veins.
(*Limelight*)

Although Allen's *persona* is partly influenced by the tradition of the American silent comedy and especially by Chaplin, there are also remarkable differences between them. To begin with, it was already referred that Allen came to film from writing and that much of his humour stems from the literary tradition. Therefore, contrarily to Chaplin's, Allen's humour is much more verbal than visual. Allen's comic situations rely mostly on their dialogic nature, something which also stems from his experience as a stand-up comedian. While Chaplin's humour places emphasis on visual situations and slapstick acrobatics Allen expounds verbal humour. One of the best epitomes for Chaplin's comic situations is one sequence in *The Tramp* (1915) where a vagrant exchanges the Tramp's (Charlie Chaplin) sandwich for a brick and consequently, the Tramp has to eat grass. Later, the same vagrant molests a farmer's daughter and the tramp helps her using the brick. Another emblematic epitome for Chaplin's situational humour, happens in *Modern Times* (1936) when the Tramp looks for a bolt to tighten while he is being pulled through the gears of an enormous machine. Although Allen's first films are an excellent combination of slapstick and verbal comedy, Allen's comic strength resides in his comic verbal ability. In *Sleeper* (1973), many examples of comic humour can be found. After being frozen for 200 years, Miles Monroe (Woody Allen), the leading character exclaims: "I haven't seen my analyst in 200 years. He was a strict Freudian. If I'd been going all this time, I'd probably almost be cured by now" (*Sleeper*). Miles's self-definition is also very funny and demonstrates Allen's cerebral and verbal humour: "I'm what you would call a teleological, existential atheist. I believe that there's intelligence to the universe, with an exception of

certain parts of New Jersey” (*Sleeper*). The differences between the two filmmakers are also historically explained: Allen writes about modern American life. As the author affirms, “I don’t want my pictures to be compared with Keaton or Chaplin. You can’t compare. I’m working forty years later. I’m a product of TV and psychoanalysis” (Hirsch, 108). In this context, while Chaplin’s comedy placed a heavy emphasis on visual and physical humour, providing for the tastes of people in the twenties (with a large percentage of non-English-speaking immigrants in America, and an enormous following all around the world), Allen’s comedy is essentially verbal and it responds to the needs and tastes of contemporary life. The differences between Allen and his sources are as obvious as the similarities: unlike Chaplin’s comedy, Allen is a comedy of dialogue and monologue, not a comedy of situation.

Another element that distinguishes the two comics is that Chaplin’s films are enriched in their emotional tone and Allen prefers a cerebral tradition of comedy like Groucho Marx. In other words, while Chaplin appeals strongly to people’s feelings, something suggested by the end of *City Lights* (1931), Allen uses psychoanalysis to analyse and intellectualise relationships. In addition to this, I would argue that the main difference between Allen and Chaplin’s *personas* lies in their visual construction. Unlike Chaplin, Allen’s *persona* does not wear a disguise. The little fellow wears a hat, baggy pants, a cane, a moustache and is characterised by his duck-walking. In Allen’s case, his *persona’s* outlook is the very same of the “real character”: he wears the same glasses and the same clothes Allen uses everyday. These similarities fostered the confusion between the real character and the fictional character. In addition to this, while Chaplin’s disguise might have helped in disassociating the real Chaplin from his *persona* when he faced some scandals concerning his private life, the similarities between Allen and his *persona* contributed to a deeper identification between the character and the private behaviour of the filmmaker during the period of the Soon Yi / Mia Farrow scandal.

In this first openly comic stage, the impact of Allen's little-man *persona* was immediate. The clumsy red-haired character with black-rimmed glasses caused an immediate confounding of his onstage *persona* and his offstage personality. Moreover, as his comic talent is integral to his personal attitude towards life, it is difficult to dissociate the comic from the man. As Woody recognizes, "I grew up taking great delight in comedy and making people laugh. I was always identifying with the comedian. It was a very painless way to get through life" (Lax, 70).

After completing a series of comic successes in the 70's he moved on to a new register and adopted a more serious style with *Annie Hall* (1977), a major turning point in his career, marking the advent of a new phase of his artistry and revealing his New Yorker intellectual sensibility. The works of this period, which include *Interiors* (1978), *Manhattan* (1979), *Stardust Memories* (1980), and *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) among others, reveal the influence of the European cinema and are full of references to great *auteurs* like Bergman, Fellini and Fritz Lang. Although they are rooted in a comic perspective, the films of this period use a more mature kind of humour and employ more "built" complex jokes and less one-liners. Gradually, his films became more self-reflexive and try to broach questions about his personal and artistic identity. Moreover, through his intimate groups and small-scale personal approach he engages with previous contemporary themes such as art, war, philosophy, communication and love. In these films, although Allen's *milieu* is materially comfortable and solidly professional, he confronts people with the selfishness of their instincts and shows that even people in elegant clothes cannot evade existential questions and social responsibilities. *Interiors*, for example, is Allen's first serious film without him as performer. Allen's absence in this film is probably related to the comic figure Allen had created. His participation in *Interiors* could have manipulated the audience's expectations and could have shadowed the serious tone of the film. Allen's first drama received negative reviews because of his negativity and nihilistic vision of the world. In addition to this, *Interiors* was released one year after the successful and bittersweet *Annie Hall* and the audience was not prepared for such a dramatic shift in tone. As Nancy Pogel states,

[s]everal noncomedic characters now express the little soul's growing self-consciousness and his anxieties; they participate in the search for meaning that resided in the little men of the earliest comedies (...) As in all Allen's films, the characters in *Interiors* have debates with themselves and with each other. (Pogel, 99)

The growing self-reflexivity to which Nancy Pogel refers is clearly influenced by European Art Cinema. In the case of *Interiors*, Bergmanian influences in the atmosphere and plot of the film encouraged critics to find similarities between Allen's drama and Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (1972). The plot of both *Interiors* and *Cries and Whispers* revolve around the story of three sisters, their relationships and the role of love. Another important theme of *Interiors* and in Allen's serious films in general, is the value and role of art, something which had already summoned interpretation in films like *Play it Again* (1972), *Sam and Annie Hall* (1977). However, in these two last films, Allen explores the regenerative power of art and in *Interiors* he focuses on its self-destructive ability. According to Mary Nichols,

Eve is an interior decorator whose art suffocates and paralyzes both her and her family. In *Play It Again, Sam* Allen presents the positive potential of art to inspire noble action, while in *Interiors* he examines its more destructive side. (Nichols, 50)

Despite the shift in the tone, Allen's themes, techniques and aesthetic of the films remain broadly consistent (some employ fantasy projection and invention rather more freely than others) but the main dilemma of his characters is still the struggle for moral integrity in a modern world unanchored by coherent systems of belief. The following sections of this thesis will focus on Allen's serious films, exploring the thematic of art and life and analysing the way the author himself plays with his status as an *auteur*.

Chapter II:

BEHIND AND IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA

The cinema is not an art which films life: the cinema is something between art and life. Unlike painting and literature, the cinema both gives to life and takes from it...

Jean-Luc Godard

Fiction and Reality

Woody Allen would certainly agree with Susan Sontag when she affirms in the beginning of *Against Interpretation* that “[t]he earliest experience of art must have been that it was incantatory, magical; art was an instrument of ritual” (Sontag, 3). In conversation with Stig Björkman in *Woody Allen on Woody Allen*, the filmmaker recollects his first-time experience in a movie theatre thus:

I saw my first film when I was eleven years old. But to me this first visit to a movie-theatre was a kind of revelation, an almost religious experience. It was a MGM musical and I immediately fell in love with the leading actress, Jane Powell. And then I started watching movies almost every day. (Björkman, 2)

Allen’s fascination with film and the cinematic image, as well as his awareness of the tantalizing effect that films have over people is probably the explanation for the fact that, in most of his films, he deals self-reflexively with the concept of cinema. As a matter of fact, most of the characters portrayed in his films are people connected with the creative arts, particularly writers, stand-up comedians, film directors and therefore, as Mary Nichols observes “[w]hether or not Allen makes movies reflecting his personal life, his movies do reflect his life as an artist” (Nichols, 13). To a certain extent, cinema has provided not only Allen but all of us the magic that real life lacks, supplying audiences with the vicarious fulfilment of their fantasies. Rita Hayworth, for example, is forever associated with the character Gilda (*Gilda*, 1946), a fictionalized version of the seductive, glamour-exuding woman every man is supposed to dream of. Although several sources describe Rita Hayworth to be a shy person and contrast the security of his onscreen *persona* with the insecurity of the real Rita, she was entrapped by the mythical *femme fatale* she created and become a sexual icon of the forties, known as “Love Goddess”. Woody Allen is aware of the power cinema possesses to “off-the-shelf fantasies” which become collective fantasies. In this sense, many of his

films are films-within-a-film particularly interested in scrutinizing the complex relationship between art and life, reality and fantasy and people's inability to distinguish and choose between them. On the other hand, Allen's work also unveils the meaningful relationships established between the trinomial film (art) – audience - artist, as he tries to understand the social and individual importance of filmic language. What do the movies do to us and for us? Is cinema a means of escape and of social catharsis or is it a vehicle of social intervention? What is reality in a cinematic context? How far can we distinguish reality from fiction? What are the consequences of blurring the line between these two worlds? Is it art that imitates life or life that imitates art... neither or perhaps both? Allen's work raises innumerable questions about the nature of cinema and its effects, beginning with his character's own obsessive repeat viewing of *The Sorrow and the Pity* in *Annie Hall*. This chapter will analyse the conflicting appeals of realism and day-dream in three of Allen's films where most evidently the two antithetic poles (reality and fantasy) merge: *Play it Again, Sam* (1972), *Stardust Memories* (1980) and *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985).

Film Analysis

The beginning of these three self-conscious fictions “à la Woody Allen” immediately fosters the interplay between reality and fantasy, leading to the reflection of the questions listed above. Foster Hirsch is correct when he states in *Love, Sex, Death and the Meaning of Life – the films of Woody Allen* that throughout the 80s “Allen celebrates the medium as a kind of white magic – only in the movies can we be released so easily from the laws of space and time” (Hirsch, 212). However, this epiphany seems already to have begun on stage with *Play it Again, Sam* (1968) and its film version in 1972. At first sight, *Play it Again, Sam* reminds us of *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Both films open with the camera focusing on Allan Felix (Woody Allen) and Cecilia (Mia Farrow) inside a movie theatre completely mesmerized by *Casablanca* (1942) and *Top Hat* (1935) respectively, watching to a world that cannot be their own, which is part of its appeal. The reflected faces of the real audience also see their own selves

projected up onto the screen. Identification and recognition become two keywords in the universe of both films because in the same way that Allan Felix and Cecilia establish a link between themselves and the characters of the films they are watching, so does the real audience ('us') and this will facilitate "our" reception of the films. By witnessing the characters' alienation from the real world and their absorption into fantasy, the real audience is invited to share a unique moment of intimate pleasure. After all, is the movie not having the same effect on the characters that it is having on us? According to Sam Girgus, Allan Felix's identification with Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) is so deep that he acquires a new identity, transforming himself into a new subject:

As Allan watches *Casablanca* on the screen, subjectivity and identity become largely ephemeral. Felix floats from being the imaginary subject of the action of the movie to being simply a viewer who loses his identity and ability to act through his total immersion into the interior film *Casablanca* (...). The sequence of shots from Bergman and Bogart to Allen and back again demonstrates the fragmented and disjointed nature of subjectivity. The visual images duplicate and dramatize psychic division. This interlacing of glances and shots involving Bergman, Bogart, and Felix places Felix psychologically in the film *Casablanca*. Bergman's gaze from the screen to Felix constitutes a life-giving act, endowing him with a new identity and reality in the darkened theater. (Girgus, 32)

An explanation for this may be that the cinematic experience masters and subverts the Kantian categories of space, time and causality that form the real world. Cinema refines and recreates them, allowing a personal organization of these categories. Taking this into account, the cinematic freedom the spectator is given is similar to that of consciousness, that of the mind itself, and for this reason we are able to establish a relationship between the two processes. As Munsterberg states:

The photoplay tells us a human story by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely space, time, and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely attention, memory, imagination and emotion... [These events] reach complete isolation from the practical world through the perfect unity of plot and pictorial appearance. (Munsterberg quoted by Dudley, 25)

Like Allan Felix and Cecilia, so does the real audience emerge into the world that is presented before its eyes, a world which the audience takes and accepts as the

true universe even if it is for scarce hours. As Robert Knopf explains in *Theater and Film – a Comparative Anthology*:

Alone, hidden in a dark room, we watch through half-open blinds a spectacle that is unaware of our existence and which is part of the universe. There is nothing to prevent us from identifying ourselves in imagination with the moving world before us, which becomes *the* world. (Knopf, 115)

However, when the films come to an end, the magic fades away and both characters seem to be waking from a dream. The look of desolation with which Allen regards the empty chairs of the theatre and Cecilia's alienated return to reality is only comparable with Allen's childhood memories of leaving the theatre, which he describes in *Woody Allen – a Biography* as:

... the worst experience in the world. You'd go into the theater at noon on a hot summer day, and you'd sit through *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Return of Scarlet Pimpernel* and it would be nothing but sheer magical joy, eating your chocolate-covered raisins for three or four hours. Then you would come out at three in the afternoon and leave the world of beautiful women and music and, you know, bravery or penthouses or things like that. And suddenly you would be out on Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn and the trolleys would be passing and the sun would be blinding and there was no more air conditioning. I remember that sense of coming out into the ugly light when I walked out after *Always Leave Them Laughing* with Milton Berle and after *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. (Lax, 26-27)

It seems clear therefore that in the theatre Allan Felix and Cecilia are able to transcend themselves, disjoin their minds and live simultaneously other's lives as if they were their own. For both Allan Felix and Cecilia the theatre represents an "initiatory space" which divides the two antagonistic worlds of fantasy and reality. The movement of the films is made from the "inside" (the movie theatre represents fantasy) to the "outside" (the real world) because this way the impact of the gulf between microcosm and macrocosm is much more effective. Unlike Allan Felix, however, Cecilia is only able to "return" to real life with the 'help' of the theatre manager, who functions as the external link between the two worlds.

As for *Stardust Memories*, the opening scene is reminiscent of Fellini's autobiographical *8 ½*. The character played by Woody Allen is inside a train full of sad-looking people but as he looks out the window his eyes glimpse another train full of joyful and engaging people. Try as he may to change trains, his attempts

are in vain. Surprisingly, the destiny of both trains is the same; at the end they both end up in a garbage dump. Then, the lights come up and again the real audience sees its image projected onto the screen. After all, we were only watching the last scene of Sandy Bate's (Woody Allen) new film and the character on the screen was not the character played by Woody Allen in *Stardust Memories* but the character played by the fictional Sandy Bates in his own movie. In the next sequence, the audience witnesses a discussion between Sandy Bates and the producers of his film who censure him for "fobbing off private suffering as art" and who do not accept such a nihilistic ending because that does not sell movie tickets in Hollywood. However, Sandy does not want his films to fulfil any specific escapist purpose, he wants them to reflect reality the way he sees it: "I don't want to make funny films anymore", "I don't feel funny. I look around the world and all I see is human suffering" (*Stardust Memories*). In contrast, the movies executives want the film to present the idealistic fantasies the audience craves and therefore, they want the film to end in a "Jazz Heaven". The beginning of *Stardust Memories*, just like *Play it Again, Sam* and *The Purple Rose of Cairo* triggers the debate and the reflection upon the competing attractions reality and fantasy. One thing becomes clear: in one way or another Allan Felix, Cecilia and Sandy Bates pursue relief through their fantasies. In these films Allen continues his tradition of celebrating the weaknesses of his anti-heroes, transforming them into strengths. He avoids heroism and portrays normal people so that the real audience can recognize themselves easily in the characters on screen. According to Wernblad in *Brooklyn is Not Expanding: Woody Allen's Comic Universe*, the real heroes in *Purple Rose* and *Play it Again, Sam* are not Gil Shephard or Tom Baxter and Humphrey Bogart, but Allan Felix and Cecilia.

Further analysis of the plot of these films will demonstrate throughout this chapter that one of the major strengths of Allen's work consists in the way he manages to draw the audience into the plot of each film, so that the fusion between reality and fantasy achieves a deeper level. As far as *Play it Again, Sam* is concerned, it may be argued, to some extent, that this is already a forerunner of *Annie Hall* (1977), widely regarded as the turning point in Allen's career. *Play it*

Again, Sam echoes Allen's career as a stand-up-comedian, but it simultaneously denotes a more serious tone. The difference of *Play it Again, Sam* from Allen's other comedies such as *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Bananas* (1971) or *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex - But Were Afraid to Ask* (1972) is that the quest for a long-lasting romantic relationship "presents Woody not in an outlandish Marxian farce, but on terra firma, suffering the pangs of sexual defeat and enjoying the thrill of sexual triumph" (Hirsch 78-79). In fact, it "sets Woody up in a new relationship to his audience, one based less on our sense of superiority to his character than on our identification with him in his state of sexual anxiety and romantic longing" (Hirsch, 79). Thereby, as Nancy Pogel remarks, "filmmaker, audience, and characters will all be implicated more seriously in a modern viewpoint that permits no comforting certainties about what constitutes fiction" (Pogel, 48).

In Maurice Yacowar's view, there is little doubt that the film "explores the ambivalent effects of film upon our self-conception" (Yacowar, 52), since it portrays the life of film critic Allan Felix, who tries to succeed in love and life by imitating his idol, Rick from *Casablanca*. His ex-wife, Nancy, complained that the only thing they did together was watching movies and her thirst for excitement did not combine with Allen's philosophy of life, because he was in her opinion "one of the world's great watchers" (*Play it again, Sam*). Movies work as substitutes for Allan's life to such an extent that he does not live his own life because he is absorbed by others' lives. The question that the film poses is, whether movies provide an escape from life or whether they are useful to life. Quoting the words of Mary Nichols, "[i]n *Play it Again, Sam* Allen portrays the neuroses of modern life and raises the question of whether movies foster those neuroses. Do they mislead us about life? Do they corrupt? Or can movies be of use in overcoming our neuroses?" (Nichols, 14-15)

The relation between reality and fantasy goes way beyond Allen's imitation of Bogart. The truth is that not only does Bogart represent Allan's idol, but he also comes down off the screen, as a projection of Allan Felix's mind and advises him

about his love affairs. Notwithstanding this, Allan Felix proves to be a clumsy antithesis of his hero, and “each time, Felix’s attempt to project a suave Bogart image disintegrates into ludicrous bumbling” (Yacowar, 51). Indeed, as Nancy Pogel remarks, much of the comic effect of the film derives from the gap between “Allan’s identification with heroic models and the limitations of his real world” (Pogel, 49). Allan Felix is evidently an anti-hero who contrasts with the macho ideals of Rick, who when referring to Allan’s divorce tells him “nothing a little bourbon and soda couldn’t fix” or “there is no dame who doesn’t understand a slap in the mouth, or the slug from a forty-five” (*Play it Again, Sam*). Allan Felix is also very different from his best friend, Dick (Tony Roberts), who represents “a parody of the American entrepreneur” in Mary Nichols’s opinion. Dick neglects a wife who loves him because he is always worried about business. Even when Allan Felix divorces Nancy (Susan Anspach), Dick tells him: “A man makes an investment, it doesn’t pay off” (*Play it Again, Sam*). According to him Allan Felix “invested his emotions on a losing stock” and therefore he must “reinvest” them.

Of all the other characters Linda (Diane Keaton) is the most similar to Allan. Obsessed by psychiatrists, she and Allan share a complex of neuroses and lack of self-esteem. Even so, Linda is the positive element that will help Allan to overcome his fears and to be himself, dissuading him from imitating Rick because “real life is not like that”. Eventually, Allan falls in love with Linda and tries to seduce her but he is not successful because while he tries to imitate Rick, “instead of dealing directly with his own emotions, he retreats into film-based fantasies” (Yacowar, 53). In a sense, he is trapped in a fantasy world that does not allow him to be himself. So, in the first part of the movie, Allan Felix’s life imitates art. Deeply immersed in fantasy with films, posters and books he tries to shape his life after Rick’s life. As Maurice Yacowar states: “(...)he regresses into fantasies and attempts to model his life after art, instead of taking art as an illumination of life (...) for Felix, a work of art establishes a pattern that he tries to achieve in his life...” (Yacowar, 58). Nevertheless, unlike Cecilia in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Allan Felix undergoes change and throughout the film the initial relation between reality and fantasy is subverted. The sequence in which Allan is trying to seduce

Linda with Rick's help is crucial to the understanding of the film. Rick incites Allan to conquer Linda although she is his best friend's wife, but despite Allan Felix's attempts he is not successful at first. Suddenly, Nancy's ghost appears and starts a discussion with Rick blaming him for Allan's lack of proper life. This metaphoric scene represents the 'tug-of-war' between reality and fantasy so common in Allen's films. Nancy represents reality, while Rick represents fantasy. Eventually, Nancy "shoots" Rick who then disappears, leaving Allan all by himself. In that moment, Allan Felix drops his mask and turns abruptly to Linda and tries to kiss her. At first she runs away, but after a while she comes back and both become involved in a love relationship. This is the moment when Allan "gives himself" to reality, setting himself free from a chain of unrealistic fantasies. To explain the essence of Linda and Allan Felix's relationship, Maurice Yacowar observes the following: "Freed from the conventional unrealities of romance and from the idealizing of false images, their love is based on their common human weakness. Linda's part in Felix's life is the antithesis of Bogart's, which is based on romantic posing" (Yacowar, 55). In the light of this evidence, only when Allan Felix learns to be himself, free from any beguiling illusions, is he able to conquer Linda's love.

However, the story has yet to undergo another turning point. As Dick realizes he is losing Linda, he decides to leave for California. Linda decides to follow him to the airport and Allan Felix, who has decided to save his friend's marriage, follows him without knowing that Linda is also doing the same. Surprisingly, it is Bogart who drives Allan Felix's taxi. Now he says, "there's other things in life besides dames and one of them is to know you did the right thing for a pal" (*Play it Again, Sam*). The last scene of *Play it Again, Sam* is a re-play of the last scene of *Casablanca*. Like his hero, Rick, Allan Felix takes the noble attitude of helping his friends at the expense of his own happiness and uses *Casablanca* as a form of acting in the best interests of all three. Allan tells Linda she must go with Dick, that if she is not on that plane she'll regret it, "may be not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon, and for the rest of her life", admitting that he has waited his whole life to pronounce the words from *Casablanca*. Although Linda goes away with Dick and Allan leaves the airport alone, he is given the chance to play

the role of his life and to fulfil a dream. In the end, “the reality he chooses over romance is the opportunity to live out his fantasy of playing Bogart”¹¹ (Nichols, 25). Nevertheless, the ending of *Play it Again, Sam* leaves in the air two possible and opposite interpretations: on the one hand, it shows that it is important to distinguish real from fictional situations. Only after conceptualizing that “the secret’s not being you, it’s being me”, which led to a choice of reality over fiction can Allan achieve his self-acceptance and authenticity. On the other hand, Felix discovers that the real purpose of escapist art is to hold an ideal of human conduct before us, so that we may be inspired and occasionally, just occasionally, we may live up to it. At this respect, Mary Nichols affirms:

When Allan Felix learns to be himself, then, he does not simply reject Bogart or the heroism of old movies; rather, he filters the images of the past and models himself on what is appropriate to him (...) By rejecting one side of Bogart and accepting another, Allen achieves his own form with the help of a movie. He has not let movies form him. Viewing movies has not caused him to lose himself in imaginary worlds, but it has helped him to realize his own integrity. (Nichols, 26-27)

Rick recognizes that Allan has reached a personal milestone, acknowledging his evolution as he understands that Allan Felix is not going to need him anymore: “Here’s looking at you, kid” (*Play it Again, Sam*). As Wes Gehring acknowledges in *Personality Comedians as Genre: Selected Players*, “[h]is closing wall-off symbolizes a literal as well as physical break with Bogart. And thus his posture changes from trying to ape art to constructively applying it to a less-than-perfect lifestyle” (Gehring, 158).

Play it Again, Sam also intends to reaffirm the essential moral values in an America already far distant from the forties. In fact, contemporary America’s problems, which swirl around neuroses and psychoanalysis, differ very much from those of an America teetering on the brink of war. Mary Nichols defends the idea that a replay is need to show that (as the famous theme song states) “the fundamental things apply”, i.e. fundamental moral values still apply. In this context, different times require different heroes and *Play it Again, Sam* reshapes a

¹¹ Diane Jacobs quoted by Mary Nichols in *Reconstructing Woody: Art, Love and Life in the Films of Woody Allen.*, 25.

new humanized hero very differently from Rick in *Casablanca*. Confounding cinema as an illusion of the real and a charismatic screen hero with the projection of an individual consciousness, Woody Allen reconfigures, in the opinion of Sam Girgus the new American hero:

From the midst of psychic fragmentation and visual displacement there emerges a vulnerable hero with an intense interior life who articulates his fears and exposes his emotional dependence on others – and makes us laugh to boot. In contrast to the classic Bogart myth of American manhood, Allan's hero finds love and identity by revealing rather than repressing pain, fear and dependence. (Girgus, 37)

It may then be concluded that “*Casablanca* remains a force in Allan's life”, since he “adopts new models of an earlier version” (Nichols, 25).

So, at the end of the film “Allan Felix is left with a self-conception that is on the mend, a more confident figure than he was when the film began” (Pogel, 53). All in all, Felix moves from an evasive or self-defensive use of the film to a practical positive one and in this sense, one can affirm that fantasy as ideals can also be applied to life for its improvement. Explaining that Allan Felix provides his own independence from films, Maurice Yacowar states that

(...) he ceases to distort his sense of reality to cohere with film conventions; instead he begins to use film language to express his sense of what the situation is. His use of film language at the airport is a kind of action, where his earlier fantasies were an evasion of action. (...) Through emulating Bogart, Felix discovers both a language for his feelings and the basis for his proper self-acceptance. He learns from Bogart that one thrives by being oneself. Ultimately Bogart does not represent a mythic ideal, but the fact that one can transcend physical limitations without sacrificing integrity and without denying one's nature. (Yacowar, 53)

The Purple Rose of Cairo is like *Play it Again, Sam* a homage to the cinema as “a factory of dreams” and it clearly delineates the dichotomy between real and reel worlds, presenting some of the fantasies that films help to construct for audiences. In general, the film deals with the perils of emulating heroic images created by the world of Hollywood, becoming in the words of Graham McCann “Allen's most satisfying expression of his anxiety over movies; his view of them (as escapism and enlightenment, deception and disclosure, crutch and catalyst) reflects his view of life” (McCann, 212). In this context, it is important to clarify that Allen's anxiety

about movies derives from a Jewish intellectually socially liberal position. On the other hand his “surrender” to movies, derives from a mass culture collective wish fulfilment psychological point of view. Although *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is a film-within-a-film, its complexity goes much further than this. In *The Films of Woody Allen*, Sam Girgus argues that “[t]he major achievement in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, however, involves Allen’s establishment of the relationship between these two worlds [the one of the movie-within-a-movie and a loving satire on thirties styles] and his engagement with such substantive issues as media, fiction, and reality” (Girgus, 96-97). The film is about the difference between reality and fantasy, and although it focuses on the seductive power of fantasy, it reminds us that we have to live with reality. The film takes place during the Depression Era but it is crucial that we understand that it is a product of the Eighties sophistication, with its more aware take on the implied naivety of the Thirties. Nevertheless, the choice of the 1930s for the setting of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* succeeds in contrasting with the brute reality of The Great Depression and the black-and-white glamour of the fictional world. In effect, the films of the 1930s are liberated from cash constraints in response to the Depression. The plot of the film portrays the life of Cecilia who uses cinema as an escape from the harsh reality she endures since her “story in this world leaves little room for anything besides pathos, loneliness, and despair” (Girgus, 97). It is only in the oneiric world of the cinema that she finds some consolation, only “in the darkness, lies the promise of illumination...” (McCann, 213). Cecilia’s dependence on film goes well beyond that of Allan Felix in *Play it Again, Sam*. While he is able to distance himself from the films he watches being aware that real life is very different from movies “Who’m I kidding? I’m not like that. I never was. I never will be – strictly the movies” (*Play it Again, Sam*), his situation is actually not all that desperate. Cecilia lives not only the lives of the fictional characters but also, as a fan, those of the real stars. She possesses the ability (but lacks the desire) to dissociate the fantasies of the cinema from her everyday life, “The people were so beautiful. They spoke so cleverly and they did such romantic things” (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). According to William Hutchings in the essay “Some of Us Are Real, Some Are Not”, the difference between reel and real worlds is

emphasized even in the opening sequence of the film, as drably clad Cecilia gazes at the movie poster's stylish woman in a "long slinky dress" – a succinct embodiment of all the desire that advertising can generate, the allure, fantasy, and commodification on which the movies (and popular culture in general) thrive. (King, 97)

To a great extent, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* incorporates many of Woody Allen's childhood longings. Childhood is appropriate on the grounds that Cecilia's naivety reminds us of Allen's discovery of cinema. At this respect, Meade goes so far as to affirm that

No role Woody Allen created was more Allan Konisberg's alter ego, his fictional soul mate, than Cecilia, who, like himself, discovers that the make-believe world of the movies is "a total, total joy". (Meade, 29)

A plausible explanation for the fact that Allan Konisberg and Cecilia share an idealized view of cinema may be related to the fact that Allen was born in the thirties, a Golden Age of the Hollywood studio system in which Cecilia lives and that was clearly marked by (perhaps even dependent on) the enchantment of film. About his childhood cinematic experience, Allen recalls the following:

This was such a glamorous time, as portrayed in films, and so great a contrast to life outside, that it was a pleasure to be in there and a monstrosity to be outside. My memory of it lingers: three hours of relentless sugar intake; of big apartments and white phones and characters whose biggest concern was 'Who are you going to take to the Easter parade?' You were transported to Arabia, and to Paris in the 1700s, but best of all to Manhattan, which was full of gangsters and showgirls. Afterward, as you walked out up the plush red carpet, the music would be playing to end the picture or to start the next one. Then the doors opened and you were back in the blazing light, amid the meat markets and trucks honking and people walking past. (Lax, 29)

The catalyst of the story is when Tom Baxter, the fictional character, escapes off the screen, "metamorphosing from black-and-white to color and causing one of the women in the audience to faint" (King, 97). In contrast to *Play it Again, Sam*, this has more implications because Tom Baxter is not purely a projection of Cecilia's mind unlike the figure of Bogart. Everyone can see and hear him. As Mary Nichols explains, "[h]e is not just an image in someone's mind (...) Tom Baxter comes off the movie screen to play a role in people's lives" (Nichols, 115). Moreover Mary Nichols also points out that Tom is a real-life explorer but "a 'real-life explorer' is also one who explores real life" (Nichols, 117). In effect, he gets off

the screen because he is tired of the fictional world to which he is confined. Tom is seduced by the unpredictability, mutability and spontaneity of life against the endless repetition of a performing show, the fixity of film art and by definition, all art. "Cecilia, I'm free. After two thousand performances of the same monotonous routine, I'm free!", he exclaims (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). Once again, as it was already mentioned in *Play it Again, Sam*, Allen is conscious that art and fantasy can mean entrapment. In a more philosophical way than Allan Felix was caught amidst his fantasies, Tom is existentially a "prisoner" of his fictional world and the truth is that Allan Felix and Tom, as well as Cecilia desire freedom and variety over monotony. Nancy Pogel believes that, "[a]s Cecilia seeks freedom from her oppressive world by going to the Jewel, Tom seeks freedom from the determinism of the written word and projected image by entering Cecilia's world" (Pogel, 204-205). For Cecilia the search for freedom, however, involves the risk of being enthralled in the twilight zone between reality and fantasy without "finding the way back home". McCann compares Cecilia with the philosopher who eavesdrops on what is going on in the next apartment in Allen's *Another Woman* (1988), who engages in an irresistible voyeuristic pleasure. He argues that the movie-goer's curiosity may turn into an obsession and that Tom Baxter enchants his admirer, but in time he may well enslave her. It is curious how *The Purple Rose of Cairo* subverts our expectations regarding reality and fantasy, showing that it is not wise to formulate stable assumptions as far as fiction is concerned. Cecilia's dissatisfaction towards life is just as important as Tom's dissatisfaction towards fiction. The more Tom learns about real life, the greater is his fascination. As Tom wonders about the "finality of death" and "the miracle of birth" he figures out that it is "almost magical to be in the real world" as opposed to "the world of celluloid and flickering shadows". In the fictional world, the characters lack the power to choose and make decisions over their own lives and Tom is well aware of that, "I want to live. I want to be free to make my choices" (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). After all, as one of the fictional characters states "the most human of all attributes is our ability to choose" (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). Art is ambiguous because it has simultaneously the capacity to liberate and to constrain its creations in a limited universe. The conundrum in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* is that, against all

expectations, Tom Baxter unlike Rick is a self-reflexive fictional character who comes to interrogate the limits of his narrow world. Therefore, he is able to question the validity of the worlds of cinema and of real life. In fact, Cecilia also learns that the fantastic world of fiction may deceive our expectations when, like Dorothy in *the Land of Oz*, she dates Tom onscreen and discovers that fictional champagne is just Ginger Ale.

Tom's decision to abandon the fictional *Purple Rose* world also affects the fictional universe because the film and its characters cannot continue without him. Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* could have been one of the influences on Woody Allen's *Purple Rose*, only in this case, instead of searching for an author, they suspend proceedings to search for a missing character. William Hutchings argues that the fictional characters are all counterparts of Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

unable to depart, unable to affect the outcome of events that directly control their plight, and unable to know what to do in the interim, they while away their time and distract themselves from seemingly inevitable boredom in a variety of predictable if ultimately ineffectual ways. (King, 99)

Curiously, this entire situation leads to self-reflection and the characters begin to acquire a new consciousness. Woody Allen anthropomorphizes the fictional characters as a means of achieving a unique effect: both fictional and real characters sabotage the plot and begin to strike poses on the margins of reality and fantasy. In my view, *Purple Rose* is by far the most complex of Allen's films, because here the real characters are not the only ones that confound reality and fiction; the fictional ones, to whom human characteristics are ascribed and who take on some of the features of Pinocchio (creations who aspire to be real), also actively blur the distinction. "Don't turn the projector off... it gets black and we disappear", says one of the characters addressing directly to the manager of the cinema. "I wonder what is like out there. I want to go too. I want to be free! I want out!" exclaims another character who is immediately censured by the producer Raoul Hirsch, in a clear comic 30s reference: "I'm warning you, that's Communist talk" (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). This is a good example of the intellectual stupidity with which Hollywood is associated and with which the New

Yorker intellectual Woody Allen has not much sympathy. This passage reminds Allen's role in *The Front* (1976), a condemnation to McCarthyism produced by Martin Ritt. In *The Front*, Howard Prince (Woody Allen) acts as the front of several blacklisted writers and the film reveals the paranoia surrounding the entertainment industry.

Another sign of the self-reflective nature of the fictional characters lies in the fact that the characters seem to be aware of their roles and of their own natures. One of the dramatic characters, for instance, is aware of the fact that he needs "forward motion" and exclaims: "I don't want to sit around and wait. That's exactly what they want. Look at us! Sitting around, slave to some stupid scenario" (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). Human beings make choices because they have the ability to interpret events and make decisions. And although people may misinterpret any given message or situation and make mistakes, the right to freedom of judgment and action is inalienable to all human beings. In this way, once that in *The Purple Rose* the fictional characters are given the power of interpretation, they are humanized. Furthermore, the possibility of expressing feelings that are not scripted also becomes available to them. Mary Nichols expresses her view on the matter thus:

They try to interpret the movie that has given them birth, just as Tom tries to understand the church to which Cecilia brings him. It is in this sense that all these "characters," especially Tom, are more "real" than the real Gil. The characters within the movie are torn between a desire to become free too and a desire for Tom to return, so that they can "continue with the story". They are more ambivalent – and therefore more human... (Nichols, 126)

However fictional they may be, there is little doubt that the unreal characters are more reliable than the human ones. When compared to Gil, Tom is more coherent in his moral values and although he learns that cars need keys to start, that there is no fade out to some "private place" after a kiss and that some women engage in sex for money with men they do not love, he conserves his idealistic spirit and remains faithful to his principles. We are told that in fiction "people, they don't disappoint. They're consistent. They're always reliable" (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). As a matter of fact for Cecilia "[o]nly the consistency, or perfection, of art,

she supposes, can give life meaning” (Nichols, 120). The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that at an early stage of the movie, Cecilia seeks the perfection of fiction. As Foster Hirsch explains, Cecilia lives out a moviegoer’s ideal fantasy because she is pursued not only by the adventurer Tom Baxter, but also by the actor Gil Shepard. Whereas Tom symbolizes the perfection of fiction, everything she has dreamt of, “I just met a wonderful man. He’s fictional, but you can’t have everything”, Gil promises the transformation of a fictional dream into a real life. Gil tries to persuade Cecilia that her relationship with Tom cannot endure: “Tell him you can’t love him. He’s fictional! You want to waste your time with a fictional character?” (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). Furthermore, he assures that Tom “can’t learn to be real. It’s like learning to be a midget. It’s not a thing you can learn. Some of us are real, some are not” (*The Purple Rose of Cairo*). Curiously, Tom’s feelings for Cecilia are consistent and true, while Gil’s declarations are a pretence. Eventually, we realize that “[i]ronically, the real world to Gil the actor is Hollywood, the epitome of the unreal” (Girgus, 103). Finally, the audience acknowledges that one should distinguish real life from fantasy, which can only deceive our hopes and play with our expectations. On the website <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/fantasy.htm>, Christopher Deacy remarks the following:

Such a realisation that the world of Hollywood cinema is ultimately no surrogate for the empirical world thus goes some way toward presenting a critique of the false and deluded hopes it has the capacity to impart. In actuality, however, in choosing Gil over Tom there is still a fundamental sense in which Cecilia is choosing the ‘reel’ world of Hollywood. Gil’s profession is illusion. It consists in the making and selling of *dreams*. The illusory nature of the world he inhabits is borne out by his sudden decision to abandon her without explanation and to return to Hollywood.

It is a fact that Hollywood provides two types of illusions: that of characters which is film narrative and that of stars which is film propaganda. Needless to say is that Gil never had serious intentions towards Cecilia. His sudden interest in Cecilia was a plan cooked up in Hollywood to save his career. In this context, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* also constitutes an attack to the business industry. Raoul Hirsh, the producer of the fictional *Purple Rose* and Gil are just worried about the drop of their film’s ticket sales.

Mary Nichols also compares *The Purple Rose* with *Play it Again, Sam*, declaring that “[w]hile Allan Felix’s leaving Linda is a sign that Rick lives in Allan Felix, Gil’s leaving Cecilia is a sign that Tom does not live in Gil” (Nichols, 129). Considering this, it could be argued that Allen alerts the audience to the necessary avoidance of confusion between real characters because they are quite distinctly different.

In *The Purple Rose of Cairo* there is a constant interchange in the relations of power between reality and fantasy, but in the end, it becomes clear that the two forces are dependant on each other. On the one hand, Cecilia has the power to break through the limits between reality and fantasy and she has the opportunity of playing a role in a film. Notwithstanding this, at the end of the film and despite all she has learnt, Cecilia is still deceived by her own fantasies, emphasizing the power of wish-fulfilment. On the other hand, the fact that the fictional characters are self-aware of their limitations because they cannot make choices finally concedes the greater power of reality.

Following from this, Allen unveils the cycle of dependence and symbiosis which lies beyond the life-art relationship. Real life needs fantasy as much as the latter needs the former. This relation of mutual reliance is undeniable here because fantasy is fed by disaffection with the limits of the real. There is evidence that

(...) the ideal world of the cinema is dependent on the audience’s devotion and belief: it is essentially a projection, a mass fantasy (...) Allen hints that movies, fictions, provide a contemporary faith. Like religion, they offer imaginative triumphs over hardship and death and give a narrative shape and meaning to existence. (Ames, 134)

In a certain way the idea that films provide a near religious consolation to people is implicit in *Purple Rose*. Mary Nichols points out that the church Tom and Cecilia visit is empty because

Reality seeks the perfection of fiction. It is no wonder then that churches are empty, for while religion may hold out the promise of heaven, it is not now, not here. Religion often teaches, moreover, an inevitable gap between the perfect and the imperfect, the divine and the human. The movies - or at least the kind that Cecilia watches or the kind that Sandy’s producers want him to create in *Stardust Memories* – foster the illusion that

“heaven” is “dancing cheek to cheek,” that after the kiss comes a fade-out to “some private, perfect place,” and that we all end up in a Jazz Heaven. (Nichols, 120)

According to this, it may be argued that the movie world answers not to our temporal needs but to our hopes and desires, as well as religion traditionally has. The empty church symbolizes Woody Allen’s awareness of a God that has failed, a theme that often haunts his films. In one way or another, and however deceptive it may ultimately prove to be, were it not for fantasy, Cecilia would not be allowed to act out her dream, living in the world of her fantasies for a short time. The final message of the film seems to be that even if cinema creates a falsely perfect world, it is still necessary to live in hope however tenuous.

In the same line of argument as *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Stardust Memories* is one of Woody Allen’s most complex films and one of his favourites as well. Despite this, it received a lot of negative reactions and reviews because the film was interpreted as an expression of Allen’s disdain for critics and audiences on the grounds that Allen and Bates “are both Jewish New Yorkers who have publicity regretted the loss of privacy which is the price of fame” (Lee, 144). In conversation with Stig Björkman, Woody Allen affirms that

They thought that the lead character was me! Not a fictional character, but me, and that I was expressing hostility toward my audience. And, of course, that was in no way the point of the film. It was about a character who is obviously having a sort of a nervous breakdown and in spite of success has come to a point in his life where he is having a bad time. (Björkman, 121)

The confusion between reality (Woody Allen) and fantasy (Sandy Bates) was primarily established by film criticism and it was reinforced by the presence of his manager Jack Rollins in the film. Whether this assumption was correct or incorrect, a provocation to simplistic film reviewing or not, the truth is that in the film Allen raises many pertinent questions about film and art. This is the reason why Nancy Pogel declares that *Stardust Memories* is “one of his most effective inquiries into the nature of film viewing and filmmaking” (Pogel, 133). Another aspect that may have contributed to the film negative reviews is that the film is, at

the very least, formally challenging. Allen jumps back and forth in the narrative of the film, which is interspersed with surreal moments, life memories and childhood flashbacks. Consequently, in the course of the film reality and fiction merge in such a way that it is sometimes very difficult to realize what is taking place.

The first sequence of the film shows the last scene of Sandy Bates's new film, although the real audience is compelled to think that the images on screen are real. At this point, Woody alerts the audience to the fact that movies can deceive people. Nevertheless, the plot swirls around the life of Sandy Bates, a filmmaker at a creative and personal crossroads, who no longer wants to "deceive" his audiences. He wants his films to be a reflex of real life as he sees it even if "all he sees when he looks around is human suffering" (*Stardust Memories*) and therefore he refuses to allow his films to provide a mere escapist illusion knowing that that is what the audience is hoping for. The message tone of his film is arguably morbid, because it suggests that no matter what our background, personality or life, we all end up in a junkyard (i.e. graveyard). After the end of the film we learn the reactions of the film executives who do not understand such an ending of a film because "too much reality is not what people want" (*Stardust Memories*) and such a dark ending would not be appropriate for Easter, when the film is going to be released. A "Jazz Heaven", on the contrary ("it's upbeat; it's commercial") would be acceptable. According to them, filmmakers like Sandy Bates "try to document their private suffering and fob it off as art" (*Stardust Memories*). Like Alvy Singer, Sandy Bates is also obsessed with human suffering and he also suffers from anhedonia, being recognized by his fans as "the master of despair". Thus, while in *Play it Again, Sam*, the posters Allan Felix has spread on the walls of his room demonstrate his obsession by the Bogart-world of fantasy, the huge poster on the wall of Sandy Bates's studio confirms his fixation with human suffering and dark images. His nihilistic vision of life extends clearly to his love affairs, something that is evident through the dependence he feels towards the problematic Dorrie throughout the film. In this perspective, while film executives want the film to end in a "Jazz Heaven", Sandy Bates finds the junkyard the ideal place for the ending of his film owing to the fact that "you can't

control life. It doesn't wind up perfectly. Only – only art you can control" (*Stardust Memories*). This statement is a very convincing argument in favour of the idea that for Sandy Bates, "[a]rt that is in control, paradoxically, must imitate life and its lack of control" (Nichols, 67). For Sandy Bates the universe is gradually breaking down and therefore he states "I don't want to make funny movies anymore" (*Stardust Memories*). For Sandy Bates art is a reflection of life and his effort to find a new ending for his film will lead to reflection and to self-analysis during a weekend at the Stardust Hotel, now attended by the most *avant-garde* film culture. Another important point, as Nancy Pogel suggests, is that Sandy's depression is also related to the demands of his public life for he lacks any pleasure in or the ability to interact with the public. On the arrival at the Stardust Hotel, where he is obliged to spend the weekend attending a festival of his films, he clearly demonstrates difficulties in dealing with the fans who surround him and, just like Allan Felix or Cecilia, he retreats into fantasy in moments of tension, imagining himself as a young boy able to fly away and out of the frame, "thus he metaphorically and literally escapes from the film" (Pogel, 139). In Hirsch's view, these magic moments are "an extension of childhood magic acts" (Hirsch, 212). In this context, Mary Nichols argues that Allen raises the question of the reality of images of art since the life that movies imitate is often surreal or, in other words "projections of images from within the mind rather than from any external reality" (Nichols, 68). All together, the film can be viewed as encompassing segments in three realms of existence: the flashbacks of his childhood (which may be real or unreal), memories of his love affairs and the segments of his films. All of them are associated with each other, forming Sandy's film. As with Cecilia and Allan Felix, Sandy's life is also marked by the quest for perfection but this desire constantly collides with life's imperfections. For instance, in one of his early comic film Sandy Bates engages in creating the "ideal woman", putting the brain of Doris "a great personality" into the body of Rita, "nasty, mean, trouble", but someone whom he loves going to bed with. At the end, he manages to create the "warm, wonderful, charming, sexy, sweet, giving, mature" Rita leaving all the negative qualities to Doris. Eventually, and against all expectations the physician ends up falling in love with the imperfect woman. In the same way that neither of these women seems to

be the alternative the physician portrayed by Sandy Bates is looking for, neither is a “Jazz Heaven” or a junkyard the perfect ending for his film.

During the film festival, Sandy and Daisy go out for a film and on their return Sandy’s car breaks down and they have to search for help. Meanwhile, they find themselves in the middle of a surreal UFO’s convention where people philosophize about life on another planets and the meaning of life in general in a grotesque parody of religion. The convention reunites several filmic elements, such as the girl who blew Sandy a kiss from the train in the opening sequence of *Stardust Memories* and the monster which represents Sydney Finkelstein’s anger. A man tells Sandy: “... this is exactly like one of your satires. It’s like we’re all characters in some film being watched in God’s screening room” (*Stardust Memories*). After having established contact with a “super intelligent being” who tries to convince him that Isobel is the best option for his personal life, Sandy is suddenly shot by a fan who gets out from the crowd unexpectedly and who claims: “Sandy, you know you’re my hero” (*Stardust Memories*). The explanation for this attitude is not clear at all, but the most plausible hypothesis is that in trying to provide people with “too much reality”, which is not what people want, his fan has exacted a brutal revenge. According to Sandy’s analyst the problem was that “he saw reality too clearly” and because of that he failed to block out the terrible truths of existence. Moving forward we see one of the festival organizers comforting his fans with the theory that Sandy will live on in his movies and that he will be remembered for the Oscar he won in *The Creation of the Universe*. In that moment, Sandy’s ghost appears and exclaims that he “would trade that Oscar for one more second of life”. In the next sequence while he was laying in his hospital bed, he was thinking of the moments that give life some meaning and then he shares with us a moment when he was looking towards Dorrie with Louis Armstrong’s music as background, because it was the moment he realized how much he loved her. This “moment of contact” moved him in “a very, very profound way” and through this last-longing memory he realized that life is meaningless but art consoles us for it and provides us precious eternal moments. The idea of perfect moments eternalized by art is reminiscent of John Keats’ “Ode on a

Grecian Urn”, which regards art as cold consolation, “Cold Pastoral”, suggesting that the perfect moment is forever frozen in art. To a certain extent, *Stardust Memories* resembles *Play it Again, Sam*, because in the same way Allan Felix discovers himself and reconciles himself to life, so does Sandy discover a new conception of art and life through his films. Nancy Pogel quotes in her book what Woody Allen once told to Gene Sistel:

Finally, through the course of searching his own soul, at the end of the film – this is what I had hoped to show – he [Sandy] came to the conclusion that there are just some moments in life – that’s all you have in life are moments, not your artistic achievements, not your material goods, not your fame or your money – just some moments, maybe with another person,... those little moments that are wonderful. (Pogel, 148)

Through art, Sandy Bates acquires a deeper meaning of life. When the audience thinks the film is getting to the end, the camera moves forward again to the hospital where Sandy is laying. The doctor says that he only fainted from nervous shock and that being shot by a fan was some hallucinatory happening, suggesting “the lack of control that even as careful an artist as Woody Allen has over the effect of his films on others. Not even art escapes the limits of life, for art is part of life” (Nichols, 78). In the last scenes of the fictional *Stardust Memories* Sandy Bates tries to persuade Isobel of his love for her. He discovered that life is not as bad as he thought and that it has “meaningful moments”: “It is not as terrible as I originally thought it was because, because you know, we like each other and, you know, have some laughs and there’s lot of closeness and the whole thing is a lot easier to take” (*Stardust Memories*). In all his films Woody seems engaged in founding a universal humanist community based on people’s relationships and feelings. Sandy’s art will continue to reflect real life, as his film will portray a character based on a “giving and warming” Isobel. The difference is that his films will also portray a newly reconciled view of life which was achieved through art and recollection. This new vision will contribute to Isobel and Sandy’s reconciliation because after all, “if he can embody his new conception of life in his art, then she is convinced that it is real” (Nichols, 77). Obviously, the line of *Stardust Memories* is the Preston Sturges’ line from *Sullivan’s Travels* (1941), since both films are a satire of the conflict between art and business. Like Sandy Bates, John Sullivan (Joel Melrea) is tired of making funny films and aims to work on a drama entitled

O Brother, where Art Thou? Not surprisingly, he is pressured by his studio bosses to direct another more lucrative film. In *Stardust Memories* Sandy Bates's producers are also self-serving and commercially-driven, constitutes Allen's attack to the commercial manipulative interests of people who want him to make funny films. Curiously, at the end of *Sullivan's Travels*, John Sullivan learns that laughter is also an important part of life and that it can do more for the poor masses than pompous dramas.

Speaking of *Stardust Memories*, it is through a self-analysis of his life and his films, "*Should I change my films? Should I change my life?*" that Sandy finds the middle ground between his extreme pessimism and the forced optimism of his producers. In this sense, Allen highlights the power of fantasy as a driving force in our lives. In Mary Nichols's opinion, Sandy Bates's change of heart accompanies Woody Allen's development as well because the filmmaker has gone a long way since the bitter-sweet ending of *Annie Hall* (1977). The author states that

Sandy's resolution of his movie is a reflection of Allen's mature understanding, and an understanding that has been refined and deepened over his years of making movies. It is a combination of the American "entertainment" that he experienced in movie theaters as a boy and the "eye-opening" maturity of European cinema (...) Allen both reflects others (the cinematic traditions that he loves, both American and European) and becomes 'his own man'. (Nichols, 12)

Nevertheless, at the end of *Stardust Memories* Woody Allen destabilizes again the whole balance between art and life that the film carefully builds. Sandy Bates is after all a character in a fictional film that ends with Sandy and Isobel's reconciliation and the real audience is again in a studio, hearing the commentaries of the actors who play roles in the film. Using a metafictional style Allen "confronts himself, his audiences, his critics, and his medium, and he deconstructs them all, even to the very last frames of his film" (Pogel, 150).

In *Stardust Memories*, Sandy Bates objects to the idea that his film should end in a "Jazz Heaven" because this would suggest that we have as much control

in life as we have in art. However, Sandy Bates is conscious that, as Mary Nichols points out “Life is open, and therefore subject to chance” (Nichols, 78). Nevertheless, both *Stardust Memories* and *The Purple Rose* make playful references to the lack of control that artists can sometimes have over their art as well. In *The Purple Rose*, the scriptwriters of the fictional film and the career-threatened Gil experience life’s lack of control as Tom Baxter escapes from the screen. In *Stardust Memories*, even the fictional Sandy Bates, who does not want his films to be a reflex of reality, portrays in the end “a very warm and very giving” character based on Isobel, who is a “real” character . Consequently, in both cases there is no doubt that art draws nourishment from life’s sense of contingency because, as Mary Nichols states: “Not even art escapes the limits of life, for art is part of life” (Nichols, 78). On the other hand, in *Play it Again, Sam* Allan learns that the inability to separate reality from fantasy, and attempts to imitate heroic figures may deceive us. In the three cases, reality and fiction become so mingled that the audience does not always realize where the frontiers between them are. This becomes especially true in *Stardust Memories*, where “[t]he director’s life and his art have merged into a single indivisible text, *Stardust Memories*, the movie” (Hirsch, 217). One of the main differences between *Stardust Memories*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and *Play it Again, Sam* is that while Sandy Bates and Allan Felix “circulate freely among the images created by [their] own imagination, Cecilia and Tom are, respectively, expelled from the movies and from reality” (Hirsch, 217). In effect, Cecilia’s presence in the fictional world is as disruptive as Tom’s presence in the real world.

In addition to this, none of the three films find and help the audience to find a clear balance between reality and fantasy. However, Sandy Bates and Allan Felix learn to deal with the imperfection of life but it is not quite clear whether Cecilia learns that fantasy is no surrogate for life. What Allen suggests is that even if it was possible to choose a “Jazz Heaven”, it would not be desirable. In the end, *Play it Again, Sam*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and *Stardust Memories* constitute three hymns to the imperfection and contingency of life and eventually both characters and audience are intended to be reconciled with life although

grateful to art. In spite of advising us to distinguish the two worlds of reality and fantasy, the cinematic experience becomes a cathartic and purifying experience because it is through it that the characters find themselves. As far as the last sequence is concerned, when Cecilia loses herself in the sound of an RKO musical, Foster Hirsch states: “Entranced, blissful, jubilantly, voyeuristic, Mia Farrow’s expression at the end makes the ritual of moviegoing seem cathartic, positively purifying” (Hirsch, 213-214).

In an attempt to account for what the cinematic experience represents, Mary Nichols establishes a comparison with the poet “who finds a way to self-knowledge, because he finds a way to reflect and thereby see himself” (Nichols, 13). She further states that having a clear idea of the goodness of imperfect human life, Allen “could both reconcile us to our human condition and also challenge the simple platitudes that view Jazz Heavens and whatever is analogous to them as either possible or desirable” (Nichols, 12). At this point, it becomes clear that Allan deconstructs the two worlds of fantasy and fiction to reconstruct them again in the viewer’s optic. Sam Girgus remarks that:

They [*The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Play it again, Sam* and *Stardust Memories*] are not just movies about movies, but self-conscious efforts to include in their very form some of the artistic, psychological, and intellectual issues related to films. Allen, as many critics have noted, strives to understand the process by which films mediate and validate experience. Films, he suggests, often provide the terms and categories for seeing and understanding life. (Girgus, 90-91)

In this context it becomes clear that the cinema becomes a temple of fantasy, “the home of hope, the refuge for remembrance, the place where one can experience renewal” (McCann, 218). According to McCann,

Leaving the theatre, a little dazed, wrapped up in themselves, feeling somewhat disjointed, they may view the world (and themselves) in a more benign manner. The movies are not an ‘escape’ for these people; rather, they are a catalyst for their compassion, exercising an effect upon their dealings with others and their understanding of themselves. Allen, in all of his work, is making the important observation that movies have become an important means of enjoying oneself, helping oneself, losing oneself, finding oneself, and knowing oneself. (McCann, 218)

In conclusion, by contrasting and opposing reality to fantasy, the Allen protagonist discovers himself and forms his own idea about life and art. Cinema appears as the common denominator of universal human experience between the members of the audience and especially between the artist and the audience, due to the emotional link that is established between them. As Einstein remarked:

Before the perception of the creator hovers a given image, emotionally embodying his theme. The task that confronts him is to transform this image into a few basic partial representations which, in their combination and juxtaposition, shall evoke in the consciousness and feelings of the spectator... that same initial general image which originally hovered before the creative artist. (Eisenstein quoted by Dudley, 72)

In a nutshell, what Allen tries to demonstrate is that the cinematic experience is therapeutic and purifying. Nevertheless, this experience is only positive if the viewer finds his / her own meaning in it. Eventually, the viewer is given the power to reinvent the cinematic experience, adopting new personal patterns and sharing them through common social interaction. Finally, we come to the conclusion that it is not life that imitates art, not art that imitates life. They reflect each other, they interlock and collide in an endless game.

Chapter III:

IRONISING SHOW BUSINESS

Show business is dog eat dog. It's worse than dog eat dog. It's a dog doesn't return other dog's phone calls.

Crimes and Misdemeanors

Allen vs. Hollywood

In the previous chapter, efforts were made to understand the conflicting relationship between art and life underlying Allen's films, the consequences of blurring the frontiers between them and the role that film art can profitably play in life. It was concluded that Allen, like Susan Sontag, feels art to be something transcendental, therapeutic and life-enhancing: "the work of art itself is also a vibrant, magical, and exemplary object which returns us to the world in some way more open and enriched" (Sontag, 28). This chapter will withdraw from the magical sphere of art to analyse the way Woody Allen deals with the "dark side" of show business he often claims to abhor. In *American Film now: The People, The Power, The Money, The Movies* James Monaco states:

Film in America has always been better understood as industry rather than as art. The febrile business atmosphere surrounding movies, the hype and glitter, the cashflow structure and balance sheet have been in large part responsible for the vitality for which American movies are known. Let the Old World worry about art and auteurs, esthetics, levels of meaning, and deeper significance. Meanwhile, we make entertainment products. And a great deal of money. Three billion dollars now for theatrical films alone in an average year. (Monaco, 29)

The above statement is a good starting point for the discussion that will be developed throughout this section, because it illustrates the gap between film in America and Allen's way of filmmaking. As an American-born Jew living in America, it might be expected that Allen would follow the American tradition of profitable filmmaking; however, he has won a singular place in American movie culture, marking his own position and distancing himself from the Hollywood monolith. Actually, in a period when film became corporate-minded, Woody Allen has built a personal body of work which not only disdains the "hunt" for money, but also rejects most West Coast values. Citing James Monaco once again, it is widely known that Allen regards film in America "as industry rather than as art", and that he despises "the febrile business atmosphere surrounding movies, the

hype and the glitter, the cashflow structure and balance sheet” which are part of the business. He is a declared devotee of the Old World Canon, and his films are permeated by a wide range of references to the literary and cinematic pantheon of European masters. Furthermore, like Sandy Bates, Allen has since the mid 70s been committed to showing that his art is not mere entertainment, that it worries about “aesthetics, levels of meaning and deeper significance”, one of the reasons why he often uses Bergmanesque and Fellinesque devices in his films. In fact, at the same time that Woody Allen has created a strong sense of identification with the Old World, he established an ambivalent relationship with Hollywood which swings between contempt and admiration, as it was observed in the analysis of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), in the previous chapter. In *Woody Allen: a casebook*, Marie-Phoenix Rivet utilizes an interesting metaphor to explain the way she understands Allen’s attitude towards Hollywood. According to her: “Woody Allen’s schlemiel is a reversal of the traditional American, specifically Hollywoodian, movie hero, a kind of New York David against Hollywood Goliath” (King, 30). No doubt Allen’s *persona* subverts all the categories that define the Hollywood film hero, constituting a parodic version of it. As an alternative to the “macho ideal” of the Hollywood hero, he portrays its comic antithesis: the nebbish, an insecure anti-hero with unprepossessing looks. Although the ‘parodic transfiguration’ of the main character establishes the comic tone of the film, Allen’s *persona* is intellectually superior to the Hollywood hero, like David is morally and tactically superior to Goliath. This is where his advantage resides. On the other hand, the fact that he mocks the film industry does not necessarily mean that Woody Allen is Hollywood’s enemy. As I see it, Allen adopted this cultural attitude to achieve some artistic distance from Hollywood and to secure his own individuality in a creative world where the possession of a developed intellect constitutes a more countercultural stance than sexual license or a drug habit.

In effect, no dividing line can be drawn between Allen’s work and that of his contemporary American cinematographers. Allen emerged as an independent filmmaker from the moment *Take the Money and Run* (1969) was released, at a time when the decline of the Production Code restrictions (1967) sent into

production a wave of violent and sexually explicit films, which had repercussions throughout the seventies. As Peter Cowie acknowledges,

Five Easy Pieces, with its poignant loss of hope and its grimace in the face of a crass society, had set the tone for the years ahead. Cassavetes, Coppola, Scorsese, Altman, Mazursky and de Palma each more or less presented a dark mirror to the 70s' soul. (Cowie, 10)

There is no doubt that the films of the seventies constitute a dark mirror of the country, because they portrayed a deglamorized view of America: "a dirty America", "a dirty urbanism", an America where criminals live on the streets and which shows the consequences of drugs and the breakdown of social order. In addition to this, and as the seventies were a liberal age, prostitution became graphical, with sympathetic characters such as the one portrayed in *Klute* (1971).

Woody Allen seems to stand aside from the mainstream films of the 70s which deliberately court the "ugly", playing with it as a technical device and aesthetic value. In contrast, he subverts the *Zeitgeist*, displaying a glamorized, stylized and even romanticized *Weltanschauung*. On the other hand, while mainstream films sought a mass audience, Allen refuses to speak widely to the world. His art functions in enclosed worlds which talk to each other, fostering a 'ghetto culture' targeted at a specific group of gifted, creative and intellectual people, which includes the Jewish *intelligentsia* from which he comes. This is the reason why Allen's art is intrinsically self-reflexive, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter. Allen is an artist studying his own art, trying to understand it and aiming to place it within a broader context. Therefore, Woody Allen never loses a chance to stigmatize the intellectual emptiness of the world of show business and to describe how it compromises and corrupts the true purpose of art. Actually, his films are full of satiric references not only to the West Coast, but also to the different branches of the world of show business. In *Sleeper* (1973), one of his early films, Luna, the character played by Diane Keaton asks Miles (Woody Allen) "What does it feel like to be dead for two hundred years?" and he replies ironically "It's like spending a weekend in Beverly Hills" (*Sleeper*). Nonetheless, it was in 1978 that his feelings for Hollywood were overtly revealed, when he made no effort to receive the two Academy Awards for the screenplay and direction of

Annie Hall (he could do no less given *Annie Hall's* thematic of the principled refusal to go west and his public statement of contempt for movie awards. His stand softened somewhat after 11/9 when he appeared [by telecast, it should be said] on the Oscar Show in 2002 to appeal for relief for the victims of the recent terrorist outrage in his beloved New York). That same night, he went off to play with his jazz band at Michael's Pub, his usual practice on Mondays and the following day he did not give any interviews or make any comments to the media, reinforcing the idea of his maverick rejection of American film industry norms.

Such a show of indifference towards the heart of the film industry and show business in general cannot be dissociated from Allen's Jewish background. In this context, it becomes crucial to analyse how Allen's Jewish roots have influenced his attitudes to art and how they contribute to creating the gulf between this filmmaker and the film industry.

THE JEWISH HERITAGE

In America, Jews represent a highly successful case of adaptation and assimilation. Although they did not deny their roots and did not abandon their traditions, they were able to leave their 'ghetto culture' to participate in all aspects of the American society, incorporating the values of the mainstream culture. Their contribution was particularly evident in the world of entertainment: Jewish enterprise controlled Broadway, nightclubs, Vaudeville and radio, which allowed them public platforms for the performing of their preferred cultural forms. A disproportionate number of Jews became comedians, theatre owners, novelists, entertainers and writers, but among all the show business domains, the film industry was the one in which they most clearly evinced their presence. Names such as Adolph Zukor, Jesse Lasky, The Warner Brothers, Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg and Harry Cohn dominated the American film industry and the major film companies were owned and financed by Jews, which is the case of MGM, The Warner Brothers, Paramount, Universal, Columbia and 20th Century Fox. However, until the sixties the image of the Jew immigrant was either largely absent or reduced to a fairly simple stereotype. In Robert Benayon's opinion Hollywood

could not have contributed to the ethnic rebirth of American comedy because in the thirties, the heads of the major studios engaged in a policy which dissembled their origins and their ethnic background. It was with the emergence of the new generation of American-born Jewish artists that the panorama changed. As David Desser and Lester D. Friedman refer in *American Jewish Filmmakers: Traditions and Trends*

Freed from a monolithic studio system that cranked out predictable assembly-line films supporting white, male, middle-class, Christian values, the movies from the 1960s onward provocatively mirrored the growing ethnic consciousness that marked the evolution of American history. (Desser and Friedman, 2)

The “growing ethnic consciousness” which the two authors allude to was fostered by a new generation of educated Jews well aware of their own individuality and of the validity of their origins. In this context, films were no longer restricted to Christian values and the cinema witnessed an openness to Jewish themes and characters, based on a very personal *Weltanschauung*. In this respect, David Desser and Lester Friedman further acknowledge the following: “Faced with this new freedom of expression, Jewish filmmakers had no direct tradition, no previous examples or models, to draw upon in creating a visual art filtered through their Jewish consciousness” (Desser and Friedman, 3). In effect, the new generation of educated Jews was free from the direct burden of history and therefore had the possibility of expressing their own personal art in a relatively autonomous form, something which had been denied to their immediate predecessors.

Along with Mel Brooks, Sidney Lumet, Mike Nichols and Paul Mazursky, Woody Allen is one of those who have built a whole new image of Jewishness in cinema:

When Allen, Brooks, Lumet, and Mazursky matured, however, an individual’s religious heritage played a dominant role in how he or she was perceived by the majority society; the very fact that these filmmakers were Jewish indelibly colored their particular worldview and, by extension, their artistic creations. (Desser and Friedman, 19)

It is clear that none of these filmmakers could previously have belonged to the mainstream filmmakers, because their background influenced not only the way

society understood and looked at them, but also their artistic creations. In addition to this, the fact that this generation of American-born Jewish writers / directors was born between two cultures triggered self-analysis. Dessler and Friedman observe that “American-Jewish filmmakers born in the 1920s and 1930s seem particularly obsessed with intense examinations of self definition” (Dessler and Friedman, 21). The need for self-definition caught them in the middle ground between assimilation and alienation, between the New World and the Old and it is from the clash between both that emerges the ‘hybrid’ identity and syncretic art of these filmmakers.

As for Woody Allen, there is no doubt that his *persona* is essentially Jewish and I would argue that it follows the tradition of the Jewish *Bildungsroman*, which focuses on the personal development of an individual. Allen’s *persona* is deeply embedded in Jewish culture and literature and it was created from the same sociocultural mould as the Jewish literary anti-heroes portrayed by Phillip Roth, Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud:

The typically divided, contradictory hero of the modern Jewish novel is a quicksilver compound of intellect and lust, rational skepticism and irrational fantasies. He is caught somewhere between the religious and social tradition in which he has been raised, and which he still clings to in part, and modern nihilism; escaping from the ghetto mentality, he is still in search of a place of his own – he’s a man in solitary exile and yet he retains memories of the stable social structure that always has been the basis of traditional Jewish unity. (Hirsch, 136)

In this perspective, Allen’s *persona* shares with the heroes of the modern Jewish novels their ambivalence. They all are a product of their natural *milieu*, a mixture of two worlds. They are men in “solitary exile” and they will always share the complexes of the eternal outsider. Allen portrays the intricacies of the Jewish life in urban America but the underlying feeling of displacement he irradiates in his films reinforces simultaneously the idea of “shared experiences” among the Jewish bourgeoisie, an educated middle-class which responds to his neuroses. In summary, Allen’s art fulfils an important social function because it departs from the particular to universalise the experience of the new generations of assimilated Jews in America.

Taking into account Allen's cultural context, it is evident that he could not easily assimilate to the mainstream tradition of filmmaking. Allen expresses a very personal tone in his films, which are targeted at a group of people for whom art fulfils an important social function. As a counterpoint to this, Allen stigmatizes the world of show business for its lack of a wider social purpose, essentially for its irresponsibility. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the ironic nature of his charges against the world of show business and to investigate the nature of his antipathy to this world, taking *Annie Hall* (1977), *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984) and *Bullets over Broadway* (1994) as objects of study and placing this same theme in the broader context of Allen's value system.

Film Analysis

Considering that the three films are separated by long intervals (they were each produced in different decades), it may be inferred that stigmatizing show business is a recurrent practice in Allen's work. Another element which links the three films is that they all vacillate on the thin line between celebration and satire, one of the essential features of Allen's style. In fact, at the same time he celebrates arts, including the performing ones, as something transcendental, he also mirrors the contradictions of business, denouncing the corrupt meanderings and vanity of show people. Even in a serious-comic vein, these films constitute three effective satires which reveal Allen's natural propensity to demythologize and ridicule the universe of show business, displaying his *metier* as social satirist. While it is true to say that the three films use a disparaging tone towards show business, they are also very different in other respects. *Annie Hall's* mock-angst-ridden direct address to the audience contrasts with the nostalgic picturesque framing of *Broadway Danny Rose* and with the show business pastiche in the 30s style that constitutes *Bullets over Broadway*. The beginning of the three films displays three different visions of the world of show business. *Annie Hall* starts with Alvy's (Woody Allen) direct address to the audience, which echoes his

nightclub years as a stand-up-comic and which denotes vaudevillian influences in his work. *Broadway Danny Rose* focuses on the adventures of an unsuccessful agent and opens with a dialogue where Danny (Woody Allen) desperately tries to book some work for his clients. *Bullets over Broadway* reveals from its opening sequence the pains and the constraints of seeking success in the world of serious theatre. Anyhow, the three films revolve around the complicated net of interests and hypocrisies that rules show business. The films also portray very different characters: while *Annie Hall* portrays a successful stand-up comic, who reflects Woody Allen's own steady rise, in *Broadway Danny Rose* Allen portrays an unsuccessful agent (himself) and in *Bullets over Broadway* the leading character is an eager-to-be-famous young playwright (John Cusack). Apart from these three films embodying Allen's ironic detachment from the world of show business, the fact that they scrutinize different areas of performing obviously enriches and extends the underlying critique in his films.

As many critics such as Sam Girgus and Nancy Pogel have observed, *Annie Hall* was the film that consolidated Allen's reputation as a major *auteur*. I consider that *Annie Hall* crystallizes core themes and ideas which had been in evidence since *Play it Again, Sam*, but which never found such an achieved tone and form before. Firstly, it was with *Annie Hall* that Allen definitely moved to a private sphere where the emphasis is no longer placed on broadly comic situations but on verbal wit, focusing much more on a "cerebral" kind of comedy rather than on a "physical" one. In other words, *Annie Hall* insists on a more introspective art, an art that looks within and which focuses on its own self-examination. From a plot perspective, this is carried out in the analysis of personal relationships. This does not mean that Allen is politically disengaged altogether, but it becomes clear that he belongs to the tradition of James Joyce, for whom art should talk about private life, because the social is subsumed in the personal. The exploration of inner conflicts was also accompanied by a change of settings. Unlike in early films, like *Bananas* (1971), *Sleeper* (1973) or *Love and Death* (1975), which take place in open-air settings, his "more introspective" films seem to prefer interiors. Simultaneously, this shift in tone emerges along with his open identification with

New York. Almost all his films are set in New York and even the exterior scenes transmit to the audience the impression of “being home”, so at ease is he in Manhattan. In McCann’s view: “At the same time that Allen began examining human behaviour by ‘looking within’, he also started examining his city as a kind of self, charting the various levels of meaning and its unconscious impulses” (McCann, 27). From a close reading of Allen’s films we may infer that so strong is Allen’s link to New York, that it becomes an extension of the filmmaker’s mind, a sort of personal microcosm where he can project his alter ego. In this sense, his narrative becomes to a large extent, a narrative of place which confirms McCann’s idea that Allen has made a personal province of his native city. By recreating it in his own visual style and bathing it in a variety of jazz musical styles (notably those of George Gershwin and Irving Berlin (two great Jewish musical originals in love with the city), he has built a universal portrait of modern urban life and has become the *Poet Laureate* of New York. The first open homage to the city (I guess modelled on Fellini’s use of Rome) occurs in *Annie Hall*, and reaches its apotheosis with *Manhattan* (1979), which opens with the following lines:

‘Chapter one. He adored New York city... He romanticized it all out of proportion. Now... 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’. Ahhh, now 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. (*Manhattan*)

In effect, Allen “romanticized it all out of proportion”, creating a private *milieu* on which he chose to project his inner feelings. In a certain way, Allen’s fascination with New York is comparable with Allen’s fascination with the movies, a mixture between childhood beguilement and a later more mature vision of life. Allen fell in love with both New York and the world of cinema when he was a child. In conversation with Eric Lax, Allen recollects the moment he went to New York for the first time: “I first came to the city in 1941 with my father and I was in love with it from the second I came up from the subway into Times Square” (Lax, 20). It is curious that Allen’s fascination for Manhattan is somehow related to his fascination for the movies:

I not only was totally in love with Manhattan from the earliest memory, I loved every single movie that was set in New York, every movie that began high above the New York skyline and moved in. Every detective story, every romantic comedy, every movie about nightclubs in New York or penthouses. To this day, ninety-nine percent of movies that are not about the city, that take place in rural atmospheres, I rarely latch on to. They really have to be extraordinary. But I love any old film that ever begins or takes place in New York City. (Lax, 21)

Allen's glamorized New York still retains its Age of Innocence, which is probably inspired by Allen's childhood recollection. It stands apart from other places in America about which stories are told; there are no Hollywood generic features in Allen's films, there is no crime, no violence, no racial conflicts and no social diversity. Woody Allen illustrates a privileged high-class intellectual scene, a set of intellectualised characters who do not pursue money avariciously (writers, teachers, rabbis) and whose main preoccupation lies with getting to grips with their personal relationships and with their art. At the same time, the exacerbated romanticization and stylization of New York contributes to deepening the great gulf between the West Coast (which represents intellectual emptiness) and the East Coast (the symbol of a great cultural metropolis). As Franck Garbazz affirms in the beginning of an article entitled "Hollywood Ending: sous le Regard de Dieu", it is no secret to anyone that Allen feels an aversion towards Los Angeles, the metropolis that constitutes the epicentre of the American film industry. It is precisely the gap between the two coasts that is the subject of the irony and satire in *Annie Hall*. And the purpose too, for to which culture does the rest of America belong? Which city, Los Angeles or New York, is to exercise the greater influence over the American heartland, represented in this film by the Midwestern WASP *Annie Hall* herself? Here, Woody Allen presents Los Angeles and New York as two antithetic poles, which represent the lowest and the highest standards of culture, respectively. In *Annie Hall*, there is a strong feeling of place and a strong sense of identification with a place. On the one hand, this is clearly linked with Allen's Jewish complex of marginality, the sense of displacement and the constant need for a place of his own which only cosmopolitan New York can satisfy. On the other hand, it is curious to observe how the personality of the characters accords with specific places. This dialectic is expounded throughout the film and the

deeper the gap between the two coasts is, the deeper the gap between Annie (Diane Keaton) and Alvy (Woody Allen) becomes, as Los Angeles prevails. In Mary Nichols's opinion the contrast between New York and Los Angeles caricatures Alvy's lack of reflection and Alvy's alienation. It is true that in a sense, Annie is Alvy's converse. In contrast to his intellectual, anhedonic lifestyle, Annie has a spontaneous personality, something that becomes clear when they discuss photography. For Alvy the medium enters the realm of art itself and has rules and principles, while Annie just "feels it". Annie represents the middle ground between Rob (Tony Roberts) and Alvy. Rob is completely mesmerized by the shallow world of Los Angeles: parties, sun, playboy dolls and fame. In contrast, Alvy's passion for New York accentuates his personal hatred towards Beverly Hills. As far as Annie is concerned, there is no doubt that she feels attracted towards Los Angeles's relaxed lifestyle, but in the end she returns to New York. That is to say, she is not as shallow as Rob nor as intellectual as Alvy, and in this sense she adapts herself to both places. For Alvy, Los Angeles stands for decadence, moral emptiness, drugs and scorching sun, things that he cannot abide. The first scene that denotes Allen's contempt for Los Angeles takes place at the beginning of the film when Alvy's friend (Rob) suggests that he moves to Los Angeles: "Get the hell out of this crazy city. We move to sunny Los Angeles. All of the show business is out there" (*Annie Hall*). To Alvy's mind, however, "the only cultural advantage" Los Angeles presents "is that you can make a right turn on a red light" (*Annie Hall*). This dialogue establishes the disparaging tone of the rest of the film and helps the audience to perceive and share Allen's critical attitude to Los Angeles. Hollywood is associated with stupidity, ignorance and shallowness, while New York represents the apotheosis of culture. In this sense, the film belittles the West Coast and overhypes the East Coast, displaying a satiric tone towards the pleasure and profit-loving entertainment business. In another sequence which takes place when they play tennis, Rob restates: "Max, if we lived in California, we could play outdoors every day in the sun" (*Annie Hall*), to which Alvy replies "sun is bad for you. Everything your parents said it was good is bad" (*Annie Hall*). The exaggerated stigmatization of Los Angeles exemplifies Allen's ingrained partiality.

A similar contrast exists between Tony Lacey's inauthentic west coast mellow rock and Alvy's east coast trad jazz.

Another situation that differentiates New York and Los Angeles occurs as Alvy has to go to California at Christmas to give an award on television: "We've got to leave New York during Christmas week, which really kills me" (*Annie Hall*). As they get there, Rob, who has now a Jacuzzi, tells Annie and Alvy that he has never been so relaxed as he has been since he moved there. Relaxed is something that Alvy cannot feel in Los Angeles, nor does he feel it appropriate to feel anywhere. In fact, Alvy seems allergic to Los Angeles and everything there: the architecture ("French next to Spanish, next to Tudor, next to Japanese"), the TV shows ("they don't throw their garbage out. They make it into TV shows") and the mellow people. In *Annie Hall*, Allen depicts his disdain for the West Coast not only verbally, but also visually. As they are driving through Los Angeles, the audience realizes the counterpoint between the serious films that are in the cinema in New York (*The Sorrow and the Pity*) and the far-fetched and overrated West Coast films (*House of Exorcism and the Messiah of Evil*). On the other hand, Alvy has his opinion on the shallowness and lack of values of show business when he learns that Rob, who has a hit series in Los Angeles, adds fake laughs into it, something that Alvy considers immoral.

Eventually, his psychological illness reveals much more about his "situational condition" than anything else and he ends up not to be able to do the TV show. Alvy suffers from "*chronic Los Angeles nausea*" or to put it in another way, he suffers from "out-of-New-York-nausea". In fact, earlier in the film, more precisely when he visits Annie's family in Chipewa Falls, Wisconsin he does not feel comfortable. New York is his natural *milieu*, his protection bubble and out of it he loses his sense of personal reference. Everything is strange in Los Angeles, "My feet haven't touched pavement since I reached Los Angeles": Clearly, Alvy cannot function outside of New York.

In the series of satiric portraits of the West Coast which Woody Allen presents in *Annie Hall*, the party at Tony Lacey's (Paul Simon) is one of the most comic. Most of the people there are very weird to Alvy and represent stereotypes of Los Angeles "showbiz people". The audience witnesses a conversation between two people at the party who say: "I'll take a meeting with you if you'll take a meeting with Freedy". The other one replies: "I took a meeting with Freedy. Freedy took a meeting with Charlie". And then the first one adds: "All the good meetings are taken". This is a pure Grouch Marx one-liner, but spoken by the character satirised. Later, a third person joins to the conversation and one of them observes: "Not only is he a great agent, but he really gives good meetings" (*Annie Hall*). This small episode is concise critique to the pompous managerial politics of show business. On this, Allen offered the following considerations:

I think that in the United States there is only a handful of film-makers that are really in the serious business of making movies. The others are doing what they call 'projects'. It takes them a long time to do them. They are preceded by lots of meetings, lunch meetings and dinner meetings and meetings with writers, meetings with directors, meetings with actors. Their life centres around the pre-production ceremonies. And finally they make the picture, and it's usually commercial nonsense. There are few film-makers there who are serious and who are trying to make interesting films and to take risks where the primary concern is not to make money. (Björkman, 90-91)

Allen's words are critical not only of the West Coast, but also of the world of show business in general and the scene described above is a parody of the endless business meetings that show business requires, as well as a critique of the fact that show business people's main concerns are frivolous and have little to do with quality, even as entertainment. The penultimate point he makes is that they don't even make business sense.

In the party, there is a great contrast between Alvy and the rest of the people. In the same way that Alvy does not feel any sense of affinity with Los Angeles, the people there do not have any connection to New York, either. In Tony Lacey's opinion, New York only presents disadvantages: "It's so dirty now. Besides if you wanna see a movie you have to stand in line. It could be freezing"

(*Annie Hall*). The issue is mainly one of “material comfort”, not of cultural advantage. Annie, in her turn, appears to be more and more tantalized by Los Angeles: “They just eat and watch movies all day”. “And gradually you get old and die. It’s important to make an effort once in a while” (*Annie Hall*), says Alvy, who cannot stand Los Angeles inertia.

The return to New York dictates the end of Annie and Alvy’s relationship. They are no longer morally and culturally synchronized. Alvy seems relieved to come back to New York despite the fact that it was fun to flirt with all those beautiful women in Los Angeles. But Annie’s inner thoughts reveal converse feelings: “That was fun. I don’t think California’s bad at all. It’s a drag coming home!” (*Annie Hall*). Annie and Alvy break up and she moves to Los Angeles, but it does not take Alvy long to realize the mistake they have made. In spite of his Los Angeles nausea, he flies to Los Angeles, hoping to reach reconciliation with Annie. However hard he tries to explain Annie that living in Los Angeles is “like living in Munchkinland”, she finds “it’s perfectly fine out there”. If Los Angeles represents inertia to Alvy, it represents motion to Annie: there she meets people, goes to parties, and plays tennis, something that was a “big step” for her. As she explains : “I’m able to enjoy people more. ‘What’s so great about New York?’”, she asks Alvy. “It’s a dying city. You read *Death in Venice*” (*Annie Hall*). Then she goes on to explain that Alvy is as self-contained as the city he idolizes: “Alvy, you’re incapable of enjoying life. You’re like this island unto yourself” (*Annie Hall*). As Annie goes away and although Alvy is furious because she did not reverse her decision to live in Los Angeles, he continues to satirize Los Angeles cultural life. When Annie tells Alvy that Tony Lacey is nominated for some music awards Alvy exclaims: “They give awards for that music? I thought just earplugs. They do nothing but give awards. Greatest fascist director – Adolf Hitler” (*Annie Hall*), suggesting that it is too easy to receive an award in Los Angeles, even for bad quality music. Later, Alvy tells Rob that he should be playing in the park, to which Rob replies: “I did Shakespeare in the Park, Max. I got mugged. I was playing Richard II and two guys with leather jackets stole my leotard” (*Annie Hall*). Even so, in New York people are natural, crime and social problems are natural and

they do not use sunglasses to keep out the alpha rays, preventing people from getting old.

Despite his efforts and “after all the serious talks and passionate moments” Alvy and Annie’s relationship ends in a health-food restaurant on Sunset Boulevard. The same does not happen at the end of Alvy’s fictional play, where the fictional characters, using the same lines of Alvy’s and Annie final conversation, stay together. “What do you want?” asks Alvy addressing the audience once again, “It was my first play. You know how you’re always trying to get things to come out perfect in art because it’s real difficult in life” (*Annie Hall*). At the end of *Annie Hall*, art seems to transcend life as a form of romantic consolation since Alvy’s play is given a happy ending.

In summary, it is obvious that Allen constructs *Annie Hall* upon the binary opposition between New York and Los Angeles. In *Annie Hall*, Los Angeles serves as a projection for the universe of the show business, and it is for this reason that Allen ridicules it. Actually, Allen does not have very much against Los Angeles the place. He just thinks “[i]t doesn’t have a cosmopolitan feeling or a cosmopolitan quality, the type that I’m used to, like London or Paris or Stockholm or Copenhagen or New York. There it’s more a suburban feeling” (Björkman, 90). Notwithstanding this, *Annie Hall* is the first of many odes to New York and especially to Manhattan, Allen’s personal oasis, revealing the high degree of identification he feels towards the city.

Broadway Danny Rose (1984), a bittersweet fable, presents a different picture of New York than the one constructed in *Annie Hall*, but it is equally consistent in its irony of the world of show business. Although Graham McCann considers *Broadway Danny Rose* as one of Allen’s poems to New York, the visualization of the city withdraws from the mythical sphere and the picture loses the degree of glamorization transmitted in films such as *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*. But it makes sense that it is so, because *Broadway Danny Rose* does not portray

the familiar *milieu* of high cultural echelons Allen has got his audience used to in films like *Hannah and her Sisters* (1986), *Manhattan* (1979) or even *Stardust Memories* (1980). Instead, *Broadway Danny Rose* recreates a vulgar Manhattan of the 50's and 60's, paying homage to the struggling artists who never ascended the ladder of stardom. In this film, Allen recollects his night-club years and explores the consequences of self-interest in the search for fame in the show business *milieu*. The film starts at the Carnegie Delicatessen Restaurant, where six story-tellers including the real Sandy Baron and Jack Rollins recall the old days of Broadway and the story of Danny Rose (Woody Allen). Danny Rose, they recall, was a former unsuccessful comedian who became a devoted agent who defends the interests of his odd, "small-time" clients, who seem condemned never to achieve success. Nevertheless, the beautiful black and white picture contrasts with the parodist tone of the rest of the film, something already announced by the tone of the opening music and which is confirmed as soon as the audience meets Danny. Danny, like the other characters of the film, is a cartoonish figure, with quirky looks, comic clothes, nervous mannerisms and a peculiar way of talking: "Might I just interject one concept of this juncture?" (*Broadway Danny Rose*). Apart from this, his almost surreal clients include a one-legged tap dancer, a blind xylophone player, a one-armed juggler, a roller-skating penguin, a bird which picks out "September Song" on the piano and Lou Canova "a dumb, fat, temperamental has-been with a drinking problem". Quoting Nancy Pogel, there is no doubt that *Broadway Danny Rose* is "a modern folktale. Danny's clients are carnival figures, so sadly, grotesquely real they seem unreal" (Pogel, 194). Notwithstanding this, and despite the fact that *Broadway Danny Rose* is considered a "light film", I believe that Danny's character is built upon a dialectic structure, since his charmless looks contrasts with his strong dogmatic ideas and principles. If Isaac (Woody Allen), the leading character of *Manhattan* lacks faith in people, Danny has got plenty of it and he believes in loyalty. Danny believes in love as redemptive and sacrifice as uplifting. His degree of naivety is only comparable to that of Cecilia in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and in a certain way they both are victims of the same dehumanized and cruel world, awakening a certain feeling of sympathy in the audience. Nevertheless, the few times his clients achieve

success, they immediately leave him for a more influential agent: “I find them, I discover them, I breathe life into them and they go” (*Broadway Danny Rose*). In a way, *Danny Rose* is reminiscent of Allen’s first manager, Harvey Meltzer, whom Allen left after five years for Jack Rollins and Charles Joffe. On the other hand, in the same sense that *The Purple Rose of Cairo* followed the same problematic of the *Kugelmass Episode*, Danny is an extension of the agent Jerry Wexler in *The Floating Lightbulb*, whose main client was a talking dog. *Danny Rose* is an outsider, he does not belong to the world of show business and he does not possess the tricks of the trade. He is the personification of the well-meaning *schlemiel*, the little man at odds with a hostile environment.

The opening scene of Danny’s story establishes the opposition between the need for moral values and the quest for fame and success, the conundrum around which *Broadway Danny Rose* circulates. While Danny tries to book an act for his clients at Weinstein’s Majestic Bungalow Colony, the audience learns about Sonny, Danny’s former client. Sonny slept on Danny’s coach and was helped by him, but as soon as he achieved success he left, revealing himself to be, “a horrible dishonest, immoral louse” (*Broadway Danny Rose*).

In spite of suffering some disappointments, Danny has the capacity to continue believing in people and, therefore, he devotes himself completely to his clients not only professionally, but also personally: “I’m in personal management – the keyword is personal” (*Broadway Danny Rose*). Lou Canova (Nick Apollo Forte) is Danny’s special client and Danny is not a mere manager. As the narrator tells the audience, they have a close relationship: “Danny is everything to Lou. He picks his songs, his arrangements. He picks his shirts, his clothes. He eats with him. They’re inseparable. Danny is his manager, his friend, his ‘father-confessor’” (*Broadway Danny Rose*). Besides, Danny is so morally-driven that he is virtually Lou’s conscience as well. When married-man Lou tells him about his affair with Tina (Mia Farrow), Danny warns him: “Sooner or later you’re gonna have to square yourself with the big guy” (*Broadway Danny Rose*) and as his aunt Rosy used to say “you can’t ride two horses with one behind” (*Broadway Danny Rose*).

Danny's ambivalence is a feature of his personality: On the one hand, he represents the victimized *schlemiel* coming to terms with a strange world; on the other hand, he assumes the role of *paterfamilias* and educator of the other characters, teaching them the moral code of right and wrong. Danny's values are the converse of the values of the world of show business and it is in this contrast that Allen's critique resides: while Danny represents integrity, honesty, selflessness and morality, show business ideals symbolise corruption, dishonesty, selfishness and immorality. This is especially true of Lou's betrayal. Danny embodies the reinforcement of moral values, while Tina and Lou represent the get-ahead at any price of show business. In fact, Tina is Danny's "loyal oppositor", which becomes evident as they discuss the concept of guilt. For Danny, it seems clear that his clients should demonstrate a little of gratitude after everything he has done for them: "I find them, I discover them, I breathe life into them and then they go. And no guilt. They didn't feel guilty or anything. They just split" (*Broadway Danny Rose*). Tina, for her part, has not yet conceptualized the word guilt: "Guilt? What the hell is that? They see something better and they grab it. Who's got time for guilt?" (*Broadway Danny Rose*). Nevertheless, Danny's moral universe revolves around that same concept: "It's important to feel guilty, otherwise you're capable of terrible things. It's very important to be guilty. I'm guilty all the time and I never did anything" (*Broadway Danny Rose*). In fact, Danny has the concept of guilt so internalized that we are forced to conclude that in a way, he is the "most stereotypically Jewish" of all Allen's characters. Nevertheless, as he is a caricatural character, his "Jewishness" is so exaggerated as ambivalent. At the same time he warns Lou that "sooner or later you're gonna have to square yourself with the big guy", he confesses to Tina that he feels guilty for not believing in God. Another aspect that marks the difference between the two characters is their philosophy of life. As far as Danny is concerned, he believes that "it's important to have some laughs, but you gotta suffer a little too, because otherwise you miss the whole point to life" (*Broadway Danny Rose*). To contrast with this idea, Tina's philosophy of life is that: "it's over too quick, so have a good time. You see what you want, go for it. Don't pay any attention to anyone else. And do it to the other guy first, cos if you don't he'll do it to you" (*Broadway Danny Rose*). As

Danny sees it, this seems like the screenplay of *“Murder Incorporated”* and he paraphrases his uncle Sidney, who had a true philosophy of life, reinforcing once again these moral dogmas: “acceptance, forgiveness and love and this is a philosophy of life!” (*Broadway Danny Rose*). This dialogue prepares the way for the next sequence, which exposes the gap between Danny and Tina’s moral values. On the boat Tina recalls the moment that propels the plot, a conversation between Lou and her in which Lou tells her “I gotta change my whole lifestyle” (*Broadway Danny Rose*), to which she replies: “the thing you gotta change is your management” (*Broadway Danny Rose*). Nancy Pogel considers that this sequence emphasises Lou and Tina’s “careless emotional dishonesty” and their “lack of guilt” and suggests that the camera lingers on the golf ball and the hole in a echo of Jordan Baker’s dishonesty during the golf tournament in *The Great Gatsby*. In this context it can be argued that *Broadway Danny Rose* is mainly a story of the price of loyalty and the consequences of betrayal, which would be developed more starkly later in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989). I certainly agree with Nancy Pogel when she affirms that *Broadway Danny Rose* has similarities with Coppola’s *The Godfather* because both are, in part, about “the distance between personal and business morality” (Pogel, 195). To some extent, I would argue that *Broadway Danny Rose* is a pastiche of Coppola’s *The Godfather*. I would like to preface my argument by explaining that *Broadway Danny Rose* is a subversion of the themes presented in *The Godfather*. Furthermore, Allen’s mafia family is conceived of as ridiculous. The sensitive and weak Johnny (Edwin Bordo) is portrayed as the converse of what films like *The Godfather* got audiences used to. Johnny’s mother (Gina De Angeles), the matriarch of the family is so theatrical that she is also a caricatural character. As far as Johnny’s brothers are concerned, they are too easily deceived by Danny and Tina. In addition to this, Danny can be seen as a subversion of Marlon Brando’s character, since as it was already mentioned, he is the *paterfamilias* of his characters. The only difference is that unlike *The Godfather* it is never “just business”. Danny cannot separate the business side from the personal one: “I’m in personal management – the key word is personal – so I gotta get involved” (*Broadway Danny Rose*).

Danny's inability to distinguish between business and personal matters is definitely revealed when Lou tells Danny he is going to replace him with Sidney Bachrach (Gerald Schoenfeld):

Lou: Don't think it's not hard for me to say, but I gotta do what's right for my career .

Danny: This kid owes me his life.

Lou: That's your problem, Danny. You make everything into a personal situation.

Danny: You can't put into a contract what I did with you. (*Broadway Danny Rose*)

This sequence reminds the audience of the sequence of *The Godfather* in which Tessio is going to be killed for betraying Michael and says: "Tell Mike I always liked him. It was just business" (*The Godfather*). From this point onwards, the tone of the film changes to a more serious one and the pathos of Danny's situation moves the audience.

After what has been discussed, there is little doubt that the central theme of *Broadway Danny Rose* concerns betrayal. Lou betrays his wife with Tina and betrays Danny by replacing him with Sidney and Tina betrays Johnny and Danny. Nevertheless, and although the audience may feel sympathy for him, it cannot be forgotten that Danny has also betrayed Barney Dunn when he gave his name to Johnny's brother, although he supposed Barney to be safely on a three-week-cruise. Besides, he also participates in deceiving Lou's wife. The difference is that while Lou and Tina betray for the sake of business, Danny betrays Barney to protect a friend. Surprisingly, the story suffers a reversal and Danny ends up not being the only character to experience feelings of guilt. While Lou never mentions Danny's name again, at least this is what the audience is induced to think, Tina starts to change. In the same way that Alvy Singer was the mentor of Annie's change, so Danny's benevolence has an effect on Tina. Like Alvy, Tina starts to suffer from anhedonia. Tina's refusal to go to California with Lou may be as emblematic as Alvy's Los Angeles nausea: "I don't wanna go to California, ok? It gives me the creeps out there" (*Broadway Danny Rose*). In refusing to go to California, Tina not only refuses the values of show business but also reveals a

new understanding of the word “guilt”. As she stands in front of the mirror with her sunglasses off, the audience seems to be looking at a new, sweeter Tina. In fact, it is in front of her mirror image that she develops a conscience and feelings of guilt for the first time, recognizing how unfair she has been towards Danny. Moreover, as she finds that the fortune teller is away from home, she is forced to make a decision on her own, for the first time. She goes to Danny’s house when he is celebrating Thanksgiving with his clients and reminds him of uncle Sidney’s philosophy of life “acceptance, forgiveness and love”. Danny ends up forgiving Tina because he cannot deny his nature. Nancy Pogel is surely right, when she considers *Broadway Danny Rose* a “modern myth of reconciliation” because it is a reaffirmation of lost values “acceptance, forgiveness and love”, a celebration of human relationships. On the other hand, *Broadway Danny Rose* implies that dedication to art is inappropriate in this show business context because Danny’s clients, without exception, are devoid of any genuine talent or calling. When the higher calling of art is impossible, it is necessary to return to the moral values of being nice to people as Danny is. Show business vanity and ruthlessness is inexcusable because it is not in the service of real gifts but rather just greed and ambition.

Bullets over Broadway, the third film this chapter will focus on, recreates the twenties, celebrates the prime of Broadway and denounces at the same time the hypocrisies of the theatre world. Although *Broadway Danny Rose* leads to an evaluation of self-interested acts, *Bullets over Broadway* implicates the problematic art / life in a much more serious and life-or-death context. Unlike *Annie Hall* and *Broadway Danny Rose*, in *Bullets over Broadway* Woody Allen sits behind the camera controlling every single detail and lets the leading role be played by John Cusack, who makes the character a little less neurotic, a little more *naïve*. The opening sequence of the film presents a key dialogue between David and his business-minded agent, which triggers the discussion on the purity of art and the hindrances of show business. “I’m an artist! I won’t change a word in my play to pander to some Broadway audience!”, exclaims David (*Bullets over Broadway*). His agent, who knows the byways of show business, tells David that

the play is too heavy, but David's conception of art is very similar to that of Sandy Bates, for whom art has the truth-telling duty: "Not everybody writes to distract. It's the theatre's duty not just to entertain but to transform souls" (*Bullets over Broadway*). In effect, both of them share the view that art is something transcendental and that it pursues higher aspirations than fame, recognition and money. "Come on", his agent tells him, "you're not in a café in Greenwich Village. This is Broadway". This last sentence, illustrates the spirit of the world of show business as Allen sees it. This is Broadway and here nobody cares about beautiful theories of art. The rule here is to make commercial entertainment. Even so, David persists in directing his play his own way because he does not want to see his work mangled as he has already seen it done before, but his agent warns him: "Kid, that's the real world out there and it's a lot rougher than you think" (*Bullets over Broadway*). It is evident that this opening dialogue reveals the opposition between the true purpose of art and the crass values of show business, which can't help but evoking the familiar dialectic of "pure" art and compromised life.

This sequence jumps forward to a scene in a Greenwich Village café, where a group of people, including David, discusses art, raising many of the fundamental questions of the film:

Flender: It's irrelevant, it's irrelevant! The point I'm making is that no truly great artist has been appreciated in his lifetime. No! No! No! Take Van Gogh or Edgar Allan Poe. Poe died poor and freezing with his cat curled on his feet!

Woman: David, don't give up on it, maybe [your play] will be produced posthumously!

Flender: No, I have never had a play produced, that's right, and I've written one play every year for the past twenty years!

David: Yes, but that's because you're a genius! And the proof is that both common people and intellectuals find your work completely incoherent! It means you're a genius!

Man: We all have that problem. I paint a canvas every week, take one look at it, and slash it with a razor.

Flender: In your case that's a good idea.

Ellen: I have faith in your plays.

David: She has faith in my plays because she loves me.

Ellen: No, it's because you're a genius!

David: Ten years ago, I kidnapped this woman from a very beautiful, middle-class life in Pittsburgh, and I've made her life miserable ever since.

Woman: Hey, Ellen, as long as he is a good man, keep him! You know, I think the mistake we women make is we fall in love with the artist...Hey, you guys are listening? We fall in love with the artist, not the man.

Flender: I don't think that's a mistake!...Look, look, look! Let's say there was a burning building, and you could rush in and you could save only one thing, either the last known copy of Shakespeare's plays, or some anonymous human being.

Woman: It's an inanimate object!

Flender: It's not an inanimate object! It's art! Art is life! It lives! (*Bullets over Broadway*)

I definitely agree with Sander H. Lee when the author affirms that Flender (Rob Reiner), like Nietzsche, believes that in a world devoid of God, art and aesthetic creativity are the only self-justifying principles. Flender's conception of the artist is that of the *Übermensch* and therefore, the artist is able to create "his own moral universe", an idea that implies that artists are free from the ties that bind other human beings to a common ethical code. The main question here is: is art more valuable than the life of a human being? Is it morally acceptable to sacrifice life to art? In effect, the rest of the film will try to answer to these questions. In addition to this, the initial discussion of the film also suggests that people and critics lack the knowledge and aesthetic judgement to recognize art. Although *Bullets over Broadway* raises serious questions about art, it is shaped through the use of parody. An example of this is David's suggestion that Flender has never had a play produced because he is a genius and people find his work incoherent.

Another major theme explored in *Bullets over Broadway* concerns the artist's integrity. It is relevant at this point to recall David's opening statement in which he firmly states his position of not changing his play to please an audience. Unlike Allen, David reveals himself not really to have any control over his work and his integrity is put to the test when he agrees to have his play backed by a hoodlum. He does admit however that it is a horrible moral dilemma: "I'm a whore! I'm a prostitute. Do I want success that badly?" (*Bullets over Broadway*). At this stage, the audience is confronted with a number of questions: Should the artist remain uncorrupted so as to protect entirely the purity of his vision? Or should he relax his standards to satisfy his ambitions? It is possible to talk of purity in the world of commercial theatre, or when one has to entrust one's vision to other

artists too? So, once again the audience is faced with the ambivalence of being an artist in the world of show business. But is David a real artist? At this point it is possible to draw a comparison between David and the Faust myth. In a sense, it could be argued that from the moment David agrees to have his play backed by Nick, he gives his soul to the 'devil'. At the beginning of the films, David tells his agent that the theatre's purpose is to transform the human soul, because art is actually the soul of the artist. As David loses control over his art and permits Cheech to change his play, he is freely giving his soul away.

In the same way as in *Broadway Danny Rose*, Allen also conceived playfully absurd characters in *Bullets over Broadway*. In his satire of the world of theatre, Allen portrays *sui generis* actors with caricatural features that immediately establish the comic tone. The most exaggerated theatrically designed character is Helen Sinclair (Dianne Wiest), a formerly revered grand dame who has lately become an adulteress and a drunk. Helen, who is always declaiming lines full-blast, refuses to participate in *God of our Fathers* at first: "I do plays put on by Belasco or Sam Harris, not some Yiddish pants salesman – turned – producer". I do Electra. I do Lady Macbeth" (*Bullets over Broadway*). Nevertheless, like David she is 'forced' to change her mind when her agent reminds her that she needs a comeback because things are a little unstable. So, she not only participates in David's play but also ends up having an affair with him. Nevertheless, this affair seems in great part motivated by business considerations: David writes his play as "a vehicle for Helen Sinclair" and she offers him Broadway acceptance. Apart from Helen, Nick's (Joe Viterelli) girlfriend, Olive Neal (Jennifer Tily) is a terrible hysterical 'desperate-to-be' actress, who does not have any talent for theatre. Notwithstanding this, her presence is crucial to the play because Nick only backs David's play if Olive is given a role in it. Curiously, Nick recognizes that Olive does not have any talent for being an actress but he introduces her to David as "a great little actress". Olive is so shallow that she can neither pronounce words such as 'masochist', nor understands them. In addition to this, the cast of the play includes a weird actress inseparable of her Chihuahua and a famous actor with an eating compulsion.

Another similarity between *Broadway Danny Rose* and *Bullets over Broadway* is that in the latter film Allen parodies and subverts gangster stories. Curiously, in *Bullets over Broadway* it is Nick (Joe Viterelli), the gangster, that ironically tells Cheech (Chazz Palminteri) to 'protect' Olive from "those theatre characters I don't trust" (*Bullets over Broadway*). It is clear that the main theme of *Bullets over Broadway* is related to the moral universe of the artist. In fact, the story unfolds in an unexpected way when it becomes clear that the only real artist is a gangster and a murder, which raises a set of interesting moral questions. Cheech is the aesthetic hero of the story, the artist as truth-teller and purist. Unlike David, Alvy Singer, Sandy Bates or Isaac David, Cheech is an uneducated man. But in the same way as Sandy Bates, he wants his art to reflect life because '[he] know[s] how people talk'. To a certain extent, Cheech echoes Allen when he expresses his rejection of teachers: 'I hate teachers'. Allen never liked school either and he dropped out of university before he finished his studies. *Bullets over Broadway* is structured upon the differences between Cheech and David. As Sander Lee explains they are the converse of each other,

Cheech is David's opposite in every area. Where David has toiled for years to develop his talent by reading and studying the works of the world's greatest writers, Cheech has no formal education in the theater, nor does he care what others may have done in the past. Where David worships at the throne of celebrity and fame, overwhelmed by Helen's ability to introduce him to a world populated by "Max Anderson", "Gene O'Neil", and Cole Porter, Cheech cares nothing for fame. Indeed, where David allows his desire for celebrity and success to overcome his sense of moral obligation, Cheech has no need to have his talent recognized by others; nor does it seem to occur to him that he could leave his life as a gangster to become a full-time artist. (Lee, 192-193)

Although David has studied art, he does not have the skills to feel it as Cheech does. And as Cheech has lived and understands life on the streets, he has the capacity to transforming it into art, touching people's souls. David is only considered a genius when Cheech reformulates his play and after reading it, Helen Sinclair states: "It's so full of passion; it's so full of life! What a difference between this and your first draft, you hadn't found yourself yet. The idea hadn't crystallised (...). It's no longer tepid and cerebral" (*Bullets over Broadway*). Cheech reveals himself to be a true artist because he does not pursue money and

fame, remaining in anonymity. In the same way, Flenders tells David at the end of the films: "I don't write hits. My plays are art. They're written to be unproduced" (*Bullets over Broadway*). Cheech is an artist who comes to demand complete control over his work. Indeed, he needs this control so much that he decides to kill the only element which causes some trouble to the play and which happens to be Olive, the 'actress' he is supposed to protect. Is it morally acceptable that Cheech protected his play at the expense of Olive's life? This links us to the problematic of saving the last copy of a Shakespeare's play or a human being, which is the departure point that offers this reflection. To Flender and to Cheech, art transcends life and in this sense the choice is obvious (although Flender would do it because he does not care about other people; Cheech's decision should cost him his own life). In contrast David believes that the life of a human being has no price. "Let's say she was ruining the play... does that mean she deserves to die?" asks David. Cheech replies, "you think it's right some tootsie messes up a beautiful thing." Cheech must but David cannot create his own moral universe: "I'm an artist too", exclaims David, "Not a great artist like you, but an artist. But first, I'm a human being, a decent more human being" (*Bullets over Broadway*). After all, it is David who respects life, not Cheech. Cheech holds beauty (in this case truth) as a moral standard and David values life. Even after being shot, Cheech's main preoccupation is to tell David to change the last line of the play because "it'll be... a great finish". The truth is that David has learned something about life and realised that he is not an artist. This way, he perceives that he does not speak Helen's Sinclair language after all and tries to recover Ellen's (Mary-Louise Parker) love: "Do you love me as the artist or the man?" he asks her. "I could love a man if he's not a real artist, but I couldn't love an artist if he's not a real man" (*Bullets over Broadway*). As Gaylord Brewer explains, "David Shayne's acceptance of his failure as a writer is finally empowering and redemptive, a movement into the risky, cruel, but rewarding world of the human" (King, 122). He may acquire the insight that Cheech has, but he will never have the sacrifice and dedication of art's high calling – and Allen does not criticize him for it.

It may be concluded therefore that *Annie Hall*, *Broadway Danny Rose* and *Bullets over Broadway* offer three different ironic takes on the world of show business. It is important to remember that Allen's view of art and of show business is deeply influenced by his Jewish sensibility. Woody Allen belongs to a later generation than that of Al Jolson, Louis B. Mayer, and the Warner Brothers, for whom show business was an avenue to security, wealth and respectability. Woody Allen's generation of showmen were American-born and educated, they performed in the Catskills, and belonged to the Borscht Belt Circuit to be sure, but figures such as Allen, Mel Brooks, Billy Crystal, Jerry Seinfeld and other's display a very different sense of 'being Jewish', one that gives them at once a more central and an ethnically distinct place in America popular culture. Woody Allen contributed more than anyone to placing show business values alongside those of high art and made the questionable pursuit of success in an entertainment industry a central part of the stories of his films.

One thing becomes clear in Woody Allen's films: art is not a business and it has very different goals. Business searches for money and fame, while art, whether ironically put or not, intends to "transform people's souls". To a certain extent, and following on from the discussion in the previous chapter, these three films also promote the idea that art is therapeutic and life-enhancing. Nevertheless, they also warn the audience about the perils of show business and the risk for both artist and audience of compromising one's standards. All the three films analysed in this chapter offer what might be called an education of Annie, Tina and David, respectively. In *Annie Hall*, for example, Los Angeles represent show business and in this perspective, every critique Allen targets at Los Angeles is intended to target show business itself. In the tradition of *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, *Annie Hall* focuses on the relationship between the older artist and the younger disciple. This causes the girls to grow up and the minute she becomes his equal, she grows away from him as well. Nevertheless, what is really important in this classic *shiksa* story is that the girl develops the power of autonomous decision-making. At first, Annie chooses to stay in Los Angeles, but her return to New York may be emblematic of her growing consciousness and of

her rejection of the shallow ideals of the show business world. In *Broadway Danny Rose*, Tina also undergoes a process of personal development with Danny's help, which leads her to redemption. In the origin of this cathartic process is her denial of self-interest ideals connected to the world of show business. As far as David is concerned, he learns not only a truer sense of life but also that he is not yet (and may never be) an artist.

All in all, the three films establish a contrast between show business's more limited ambitions and art's higher purposes. And whatever else they argue, they pre-eminently show, tongue-in-cheek, that art – in America at least – lives in New York. The fact that Allen is a comic artist has an important effect: it provides reassurance that however much he lambastes the world of show business, he can never altogether forget the real and considerable value of entertaining. The Alvy Singer who would rather watch the Nets play basketball on television in the bedroom than attend his wife's society party is not someone who can be constantly walking in the footsteps of Bergman, Joyce and Chekhov, nor be constantly lecturing us on the lowness of our taste.

Chapter IV

AUTHENTICITY AND PERSONA

*The star is more than an actor
incarnating characters, he
incarnates himself in them, and
they become incarnate in him...*
E. Morin

ALLEN'S PERSONA

In his study *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, P. David Marshall explains that the “[s]tar is the usual identification of some *persona* that has transcended the films that he or she performed in and created an aura” (Marshall, 12). In effect, the creation of a filmic aura involves the transposition of the limits between fantasy and life, triggering the projection of a ‘self’ in which fictional and real realms combine. The interpenetration of art and life also causes the inevitable conflation of private and public spheres. As P. David Marshall further acknowledges,

The activity of creating a celebrity from film involves coordinating the reading of the star by the audience outside of the film. The character in the film may set the heroic type that the star embodies, but the relationship to the real person behind the image completes the construction of the celebrity. It is the solving by the audience of the enigma of the star’s personality that helps formulate the celebrity: the audience wants to know the authentic nature of the star beyond the screen. Through reading the extratextual reports about a particular film celebrity, the audience knits together a coherent though always incomplete celebrity identity. (Marshall, 85)

Although in general, fictional representations ascertain the nature of the identification of the celebrity, the construction of a star is not autonomous of his/her private life. This is due to the audience’s inability to distance itself emotionally from the identity of the public personality. P. David Marshall explains that the creation of the celebrity is not ruled by the language of rationality and reason, therefore: “As opposed to the political sphere of leadership politics or the rational rhetoric that envelops business discourse, the entertainment industry celebrates its play with the affective, emotional, and sentimental in its construction of public personalities” (Marshall, 186). There is no doubt that this entire irrational process of the formation of a celebrity presents its peril, mainly because “[i]t’s a common characteristic of celebrity to give rise to a curious syndrome in the world

of show business, namely identifying the actor with the role he plays” (Benayon, 13), encouraging the confusion between art and life.

In no case has this become more evident than in Woody Allen’s. Woody Allen is not just a star, he is a cultural icon and there is no doubt that his media image is “in excess of” the films he has performed in and even the films he did not perform in to create an aura, this is, an existence outside them. Over the years, the line between Allen and his *persona* has been deliberately blurred and no very clear idea of where Woody Allen stops and his character starts has been formed in the minds of critics and audiences. Certainly, Allen as the filmmaker, the comic, the clarinet player, the author and each of the characters he plays, assumes a polymorphic identity. As many critics have observed, Allen has built a career in many aspects similar to that of great comedians, such as Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx, Bob Hope and Buster Keaton but in each of these cases their identities as performers held public sway over their reputations as thinkers and artists. Because Allen cultivates a more openly self-reflexive and self-analytic art, exploiting his own identity, the border which separates life and fiction is much thinner than it was with his forerunners. In Stig Björkman’s *Woody Allen on Woody Allen* the filmmaker himself recognizes that his *persona* finds its roots in the tradition of silent comedy:

Well, it seemed to me like a very standard film persona for a comedian. Someone who is a physical coward, who lusts after women, who is good-hearted but ineffectual and clumsy and nervous. All standard things that you’ve seen in different various disguises. In Charlie Chaplin or W.C. Fields or Groucho Marx there’s the same thing but in different forms. But the structural underbase was the same thing, as I view it. (Björkman, 26)

From these remarks we may infer that, although Allen’s *persona* was inspired by silent comedy heroes, it was differently conceived. *Persona* is the Latin word for “mask” and in the case of Charlie Chaplin and Groucho Marx, for instance, it really functioned as a mask. Charlie Chaplin hid himself behind his tramp’s outfit, his fake moustache and his dyed black hair. Groucho Marx also used a fake moustache and hid behind ridiculous names (Otis B. Driftwood and Dr. Hugo Z. Hackenbush), which made it easier for the audience to keep separate their perceptions of the screen *persona* and the real comedian. As far as Woody Allen

is concerned, his *persona* seems to reveal more than it camouflages about the real character: he wears exactly the same clothes as the real Woody Allen, the same black-rimmed glasses and he even started his comic career, portraying the adventures of Heywood Allen, a name which has similarities with Allen's own. Such an approach to the formation of his *persona* led many critics to affirm that Allen's characters are just "thinly disguised" versions of the filmmaker himself. Foster Hirsch, for instance, argues that Allen's *persona* is a cleverly engineered masquerade a "comic mask that hides as much as it reveals about his real-life counterpart. Allen Konigsberg is playing a shrewd burlesque version of himself, a made-up character that exaggerates and distorts reality" (Hirsch, 7). In the same way, Sam Girgus expounds the view that Allen "invariably plays himself, thinly disguising himself as various film characters who are themselves fictionalized versions of Allen's own manufactured identity as Woody Allen" (Girgus, 1). In *Annie Hall*, for example, the parallel between the real character and his *persona* is evident. Allen, a former stand-up comic like Alvy Singer, had recently ended a romance with Diane Keaton and the film seems to be an analysis of the end of that relationship. The probability that art was imitating life was further suggested by Alvy's personality, since like Allen himself, he is constantly in flight from fame and recognition. Finally, the fact that Alvy transposes his relationship with Annie into his art also suggests the very same practice that Allen engages in. As Foster Hirsch points out, "[l]ike that play, *Annie Hall* reworks life into art, changing it around so that it comes out "perfect"" (Hirsch, 84-85). Taking this into consideration, Allen has always assumed a paradoxical position towards his art: on the one hand, he encourages, even signposts, the identification between himself and his onscreen *persona*. On the other hand, in films such as *Play it Again, Sam*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and *Stardust Memories*, he deliberately warns the audience against the perils of the confusion between art and life, as was already discussed in the second chapter of this study.

For many years, the popular identification between the real Allen and his onscreen *persona* constituted the unstated formula for his success and during the seventies and the eighties, he became an iconic figure. To a certain extent, Allen

became “enmeshed” in his own creation but this was also the basis for his solid career. The other side of the issue is that the fusion of the private and public spheres made Allen more susceptible to the invasion of his privacy. As Sam Girgus confirms “[h]e has not been able to inoculate his public image against an association with his private behavior” (Girgus, 1). So, in the nineties, the scandal concerning his relationship with Soon-Yi, Mia Farrow’s adopted daughter, brought his public image into discredit and had serious consequences for his career and reputation. The media spread news about the scandal and about Mia and Allen’s official battle over the custody of their children. Sensational headlines and gossipy articles raised a sudden scepticism about a man who seemed to be ‘untouchable’ for decades. Sam Girgus cites the headline for an article by the *New York Times* film critic Caryn James entitled “And there we thought we knew him” (Girgus, 2). Apparently, audiences had always linked Allen with his morally superior and innocent characters such as Danny Rose or Isaac Davis. Less attractive traits in these characterisations were now sought out and highlighted. Now the prevailing feeling of affection for Allen’s *persona* was put in jeopardy by media intrusion and adverse publicity. Nevertheless, it is widely known that Allen has always been quite hostile towards the media and the condition of being a celebrity and a loyal minority stuck by him. In this respect, Graham McCann acknowledges that,

He needs the media attention that accompanies the release of each ‘Woody Allen movie’, but he is careful to protect his work from the more exploitative aspects of the publicity process: he personally selects excerpts from his movies for screening on television review programmes, he chooses restrained, small advertisements, and he only grants interviews to magazines he regards as ‘serious’. Allen is deeply suspicious of the media and the cult of celebrity; he regards the recent wave of ‘celebrity’ magazines as a sign of the trivialization of every cultural figure and event. (McCann, 141)

This chapter aims to analyse the consequences of the interpenetration of the private and the public spheres in the construction of Woody Allen’s public image and the influence of the media in the modern society. In addition, it will also analyse the way Woody Allen addresses the spread of the cult of celebrity in his films. To a certain extent, this chapter is a gathering together and an extension to the three previous chapters because it will take up the issues previously discussed: Allen’s establishment as an *auteur*, the perils of the confusion between

art and life and the show business practices he deeply criticizes. To illustrate the points I would like to make, this chapter will focus on three more films: *Zelig* (1983), *Deconstructing Harry* (1997) and *Celebrity* (1998).

Film Analysis

Zelig (1983) is a pseudo-documentary about a celebrity-nonentity, which mocks the documentary form; it also cultivates the same innocent kind of victimized character Allen portrays in *Play it Again, Sam*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and *Broadway Danny Rose*. On the other hand, *Deconstructing Harry* (1997) and *Celebrity* (1998) mark an abrupt departure from Allen's gently glamorized style, to portray a cruder world, a more feral society where moral iniquity prevails. To put this another way, Allen has always constructed decent "comedy of manners", where the characters were an educated upper-class concerned with high ideals and where sex scenes were subtle and implicit. *Deconstructing Harry* and *Celebrity* (1998) break with this tradition to display explicit sex scenes and to introduce new types of characters, in particular opportunists and prostitutes. What they share, although much more astringently, is a critique of the moral corruption in an increasingly decadent society and concern to investigate the possibility of conserving personal integrity in a dehumanized world.

Zelig constitutes a sort of social chronicle of life during the twenties in the form of a documentary, articulated by real-life New York intellectuals such as Saul Bellow, Susan Sontag and Irving Howe, who give it a plausible sense of social history. *Zelig* is the story of a human chameleon who "wants so badly to be liked", that he changes his own form and his personality according to the people he is with. When he is with black people, he turns black, when he is with overweight people, he turns overweight and when he is with a psychiatrist, he looks, acts and talks like a psychiatrist. The narrator's voice over (Patrick Horgan) informs the audience about the extreme social alienation of his situation:

Zelig's own existence is a non-existence. Devoid of personality, his human qualities long since lost in the shuffle of life, he sits alone quietly staring into space, a cipher, a non-person, a performing freak. He who wanted only to

fit in – to belong, to go unseen, by his enemies and be loved – neither fits in nor belongs, is supervised by enemies, and remains uncared for. (*Zelig*)

As Susan Sontag affirms at the beginning of the film, “he was the phenomenon of the 20’s” (*Zelig*). This statement is also the bridge to Irving Howe’s interpretation of Zelig’s story. According to him, “the story reflected the nature of our civilization, a character of our times, yet, it was also a one man’s story” (*Zelig*). In fact, Zelig’s story is the background of a film which intends to show the nature of our civilization’s mediatization of knowledge through one man’s story. Even respected intellectuals speak *clichés* when put before a mass audience. *Zelig*, like *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, is a film about the 20s and 30s but which actually throws a critical look at the 80s and at a society in which media have the power to make and break heroes. In an attempt to establish a comparison between *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *Zelig*, Nancy Pogel argues that the latter “is also a self-conscious investigation of the legitimacy of the media, of the validity of public taste, and of the liabilities of being a celebrity” (Pogel, 176). *Zelig* is a story about the power and influence media has to shape people’s minds. In the newspapers, for instance, *Zelig* turns from an impostor chased in a football game to a celebrity, the new media-driven phenomenon in America, here traced back to its origins in the Hearst yellow press. As doctors analyse his condition in a Manhattan’s hospital, tabloids throw out headlines on Leonard Zelig: “Human who transforms self discovered”, “Miraculous changing”, “Man Puzzles Doctors” “Bizarre Discovery at Manhattan’s hospital”. Press stories on *Zelig* spread everywhere and doctors are forced to issue a statement about “the medical phenomenon of the Age and possibly of our time” (*Zelig*). Meanwhile, all over America people follow attentively every bit of news about Leonard Zelig in the media, “totally absorbed in the real life drama”. The portrait of a country absorbed by *Zelig*’s “real life drama”, offers a critique on the shallowness of a society ruled by voyeurism and sensationalism and it also hints at the future spread of the tabloid television/reality-shows that flourished in the mid 1990s. Reinforcing this position, *Zelig* counts on the testimonies of Mike Geibell and Ted Bierbauer from the *New York Daily Mirror* who wanted *Zelig*’s story on page one every day: “In those days you would take anything to sell newspapers” although “it may even play with the truth a little bit”

(*Zelig*). *Zelig* is about the propensity media has to distort reality to make profits, as well as our difficulty, under the barrage of media images, to interpret what is real, something which brings us back to the old problematic of confounding reality and fiction.

The film underscores the lack of morality of a society which exploits *Zelig's* distress. *Zelig* is exploited by doctors, by the media, by Hollywood, by the public and even by his sister, Ruth Zelig (Marie Louise Wilson), who removes him from the hospital so that "he can be better cared for at home" (*Zelig*). Instead, she and her boyfriend, Martin Geist (Sol Lomita) exhibit him as "The Phenomenon of the Ages". In effect, *Zelig* mania spreads all over America in every form: dance contests, photos, anecdotes, dolls, clocks, books, games, cigarettes and songs. In Hollywood, *Warner Brothers* produce a film entitled *The Changing Man* and Cole Porter writes the lyric "You're the top, you're Leonard Zelig". Apart from Dr. Eudora Fletcher, everybody sees in him a chance to make some money. She is the only one who cares about him as a human being and who regards him as human. Under hypnosis, *Zelig* confesses her: "I want to be like the others. I wanna be liked" (*Zelig*). His physical metamorphosis stems from his need to be liked and functions as "a protective coloring or shield against the pain of disapproval and rejection" (Pogel, 172).

Curiously, *Zelig's* cure is only reached when Dr. Eudora Fletcher (Mia Farrow) becomes *Zelig's* mirror-image. By pretending to be *Zelig*, she provides him with some objectivity and he becomes aware of himself as an individual. The externalization of such an image contributes to the validation of his identity and to his own acceptance. Moreover, in showing *Zelig* to himself, Dr. Eudora does exactly the same thing that *Zelig* has been doing to others all his life: showing other people their mirror image and it is from this that they both learn that the need to be liked is something natural but needs controlling. In this perspective, Mary Nichols states that "*Zelig* is a movie about the two senses of reflection. Reflection means deriving an identity or content from an object outside oneself, as a mirror reflects the person standing before it, and as *Zelig* reflects those who stand before

him” (Nichols, 111), which signifies that “[t]he movie moves back and forth between Zelig’s reflections of others and others’ reflections on Zelig” (Nichols, 111-112). It is important to understand that if reflection “means deriving content from an object outside oneself”, it is closely linked to the act of interpretation which also “means deriving content from an object outside oneself”. *Zelig* is a parody to the ideas of ‘interpretation’ and ‘commentary’ and it plays with interpretations about interpretations behind the ‘serious’ comments of the real life authorities, the intellectuals who stand for lame pundits. Therefore, predicting what the critics may interpret about this story, Irving Howe comments: “When I think about it, it seems to me that his story reflected a lot of the Jewish experience in America, the great urge to push in and find one’s place and then to assimilate into the culture. I mean, he wanted to assimilate like crazy” (*Zelig*). Actually, I believe that Zelig’s passion to be liked is a grotesque version of Jewish assimilatory practice. By assimilating other people’s values he hopes to become like them and to be accepted. His equilibrium resides not only in other people’s acceptance of his personality but also in his own acceptance of the contorted (and absurd) self he has become. When public sympathy starts shifting away from him, having no viable self-image, he loses his equilibrium and disappears. It is richly absurd that Eudora finds him, a Jew, among a mass of Hitler’s followers, but in Saul Below’s words, this also stem from his desire of immersion in the crowd:

... it really made sense, it made all the sense in the world, because, although he wanted to be loved... craved to be loved... there was also something in him... that desired... immersion in the mass (...) anonymity, and Fascism offered Zelig that kind of opportunity, so that he could make something anonymous of himself by belonging to this vast movement.
(*Zelig*)

At this point, I would argue that Zelig is an externalisation of Allen’s alter ego, embodying his (and our) vacillation between the desire for recognition and the desire for anonymity. Allen, like Zelig, simultaneously seeks and escapes from fame. He produces art that draws attention to its creator but he longs for privacy. However, “like a man emerging from a dream”, Zelig awakens when he sees Eudora and “in a matter of seconds everything comes back to him” (*Zelig*). Eventually, Zelig transforms himself into a pilot, saving himself and Eudora. After breaking the world’s record for flying across the Atlantic, they are paid the homage

of a ticker-tape parade, the quintessential American media event, since they are considered “a great inspiration to the young of this nation, who will one day grow up and be great doctors and great patients” (*Zelig*). In fact, as Saul Below comments, Allen was a great patient because “what enabled him to perform this astounding fact was his ability to transform himself. Therefore, his sickness was also the root of his salvation” (*Zelig*).

In keeping with Allen’s faith in the personal, *Zelig* is an affirmation of love, patience, loyalty and tolerance because it was these qualities which effected his cure. It was Zelig and Eudora’s capacity to recognize and understand each other that facilitated Zelig’s cure. As Mary Nichols points out: “The greatness for both doctor and patient lies in becoming like the other, in simultaneously saving and being saved” (Nichols, 106). According to this, Zelig and Eudora become simultaneously doctor and patient for both to be eventually saved: Zelig acquires his own identity and becomes “his own man”; Eudora learns the true meaning of life and has the opportunity to acquire a love more rewarding than the recognition she has longed for. Finally, Zelig concludes in a voice which, whatever Allen’s transgressions, is unique and valuable in American cinema,

You have to be your own man and learn to speak up and say what’s on your mind. Now maybe they’re not free to do it in foreign countries but that’s the American way. You take it from me because I used to be a member of the reptile family but I’m not anymore. (*Zelig*)

Actually, *Zelig* should be understood in a broader context. Although the film is about a “one man’s story” it is easy to perceive the reason why Irving Howe states that it reflected the nature of our civilization. *Zelig* is one embodiment of the American Dream, of self-making and a comic avatar of millions of people who went to America to find their own way, to fit in and eventually to be ‘their own men and women’. Taking the part for the whole, *Zelig* universalizes the myth of the American Dream but shows that self-construction can easily be overwhelmed by others’ requirements of you, especially when dollars are to be made.

While the public is made to perceive a set of narrow readings of the “importance” of *Zelig*’s story, we must understand *Zelig* as another kind of symbol.

At the beginning of the film *Zelig* appears as the “ultimate conformist”, someone who “lacks inner direction”, someone who “wants to fit like a crazy”. Notwithstanding the apparent simplicity of Allen’s proposition, we glimpse his creator as the portrait of an eccentric and non-conformist; his satire is the rejection of views other people have of him, the ironic statement of someone who is clearly “his own man”. Nevertheless, concern about visual manipulation in *Zelig* has raised questions about the possibility of being “one’s own man”. According to Sam Girgus “Allen analogizes the way the mind perceives and deals with reality and the way the camera operates to record reality” (Girgus, 93). In this sense, Allen scrutinizes the way our perception is influenced by media. In Girgus’s opinion, Allen associates the psyche with the operations and manipulations of the media. In this perspective, the media not only distort reality, but it also has the capacity to create an alternative, valid world: “The process of Zelig’s artistry and technology testifies to the power of the media, not just to reflect or distort reality, but also to create a new environment of mediated reality for the individual and the mass audience” (Girgus, 95). He further states that this happens, because of the mind’s vulnerability to the photographic image. Nevertheless, it is due to the distortion of real images that Zelig’s identity remains hybrid, even at the end of the film: “(...) the last image we have of Zelig is inconclusive. He both escapes and remains caught within the film, half fiction, half real, a memory, a legend” (Pogel, 186).

In the aftermath of the 1992/3 public conflict between Allen and Mia Farrow, both his public image and his art seemed to have altered radically. *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) *Deconstructing Harry* and *Celebrity* mark a new era in Allen’s work and a shift in tone from his previous work. Quoting Gaylord Brewer’s words, “*Deconstructing Harry* (1997) and *Celebrity* (1998), are controversial recastings of Allen personae and variations on the costs and consequences of artistic success” (Phoenix, 115). Unlike Danny Rose in *Broadway Danny Rose* or David Shayne in *Bullets over Broadway*, for instance, the characters in *Deconstructing Harry* and *Celebrity* are neither morally superior nor morally-driven. Actually, these films embrace new kinds of characters to which the audience was unused to in Allen’s films. Prostitutes, drugged directors and depraved writers, are now part of Allen’s

universe of characters. Allen, who has always made intelligent comedy from the stereotypical Jewish attitude of anxiety about sex but who has fundamentally never separated it from romantic love, changes his approach to the theme in these three films. More explicit sex, scenes of nudity, and profane language propose a cruder and ruder world, which contrasts with the innocence and glamorization of Allen's former films.

Deconstructing Harry could be seen as Allen's extreme attempt to dissociate himself from his *persona* in the public eyes. To carry out his purpose, Allen portrays a character who shares very few similarities with Allen's previous characters. The story centres on the supposedly contemptible Harry Block (Woody Allen), his chaotic existence and his history of failed relationships: he has gone through three failed marriages, his sister-in-law wants to kill him because he destroyed her marriage, one of his ex-wives has custody of his son, his sister is offended by the ridiculous caricature he drew of her in one of his books and he is about to lose Faye (Elisabeth Shue), his present love. At the beginning of *Deconstructing Harry* art seems to be imitating the tabloid version of Allen's life and in this context, the rest of the film offers a reflection upon the relationship between the two realms.

Harry's inability to fit in society and to conform to conventional moral standards stems apparently from his inability to distinguish between art and life and therefore, he ends up having trouble with everyone who surrounds him. The film itself is structurally as chaotic as Harry's life and mind since it is broken up with fictional story fragments, past recollections, dreams and fictional journeys. The film starts in Harry's basement, which is a sign of the journey of descent which the film enacts. Harry resembles the archetype 'evil genius', he is simultaneously a gifted but ultimately degenerate individual. Like the picture of Dorian Gray, his art is self-destructive and it reveals the 'true personality of the artist'. Lucy (Judy Davis) accuses Harry of the unscrupulous practice of displaying her private life in his books and of having destroyed her life:

How could you write that book? Are you so selfish? Are you so self-engrossed, you don't give a shit who you destroy? You told our whole

story. All the details you gave me away to my sister. Marvin's left me. He's gone. (*Deconstructing Harry*)

She further compares Harry to a black magician who destroys other people for the sake of money, the first sign that Harry Block has a different nature from Allen's previous characters.

Now, two years later, your latest magnum opus emerges from this sewer of an apartment where you take everyone's suffering and turn it into gold, literary gold. Everyone's misery. You even cause their misery and mix your alchemy and turn it into gold. Like some fucking black magician, (*Deconstructing Harry*).

In fact, unlike *Zelig* or Allen's previous films the audience does not feel any immediate sympathy with the insensitive Harry. On the contrary, Harry's depravity alienates audiences and unveils a not very subtle lust towards women. He confesses: *'I'm always thinking fucking every woman I meet. What she would be like naked'* (*Deconstructing Harry*).

Harry's world is falling apart and he recognizes that he cannot function in life: "I'm not good at life. I write well but that's a different story. I can't function in the world we have. You know I'm a failure at life" (*Deconstructing Harry*). Harry's failure at life, the fact that he cannot function in it causes his latest malady: he is suffering from writer's block. In fact, as I have already said, Harry's art imitates life and Harry's inability to fit in is reflected in his own art. Therefore, as the picture of reality becomes more and more unclear in Harry's psyche, he is unable to produce art. Along with this problem is the fact that, in Allen's/Harry's mind the borders between reality and fantasy are constantly blurred. However, he is not entirely aware of this and when his own creations appear to him, he does not immediately recognize them: "Look at this guy", exclaims Ken, "you created me, now you don't recognize me. I'm just you thinly disguised. You gave me a little more maturity and a different name" (*Deconstructing Harry*). Although these illusions are projections of Harry's psyche, they posit a connection between art and life and suggest that art can lecture life. In the same way that Cecilia learns from Tom in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and Allen Felix learns from Bogart in *Play it Again, Sam*, it is largely through his fictional creations that Harry comprehends that his

characters are versions of himself and therefore, a reflex of reality. Furthermore, the fact that Ken (Richard Benjamin) is self-aware that he is a 'thinly disguised' version of his creator, gives him human understanding, which to a certain extent, makes him more real than Harry. *Deconstructing Harry* is also reminiscent of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and of *The Kugelmass Episode*. In the same way that fictional characters get out of their fictional universe to play a role in the life of 'real characters', so as he begins to unravel Harry's fictional creations start to play a role in Harry's life. The film strongly suggests that Harry's characters are part of his life and cannot be dissociated from him. It further suggests that art may escape the control of its creator. As Ken clarifies "you can't fool me. I'm not like your shrink. He only knows what you tell him. I know the truth" (*Deconstructing Harry*). This sequence reverses the roles of both the creator and the creation, since the latter is given the power of knowing the truth, a role which is usually reserved for the creator. Moreover, if Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* presents six characters looking for their author, *Deconstructing Harry* stages fictional characters that help their author finding himself. As the name of the film indicates, Harry's creations are the catalysts for his deconstruction, for his self-analysis and for his examination. This self-analysis takes two different forms and occurs at two different stages. At the first, external level, Harry meets the 'real' characters who surround him: his ex-wives, his sister-in-law, his psychiatrist, Faye, Larry and Cookie. At a second, internal level Harry meets the fictional characters of his books. It is due to the interpenetration between the two worlds that Allen starts a complex process of evolution and metamorphosis. In part, Harry's change is motivated by public disapproval, like Zelig's change. His sister, for example, tells him: "you have no values, your whole life is nihilism, is cynicism, is sarcasm and is orgasm" (*Deconstructing Harry*). Although Harry was conceived differently from Allen's previous characters, there are also some similarities. Like Danny Rose, for example, Harry is an atheist. However, both of them fear punishment and both of them exteriorize the Jewish feeling of guilt: "I'm spiritually bankrupt, I'm empty... I'm frightened... I got no soul. You know what I mean? Let me put it this way – when I was younger, it was less scary waiting for Lefty than it was waiting for Godot" (*Deconstructing Harry*). Cookie (Hazelle Godman), one of

the only black characters featured in Allen's films, is a crucial element because she helps him to externalize his crisis:

Harry: I'm the worst person in the world.

Cookie: I've seen worse.

Harry: Who?

Cookie: Hitler. (*Deconstructing Harry*)

The turning point of the story occurs when Harry admits that his characters are 'thinly disguised' versions of himself: "It's me thinly disguised. I don't even think I should disguise anymore. It's me" (*Deconstructing Harry*). I think this is the key line of the whole film because it fosters a double confusion between art and life. In the background, it validates the confusion between the 'real' Harry and his fictional characters. In the foreground, critics interpreted this as Allen's confession that his characters were always playing him after all. As John Bickley acknowledges,

This confession is significant not only to Harry as a character – a character who until this moment is unable to make a meaningful connection between his fiction and his real life – but it also raises questions about the connections between *Deconstructing Harry* and director / writer Woody Allen's personal life. Is Woody admitting here that this fiction he has created – the disjointed life of a character named Harry – is equivocal with himself? Is this movie simply a confession to the public about what the personality behind the art is experiencing? Is Allen finally admitting that his stage persona is actually the man? (Phoenix, 139)

Although most critics were tempted to agree that *Deconstructing Harry* is a *mea culpa* confession and a declaration that Allen's screen *persona* is actually the man himself, the film itself offers a challenge to such an easy conclusion. As Mary Nichols points out, identifying Allen with his characters is to confound reality and fiction, which is the very mistake Harry makes. It is obvious that critics are confounding art and life when they accuse Allen of the same thing Lucy accuses Harry of – making destructive fiction based on reality. On the other hand, in an attempt to deny any connection between himself and his stage *persona*, Allen declared in December, 1, 1999, issue of *USA Today* quoted in *Woody Allen: a Case Book* the following:

I'm not my persona. I don't sit at home drinking liquor with writer's block. I don't have a bad relationship with my sister. I didn't kidnap my kid. I didn't grow up in Coney Island, and my father did not work bumper cars. But people think it's true. (Phoenix, 140)

In support of this, *Deconstructing Harry* is not concerned with Harry's public image and if Harry was intended to be Allen's own representation, it would be incoherent not to focus on that which had been so problematic for him of late.

Returning to *Deconstructing Harry*, Harry's process of change reaches its climax in his internal and illusory journey to hell, which also constitutes Allen's counterattack over the media publicity concerning his private life. Hell is a comic representation of an underworld of vice and the criticism targeted at the media is revealed when the audience learns that the seventh floor, which is reserved for media, is full to bursting. Furthermore, the devil (played by Billy Crystal) is a comic parody of a Hollywood studio boss (he had been running a Hollywood studio for two years). Notwithstanding this, the descent into hell represents the bottom of Harry's process of deconstruction and marks the beginning of his process of reconstruction. The final sequence of *Deconstructing Harry* reconciles Harry with his work and constitutes an illusory moment of triumph for him. He imagines all his characters honouring him: "It's your dream. You've created it" (*Deconstructing Harry*). Harry declares: "I love all of you. You've given me some of the happiest moments of my life. You've even saved my life at time. You actually taught me things" (*Deconstructing Harry*). Harry, in paying homage to his art, receives some personal validation in return. One of his characters tells him: "Your books all seem a little sad on the surface, which is why I like deconstructing them. Because underneath, they're real happy. It's just that you don't know it" (*Deconstructing Harry*). Apparently, this validation is sufficient to restore the ability to work to Harry. W. B. Yeats, who once called himself the last romantic, makes the same point in his poetry about tragic art, that under the surface it is fundamentally happy (at the time he was able to use the word "gay").

Notes for a novel: Ripken leads a fragmented, disjointed existence. He had long ago come to this conclusion. All the people know the same truth: a life consists of how we choose to distort it. Only his writing was calm. His writing, which had more ways than one, saved his life. (*Deconstructing Harry*)

The end of *Deconstructing Harry* reiterates the idea that art can be instructive and life-enhancing. It was through his art that Harry started a process of

deconstruction, which eventually leads him through a process of self-discovery and which culminates in the restoration of his creativity.

Like *Zelig* and *Deconstructing Harry*, *Celebrity* also deals with questions of *persona* and authenticity. According to Sam Girgus, “[o]ne of Allen’s most inventive and startling efforts to effectuate the recently desired separation of his public persona from his character in a film occurs in *Celebrity* (1998)” (Girgus, 14). This is the most plausible reason to account for the fact that Kenneth Branagh plays the Woody Allen role. In order to differentiate Allen and his onscreen *persona*, Kenneth Branagh functions as a sort of defensive screen between Allen and the audience. However, Kenneth Branagh the consummate technical actor, reflects Allen’s mannerisms in such a faithful way, that it is generally admitted that the actor is the filmmaker’s alter ego more compellingly than Cusack’s David Shayne had been in *Bullets over Broadway*. Allen’s *Celebrity* is a carnivalesque satire of a society obsessed with celebrity, scandal, body culture and media attention. As Woody Allen explains,

My main motive in making the film was an awareness of the phenomenon of the celebrity, in New York and the United States in general. It seemed to me that everybody was a celebrity. Every doctor, every priest - everyone was a celebrity. The chefs were celebrities – and so were the prostitutes. We live in a culture filled with celebrities and privileged people (...) That was really my only thought of the film: to picture for people the culture of celebrity. (Björkman, 340-341)

Allen’s *Celebrity* savages the 90’s: a decade pervaded by the unchecked rise of celebrity culture, predicated on people’s fascination with the private lives of those who the media took up. Besides, it was also a time in which global media multiplied and hyped the material available to our imagination. *Celebrity* became an important part of the mass imagination and brought with it the trivialization of art and a celebration of the ephemeral, complete with its own theoretical underpinning, postmodernism. *Celebrity* analyses the cultural phenomenon of the nineties: reality TV, voyeurism, supermodels and celebrities worship (Michael Jackson, Madonna), false gods and publicity. *Celebrity* also denounces the aimlessness and the decadence of the modern society. However, at the same time that it condemns the cultural vacuum of the American society, it seems to

celebrate its 'extravaganza' and sensationalism. *Celebrity* reiterates Allen's admiration for Fellini and it is reminiscent of *Dolce Vita* (1960) not only in its episodic structure, but also in the development of its themes and characters' design. Actually, the leading characters, Marcello (Marcello Mastroianni) and Lee (Kenneth Branagh), are similarly conceived and portray two picaresque anti-heroes. Firstly, the two characters earn their living by interviewing and writing about film stars and consequently, they attend the same sort of glitzy media occasions. Secondly, in both cases, there is a woman who loves them and who is willing to give them a family; nevertheless, both Marcello and Lee end up having affairs with sexy, tantalizing women. It is revealed that Marcello and Lee are frustrated and unfulfilled not only professionally, but also emotionally. They both dream about different jobs, writing a book, enriching their emotional lives and finding some meaning in life. Another similarity between Lee and Marcello is that both of them become entrapped into a vicious circle of parties, scandal and sex; that is, they become enmeshed in the *milieu* they are supposed to observe and report on from the outside. Finally, both films explore their dissatisfaction and take a view of their responsibility for their personal failures.

Allen's film questions the value of fame from its very beginning. When Lee interviews a famous actress played by Melanie Griffith, she confesses her childhood dreams and desires: "And I would pray that my breasts and my legs would be beautiful, so that I could be an actress" (*Celebrity*). The sequence states clearly her belief that the condition for being an actress depends not on merit or talent, but on beautiful breasts and legs. What if this is true? This is the film's first attack on the body culture that has established itself in the United States and that has spread into films and TV series, such as *Baywatch*. Moreover, this sequence declares the lack of moral values of a society running on lechery. As Lee tries to seduce the actress, he whispers: "you cut a very erotic figure reclining like that, I have to say" (*Celebrity*). Then, emphasizing the hypocrisy that underlies modern society, the audience witnesses a seduction game between Lee and Nicole Oliver:

I can't sleep with you. I'm not saying that I don't find you attractive. I find you very attractive. There are certain things that I won't do to my husband out of commitment. I could never have intercourse with anyone other than

Phil. My body belongs to my husband but what I do from the neck up, that's a different story (*Celebrity*).

Celebrity is a sort of sexual comedy of “bad” manners like *Mighty Aphrodite* and *Deconstructing Harry*. Three consecutive films praising *fellatio* in no uncertain terms was a shock to the system of Allen’s fans. It is a comedy of carnal drives rather than of romantic longing. Indeed romantic pretension is always undermined by sexual appetite and opportunism. Lee thinks he longs for romantic love but he is shamelessly inconstant and duplicitous. And the world he moves in provides copious examples of temptation. An example of this is the sequence in which he meets the eccentric model played by Charlize Theron and he says “you are the most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen. I mean, every curve in your body fulfils its promise. If the universe has any meaning at all, I’m looking at it” (*Celebrity*). The model’s response is purely physical: “Well, I’m polymorphously perverse (...) Meaning every part of my body is... well, gives me sexual pleasure (...). I’m orgasmic” (*Celebrity*). Another purpose of *Celebrity* is to satirise the fusion of the private and public spheres in the construction of celebrity through the media. When Lee and the model have a car accident, she exclaims: “I can’t be in the papers connected with some drunken-driving accident. The tabloids will kill me. I just signed a huge personal endorsement with a big cosmetic company” (*Celebrity*). The society portrayed in *Celebrity* is one in which the media creates and destroys celebrities, fills and empties pockets. Therefore, this sequence is connected to one which presents a plastic surgeon who became famous because of a *Newsweek* article. The media calls him “The Michael Angelo of Manhattan” and the publicity they gave him is a proof of the power of the organs of public opinion: “With the skill of a great sculptor, unsightly flesh is suctioned away, until all that remains is youth – or the illusion of youth” (*Celebrity*). The scene satirises the manipulation of bodies for fame and profit and questions the possibility of being authentic in a culture which promotes envy, vanity and conformity to social stereotypes.

Lee is a person of ambivalent attitudes: on the one hand, he questions the possibility of authenticity and aims to write a book which denounces the futility of

this sick society. On the other hand, he wants desperately to belong to this circle of venality and vengery, which is the world of show business:

My book is about the values of a society gone astray. A culture badly in need of help. A country that gives a twenty year old kid who can barely read or write a 100 million contract to play basketball. A murder trial on who's sleeping with the president is show business? Everything is show business. (*Celebrity*)

Celebrity analyses the subordination of every subject to show business. Therefore, when Lee's ex-wife, Robin (Judy Davis), tells producer Tony Gardella (Joe Mantegna) that "all I'm good at is Chaucer", he answers "well, we have a cooking show, you could do great writer's recipes. Chaucer's fettucini with clam sauce, Sir Walter Raleigh's gazpacho" (*Celebrity*). In this film, a socially useful role like teaching is just brushed aside in favour of some flunkey job in television. As Gaylord Brewer explains, "like all others in *Celebrity*, the literary world is co-opted by media and marketing. Nearly everyone in the film seems to be writing something and little practical distinction is made between screenplay, article, or novel" (Phoenix, 127). During an orgy in Brandon (Leonardo DiCaprio nicely spoofing the media's tabloid obsession with him)'s house, even Lee's partner tell him that she is a writer: "I wrote some film scripts... have you ever heard of Chekhov?... I write like him" (*Celebrity*). Another important theme of *Celebrity* that the audience has already seen developed in *Bullets over Broadway* is that the artist creates his/her own moral universe and enjoys certain privileges. Therefore, despite breaking up his hotel suite and beating up his girlfriend, director Brandon Darrow (Leonardo DiCaprio) does not go to jail, because his media status gets him off, since he is an acclaimed film director. Instead, he intimidates hotel security with threats of suing them. Brandon Darrow lives in a druggy and chaotic world in which Lee tries to fit in order to get his script produced. Nevertheless, Brandon is a parody of Hollywood 'talent', a mixture of psychotic and schizophrenic who simultaneously praises and criticizes Lee's work: "Character development... who is this guy Sonny Boy?... Why does he need to score so bad? Know what I'm sending?" (*Celebrity*). Later, as Lee tries to get some feedback on his work he tells Brandon: "I was wondering how you felt about the way I handled the robbery.

Cause I think it's just a terrific sequence" (*Celebrity*). While smoking marijuana Brandon answers casually that it "needs a complete rewrite".

Eventually, after of a series of attempts to fit in the world of celebrities, Lee realizes the strength of his feelings for Nola (Winona Ryder), just as Harry realizes his feelings for Faye. Love appears again as the redemptive force and the way to find the true meaning of life and in this sense, Lee is willing to give up his search for fame to conquer Nola's love. Nevertheless, like Harry, Lee confuses art and life: "Twice you were the obscure object of desire in books that I've written" (*Celebrity*). In Lee's mind, Nola is the desired projection of his mind and he assumes the role of the omniscient author for some time:

Nola: Yeah, well what am I thinking?

Lee: You're thinking I wish this guy would shut up and kiss me...except, you know, why would I kiss you here when your apartment is two blocks away.

Nola: How did you know that?

Lee: Well, why wouldn't I know where you live? You were Stephanie in my first book, and Louise in my second, and now - you're Nola. (*Celebrity*)

Nevertheless, in the same sense that the confusion between art and life causes Harry to lose Faye, it also causes Lee to lose Nola. Unlike the end of *Deconstructing Harry*, or even *Zelig* the end of *Celebrity* does not offer the possibility of reconciliation, neither with art, nor with life. As Lee sits in the dark of the cinema, he reminds us of Cecilia. On the screen, in a Fellinesque touch, a skywriting of "Help" seems to translate Lee's cry of despair: "He seems by the film's end to have begun a painful journey back to simple, humanizing values" (King, 129).

All in all, *Zelig*, *Deconstructing Harry* and *Celebrity* constitute three satires of the modern world and of the individual artist's place in it. Furthermore, the three films present a fragmented and disjointed *Weltanschauung*, as well as the chaos of a society pervaded by alienation, confusion, hypocrisy and absurdity. Their protagonists go on journeys of self-discovery, seeking their own authenticity at a time when no one seems very sure what that might be. Weak conformity, ruthless ambition and the temptations of the flesh and the ego beset them on all sides.

The frontiers between reality and fiction had been fairly permeable in Allen's earlier work, but here the Allen role seems to be positively collusive with the forces of confusion and corruption. And not a little provocative to those who wanted to believe that he (Woody Allen) stood apart, a little horn-rimmed citadel of sanity, amid all the media madness. Audiences did not care much for the last two films but they came to prefer them to a bitter and unfunny Woody Allen who appeared after the new millennium in films like *Curse of the Jade Scorpion* (2001) and *Hollywood Ending* (2004).

CONCLUSION

General Considerations

Throughout this thesis it has been suggested that Allen's films present a dialectical vision of the world based upon binary oppositions. So, the first conclusion to draw from the analysis of Allen's *oeuvre* is that Allen's attitude towards art is paradoxically romantic and analytical, and that his work vacillates between the two contrary positions: the emotional and the rational, the intuitive and the demonstrable.

In the first instance, Allen's art is strictly personal and instinctive, which may be explained by the lack of formal training he has had in filmmaking. In fact, if there were still any doubts on whether Allen could actually be regarded as an *auteur*, I hope they have been dissipated at an early stage of this thesis. It should be noted, however, that while most directors / *auteurs* tend to work within the same genre or type of film (Alfred Hitchcock worked essentially in the thriller and Ingmar Bergman's predilection was for existential drama), Allen has branched out from comedy to essay other forms like the musical and the domestic drama. Even so, if the crucial condition to be regarded as an *auteur* depends on "finding the director's fingerprints" in his / her work, that is to say, if the artist's personal vision of the world transcends each individual work, then Allen is certainly an *auteur*. It is true that in *Bananas* (1971), for example, Allen constructs a political satire based on the political unrest of the sixties¹², which proves he is not politically disengaged altogether, but alienation and the search for authenticity are also big issues raised in the film. Furthermore, as Nancy Pogel acknowledges, "*Bananas* suggests that if meaning is to be found, it lies in a recovery of humane instincts and in close personal relationships rather than in political abstractions" (Pogel, 40). According to Nancy Pogel, although the background of *Bananas* is political, its foreground privileges the necessity of human contact, a recurrent theme in Allen's films. It is clear that Allen follows the tradition of James Joyce in which art talks about the private life, instead of being something directly socially engaged. Allen's films are liberal but they do not offer political or social solutions. It is the artist's personal

¹² The sixties were marked by political revolts in South America and by the students unrest over Civil Rights and the polemical Vietnam war in the United states, some of the themes that may have served as inspiration to Allen in *Bananas*.

concerns and life experience that go into his films. The fact that his art is personal and that it comprises themes of everyday life enables him to draw upon his intuitive perceptions. Allen often gets new ideas for a screenplay when he is walking down the street, he does not do extensive research or rehearsal work and the actors he trusts are often free to adapt their lines. As Allen affirmed in an interview with Kit Bowen on the website www.woodyallen.art.pl,

I'm not a perfectionist at all. I don't like to rehearse because it bores me. If there's a scene I'm shooting with a mistake in it, I don't do another take particularly because I don't have the patience. (...) I hire top people as actors and actresses. And then I get out of their way. I tell them, if you want to change the script, change it. If you want to say these lines, you can say them. If you don't want to say them, as long as you're in character, make up your own lines. If you want to ad lib, you can ad lib. I give them enormous amounts of freedom.

While it cannot be denied that Allen's methods are often instinctive, it is also fairly clear that his analytical bent has always been much in evidence in his career, especially in Allen's attempts to rationalize his feelings and moods, something that explains his dependence on psychoanalysis. In the same way, Allen strives to understand people's response to cinema as an art, the act of communication established between its participants (audience and artists) and the way art validates our experience of the world, as it takes account of individual and social contexts. In this sense, Allen becomes an investigator, a student of his own impulse to make public art and the multiple spheres of analysis that arise from it.

Interestingly, at the same time the artist explores the purpose of art and its effects on people, he also examines himself as both a spectator and as an artist. Allen's work is marked by a feeling of nostalgia for the past, a longing for human connection and authenticity both of which seem to have grown fragile in the pace of modern urban life. In a certain way, Allen's films are modern morality plays. Most of Allen's characters try to live according to traditionally ethical values, although they recognize that there's no ontological basis for them. Ultimately it is art itself which offers a plausible alternative to fill the voids of modern life. Perhaps this is the reason why Allen often represents art as something semi-divine. Consequently, the figure of the artist has a priest-like calling and sense of duty and

yet is very obviously and ambiguously compromised as a flawed person in the material world. Allen creates his own moral universe and his own set of moral imperatives. Similarly to the Joycean value-system of high modernism, in Allen's universe the artist owes total dedication to art and should sacrifice not only himself but also everyone and everything else which surrounds him for the sake of that art. In this way, the artist lives under a different dispensation than ordinary people and under different rules. This accounts for the fact that Cheech kills Olive in *Bullets over Broadway* and that Harry sacrifices his personal life for the sake of art in *Deconstructing Harry*. These two films epitomize the *Dorian Grey* motif, since the personally destructive and ruthless nature of that dedication enacts the separation of the moral and human consequences of our deeds from their higher aesthetic purpose.

Through the examination of Allen's films it is possible to understand the way Allen's cinematic perception has altered over the years. In *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, for instance, Allen demonstrates the way the magic and escapist aura of films affected his childhood. However, Allen's predilection for "serious" films, as in the case of *Stardust Memories*, reveals that the author cannot and should not confine his art to mere entertainment. Therefore, he establishes a long-running opposition between entertaining films and art films. In other words, he makes an explicit comparison between Hollywood commercial films and European art films. In *Reconstructing Woody: Art, Love and Life in the films of Woody Allen*, Mary Nichols uses a pertinent metaphor to describe Allen's vision of the difference between "the entertainment and escapism" of American cinema and "much more confrontational and grown up" European films. Mary Nichols suggests that the difference between them should remind us of "the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (Nichols, 10). In *Plato's Republic*, Socrates opposes the poet to the philosopher and accuses him of flattering the audience by hiding the truth, while the philosopher pursues the truth. Mary Nichol's metaphor is extremely useful in the association it celebrates between American cinema and poetry on the one hand, and European films and philosophy, on the other hand. However, I would argue that she fails to develop the application of the idea in more detail. Actually,

Socrates condemns poets for the same reason Allen criticizes commercial films. Both of them rely on hedonism and both of them contemplate entertainment as an ultimate goal. Conversely, Allen's conception of art is more like Socrates' conception of philosophy, since both of them purport to confront people with truth. In Allen's view, art is a vehicle which should allow people to reflect upon the real and instead of encouraging passivity on their part, it demands that people "complete the picture" before their eyes, creating an interactive space. At the same time that Allen's perspective of art shares a resemblance with Socrates' conception of philosophy, it also departs from it. Unlike Socrates, Allen contemplates the possibility of a "philosophic poetry", as Mary Nichols explains it. In other words, Allen understands that cinema should be an entertaining medium, but it can also be an excellent educational tool and a positive life-enhancing force (as he reveals in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and *Play it Again, Sam*). His life-long commitment to essentially comic form is proof of this. The analysis of Allen's films also concludes that, although Allen felt disaffected with Hollywood because it never ceased to disappoint him with its banality, he was always attracted to aspects of commercial cinema for their 'magical' properties. He considers American cinema to be a promise largely unfulfilled.

The conclusion that Allen's art is concerned with truth-telling may seem to mislead some critics about the major point of discussion of this thesis: the interpenetration between art and life. To some extent, I believe that Allen would agree with Bazin when he regards cinema as an "asymptote of reality"¹³. Nevertheless, in spite of recognizing that Allen's art pursues truth, I do not agree with the easy assumption that art imitates life in Allen's films. It is clear that Allen's *persona* is an exaggerated version of the artist which bears some resemblance to reality. Even so, it should never be forgotten that films are composed of images and messages which go far beyond the story they help to narrate. To explain this, Mary Nichols utilizes another curious analogy. She compares the critics that regard Allen's films as a simple reflection of reality to the notion Socrates held of

¹³ Information taken from J. Dudley Andrew's *The Major Film Theories*, 140.

the artist, when he compared them “to someone carrying around a mirror and reflecting everything in the world” (Nichols, 3). As she further explains,

This analogy suggests that artists or poets in the broad sense present “nothing more than meets the eye,” for a mirror reflects no more than the eye reflects. But if poets simply re-presented the world, as this mirror image suggests, their representations would be superfluous. Art would add nothing to what we see, and we would have no desire to look through the eyes of the artist; art would have no appeal. (Nichols, 3)

In my view, assertions that films like *Annie Hall* and *Deconstructing Harry* are a portrait of Allen’s life present a very reductive and simplistic perspective of Allen’s films, therefore I totally agree with Mary Nichols when she says that if art was a mirror of reality, it would add nothing to what we see. Even if Woody Allen set out to do no more than represent his raw experience on the screen (and he never does less than something manifestly more complex and art-influenced than this), it would still nevertheless be a mediated artwork and as such not in any meaningful sense ‘real’. What we see thematically exposed in his films is that art and life go hand in hand and that it is very difficult to distinguish between the two. What makes Allen’s *oeuvre* so complex is that it embodies the problem it seeks to scrutinize. As Nancy Pogel remarks,

They may emphasize the problem we have separating the fictional quality of reality from the reality of the fictional world; they present our world as one where visual imagery indoctrinates, and roles are difficult to distinguish from authentic experience. In doing so, they undermine the last remaining belief system, the very art we are seeing; they draw attention to the role film plays as part of the very problem it is exploring. (Pogel, 13)

Moreover, it follows from this that if Allen openly challenges us with the ‘lived nature’ of the stories and messages he seeks to convey, then he is inviting the active participation of the audience in disentangling the imagined (often formalist or generic in the case of *Shadows and Fog* (1992) or his *Midsummer Night’s Dream* pastiche) from the experiential. Allen is a naturally verbal artist (as first and foremost a writer) but he came to be aware of the visual power of the cinematic image in the late 70s and 80s. In this context and taking into consideration the importance of story-telling among Jewish communities, his films work their way through to often open-ended but satisfying resolutions. Although never very heavily driven by plot, there are reasons to believe that Allen always regards film

as a narrative experience. Furthermore, I imagine that, to a certain extent influenced by the French school of film theory, Allen would not altogether disagree with Alexandre Astruc when he celebrates cinema as a language:

The film will gradually free itself from the tyranny of the visual, of the image for its own sake, of the immediate and concrete anecdote, to become a means of writing as supple and subtle as the written word... What interests us in the cinema today is the creation of this language. (Alexandre Astruc quoted by Sontag, 181)

Alexandre Astruc was predictive of Allen's cinema when he contemplated the creation of a cinematic language. In the same way that Astruc explains it, the camera becomes Allen's pen and allows him to tell stories which have a deeper impact on the screen that they would have on paper. This idea is also emphasized by something that has already been referred to in this study, his coming to film from writing and the act of direct address between a comedian and his audience.

On the other hand, Allen does with film the same thing David Lodge does with his novels. Both are committed to explore their art within their own art and both deconstruct their texts for analysis. David Lodge's novels are not mere novels-within-novels, just as Allen's films are not mere films-within-films. Instead, they constitute conscious efforts to analyse the medium they are projected in. So, if David Lodge is one of the masters of meta-narrative novels, I would argue that Woody Allen is one of the masters of meta-narrative films, since both deconstruct the elements of novel and film, respectively, to understand their core functions and effects. As Sage Hamilton Rountree explains in an essay entitled "Self-Reflexivity in Woody Allen's Films",

Metanarrative films, however, force an audience's attention toward their status as constructions by depicting the various elements that go into making a film and examining the way in which narrative is created. Metafiction is more concerned with narrative itself than with imitation of life. Through the course of creating a fictional narrative, they deconstruct that narrative and examine its components. (King, 12)

If meta-narrative films give primacy to their construction and to their components rather than to an imitation of reality, then in what way can it make sense to regard Allen as someone who just throws his life up on the screen? Allen's films could not

be conveying faithful representations of the world if they are equally concerned, if not more so, with the nature of cinema itself, its highly composed and analytical mode of construction in *mise en scène* and film editing.

Another important aspect which was explored in relation to Allen's films has to do with film as an interactive process. Naturally, Allen's films are a personal medium of self-expression. However, expression and meaning can only be communicated if he has some sense of how the audience will interact with the film and draw meaning from the experience. In a certain way, films create a mirror-image that invites us to reflect upon our own experiences in the world, whether they are romantic or professional or familial, and help to shape our perceptions of them. By looking at the microcosm which is the world of another "self", we are able to recognize aspects of our own experience. In this context, film evolves from a microcosmic perspective to a macrocosmic dimension of larger human connectedness. Consequently, cinema can become a common denominator of human experience in an expanded world community of scepticism and confusing diversity. Allen's sophisticated and intimate tone helps to build this community with his audience and this perhaps accounts for why, until very recently, his small and select audiences have been very loyal to him.

All in all, Woody Allen is a living paradox as an artist: he is able to hold up a simultaneously critical and seductive look at the United States and at society in general. Speaking in Freudian terms, he uses cinema as a medium of self-expression in which he projects different aspects of his 'self' for auto-analysis: his *alter-ego* (Alvy Singer, Danny Rose) and his *id* (Harry Block, Lee). For Allen, cinema is a serious and reflective art form which holds the power to entertain people and to make them reflect upon modern experience. As Sam Girgus affirms,

For Allen, the capacity for cinema to move fluidly between verbal script and the visual image gives the medium extraordinary power to invade individual perceptions and influence public consciousness. Vulnerable to the perverse exploitations of propaganda, cinema also can be a potent force for personal renewal and cultural regeneration, including a potential revivification of American perspectives and values. (Girgus, 28)

It has already been stated many times that Allen's films stem from the fascination he has with the power of the cinematic image. In most cases, Woody Allen regards film as a positive catalyst for change. In his mind, cinema influences both the individual and the collective realms, contributing therefore to 'personal renewal and cultural regeneration'. In this sense, by proposing an interface between private and social spheres, films have the privileged capacity to be life-enhancing forces for transformation, which can contribute to the reinforcement of moral values and therefore, to a more humane world.

Future Research

Over the course of this thesis a variety of new ideas have been raised that seem fruitful for further exploration. One of the most interesting questions that emerged in the development of this thesis regards the ambivalent attitude Woody Allen has towards education and intellectualization. Most of Allen's films portray upper echelons of (mainly New York) society, people who belong to a privileged social *milieu*: they discuss art and ideas, analyse literature, appreciate music and are interested in painting. They mostly see themselves as creative and look for avenues to develop their perceived talents. Nevertheless, Allen's films imply that the more educated people are, the unhappier they become. This aspect is also linked to the generalized lack of faith in the precepts and values upon which intellectual enquiry is based. People who generally lack faith cannot deal with the meaningless of existence, which gives rise to neuroses and anxieties shared by the *intelligentsia* in general and New York professionals in particular.

This is also the case as far as love relationships are concerned. In fiction, as in real life, Allen seems to feel naturally attracted to women who are intellectually inferior to him. Annie Hall, for example, is persuaded by Alvy Singer to become more educated but she becomes more suspect when she does. Allen's relationship with WASP girls reflects the story of *Pygmalion*: Allen makes efforts to educate the girl, but as soon as she becomes more or equally educated, the

relationship fails. Apart from this, in *Annie Hall*, the two relationships Alvy has before meeting Annie are so enmeshed in questionable intellectualism that they do not work out. Despite the fact that Annie is the only one who is truly spontaneous and capable of true feelings, when she grows intellectually she leaves Allen. Is Allen giving voice to his misogynist feelings or is he trying to prove that education is not compatible with people's happiness? Is Allen's attitude to education comparable to the love-hate relationship he has with Hollywood or is he simply not secure enough to coexist with a confident and assertive woman?

Further investigations on the role of education and intellectual self-improvement in Allen's films would be very valuable and would contribute to a deeper knowledge of Allen's compelling fictional universe.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

www.imdb.com

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FILMOGRAPHY

WOODY ALLEN'S FILMOGRAPHY (PART I)

Annie Hall (1977)

Screenplay: Woody Allen, Marshall Brickman

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Gordon Willis

Editing: Ralph Rosenblum

Producer: Charles H. Joffe

Executive producer: Robert Greenhut

Production company/Distributor: Rollins-Joffe/United Artists

Cast: Woody Allen, Diane Keaton, Tony Roberts, Carol Kane, Paul Simon, Shelley Duvall, Janet Margolin, Colleen Dewhurst, Christopher Walken, Donald Symington, Helen Ludlam, Mordechai Lawner, Joan Newman, Jonathan Munk, Ruth Volner, Martin Rosenblatt, Hy Anzell, Marshall McLuhan.

Budget: \$ 4,000,000 (estimated)

Box Office: \$ 38,251,425

Awards: Best Actress, Best Director, Best Picture, Best Screenplay

Broadway Danny Rose (1984)

Screenplay: Woody Allen

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Gordon Willis

Editing: Susan E. Morse

Producer: Robert Greenhut

Production company/Distributor: Rollins-Joffe/Orion

Cast: Woody Allen, Mia Farrow, Nick Apollo Forte, Sandy Baron, Corbett Monica, Jackie Gayle, Morty Gunty, Will Jordan, Howard Storm, Jack Rollins, Milton Berle, Craig Vandenberg, Herb Reynolds, Paul Greco, Frank Renzulli, Edwin Bordo, Gina DeAngelis.

Budget: \$ 8,000,000 (estimated)

Box Office: \$ 10,600,497 (USA)

Bullets over Broadway (1994)

Screenplay: Woody Allen, Douglas McGrath

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Carlo Di Palma

Editing: Susan E. Morse

Producer: J. E. Beaucaire, Jean Doumanian, Robert Greenhut, Thomas Reilly

Executive producers: Letty Aronson, Jack Rollins, Charles H. Joffe

Production company: Miramax

Cast: John Cusack, Jack Warden, Chazz Palminteri, Joe Viterelli, Paul Herman, Jennifer Tilly, Rob Reiner, Stacy Nelkin, Dianne Wiest.

Budget: \$ 20,000,000 (estimated)

Box Office: \$ 13,383,737 (USA)

Awards: Best Actress in a Supporting Role

Celebrity (1998)

Screenplay: Woody Allen

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Sven Nykvist

Editing: Susan E. Morse

Producer: Jean Doumanian, Juliet Taylor

Production company: Miramax

Cast: Hank Azaria, Kenneth Branagh, Judy Davis, Leonardo DiCaprio, Melanie Griffith, Famke Janssen, Michael Lerner, Joe Mantegna, Winona Ryder, Donald Trump, Charlize Theron .

Budget: \$ 12,000,000 (estimated)

Box Office: \$ 5,032,496 (USA; 3 January 1999)

Deconstructing Harry (1997)

Screenplay: Woody Allen

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Carlo Di Palma

Editing: Susan E. Morse

Producer: Jean Doumanian

Executive producer: J. E. Beaucaire

Production company: Jean Doumanian/Sweetland/Fine Line Features

Cast: Woody Allen, Judy Davis, Elisabeth Shue, Richard Benjamin, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Kirstie Alley, Bob Balaban, Hazelle Goodman, Demi Moore, Tobey Maguire.

Budget: \$ 20,000,000 (estimated)

Box Office: \$ 10,569,071 (USA; 8 March 1998)

Play it again, Sam (1972)

Screenplay: Woody Allen, after his play

Director: Herbert Ross

Director of photography: Owen Roizman

Editing: Marion Rothman

Music: Billy Goldenberg

Producer: Arthur P. Jacobs

Distributor: Paramount

Cast: Woody Allen, Diane Keaton, Tony Roberts, Jerry Lacy, Susan Anspach, Jennifer Salt, Joy Bang, Viva, Susanne Zenor, Diana Davile, Mari Fletcher, Michael Greene, Ted Markland.

Stardust Memories (1980)

Screenplay: Woody Allen

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Gordon Willis

Editing: Susan E. Morse

Producer: Robert Greenhut

Executive producers: Jack Rollins, Charles H. Joffe

Production company/Distributor: Rollins-Joffe/United Artists

Cast: Woody Allen, Charlotte Rampling, Jessica Harper, Marie-Christine Barrault, Tony Robert, Daniel Stern, Amy Wright, Helen Hanft, John Rothman, Anne De Salvo, Joan Neuman, Ken Chapin, Leonardo Cimino, Louise Lasser, Robert Munk,

Sharon Stone, Andy Albeck, Robert Friedman, Douglas Ireland, Jack Rollins, Laraine Newman, Howard Kissel, Max Leavitt, Renee Lippin, Sol Lomita, Irving Metzman, Dorothy Leon.

Budget: \$ 10,000,000 (estimated)

Box Office: \$ 10,389,003 (USA)

The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985)

Screenplay: Woody Allen

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Gordon Willis

Editing: Susan E. Morse

Producer: Robert Greenhut

Production company/Distributor: Rollins-Joffe/Orion

Cast: Mia Farrow, Jeff Daniels, Danny Aiello, Irving Metzman, Stephanie Farrow, Dianne Wiest, Jeff Daniels, Edward Herrmann, John Wood, Deborah Rush, Van Johnson, Zoe Caldwell, Eugene Anthony, Karen Akers, Milo O'Shea, Annie Joe Edwards, Peter McRobbie.

Budget: \$ 15,000,000 (estimated)

Box Office: \$ 10,631,333 (USA)

Zelig (1983)

Screenplay: Woody Allen

Director: Woody Allen

Director of photography: Gordon Willis

Editing: Susan E. Morse

Producer: Robert Greenhut

Executive producer: Charles H. Joffe

Production company/Distributor: Rollins-Joffe/Orion

Cast: Woody Allen, Mia Farrow, John Rothman, John Buckwater, Marvin Chatinover, Stanley Sverdlow, Paul Nevens, Howard Erskine, Stephanie Farrow, Ellen Garrison, Sherman Loud, Elizabeth Rothschild, Susan Sontag, Irving Howe, Saul Bellow, Dr Bruno Bettelheim, Professor John Morton Blum.

Box Office: \$ 11,798,616 (USA)

WOODY ALLEN'S FILMOGRAPHY (PART II)

Alice. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Orion Pictures. 1991.

A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Orion Pictures, 1982.

Anything Else. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Letty Aronson & Helen Robin. DreamWorks. 2003.

Another Woman. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Orion Pictures, 1988.

Bananas. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Jack Grossberg. United Artists, 1971.

Crimes and Misdemeanors. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Orion Pictures. 1989.

Curse of the Jade Scorpion. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Letty Aronson. DreamWorks. 2001.

Everyone Says I Love You. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Jean Doumanian. Miramax Films. 1996.

Everything You always Wanted to Know about Sex* (*but were afraid to ask). Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Charles H. Joffe. United Artists, 1972.

Hannah and Her Sisters. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Orion Pictures, 1986.

Hollywood Ending. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Letty Aronson. Dream Works Pictures. 2002.

Husbands and Wives. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Columbia TriStar. 1992.

Interiors. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Charles H. Joffe. United Artists, 1978.

Love and Death. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Charles H. Joffe. United Artists, 1975.

Manhattan. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Charles H. Joffe. United Artists, 1979.

Manhattan Murder Mystery. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Columbia TriStar. 1993.

Match Point. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Letty Aronson, Lucy Darwin and Gareth Wiley. HanWay Films. 2005.

Melinda and Melinda. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Letty Aronson. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. 2004.

Mighty Aphrodite. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Buena Vista Pictures. 1995.

Radio Days. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Orion Pictures, 1987.

Shadows and Fog. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Columbia TriStar. 1992.

September. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Robert Greenhut. Orion Pictures, 1987.

Sleeper. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Jack Grossberg. United Artists, 1973.

Small Time Crooks. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Jean Doumanian. DreamWorks. 2000.

Sweet and Lowdown. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Richard Brick. Sony Pictures Classics. 1999.

Take the Money and Run. Dir. Woody Allen. Prod. Charles H. Joffe. Palomar Pictures, 1969.

What's New, Pussycat?. Dir. Clive Donner. Prod. Charles K. Feldman. Famous Artists, 1965.

GENERAL FILMOGRAPHY

Casablanca. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Prod. Hal B. Wallis. Warner Bros., 1942.

City Lights. Dir. Charles Chaplin. Prod. Alfred Reeves. United Artists, 1931.

Cries and Whispers. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. Prod. Lars-Owe Carlberg. New World Pictures. 1972.

Gilda. Dir. Charles Vidor. Prod. Virginia Van Upp. Columbia Pictures, 1946.

La Dolce Vita. Dir. Federico Fellini. Prod. Giuseppe Amato & Angelo Rizzoli. Astor Pictures Corporation. 1960.

8½. Dir. Federico Fellini. Prod. Angelo Rizzoli. Embassy Pictures Corporation. 1963.

Limelight. Dir. Charles Chaplin. Prod. Charles Chaplin. United Artists, 1952.

Modern Times. Dir. Charles Chaplin. Prod. Charles Chaplin. United Artists, 1936.

Mr. Saturday Night. Dir. Billy Crystal. Prod. Billy Crystal. Columbia Pictures, 1992.

Sherlock Jr. Dir. Buster Keaton. Prod. Joseph M. Schenck. Metro Pictures Corporation. 1924.

Smiles of a Summer Night. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. Prod. Allan Ekelund. Arthaus Filmverleih. 1995.

Sullivan's Travels. Dir. Preston Sturges. Prod. Preston Sturges. Paramount Pictures, 1941.

The Godfather. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Prod. Albert S. Ruddy. Paramount Pictures. 1972.

The Gold Rush. Dir. Charles Chaplin. Prod. Charles Chaplin. United Artists. 1925.

The Tramp. Dir. Charles Chaplin. Prod. Jess Robbins. General Film Company, 1915.

Top Hat. Dir. Mark Sandrich. Prod. Pandro S. Berman. RKO Radio Pictures Inc., 1935.

Wild Strawberries. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. Prod. Allan Ekelund. Arthaus Filmverleih, 1957.