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Auteurs at an Urban Crossroads: A Certain Tendency in New York Cinema

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**Auteurs at an Urban Crossroads:
A Certain Tendency in New York Cinema**

by

Rene Thomas Rodriguez

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Liberal Arts
with a concentration in Film and New Media Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Dedicated To

Tom and Mary Zambito

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Abstract

Perhaps more than any other major American city in the 1970s, New York represented the decline of an urban existence. Job loss from factors related to deindustrialization and intense crime occupied local and national news, reflecting the increasing anxiety of America's future. New York City was positioned at the center of this frightening chaos. Films made during this period, known by film scholars and journalists as the "New Hollywood" captured the collective temperament of the people and the physical space they inhabit during its disintegration. The depiction of New York during the 1970s has been widely discussed in the writing on two key New York City directors, Woody Allen and Martin Scorsese. Scholars like Ellis Cashmore and Charles Silet have argued about Allen and Scorsese's depiction of New York respectively, however, they have not adequately offered a fully comprehensive study of their works collected together in order to uncover New York's decline. Specifically, this Thesis, examines the films made by Allen and Scorsese during the 1970s, specifically, *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan*, *Mean Streets*, and *Taxi Driver*. I explore the disparities and philosophies that both auteurs express in their depiction of the same urban space. Although the films are not documentaries, they do however; offer a faithful portrayal of a city in transition. By closely examining their works together, I offer a new perspective of New York's culturally diverse population transforming from a working class industrial landscape to one influenced by the principles of Neoliberalism.

Introduction

A decade ago, I moved to New York and arrived with romantic visions from the varied influences that were shaping my disposition on the world. After I settled in the West Village, I immediately visited the places that I read about over the years. Connecting with these establishments in a sensory level, I suddenly connected to the images I had in my head thousands of miles away back in Florida. For instance, the Whitehorse Tavern, where the Beat Generation would meet and hatch out the facets of arguably the most influential creative movement of the post war era. Then there was 161 West 4th Street, where Bob Dylan bought his first apartment after he signed with Columbia Records. The more I walked around, the more I entwined myself with the people who had called New York home for over forty years and the infinite amount of stories that reverberated in my head that amplified my vision of the city. The more I heard their stories I began to discern that much of this past was concentrated from the 1970s. I knew very little about this decade in the city's history, however, I felt a growing tension in these narratives. The tone of their voices when describing subway muggings just before they reach the streets where buildings were blazing and city streets engulfed with trash as music blared out of Hilly Kristal's CBGB club in the Bowery. The horrific imagery and sentimental tone bewildered me. As the years passed I came to realize how potent of a force nostalgia can be, particularly for those have witnessed New York's transformation over these decades and for better or worse, seen what it has become. Perhaps some had no alternative, adapt or move. Engaged in their tales from this period, I was always astonished with the nuances they brought. Each person had such a

personal reaction of their exact location when Reggie Jackson hit his third home run in Game 6 of the 1977 World Series or the bartender at Corner Bistro near my apartment would see a disheveled Lou Reed walking the streets in the middle of the night. These anecdotes fueled by burgeoning fascination with my new home, I found them fascinating and always looked to the art of this particular time-period as a connection to these stories. Although my love for the city has waned quite considerably over the years since I left, New York in the 70s remained an interest of mine, and wasn't until a couple of years ago, that my interest peaked while viewing the films of Martin Scorsese and Woody Allen. The more I watched *Mean Streets* and *Manhattan* the more I realized these were disparate views of the same urban space, but with characters sharing the same concerns with one another. From Scorsese, the city appeared like a waste land for the outcast, forgotten, and ostracized from an old New York as a new one was slowly transforming into a corporate playground under the guidance of Wall Street and Mayor Edward Koch. Allen's New York however, still glistened and exuded the hope that the city stood for, but was no longer willing to bestow to those migrating to the city. New York became a deathtrap filled with violence, drugs, and crumbling buildings. As the seventies approached, dreams of prosperity from the sixties turned into bitter disillusionment as America slid into a recession. New York became the face of this downfall, as culture writer Peter Shapiro notes, "In the early seventies the words New York City became a shorthand code for everything that was wrong with America."¹

As New York was descending, another entity was prospering from the west coast. Hollywood's fall in late 60s stemmed from various sources: television and the quality of films produced are two important reasons for its collapse. Films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* made in 1967 paved the way for films like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Wild Bunch*. But it was not until the start of the new decade that Hollywood began to transform and

altered the way the industry would do business for the next few years. Soon after, a surge of character driven films followed made by directors who studied film at newly established programs at USC, UCLA, and NYU. Critics, aware of this formidable energy deemed these filmmakers the “New Hollywood.”² It was at this time that Allen and Scorsese began their filmmaking careers. This new wave of filmmakers emerged from diverse backgrounds that enabled films to take on a more personal mode of expression. For the first time, directors and writers producing the films possessed the same social values as its audience rooted in the ethos of the counterculture movement.³ American cinema was more cynical and jaded about an uncertain future from a decade filled with civil rights, Woodstock, Vietnam, and assassinations.

From the ashes of the old Hollywood studio system, a new infrastructure bloomed that nurtured and promoted new notions of film aesthetics, but most importantly, autonomy bestowed to directors by the studios that enabled filmmakers to expressed personal insights from very distinct backgrounds. This freedom enabled directors such as Allen and Scorsese to expressed the ambiguities and frustrations of living in New York. Along with the directors, arrived a group of actors that altered the way we thought of leading men and women. This new group did not discharge the pristine glamour of old Hollywood, but instead, an uncompromising existence rooted in the harsh realities of the quotidian. A great deal of these new actors came from the revered acting schools of New York: Lee Strasburg’s school of the method and Stella Adler’s teachings⁴ reenergized audiences. Their imperfections spoke to an audience that realized the vibrant utopian dreams of “feeling groovy” in the 1960s faded into grim nightmares at the turn of the new decade. Actors like Robert DeNiro, Elliot Gould, Diane Keaton, Tony Roberts, and Harvey Kietel embodied a gritty verve that was tangible. As writer Peter Biskind notes, “A lot of the energy that animated the New Hollywood came from New York; the 70s was the decade

when New York swallowed Hollywood, when Hollywood was Gothamized.”⁵ Over the past year, I have read numerous writings about Scorsese and Allen from scholars that ostensibly detect the differences from the directors. However, only mentioned their differences in passing, for instance, in Leonard Quart’s essay about *Taxi Driver*, he begins his essay, “Martin Scorsese’s New York is obviously a much darker and more dangerous place than the safe, luminous one that plays such a central role in Woody Allen’s films.”⁶ Perhaps for many, the idea of comparing the two will not be elaborating on their argument; nevertheless, assertions such as this one mentioned sparked my intense fascination toward trying to compare arguably New York’s greatest auteurs.

I begin my study with *Mean Streets*, a film that permits me access to the early part of the decade and to obtain the implicit and explicit social issues that lie within the film. New York was falling deep into a financial calamity that many economist believed to be the start of the city’s growing troubles, however the film business was thriving in the early 1970s. This noticeable issue penetrates both the foreground and background of *Mean Streets* (1973) vis a vis how Scorsese depicts a very specific locale of the city with an entrenched ethnic identity. This section also discusses the selling of heritage and other capitalistic endeavors to earn income that Charlie and his friends partake in their neighborhood. But most importantly, Chapter One discusses the relationship between film and history and the ways Allen and Scorsese depict ethnic spaces within the city, as well as how they situate their characters within this given territory. From this chapter, we obtain an idea of Scorsese’s use of neorealist aesthetics that makes *Mean Streets* the most claustrophobic of the four discussed, how space is confined and restricted compared to *Annie Hall* and to a certain extent, *Taxi Driver*. By shooting down at ground level and compact interiors, tension arises from within this specific ethnic demographic. I am also interested in how

different cultural groups are increasingly threatening the Italian experience of the Lower East Side: Latino, Asian, and African American are depicted in varying ways that express the anxiety of this burgeoning cultural expansion.

New York from the perspective of Scorsese is portentous. He depicts New York as a city in ruin, unwilling to resolve its issues, but instead accepting its fate. This New York is one that Woody Allen refused to believe existed. Keeping the issues from his characters segregated in a more gentrified New York enthralled in intellectual conversations and troubled relationships. For many, Scorsese's New York appears true to life in terms of what many were experiencing during the city's collapse. Filled with graphic images of violence and drug use, Scorsese's city is relentless and brutish, citizens that roam the streets searching for a way out from their dejected state. As New York Times film critic Vincent Canby wrote, "New York City has become a metaphor for what looks like the last days of American civilization. It is run by fools. Its citizens are at the mercy of its criminals who, often as not, are protected by an unholy alliance of civil libertarians and crooked cops"⁷ *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Annie Hall*, and *Manhattan*, are in many ways, prisms that enable me to penetrate New York's collapse during this time period. Everything that moves in the background of the characters in the mise en scene brings the past suddenly to life. The city's energy from this time period pulsates, it pulls you in and never relinquishes until the movies have ended. Films can provide an understanding of history that offers viewers a glimpse into the temporal reality of a determined space. These films, while varying in subject matter, offer us a look into New York City during the 1970s, and the complicated social dynamics that emerged. By focusing on the physical space that these characters are in, I am able to perceive how these characters guide themselves within this urban

terrain and how it affects their psychological mindset and the relationships they forge.

Constructing vital facts from New York's nadir in the 1970s is critical that enables my study to separate itself from the wave of nostalgia that permeates the literature about this time-period.

These films are a reflection of the past. Viewing them today, they are texts that allow me to probe deeper into an existence within a particular historical moment.

Chapter 2 discusses the social dynamics of the city with *Taxi Driver* and *Annie Hall*, as Neoliberalism principles guided the city out of its financial crisis. Along with the social issues affecting New York, I discuss Woody Allen's transition as comic to director. *Annie Hall* marked the moment in Allen's career that established him as a filmmaker, an artists who embodied the city of New York. Allen portrays New York as a placed filled with affluent intellectuals and neurotics clinging to their psychiatrists. In an implicit way, Allen dives into the decline of New York, but through the perspectives of Upper East Side residents who appear separated from the madness that midtown and lower Manhattan experienced at this time. We see the amenities from the well to do- in the film: tennis clubs, art house cinemas, and brownstones. The theme of nostalgia plays a pivotal roll in *Annie Hall*. By reverting to the past, Allen conjures up a post war New York at the nascent stages of its dominance as America's most thriving city, a place that was once great, but now crumbling by antiquated policies. This destruction is explicit in *Taxi Driver*, a film that peers into the heart of New York's decaying state through the eyes of its protagonist Travis Bickle. Travis views the city as a cesspool filled with crime and filth, a place that needs cleansing from the people who have destroyed it. Following Travis' every move in the city enables the viewer to observe New York's streets as they were in the summer of 1975. The trash, the crime, and neighborhoods that look like bomb induced towns from World War II evoke a feeling of despair and doom.

I end with Chapter 3 discussing Allen's *Manhattan*, a film that hinted at New York's recovery as a new decade was fast approaching. I continue the discussion of Nostalgia, but more of a syrupy reminiscing for the present, as oppose to the past. Chapter 3 examines how Neoliberalism transformed New York's streets from reshaping the free market under Mayor Koch's regime. In Allen's film, we perceive the repercussions under the Neoliberal ideology, all the while, yearning for an old New York that once existed and now vanished. I think it is important to note Allen's aesthetic choices and why he chose to film *Manhattan* in black and white and in widescreen. These aesthetic predilections convey a nostalgic impression of the city through the mind of his character and the refusal to give up on the city. Relationships are essential to Allen's work. They are one of the many components that signify the level of success from the characters that inhabit New York. Allen's character, Isaac Davis, is divorced and recently left his job. He is once again seeking purpose in New York that is transforming into a playground for the wealthy. There are moments that Davis assimilates himself in this world: dinners at Elaine's, Russian Tea Room, black tie events, where Davis ridicules those who have money, but lack his insight about life and relationships. *Manhattan* represented a feeling of optimism that journalist James Wolcott discusses in his book "Lucking Out" that signified hope toward New York's future. Ultimately, this project examines the city as it stood, how film became the technology, which recorded and essentially, preserved this contentious and mercurial metropolis we know as New York in the 1970s.

¹ Peter Shapiro's "Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco" has an informative introduction on the current social conditions of New York before Disco became not only a regional phenomenon, but a national one as well. His insight into the rapid decline of New York provides vital context to how other art forms such as music was thriving in the city's crumbling state.

² Peter Biskind's "Easy Rider Raging Bulls" is the informative book about the history of the film school generation and New Hollywood. Mostly first hand accounts from this period, nevertheless, Biskind's introduction provides great insight toward New York's role in this period in Hollywood History.

³ For further reading, please read Barry Miles' "Hippie." (New York: Sterling, 2005)

⁴ Biskin pg. 15

⁵ Biskind pg16

⁶ Leonard Quart's essay "A Slice of Delirium: Scorsese's Taxi Driver Revisited provides an example of the approach critics and scholars have taken to discuss the films of Martin Scorsese and Woody Allen.

⁷ Vincent Canby's was a the film critic for the New York Times from this period and provided important insight to some of major critics and their responses to these films.

CHAPTER ONE

Neon-Realist: A City in Decay with *Mean Streets*

“New York in the ’70s was more like the reality of human existence and you need to know what the world is really like to make good art.”- Richard Hell

“You could say that the first impulse of cinema was to record life.”- Martin Scorsese

Rewinding History

Released in 1973, Martin Scorsese’s *Mean Streets* pulsates with an irrepressible energy about a neighborhood and those affected by New York’s rapid descent. The film is a self-reflexive mediation on the developing issues of New York’s Little Italy told through the perspective of Harvey Kietel’s character Charlie and the relationships between friends, family, and the notions of cultural traditions that project an existential mediation of existence and purpose. Through the varying aesthetics from diverse modes of filmmaking implemented by Scorsese, we are able to examine the mise en scene that depict a specific geographical locale full of cultural artifacts that reflect nostalgia for personal ancestry. Although *Mean Streets*’ portrait of Italian Americans is the focus of the film, it is through Scorsese’s film that we peer into the growing issues of New York’s decline among its diverse ethnic groups surrounding the Lower East Side and to a way of life that was rapidly unraveling.

In a New York Times article in July 2014 titled “Passing of a Video Store and a Downtown Aesthetic,” columnist Tom Roston writes about the closing of Kim’s Video & Music in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. For many New Yorkers, Kim’s closing symbolized the end of an era that solidified the triumph of corporations such as Netflix and Amazon altering the way

we purchase media. Residents saw Kim's Video as more than a shop for consuming film and new music, but a place where people could go, to converse and express varied taste and exchange ideas of a downtown culture that now appears lost. Punk Rock pioneer Richard Hell, a customer of Kim's Video recalled when the video store first opened in the neighborhood and how it solidified "everything else in the area" as he explains. In a hint of nostalgia, Hell asserts "Manhattan in the 21st century is this Disneyland for the superrich,"⁸ but cautions Roston about the past, more specifically, New York in the 1970s. Hell's sentiment toward "everything else in the area" is what interests me, a sector of New York where artists and working class families, who had emigrated from Europe, worked and lived. Establishments such as Hilly Kristal's CBGB music club⁹ became the center of a musical revolution known as Punk Rock, while simultaneously, visitors from all over New York and the country would flock to Mulberry Street for the San Gunnar festival, a feast that honors the patron saint of Naples, and one that frames the narrative in Scorsese's *Mean Streets*. Sadly, the area was not immune to New York's increased woes during the 70s. As manufacturing jobs were dwindling, so did a way of life for the immigrant family. As Hell and others were able to express their frustrations with songs like "The Blank Generation," families in the area turned into muted representatives of working class America who had little alternatives to stay above water. The death of the immigrant experience, where hope guided promise toward a meaningful existence vanquished under the hemorrhaging policies of a government no longer functioning.

During New York's downfall, small reminders of the immigrant experience appeared in films such as Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part II* (1974), where a young Vito Corleone arrived on the steps of Ellis Island alone and penniless. These images from *Part II* amplified the nostalgic yearning of prosperity and community in a new land that Woody Allen

and Martin Scorsese also depict in their films. The bedrock of Allen and Scorsese' narratives stem from their cultural heritages and the neighborhoods that formed distinctive temperaments we see on the screen: Allen of Jewish descent from Brooklyn and Scorsese from the Lower East Side of Sicilian decent. Nevertheless, Allen and Scorsese express in varying forms about their heritages' influence on their work. However, Scorsese appears to have more concern about this experience that defined his work as an auteur, depicting New York as a city of immigrants yearning for better lives for themselves and for their children. *Mean Streets* (1973) is a hybrid film rooted in the assorted influences of the Neo-Realist movement in Italy, Underground Cinema in America, Classical Hollywood, and Documentary film. Undoubtedly, Scorsese's film is indebted to all these modes, but more specifically, *Mean Streets*' stylistic choices supports my assertion that Scorsese's film is a direct descendant of the Neo-Realist movement. Implementing hand-held camera, real and non-actors, and location shooting enables Scorsese to discern the intricate dynamics between space and people; however, this aesthetic also enables viewers to penetrate New York's decline. Within the mise en scene of *Mean Streets*, tension ultimately arises due to Scorsese's use of long tracking shots and long takes rooted in the Classical Hollywood mode of filmmaking. Nevertheless, Scorsese creates a Neorealist discourse from the semantic signifiers that lie within each scene in the film that inevitably mark New York's current condition. For those familiar with this amalgamation, also will surmise a position held by theorist and critic Andre Bazin in his essay "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism," concerning these modes created during his time. Bazin recognized filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini and Luchino Visconti as correspondents creating "reconstituted reportage" for those looking on the outside of post war life in Italy. While praising the Neorealist aesthetic, Bazin was also

postulating how these stylistic choices ultimately progress the art of filmmaking and how we look at cinema from a historical perspective.

With *Mean Streets*, Scorsese allows the viewer to penetrate the intricate dynamic between the characters and the streets they call home. This “reconstituted reportage” of Little Italy allows us access to Scorsese’s world where police sirens, jump cuts, and music by The Ronettes divulge the increased tension between the old customs established by immigrants and new ones forming within the ten-block radius of his neighborhood. Although all four films use contrastive forms to express character psyches, by incorporating this style, *Mean Streets* probes deeper to the city dynamics. It morphs into an historical document where an unfeigned existence of living in New York becomes a tangible reminder of the harsh realities of everyday life and the American dream at the brink of calamity. However, what *Mean Streets* ultimately divulges extends beyond Scorsese’s neighborhood, but to the nascent moments of New York’s decline and the slow death of the American Dream that reveals the capacity of the film to present and preserve life as it was in 1973.

Down These Mean Streets

New York mayor John V. Lindsay pronounces in 1970, two days after the Kent State killings that left four students dead and nine injured, “The country is virtually on the edge of a spiritual and perhaps physical breakdown.”¹⁰ In *Mean Streets*, we are witnesses to both the spiritual and physical breakdowns of Charlie and his friends. Out of these collapses, forge new definitions of purpose and a self-awareness of the moral struggles in New York’s crumbling milieu. All the while, *Mean Streets* provides a glimpse toward the beginning of New York’s decline, a reality forged by an urban aesthetic where both the objective and subjective meet, where violence erupts at every corner as doo-wop and rock n roll provide the soundtrack of their

diminishing ways of existence. Raymond Chandler writes, “Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. He is the hero; he is everything.”¹¹ For Charlie, the streets of the Lower East Side define his identity. Through out the film, Charlie searches for purpose in a terrain that appears on the verge of violent uproar. A voiceover begins the film declaring, “You don’t make up your sins in the church, you do it on the street, at home. The rest is bullshit and you know it.” We first see Charlie waking; somehow, this voice comes from a place beyond his conscience. It triggers his anxiety toward the varied conflicts that might prevent growth and opportunity in the neighborhood. As sirens ring outside Charlie’s window, Scorsese utilizes jump cuts of Charlie’s head returning to his pillow in bed with “Be My Baby” blaring as home movies play in the opening credit scene. The images we see are like dreams from Charlie. They are untroubled snapshots of Charlie’s life and the people that surround his environs. We see him shaking hands with men walking into hardware stores, bakeries, and interacting with characters that soon become the cause of his worries such as Johnny Boy (Robert DeNiro) and Teresa (Amy Robinson). The montage establishes a point of view for the audience in order to gain access not only to Charlie’s psychological state, but also to his surroundings and the people he interacts with daily. *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*, which I will discuss further in the next chapter, deal with this relationship between space and individual. As writer Robert Kolker points out in Scorsese’s films during this period, “there is a sense that the place inhabited by the characters is structured by their own, slightly crazed perceptions.”¹² Through Scorsese’ protagonists such as Charlie and Travis, we comprehend the complexities that generate their anxiety within the specific environments, in this case, New York and how the city affects their personalities and the relationships they forge. For Charlie, he desires a better life, one that he can be proud of, however, this yearning comes with a cost: delusions filled with the

harsh realities. Significant to the opening of the film is the voice not of Keitel, but of Scorsese's voice instead. Conceivably, it's Scorsese's attempt at coming to terms with the streets he grew up in; conjuring up a past and an upbringing rooted in Catholicism, the values of his Sicilian roots, and the neighborhood that shaped his viewpoint of the world. Scorsese's ambition is to connect us to an objective present, but while doing so, Scorsese essentially connects us to a subjective past rooted in his experiences that tells us about the people of Little Italy, the events that affect their lives, and the limitations that many were perceiving during this time period. This fusion provides central toward what Bazin "believes in the necessary coexistence and interaction of both objective and subjective aspects in the making and experiencing films."¹³ What I mean by subjective and objective are twofold: the *subjective* is personal, rooted in the emotional circumstances and occurrences we see on the screen that possibly connect us to the narrative and the personal knowledge we bring to the neutral experience of watching a film. *Objective*, the veritable and unbiased depiction of specific conditions, but most importantly how these two influence one another.

In this particular instance, Scorsese depicts an authentic experience with the exteriors of New York and the crowded streets. However, most of the interiors in *Mean Streets* are in Los Angeles. Duplicated the real from his personal experiences creates a fascinating synthesis between an authentic past and an interpretation of the past. Even during this reproduction of a specific space, the space thus becomes a subjective artifact because its construction is rooted from personal recollections of one person. In essence, Scorsese's film informs us of the present at the time of *Mean Streets*' released, but it also notifies us of a representational past and how we gain access to it. Through the neo-realist aesthetic of hand-held camera movements, the small, cramped apartments that duplicate for Little Italy point to a factual existence, Scorsese's lifelike

recovery of his past connects viewers to New York's present. What enhances this believability of New York's space derives from the actors such as Harvey Keitel and Robert DeNiro. Their physical presence and their speech patterns offer us, as Kolker points out a glimpse into an objective examination of people and space. Even though their exchanges are fictional, their approach to the material amplifies the validity of their conversations. Somehow, through the artifice of the film narrative, the subjective and objective vacillate, making us aware what we are viewing indeed is fiction, but somehow, rooted in actual situations. Charlie's plights and obligations to his Mafia boss Uncle who wants him to take over a restaurant and his relationships with Johnny Boy and his cousin Teresa extend to the aesthetics of the film. The film's nucleus unequivocally resides with Charlie's identity crisis; however, the capitalistic ventures of Charlie and his friends drive the narrative. Their aspirations connect us to their struggles and the specific conflicts of Little Italy. The streets for Charlie are the holy terrain where everything and everyone becomes a retribution project that might yield salvation in the eyes of God. Inherently, Charlie becomes the moral tone of the film and a surrogate for Scorsese's viewpoint about the streets of his youth. Film critic Pauline Kael asserts, "*Mean Streets* never loses touch with the ordinary look of things or with the common experience; rather, it puts us in closer touch with the ordinary, the common, by turning a different light on them."¹⁴ Little Italy's influence on Charlie only increases the notion of how this specific space guides him through the moral conflicts that he must resolve. Pointing another light on these facets magnifies our ability to be enthralled with the subjective reality of Charlie and his perception of his home turf evolving. Indeed, this assertion from Kael provides two vital meanings to my argument in this chapter.

Entering the hellish red lighting of Tony's subterranean nightclub immerses us in Charlie's domain, it establishes the formidable connection between space and individual, where

Charlie interacts with those in the neighborhood and the sordid characters that inflict his increased anxiety. For Charlie and his friends, the bar is a place where the cultural bonds between them reveal a disdain for outsiders that dare to enter their guarded territory. The club throughout the film erupts with violent outburst, often with fatal repercussions. Even as the camera weaves through the social space, we detect this place from the perspective of Charlie. Through these facets of bonds and blood, Tony's nightclub also reveals Charlie's illicit desires for an African American go-go dancer that works at the club and the overwhelming guilt he has from these sexual affections. Through voice over, we hear Charlie pondering the cultural repercussions if he acts on his feelings, which ultimately reveal his prejudices. These dynamics from the club ultimately reveal a *mise en scene* that connects us to a way of life in New York that appears primordial, where polyester three piece suits, cars, hairstyles, music, and the run-down buildings that surround the characters reveal a pastness that we as viewers can equate toward our observations of New York in the 70s. That is why to begin with Bazin and his theories on cinema's capacity to convey reality, we discern Scorsese's *Mean Streets* as a tool that carries the potential to further critique the social problems of New York and uncover additional nuances that enhance the discourse of film and its historiographical potentialities. As Bazin writes, "Photography and cinema, on the hand, are discoveries that satisfy once and for all in its very essence, our obsession with realism."¹⁵ Fulfilling our infatuation for realism allows us to obtain the symptomatic meanings within Scorsese's film. Every facet of the *mise en scene* essentially becomes *mummified*,¹⁶ preserve for analysis that allows the past to inform the present. Bazin implements this term to describe cinema's capacity to freeze the temporal movement of time from inside the film's diegetic world. At its core, Bazin's argument corresponds toward our impulses for capturing reality, and how auteurs such as Allen and Scorsese implement a style

predicated on subjective artifacts from the time of their productions, thus, essentially, preserving some form of the present that transforms into the past due to temporality. As historian Reinhart Koselleck puts it, “Time becomes a dynamic and historical force in own right.”¹⁷ This sentiment from Koselleck provides a succinct understanding of Phillip Rosen’s exhaustive research about cinema and history in “Change Mummified.” In his book, Rosen writes about Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, a 19th century architect known for the restoration of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. In his chapter titled, “Entering History,” Rosen discusses the architect’s concepts of restoration and preservation, concluding that restoration is entirely indicative of modern times, an attempt to replace and to construct, “on the shell of the old and reestablish it to a completed state.” He soon realized that while striving to restore with admirable intentions, this “authority of the past could have odd results.” Viollet-le-Duc concluded that preservation resulted with sentiments of honoring the past. As he asserts: preservation is “maintaining the old, prolonging its existence as long as practically possible.”¹⁸ Rosen provides a succinct interpretation of Viollet-le-Duc’s definitions that proves vital toward our filmic context. He asserts, “Restoration cannot replicate the historical actuality of a building, which is its existence in time, but preservation can provide an encounter with that actuality by refusing to interrupt its passage through time.” Thus the reason to begin with *Mean Streets*, it enables us to fling open the doors to the past, so we as spectators acknowledge an existence filled with diminutive features that guides us toward cogent actualities. By perceiving its moment in time, we restore Scorsese’s film from the time of its production to fully engage with visualization of the past. However, what the film achieves, and essentially all films produced succeed in doing, is preserving time as it once stood. The pausing of the temporality enables viewers to detect the objects that are hovering in and around the mise en scene that speaks to us in the present. Rosen poses the question, “What

is a genuine historical object and what is its use?"¹⁹ Answering this broad inquiry within our context is this: to fully meditate on *Mean Streets*, will expound on the embed acumen that has been lost through time. Scorsese 's film today recovers a past that depicts a specific society. Like the ethnographic films of Robert Flaherty and Merian C. Cooper, *Mean Streets*, undoubtedly, attempts to depict an authentic reality, even through its plot, the film never feels hackneyed, invariably indebted to the memories of its creator and his ethnic background. Unequivocally, the film offers us an alternative text to reflect upon history, to conclude cinematic representation has a means of discovering the past. Scorsese's devotion to realism compels us to believe in the plights of Charlie, plights that cause Charlie to reflect his position in the neighborhood rapidly altering.

Changing Times

The second point to my argument once again begins in Tony's nightclub, however, this time, the bar amplifies the growing predicaments of Italian American life. The place transforms into a place where Charlie repents and manages his cantankerous, but loving relationship with Johnny Boy. In doing so, Charlie reveals the broader social upheaval that extends beyond the borders of Little Italy. For instance, Johnny Boy is unwilling to pay his debts to friend and loan shark Michael (Richard Romanus). His inability to pay off his debts to Michael enables Charlie to be the mediator between these outstanding payments. Much like New York's governing policy, which I discuss further in Chapter 2 during this time, Johnny lives life on a tab. We first see Johnny Boy enter the bar with two girls he had met that evening in Greenwich Village. Going outside the neighborhood to seduce women excites Johnny; it is a game and a sign of his manhood to his friends that his juvenile charm extends beyond the neighborhood borders. In the eyes of Charlie, Johnny Boy embodies redemption.

Johnny's sins are the cross that Charlie must bear. Just before Johnny walks into the bar, we hear Charlie's voiceover proclaiming, "Ok, ok, lord, thank you for opening my eyes, we talk about penance, and you send this through door," implying Johnny as Charlie's only hope for redemption in a terrain full of sin and despair. From the bar with Tony, to Michael and others around the neighborhood, Johnny's disregard for his obligations extend toward the notion of honor, a quality that Charlie strives to achieve through varied relationships with his Uncle Giovanni (Cesare Danova), a Mafia boss and oracle of the neighborhood with whom many seek guidance and council. Charlie also perceives honor as an attribute dissipating, but strictly speaking, in the homosocial world Scorsese creates, the notions of this trait does not extend through his secret affair with Johnny Boy's cousin Teresa, someone who yearns to break free from the shackles of familial traditions and move out of the neighborhood. This action, frowned upon by many Italian families if a daughter left the household before marriage is emblematic of also the rapid social differences between generations occurring. The Little Italy of old was slowly turning into a tourist attraction for those seeking an authentic Italian experience. Rather observing specifically Italian customs, many were witnessing the transformation of a cosmopolitan milieu suffused with Latinos and Asians. In two particular moments in the film where this transformation becomes evident is when Charlie and others are strolling the streets during the feast. Scorsese still adheres to the elements of Neo-Realist movement when we take to the streets with hand-held camera shots winding in and out of the frenzy in the streets. In the background, we hear the Sicilian marching band playing the Star Spangled Banner in the background as Charlie walks to meet his Uncle, the visuals of the immigrant way of life appear with Italy's flags and banners and those honoring the patron saint of Naples. Rapid cuts of the Old Italian faces from non-actors also give these scenes an

immediacy to them, which enables history tangible for us from the world Scorsese creates with the camera. Even when the music continues to play and Charlie greets his Uncle, he does not converse in English, but in Sicilian. This combination reflects the assimilation toward American life for both Charlie and Uncle Giovanni, but the Uncle more; in toward the notion of clinging to tradition, to language that represents heritage and noble origins. We soon hear them converse in English, discussing Charlie's future in the neighborhood and the Uncle's expectations of Charlie upholding traditions in their territory.

Another scene that pivots Little Italy's transition occurs toward the end of the film in the cemetery between Charlie and Johnny Boy. Throughout the film, Scorsese implements music that connects us to the neighborhood and its social function. However, music also signifies the notion of assimilation in American culture with Rock 'n' Roll and Doo-Wop, but when we hear the Neapolitan love songs, it represents the music of the immigrant experience, the music of Charlie's parents and cultural nostalgia. Most importantly, the music in the cemetery is none of the three groups previously mentioned, but Latin salsa music heard from the windows where Charlie and Johnny Boy are located. Hearing salsa music outside the windows in the Lower East Side represents the increased changes in demographics occurring around neighborhood. Surrounded by those Italians that have long past, the sardonic irony of this particular scene expresses Little Italy's transformation. Music in the film amplifies the psychological realism from Charlie and the interactions that he and his friends encounter through out the film. It mostly hovers in the background; Scorsese only pushes the music forward in the non-diegetic space to emphasize tension between those occupying the same space. For instance, when we hear "Please Mr. Postman" by the Marvelettes playing in the background as Charlie and his friends are in a pool hall brawl or Renato Carosone's

“Maruzella” echoes when a long hair hit man enters Tony’s Bar and kills a man who previously insulted a Mafia boss. We realize the music hovers around them; this is the music of the neighborhood. As Pauline Kael asserts in her review of *Mean Streets*, “The music here isn’t our music, but the characters’ music. The music is the electricity in the air of this movie.”²⁰

Scorsese positions Tony’s bar as a specific space that focuses the greater troubles of Little Italy. We see a man using heroin inside the bathroom, his blue shirt crinkled up and needle pressing down on his right arm as Italian music plays from outside projects the harsh realities of Scorsese’s home. In the beginning of the film, Scorsese introduces us to the four characters that play a vital role of Charlie’s life. We first see Tony throwing the heroin user out of his bar, giving us the increased anxiety toward the sort of troubles Tony deals with at the bar. We then see Michael, a man willing to make any deal for anything and with anyone. Michael attempts to sell German lenses to a black market dealer, but instead finds himself with Japanese adapters. Capitalistic endeavors play a crucial role in the film and with Michael; his goals extend beyond the legal realms that signify the altering landscape of New York’s employment opportunities for the working class. Charlie and his friends never express their disdain for the growing troubles occurring around New York. Perhaps their concerns do not extend outside their neighborhood, but there are moments that point to their understanding when they venture out of the community to see how others are living and varied philosophical mindsets people possess.

When Scorsese returned to the neighborhood with *Mean Streets* after he made *Who’s That Knocking At My Door* in 1967, not only had the neighborhood altered, but New York as well. At the turn of the new decade, protest for the Vietnam War had reached its apex. Many working class citizens in New York saw the protesters as Un-American with flag burning

demonstrations and as draft dodgers, but most importantly, a threat to their existence. From the perspective of a working class citizen, the dissenters were unruly college educated elites imbedded with sixties liberalism that threatened a way of life that so many fought to obtain. These feelings of indignation had slowly been rummaging during Lindsay's reelection campaign, a contest that Carroll explains was met with "unusual rhetorical violence in which white ethnic voters scorned the mayor for his softness toward black militants and welfare cheats"²¹ Lindsay's policies seemed to favor poor blacks and upper-middle-class whites. Not only in New York, but nation wide, unemployment was increasing, with almost 30 percent of the nation's construction workers out of work due to inflation and budgetary shifts."²² Scorsese's streets and the characters that inhabit them are tangible indicators of the working class world rapidly fading.

In *Mean Streets*, we see the faces that fought in Vietnam when Charlie and his friends attend a party of a returning soldier. However, a celebration for their friend's return home turns into a violent uproar of punches and guns, and an unfortunate reminder toward the mercurial acts of violence that occurred throughout the film. Vietnam's implicit presence in both *Mean Streets* and in *Taxi Driver* reminds viewers of an existence that goes beyond the fictional representation Scorsese depicts, an indicator of Scorsese's desire for realism and the aesthetics that faithfully present New York's authentic state. The verisimilitude of Scorsese's streets have an uncontrollable energy that exudes New York's increased setbacks, ones that will fully be discussed in the following chapter with *Taxi Driver* and *Annie Hall*. In the three years after *Mean Streets*' released, New York alters into an urban trash heap littered with garbage, Time Square becomes a mecca for pornography as increased violence becomes a pervasive concern.

⁸ Roston's article was a pivotal stepping-stone to visualize the present state of New York and how others reflect on the past during Lower East Side's transition.

⁹For further reading of this time period please see “Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk” by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain. (New York: Grove Press, 2003)

¹⁰ Peter N. Carroll’s book “It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s” provides great insight toward America’s social issues during this time period and how policies were essentially affecting the class structures as well.

¹¹ Raymond Chandler’s book “The Simple Art of Murder” is where Scorsese and Co-Screenwriter Mardik Martin got the name of the film.

¹² Robert Phillip Kolker’s book “A Cinema of Loneliness” discusses the films of Martin Scorsese and other filmmakers during this time-period and the themes that were pervading American Cinema starting in the 1960s.

¹³ Phillip Rosen’s “Change Mummified” is a cornerstone to my research and provides insightful viewpoints of film and its historical significance as a medium to communicate and instill acumen about the past and present.

¹⁴ Pauline Kael’s collection of reviews titled “Reeling” gave me great insight into the verve that critics such as Kael had for these films from new filmmakers such as Scorsese, Coppola, and Lucas.

¹⁵ Andre Bazin’s “Ontology of the Photographic Image” once again provided transformative ideas toward approaching the cinema and these films that I discuss in my research.

¹⁶ A term that Bazin uses in his essay and one that Rosen uses for his book title. Bazin’s context refers to how cinema essentially preserves time, just like what the Ancient Egyptians

¹⁷ Rosen pg. 48

¹⁸ Rosen pg.106

¹⁹ Rosen pg. 8

²⁰ Kael pg. 174

²¹ Carroll pg. 58.

²² Carroll pg. 58

CHAPTER TWO

Annie Hall Could Never Date a Taxi Driver: Woody, Alienation, and the Dawn of Neoliberalism

“New York is not quite dead, but death is clearly inevitable.”-Robert Zevin

“What’s so great about New York City? It’s a dead city.”-Annie Hall

The Rotten Apple

This chapter focuses on two films from the middle part of the decade, when New York’s fiscal crisis was hemorrhaging the city’s resources that soon was afflicting its citizens. *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Annie Hall* (1977) are undoubtedly genre films working within the conventions of their classifications, but like *Mean Streets*, these films’ mise en scenes contain elements of New York as it stood during this time period and the sociological artifacts that allow me to peer into the city’s economical failures and its affects. Under the reorganization of city life, Travis Bickle and Alvy Singer appear confused and disoriented in their distinct environs, however from their attraction to women, Alvy and Travis view women as dependable objects in an attempt to find a stable foundation during the city’s unstable present. Much the same way nostalgia functions in *Mean Streets*, Alvy’s nostalgia in *Annie Hall* reveals an ethnic identity that uncovers Alvy’s crisis due to New York’s setbacks and the social dynamics in his life. With Travis, ambivalence in New York amplifies his psychological underpinnings of purpose and as a liberator for those suffering in the city’s decay. While it seems these two films are contrasting in their stories and portrayal of characters, these films are implicitly similar that speak to each other about anxiety during New York’s restructuring of space and its people that will eventually map

out a new terrain under the principles of Neoliberalism that will guide the city out of its financial predicament.

New York in 1975 was suffering the worst financial crisis in the city's history. Banks were unwilling to pay off its debts. With hiring freezes to manufacturing companies exiting, the city lost 500,000 jobs from 1969-1976²³ as a massive migration out of the city where industrial jobs were plentiful dissipated, moving elsewhere like Europe and the Third World. As economist Robert E. Alchay notes, "Lesser-skilled blacks were thus left stranded in the cities, there to subsist on the handouts of a debasing and bureaucratic system of welfare."²⁴ The images of poor blacks and other minority groups on the streets became the ubiquitous snapshot of an urban existence that was collapsing and a breeding ground of "racial discrimination in schooling, housing, and jobs."²⁵ New York City mayor Abraham Beame and state Governor Hugh Carey looked to Washington and the Ford Administration for aid. Unwilling to acquiesce, Ford told New York officials that the rest of country was not responsible for New York's woes. The now infamous *New York Daily News* headline on October 29, 1975: "Ford to City: Drop Dead," signified the downfall of America's largest metropolitan city. Along with Alchay, writer David Mermelstein mentions the crux of the fiscal urban crisis was toward the transformation of the U.S. economy into a generator of high profits achieved at the expense of the living standards of workers and others. In New York the "immediate repercussions of general economic decline have been the loss of tax revenue due to a decline of both corporate and personal income."²⁶ In a *New York Times* article in July 1975, economic experts and critics voiced an assortment of explanations for New York's fiscal meltdown. Author John Kenneth Galbraith attributed one important facet to the exodus out of New York and into other areas surrounding the city. The remarkable thing, he asserts, "Is not that this city's government costs so much but that so many

people of wealth have left. It's outrageous that the development of the metropolitan community has been organized with escape hatches that allow people to enjoy the proximity of the city while not paying their share of taxes. It's outrageous that a person can avoid income tax by moving to New Jersey or Connecticut. Fiscal funk holes are what the suburbs are."²⁷ Reshaping New York's business and governmental practices became a priority that developed new concepts and ideologies toward operating urban populated cities. From New York's devastation, the rise of Neoliberalism developed; forging a new identity for New York as a city dominated by working class immigrants, to a terrain for the affluent to wield power and prosper under a new regime of individualism and profit. The shift from liberal politicians that dominated the early part of the decade like John Lindsay to a recognizably more conservative change toward the latter part of the 70s and into the 1980s like Ed Koch signified the evolving demographics of New York. As industrial jobs began to disappear, more residents with college degrees and employed by business establishments were now making up the vast majority of the city's population. This shift occurred across the country as well, but in New York, this alteration of political beliefs appeared magnified. However, with the downfall of U.S economy, the fiscal conditions and the "reigning political climate have made professionals look liberal in one era and conservative in another,"²⁸ making New York the new terrain for urban redevelopment. When Beame took office in the beginning of 1974, New York's budget deficit was at \$1.5 billion. The city he inherited from Mayor Lindsay's regime was corrupt and irresponsible, turning a city addicted to a "buy now, pay later" mentality. Mayor Beame made the hard decision to put a freeze on municipal hiring and eventually forced to make the harder decision of firing New York employees. Not since the Great Depression had a loss of jobs occurred so rapidly, making union leaders irate at New York's newest elected major. From librarians to police and garbage workers,

the effects touched every facet of the city, turning the city into a filthy milieu imbued with broken down buildings and a terrain for criminals. Prices in the city such as rent and subway fares were going up. Mayor Beame ended 129 years of free tuition at New York's public colleges. The stepping-stones toward a middle-class life were disappearing. As author Jonathan Malher points out, "New York was not considered a safe investment. The city was no longer able to sell bonds, its main source of capital. The iceberg had hit, and Gotham was taking on water."²⁹ New York needed to operate under efficient means. The poison and remedy to cure New York's woes lay within the rise of Neoliberalism.

Many theorists and economists such as Michael Foucault and David Harvey have sought to define the concepts behind Neoliberalism. However, in its simplest form, "Neoliberalism is a loosely demarcated set of political beliefs, which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights."³⁰ Neoliberalism is a particular transformation of existing market capitalist notions and behaviors: it is about celebrating and re-emphasizing specific elements of markets and individuals in those markets.

With New York in shambles, the displacement of people from their homes to the streets was evident. A feeling of alienation settled in, leaving New Yorkers few alternatives: leave the city or stay and hope things would turnaround. Displacement and alienation are the common strands in both *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Annie Hall* (1977). Although Scorsese and Allen utilize varying aesthetics to project this collective disposition, nevertheless, both films attempt to deal with New York's transformation under Neoliberalism and how their characters situate themselves within this restructured space. For Travis Bickle and Alvy Singer, a personal crisis

lies at the center of these narratives that speak to the plights and conditions of New York's decline. Their mobilization plays a vital role in attempting to rediscover a sense of self and purpose in New York's rehabilitation. By mobilizing their physical presence, Travis and Alvy are able to connect to their psychological states that fuel their alienation within the urban environs that surround them. Most importantly, *Annie Hall* and *Taxi Driver* are documents of both New York's crumbling state and the revamping of an urban identity at a crossroads.

Scorsese's State of Mind

Out of the black and sweaty night, a yellow cab makes its way through the ominous steam. Moving at a leisurely pace, this image, followed by the sultry, and seductive cacophony of Bernard Hermann's musical score as TAXI DRIVER in bold yellow letters appears as the steam dissipates. The viewer sees a man, his eyes glazed over from the long night. He appears fatigued, but aware of his surroundings. He is Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro), a man who appears from the depths of cinema's vagabonds and loners, a man searching, contemplating his purpose after war. However, Travis, a Vietnam veteran, is contemplating a different kind of war, a class war that is slowly boiling onto the hot summer streets of New York. His eyes from the beginning sequence construct a major facet of Travis' obsession with his surroundings. The city from his cab window is bright, fast, and full of vitality. However, New York is not the same vibrant metropolis of the country's post war boom. Scorsese's New York exudes a sullied quality, filled with a vile odor that permeates the midnight streets as Travis maneuvers throughout the city's boroughs. Scorsese's expressionistic depiction of the city allows us to enter a nightmarish Manhattan that is vivid and polluted. He employs Travis as a tool to convey a rhetoric of alienation and desolation. Similarly to Charlie's New York in *Mean Streets*, Travis's New York

is a claustrophobic dystopia with no exits. Through close ups, Scorsese confines Travis to tight locales, never giving him space to breathe. Even during his mobilization, Travis appears trapped in the filth and grime of a city that is onerous from the slow undoing of its deterioration, but during this degradation, Travis appears to flourish economically because of his work ethic, an attribute that others more affluent than Travis, sought to exploit the city's decay for profit.

New Yorkers were suffering, however, some recognized this moment as a fortuitous moment to prosper. Educated businessmen from Wall Street saw the opportunity to reshape the city into a global juggernaut. Led by Citibank's Walter Wriston, a powerful group of investment bankers "refused to roll over the debt and pushed the city into technical bankruptcy. The bailout that followed entailed the construction of new institutions that took over the management of the city budget"³¹ and the process of redistribution of wealth to the upper class during the fiscal crisis took place. Milton Friedman, a professor of economics and thought by many scholars to be one of the founding fathers of Neoliberal practices, voiced a similar stance as the bankers running New York. He argued:

Go bankrupt. That will make it impossible for New York City in the future to borrow any money and force New York to live within its budget. The only alternative is the obvious one—tighten its belt, pay off its debt, live within its means and become an honest city again. That's a much better solution from the long-run point of view, but whether it's a politically feasible solution I don't know, whereas the first one is.³²

Bankruptcy for New York appeared to be the only exit out of their economic calamity. The intricate dynamics toward this downfall began with the city's work service: New York was second in the nation only to the federal government with 350,000 employees, a number that ballooned in a ten year span with most employees joining municipal organizations that wielded power. At every moment the subtle threat from big government emerged. Union members were

“highly paid and increasing at a rapid rate, while the population of the city and the apparent level of actual municipal services had remained close to unchanged.”³³ Many unions such as fire, sanitation, and NYPD were losing their powers and eventually their jobs. Members who made up the backbone of New York’s working class desisted from their contentious debates and protest against city government.

Travis’ ability to ride all night across the five boroughs enables him to accumulate wealth. Indeed, Travis does not exude the fervent union spirit of a Woody Guthrie song that became rallying cries when union organizations were threatened by corporations and governments that seek to curb their influence. Nonetheless, his insomnia enables to progress, while so many others similar to Travis were losing jobs. In his essay “New York City Crisis: First Act in a New Age of Reaction,” Robert Zevin poses the question to readers from this devastation occurring in New York, “who wins and who loses?” Evidently, welfare recipients, union members, city officials, and taxpayers were the real losers from this decline, but who profited from this ruination? Bankers and corporations redefining the notions of capitalism in the U.S. were forging ahead with a new identity toward New York’s future. The years of immigrants landing on the shores of Ellis Island who shaped the working class spirit and identity of New York were undone. Under the Neoliberal agenda, the city was transforming into a free market terrain encouraging free will toward the infinite choices of consumer goods for the few who can afford such amenities. New York in rapid fashion turned into an urban El Dorado for anyone seeking capitalistic gains and unfazed by the pervasive threat of crime. As David Harvey points out, “the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by the freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking.”³⁴ This autonomy bestowed to citizens under the Neoliberal agenda turned New York into a mecca for consumerism and product

development, a major component in Neoliberalism. City government acted less like an entity providing for the people and more like an enterprise whose goals were solely for profit.

Everything we see from New York's downfall is through Travis' perspective as he drives around seeking answers for his horrid surroundings. Rather than concentrating on a specific neighborhood like Little Italy in *Mean Streets*, Scorsese enables Travis to see the totality of the city's dejected state from the comfort of his cab. Repulsed by the violent and execrable images he inspects from inside his cab, these quotidian depictions of increased homelessness, violence, and drug use plague Travis and the repercussions of New York's decline. The film begins with Travis obtaining a job at New York's taxi headquarters. As Travis exits the garage with cabs driving in an out, the camera moves in a 360-degree angle to give us the space Travis inhabits. The space is loud and fast paced as Travis looks on at the service he is about to provide. He complains he cannot sleep, thus his desire to take on the nightshift. His insomnia makes him mobile for the seedy underbelly of New York. Unlike his fellow cabdrivers, Travis does not discriminate who enters his cab. Hookers, adulterers, pimps, and politicians ride in the backseat of Travis's cab. Interacting with these unsavory characters amplifies his contempt for the New York outside his window. "All the animals come out at night," Travis expresses. "The whores, skunks, pussies, buggers, queens, faires, dopers, junkies... sick, venal. Someday a real rain will come and wash away all this scum off the street." Travis's narration about the city's filth contradicts the appearance of his apartment. His habitat is grimy and unpleasant, but his anxiety toward the city's filth never wavers. Signs of corporate influence in New York is apparent when we detect McDonald's quarter pounder wrappers and cans of Coca Cola spread throughout his apartment. Travis' status as a working class individual looking for cheap fast food makes up the central driving forces of the McDonald's marketing machine.³⁵

The desire for purification consumes Travis, yet for most of the first act, his unhealthy intake of fast food and caffeine contradicts his desire toward a purified way of life. Author Lesley Stern finds a psychological explanation for Travis' conflicting behavior. She asserts, "If we assume that dirt and cleanliness are not absolute values, but relative, existing in a dynamic relation (culturally, historically, personally variable) then Travis's attitude here can be seen not as contradictory but as embodying a certain logic. Some repressed fear is transformed into an excessive concern."³⁶ If the viewer can remove conventional assertions that Travis is not contradictory, but rather seeking meaning and reason for this filth, then his behavior has validity toward his quest for change. Nevertheless, why does Travis subject himself to these unpleasant images night after night? Under Neoliberalism, autonomy is central toward its success, but with Travis, who has little education and his options for work are minimal, his status induces desperation and dependence on a market with limited jobs. Indeed, during shooting of *Taxi Driver*, New York was in a "strike of garbage disposal workers, engulfing the city streets with trash."³⁷ Times Square in midtown Manhattan is the cornerstone of Scorsese's depiction of New York's filth. Neon lights blinking, prostitutes around every corner, heroin as the essential commodity for dejected New Yorkers, the city's entrenchment in class warfare during its worse financial crisis since the Great Depression signaled a shift of radical measurements toward the reconstruction of New York. Meanwhile, as Travis moves upward in Manhattan, the streets appear intact from the atrocities of the city's collapse. One of the causes were property owners in certain parts of New York at this time were burning buildings to cash in on insurance claims and to drive out current renters in order to increase rent charges. In the Bronx, 97% of the buildings were gone between 1970 and 1980.³⁸ With 70% percent of the fire marshal program gutted due

to budget cuts, firehouses across the five boroughs closed down and in few that functioned, firefighters in predominantly poor and ethnic neighborhoods became overworked.

Travis's mobilization provides insight into a city that is cynical and violent. His voiceover conveys the increasing anxiety toward his abhorrent living conditions as he attempts to find purpose within this deplorable environment. Again, what he utters and what he undertakes to achieve as his internal goals call into question Travis' mental faculties. When Travis ends his shift, he visits porno theatres in midtown in hopes of ridding his insomnia. In 1977, the planning commission reported there were more than 245 pornography run enterprises, ninety-three alone in Times Square.³⁹ For Travis, these weekly visits to porno theatres also establish his desire toward his encounter with the outside world. Even in a crowded theater gazing at the pornographic images, his isolation within the urban space manifest a man devoid of human interaction. In a physical sense, whether driving customers or in the theatre, the connection to other humans is made, but from a mental perspective, his detachment becomes evident when we are introduced to Betsy (Cybill Shepard). Travis' longing for social acceptance manifest through Betsy, his savior from his dispirited state of mind. Betsy is a volunteer organizer for Presidential hopeful Senator Palantine. Her seeming piety awakens something in Travis. "She appeared like an angel out of this filthy mass," he says. Out of New York's filth, Travis concocts a hetero fantasy milieu where stability is possible. For Travis, Betsy's physical presence ignites an instant attraction, which leads to his assertiveness to walk into campaign headquarters and approach her. Betsy is aware of Travis' distinct demeanor while talking. She inquiries if he knows the senator's stance on Welfare, to which he applies, "I really don't know the senator's stand on welfare. I'm sure it's a good stand." His maroon sport coat and parted hair projects an ordinary man, however, Travis instills a quiet confidence that intrigues Betsy. By conversing with Betsy, Travis is

beginning to situate himself in New York's restructured space. Travis says to her, "I knew when I walked in there was an impulse we were both following, which gave me the right to talk to you." This scene exemplifies how Neoliberalism attempts to redefine individual freedom even in social conditions. Impulses under self-regulated milieus permits the individual to obtain whatever he or she desires and for Travis, the connection for Betsy to rid his detestation for everything that surrounds him connects Travis to a tangible object of desire. Most importantly, the scene shows also how incredibly inept and out of place Travis really is with social interactions.

According to scholar Sabine Haenni, Travis' reverie is vital toward his growth and development within his urban space. He needs to contemplate the possibilities as opposed to imagining his prevailing circumstances. His object of fixation betrays him after their date to a porno theatre. His inexperience with dating etiquette leads Betsy to leave in disgust. Suddenly Betsy views Travis as the very entity he loathes, a disgusted creature lurking from the ominous shadows of the city. After his confrontation with Betsy, Travis sets out on a quest for a spiritual and physical cleansing. In a pivotal moment in the film, Travis picks up a new customer, current Senator, and presidential hopeful Chuck Palantine (Leonard Harris). Travis recognizes Palantine, and exchanges a conversation. Palantine inquires, "What is the one thing about this country that bugs you most? After some contemplation, Travis responds:

Well, whatever it is, he (the president) should clean up this city here because this city here is like an open sewer, you know. It's full of filth and scum. Sometimes I can hardly take it. Whoever becomes the president should just really clean it up know what I mean? Sometimes I go out and smell it. I get headaches it's so bad, you know. It's like... they just never go away, you know. It's like the president should clean up this whole mess here. He should just flush it right down the fucking toilet.

After this diatribe from Travis, Palantine is seen quite vexed in how to respond, but replies in a manner in order to exude his connection to blue-collar values and beliefs. He adds, “ I think I know what you mean Travis. But it’s not going to be easy, we are going to have to make some radical changes.” After the Senator exits out of the cab, he shakes Travis’s hand and enters the hotel. Travis sits motionless inside his cab, and nods his head, a nod toward his approval of Palantine.

With a city in ruins, Scorsese and Paul Schrader conceived a cinematic backdrop rooted in the aesthetics of *film noir*. From voice over to oblique angles and to Hermann’s jazzy score, *Taxi Driver* is Scorsese’s articulation of a specific style of Classical Hollywood filmmaking, but all the while, creating a contemporary sensibility that provoke new and provocative modes of storytelling. Scorsese’s mastery of images combine with the existential prose of Schrader make *Taxi Driver* a self-reflexive mediation on purpose, and guilt in an violent and decaying urban location. Scorsese and Schrader forge a *mise en scene* rooted in postwar cynicism. As Schrader writes in his influential essay, *Notes on Film Noir*. This examination of the “underside of the American character”⁴⁰ leads to a pondering of contemporary values, something Travis contemplates as he seeks purpose in his vulnerable state. Travis’ reflections of New York are tangible; their visual force compels us to be engrossed with his surroundings during his quest for purpose in New York’s restructured space. While Scorsese projects the horrors of his beloved city, with Woody Allen, these horrors dissolve underneath the rigid crack streets of the city that reveal characters aware of the city’s problems, but concerned more about their personal plights. Through Allen’s film, characters are socially sufficient, mobilized from their successful careers, nevertheless, shared a commonality toward purpose in New York’s unresolved transition.

How the Other Half Sort of Lives

With *Annie Hall*, a different kind of crisis within the same urban space occurs, one that transpires not by a desire for violence to rid the city's filth, but a reflection of the self and seeking reason for alienation in New York's decline. Nevertheless, Allen's character, Alvy Singer is similar to Travis. He projects an awareness of his urban existence rapidly deteriorated. From the complicated dynamics of relationships, love, and show business, living in New York positions Alvy as a seeker for reason and reevaluating his place within the altering landscape of New York. Alvy's crisis compels him to reconnect to his past growing up in Brooklyn, igniting a deep contemplation toward his present life filled with unhappiness and uncertainty. Nostalgia is a potent force in *Annie Hall* that provides Alvy a foundation that can essentially reconnect him to his authentic self.

Annie Hall is the culmination of Allen's output as a comic. However, in *Annie Hall*, Allen's barrage of jokes is constrained to fully convey the self-reflexive nature of his character Alvy Singer. Far from departure that one might assume from viewing *Annie Hall*, the film perforates more deeply the subject matters that have permeated Allen's earlier work: sex, love, art, intellect, death, and most importantly a sense of self. From *Annie Hall* arrives a new form of aesthetics that allows the internal discourse of Allen's character to take on an autobiographical feel. Instead of conjuring up a comic fantasy milieu, the film instead takes in place Allen's hometown of New York City, a city that will come to be the central character, and the most

significant facet of his status as an auteur. Set against a stark, cream-colored background, Allen opens the film with his character Alvy talking to the audience. Like a stand-up act, Allen's monologue conveys the present state of his existence and the complex elements that constitutes his ambiguity. Allen separates Alvy from the specific space (New York City) that has caused his increased anxiety. Wearing a brown crumpled sports jacket, flannel shirt, and his signature black frame glasses, the first line delivered by Alvy is a joke about two elderly women at a Catskills resort that serves the purpose of analogy. After the joke, he proclaims, "Its essentially how I feel about my life. Full of loneliness and misery and suffering and unhappiness, and its all over much too quickly." Alvy tells another joke from Groucho Marx, "I would never want to belong to any club that would have someone like me for a member." From this joke, we detect Alvy's crisis that plagues his life. He recognizes his ambiguity, "a lot of strange things have been going through my mind. I turned 40, so I guess I'm going through a life crisis." Alvy embraces his crisis. He simply wishes to understand the ruminations that generate his grief. Having started the film in this space, it generates a link between character and author. However, what Allen also does is separate Alvy from the terrain that fuels his alienation.

With this prologue, Allen creates the groundwork for his grief. For almost three minutes, Allen's monologue is a self-confessional toward his relationship with Annie. Starting the film with this monologue, it essentially outlines the story of a man and his relationship between New York, and the people that inhabit the urban topography, consumed with the intimate complexities of the everyday. Before Allen divulges the reasons for his failed relationship with Annie, he begins with his childhood growing up in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn during World War II. Alvy somehow believes by conjuring up the past, the answers he yearns for in the present will be ascertained. Alvy's vision of Brooklyn is completely personal, and steeped

toward a desire for an understanding of self. As Alvy asserts during the flashback, “ I have some trouble between fantasy and reality. Alvy’s Brooklyn after World War II is the way he remembers it. Full of the vitality and promise that post war life bestowed to many. Allen cuts to a small wooden white house underneath a roller coaster as a young Alvy slurps Campbell’s tomato soup. Alvy’s fixation with the house pivots his desire to return home through memory. Even with its rickety exterior, the house provided structure for the young Alvy that fostered ideas and sentiments toward life during an exciting transition in New York, and once again, during New York’s decline, he yearns for a return to an image that represents stability. Author Allan Megill points toward two directions one might seek when in crisis: the first could lead “to an enthusiastic embrace of the new; on the other, to an attempt to revitalize the old.”⁴¹ With the exception of *Taxi Driver*, nostalgia permeates through out most of the films discussed, albeit in varying forms: culture, space, and ideas about the present. However, all attribute toward New York’s decline as the catalyst for a return to the past. By contemplating on a former self, can a reshaped other manifest and be mobile in New York’s transition. Alvy’s inclination toward past not only focuses on the personal, but about New York as well. Allen never gives us the physical reminders of New York’s current state throughout the film. Only through dialogue from characters, the audience discerns the city’s collapse.

In “Roller Coasters, Aristotle, and the films of Woody Allen,” Joseph Mills suggest the roller coaster represents a sense of self.⁴² Mills offers the explanations that it symbolizes the mechanist world, and that it perhaps offers a simple cliché that life is unpredictable. By reverting to his childhood home of Brooklyn, Alvy reexamines his sense of self. As Martin Heidegger mentions in “Being and Time”, a return home drives the individual to question the self. Returning home provides an ontological journey, it gives us direction toward our way toward

being and for Alvy, returning to Brooklyn allows us access to his crisis, one filled with alienation and doubt. Writer Tim Cresswell points to Gaston Bachelard's "The Poetics of Space," a book that "considers the home as a primal space that acts as a first world or first universe, that then frames our understandings of all the space outside."⁴³ Nevertheless, the roller coaster is a facet that has contributed to his nervous disposition, but all the while, in a moment of crisis, offers him solace. It offers a physical representation of a veritable way of life, shunned out from the complexities of the everyday world, a space where Alvy can retreat to frequently. Alvy returns to Brooklyn with Annie and his friend Rob (Tony Roberts) during the film. This time, the space that Alvy envisioned in his head presents itself in its present state and with others involved in the experience. Yet, the past that Alvy envisions manifest for Annie and Rob into an encounter with the past. Home becomes a shared experience, a fleeting moment that removes Alvy from his troubles with Annie and Max's aspirations for him and Alvy to leave New York and move to Los Angeles. In his essay, *The Rebel*, Albert Camus quotes Nietzsche, proclaiming, "No artist tolerates reality." Camus concurs, but also adds, "That no artist can get along without reality."⁴⁴ I think Camus's quote proves vital toward Alvy's connection between New York and himself in the city's dejected state. Alvy throughout the film divulges New York's current conditions, whether through interactions with people or addressing us, but he offers no deeper contemplation toward its problems. Instead, and like many around him, attempt to unattached themselves, but New York and Alvy are inseparable, forever entwined by Alvy's formidable bond and ideas about home. New York makes sense for Alvy, even during its decline.

Five minutes into *Annie Hall*, authorship toward a new approach to film comedy establishes Allen's newfound aesthetic. Allen's film merges the real and fictional and offers an image that he is bearing everything, he is no longer hiding from the precipitated rush of his one-

liners from earlier films. Like Scorsese, Allen recognizes the boundless potential for filmic trickery has to offer, nevertheless, the cinematic devices of cross cutting, animation, and a multitude of artifices or as Bazin refers to them, “plastics” convey a cinematic verisimilitude that is simultaneously rooted in reality. The driving force of *Annie Hall* is Alvy’s self-reflective nature. His ability to cogitate drives the narrative and a galvanizing element that enables characters to weave in and out of Alvy’s existence. From Alvy’s self-reflexivity, Alvy is able to narrate the present, examine the rudiments of his failed relationship with Annie and his inability to cope during New York’s decline. Structurally, the self-reflexive quality Alvy possesses allows Allen to weave from present to past, making image and sound seem personal, and esoteric. He invites the audience to stand alongside him as he constructs the reasons for his doomed relationships and the meanings behind their failures. This facet also allows the non-diegetic and diegetic to interact, prompting Alvy’s unhappiness in his life, constantly perplexed to what is real, and artificial. Alvy’s trouble, “between reality and fantasy,” enables him to propel the audience to question the validity of the events that have transpired, but Alvy’s attitude provides empathy, even if exudes self-absorbed tendencies. For Alvy, it appears divulging all the information in such a fashion, that somehow he can correct the imperfections that will eventually plague his life, by conjuring up the past in the present allows Alvy to converse with his internal discourse. Alvy’s self-reflexivity produces tension between truth and fiction, creating the film’s fictive universal, and its inventive use of breaking the fourth wall, animation, internal discourse between characters (voiced and subtitled), and the injection of real characters amid fictional characters in the diegesis (Dick Cavett and Marshall McLuhan). These techniques appear when Alvy and Annie begin to have problems, while concurrently amplifying Alvy’s inability to change, and displaying a character whose wit overshadows his despondency. As Foster Hirsch

examines, “the melancholy, self-critical pose that had always been part of his persona is no longer played simply for laughs, and is no longer simply a charade. For the first time, on public view Allen expresses a genuine unhappiness with himself.”⁴⁵ While this is true, I would argue that Alvy is not unhappy throughout the entire film, while with Annie during their untroubled, and carefree phases of their relationship, Alvy views Annie as a woman with potential, a gentle straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting with a keen fashion sense, and the antithesis of his previous wives. Meeting Annie energizes him. Their similar sense of humor appears as the dominant dimension of their attraction, but somehow his incompetence to evolve with Annie leads to their downfall. Similarly, as Travis draws to Betsy, Alvy views Annie as stability in an unstable terrain. It is worth mentioning this strand between the two characters that view these women as formidable and spirited individuals during this precarious time as well as sanctuaries among the vilified. For Alvy and Travis, their anxiety that projects outwardly to the audience induces a sense of guilt as both men contemplate their transgressions, whether it’s Alvy and his relationships or Travis formulating a new identity. Travis and Alvy see Betsy and Annie as liberators that accept their personal flaws as they sanctified themselves among the degenerates in a derelict city before them. In Alvy’s relationship, Annie unequivocally has a more sanguine view on life than he does, which perhaps, makes Annie break up with Alvy after their trip to Los Angeles. Annie’s assertion for departing enables her to pursue her career as a singer out west, leaving behind her old life in New York and Alvy during this unstable period not only in his life, but in New York as well.

New York in *Annie Hall* defines Alvy’s philosophical mindset, and his perception of the world. Alvy refuses to accept its flaws, and its slow decay. Alvy, perhaps going against his pessimism toward people, refuses to accept its ruination. From this constant motion moving from

past to present, New York becomes an interactive entity for Alvy's life. He refuses to adapt to the changes that seem to wane on the people around him like Annie and Rob (Tony Roberts). A move to California seems like a logical choice for Alvy, "all the show business is out there," proclaims Rob, but Alvy refuses to accept the notion of adapting to a social milieu that seems alienated, and consume with the superficialities of modern society. Rob and Annie embrace a move to the west coast, it offers them vitality, and a released from the stagnant life back east. Both Annie and Rob believe California bestows freedom, something they feel New York could not offer, as well as professional improvement, something Alvy feels he can only obtain in New York. In his visit to California during Christmas time, Allen gives us shots of houses of Los Angeles neighborhoods underneath the enjoyable and favorable conditions of warmth and sunshine, a complete juxtaposition of the kind of Christmas Alvy and Annie are accustomed to back east. Rob made the move a few months' prior, and urges Annie and Alvy to do same, both for the enhancements of their careers, and for the serene beauty of the west coast. Annie embraces the glow of Los Angeles, while Alvy refuses to accept its authenticity, always conscious of its potential toward uncovering the city's plastic semblance. Annie's willingness to move out west, and Alvy's refusal to embrace the change, ultimately ends their relationship. In an attempt to win Annie back and persuade her to move back with him to New York, Alvy flies to California. From Alvy's point of view, California exudes health and contentment, two facets of his life Alvy constantly fears, never willing to be enthralled with the present, constantly pondering the demise of civilization, and perhaps rightly so. After all, New York was in decay. Many had exited and left people like Alvy to pick up pieces of a one great and prosperous city. Toward the end of the film, Annie says to him outside the health food restaurant, "You're like New York, you're an island onto yourself, incapable of enjoying people." To Alvy, New York is

the only constant variable in his life; he finds comfort walking the streets during a moment of crisis, he is dependent of the city's cultural resources, and refuses to give up on the city of his origins.

The ending of *Annie Hall* culminates with Alvy running into Annie outside of a movie theatre on the Upper East Side. Alvy's voice over succinctly conveys the time frame from their last encounter and Annie's return back to New York. Her return to New York clearly does not evoke the city she had left. By the time Annie returns neighborhoods had collapse, social conditions had drastically altered, perhaps not as recognizable in the Upper East Side, but throughout most of Manhattan and across the boroughs, Neoliberal policies had their affects. Some critics of Neoliberalism such as Jenny Kaplan-Lyman argue Neoliberal policies increased crime caused by altering communities and lack of police force due to massive layoffs from the city when the debt crisis hit in 1975.⁴⁶ The mayor race at the time of *Annie Hall's* released in April 1977 between Mario Cuomo, feminist activist Bella Abzug, and unknown candidate from The Bronx, Edward Koch was just beginning. A few months later, the city will experience record-breaking heat waves. The infamous blackout in July of that summer, caused by lighting strikes and U.S. Postal worker turned serial killer, David Berkowitz or Son of Sam as he was referred, unleashed a menacing terror reminiscent of the one we see at the end of *Taxi Driver*, killing six and wounding seven.⁴⁷ Allen ends *Annie Hall* with a long shot looking out over West 63rd Street near Lincoln Center, an edifice constructed by city visionary Robert Moses that symbolized New York's slow descent into gentrification. Allen's image conveys a serene moment in New York's most turbulent time-period after the debt crisis. Allen's streets are oddly disembodied pieces of urban landscape, a topography of tranquility that appear shielded from the crisis we view in *Taxi Driver*. For Travis and Alvy, Neoliberalism's force had the capacity to

question identities, but through violence and laughter, we discern the same anxieties between these two characters. New York's shifting landscape called into the question the notion between city and how Travis and Alvy saw themselves in it. As we will see in Chapter three in Allen's *Manhattan*, Neoliberalism and the full affects that culminated into a new era of governing both on a local and national level.

²³ Writers Roger E. Alcaly and David Mermelstein's informative preface to their collection of essays titled "The Fiscal Crisis of American Cities: With Special Reference to New York" was published in 1976 and provide a contemporaneous perspective at the time of New York's decline.

²⁴ Alcaly and Mermelstein xii

²⁵ Alcaly and Mermelstein xiii

²⁶ Alcaly and Mermelstein xii

²⁷ Israel Shenker's article in the New York Times, July 30, 1975 surveyed scholars and economist about New York's fiscal crisis.

²⁸ Steven Brint's essay "Upper Professionals: A High Command of Commerce, Culture, and Civic Regulation in the book *Dual New York: Restructuring New York*

²⁹ Jonathan Mahler's engrossing and essential book to my Thesis, "The Bronx is Burning" is a major source to new found research about what New York was going through in 1977. Three major components of his book are Baseball, politics, and the social conditions of the city have been beneficial during this time in my research.

³⁰ "What is Neoliberalism" by Dag Einar Thorsen and Amund Lie is an informative essay about the rise of Neoliberalism on a global scale and the impacts it has had on the world markets and how countries have benefited from such concepts.

³¹ David Harvey "A Brief History of Neoliberalism."

³² Shenker pg.7

³³ Robert Zevin's essay *New York City Crisis: First Act in a New Age of Reaction*," is an informative essay on the social dynamics of New York and the causes of its collapse.

³⁴ David Harvey's "A Brief History of Neoliberalism" points to a New York Times article by Robert Zevin in 1975 as well that provides pivotal information toward the rise of Neoliberalism and late capitalism in New York City.

³⁵ For more information see Eric Schlosser's "Fast Food Nation," as he discusses the rise of McDonald's during the 1970s when drive thru windows were implemented and the increase profits from the chain increased.

³⁶ Lesley Stern's "The Scorsese Connection" is an engaging book on the varying connections to Scorsese's oeuvre and its relation to Classical Hollywood Cinema.

³⁷ *Geographies of Desire: Postsocial Urban Space and Historical Revision in the Films of Martin Scorsese* by Sabine Haenni in the *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 62, No. 1-2 (SPRING/SUMMER 2010), pp. 67-85 provides a crucial understanding to Travis' connection to his state of mind and his environment.

³⁸ Joe Flood's NY Post opinion article title "Why The Bronx Burned," is an informative and succinct take on the elements that caused many fires and arson cases during this time in the 1970s.

³⁹ Mahler points out that Mayor Beame went around town raiding porno establishments, a similar stunt pulled by Mayor La Guardia in 1934 when he went around city streets to smash illegal slot machines.

⁴⁰ Paul Schrader's essay provides insight in the origins of film noir and its lasting impact on American Cinema. Many have argued in fact that *Taxi Driver* is a film indebted to the post war style.

⁴¹ Allan Megill's book "Prophets of Extremity" discusses the works of Martin Heidegger and other philosophers about the concepts of crisis and death and their influence on the modern world and what ultimately Nostalgia accomplishes.

⁴² Joseph Mill's essay discusses the philosophical underpinnings of Allen's work and the significance of the roller coaster in *Annie Hall*. Although I do not agree with his argument, his essay provided insight into my assertions of Brooklyn and its significance in the film.

⁴³ Tim Cresswell's "Place: A Short Introduction" bestowed great insight to the concepts of space and place and our roles within the terrain we occupy as citizens, specifically, in urban regions.

⁴⁴ Albert Camus' "The Rebel" supplied great insight into the mind of the artist and his or her role in society.

⁴⁵ Foster Hirsch's "Love, Sex, Death, and The Meaning of Life: The Films of Woody Allen" spends much of his research on Allen's output from the 1970s.

⁴⁶ Lyman's article for Yale Human Rights and Development Journal sheds new ideas and concepts of Neoliberalism's influence in New York starting in the 1970s to 2009.

⁴⁷ For more on this summer in New York, please see Jonathan Mahler's book, "The Bronx is Burning."

CHAPTER THREE

New York in Rhapsody: Nostalgia, Money, and Gentrification in *Manhattan*

“This is really a great city, I don’t care what anybody says.” -Isaac Davis

“The City seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its wild promise of all the mystery and beauty in the world.” –F. Scott Fitzgerald

Seeking the self in New York’s restructured landscape during the middle part of the decade is the crux of both *Annie Hall* and *Taxi Driver*, but as we see with Allen’s *Manhattan* (1979), the self this time appears grounded. In Allen’s film, the characters inhabiting New York’s newly organized environs are entrenched in their distinct upper class advantages, consumed by objects and goods that represent their status in the city. However, Allen’s character Isaac Davis, contemplates New York’s present while attempting to reconnect to its past. This chapter discusses New York toward the end of the decade and how Allen’s film became a representation of a different kind of nostalgia, one that reflects on the present and a desire for a certain lifestyle that New York could bestow to those seeking autonomy and affluence in the city’s newly gentrified topography.

Watching the beginning montage of Woody Allen’s *Manhattan*, the images of the city hypnotizes the viewer, Allen seduces us toward his vision of New York and a clear indication of our removal from *Taxi Driver*’s dejected presentation of a city at its lowest. Filmed in widescreen black and white photography, Allen clearly has a romantic yearning for the past that permeates through every black and white shot that connects us to the city, and most importantly, to its creator. However, the montage also carries a nostalgic longing for the present. Shot by

cinematographer Gordon Willis, the images are of a quotidian existence of New York in the late seventies and the people who march up and down the bustling streets and avenues with purpose, carving out a piece of the metropolis to call their own. City skyscrapers, Yankee Stadium, construction workers, bridges, and trains: all images that evoke the industrial transformation that made New York the home to so many desiring to break free toward the riches that America had promised. Similarly, like George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" that plays as the images are shown, Allen's montage evokes the city symphony films of the 1920s from Avant-Garde filmmakers Paul Strand and Walter Ruttmann. Each shot carefully synchronized to Gershwin's composition that builds to a fireworks crescendo of a luminous New York that reimagines our visions of New York during this period.

For many, the montage from *Manhattan* represented the gleaming light of hope that had burned out for most of the decade. As writer James Wolcott points out in his memoir "Lucking Out: My Life Getting Down and Semi-Dirty in Seventies New York," The Gershwin-Willis opening, "Was a balm for every bruise that New York had taken in the seventies, a relieved sigh from the trenches signaling that perhaps the worst was over, somehow we had come through."⁴⁸ Many indeed were able to pick up the pieces of the city's shattering façade and look forward toward the new decade. Unfortunately, those with immense capital were in a propitious position to ascertain their aspirations under New York's new governing policies with Edward Koch as the newly appointed mayor. Under Koch, the neoliberal philosophy transformed the city into a corporation where officials presided over policies with the watchful eye of Wall Street and large corporations. Some critics have concluded that Koch's governing practices and loquacious personality won him reelection in 1981, as voting numbers within New York's "sixty assembly districts prove that Koch and Ronald Reagan were quite popular in districts with high proportions

of professionals and managers.”⁴⁹ The nascent stages of gentrification that had occurred in the previous decade with Robert Moses had begun to surge, with newly city developments that would mutilate many city neighborhoods that thrived on the diversity of its working class citizens.

Manhattan takes place in the upper part of the city, where trendy neighborhoods, museums, and parks are safe places, secluded from the violent atrocities of parts of Midtown and Downtown. Allen’s vision of New York in *Annie Hall* two years prior morphs into a private enclave for the wealthy and college educated. The subtle elements of the 60s counterculture that are noticeable in *Annie Hall* with Shelly Duval’s character as a Rolling Stone journalist praising the holiness of a Gandhi like figure at a concert event are gone, replaced by neurotic intellectuals examining the amenities in the restructured spaces of New York. Within the consumer frenzy that was taking over New York and explicitly displayed in the film, Allen’s character, Isaac Davis longs for New York’s past. In a similar way to Alvy in *Annie Hall*, Isaac attempts to situate himself within New York, but Isaac clearly enjoys the amenities that he has attain working as a television writer, contemplating what New York ultimately means to him and the city he has called home is entire existence. This chapter examines *Manhattan* and its aesthetic predilections of cinematography and story that exude the present conditions of New York that unequivocally speak to altering contemporary relationships among New Yorkers during the 1970s from an evolving city under the affects of Neoliberalism.

The Monochrome Present

To analyze Woody Allen’s *Manhattan*, one must start at the beginning montage of the film where black and white images of the city and its inhabitants moving along the bustling

streets, many searching for tangible reminders that the present ultimately leads to the future, that the past few years of desolation and despair in the city of dreams have vanished. When we see the first image of the Manhattan skyline in the film, it appears battered and grimy. Buildings covered in dirt that black and white photography amplified are clinging to their foundations from years of neglect. Allen's images are like postcards from cinema's past when New York after World War II became Hollywood's back lot for *film noir* and urban dramas depicting the austere predicaments of neighborhood life.⁵⁰ Allen clearly envisions New York not only from his experiences, but also from cinema. "No matter the season this was a city that existed in black and pulsed to the great tunes of George Gershwin," Allen's voiceover explains. Seeing these images on the screen, along with soundtrack of the first notes of Gershwin's tune, reminds us of what sound can do to the images. In this particular context, Gershwin's composition invites us to a place that we clearly see as New York, but the music elicits a feeling of optimism. Allen's choice of music breathes vitality to these familiar images of New York, once again; Allen invites us to view New York through his perspective. Along with the music, we hear a voiceover, and although we do not have a name to the voice we are hearing, we recognize it as Allen's voice. Strangely, Allen's voice and the images on the screen feel detached from the narrative. It indeed establishes a setting for us, but immediately after the montage, we see Allen's character Isaac and his friends eating dinner at Elaine's and one can possibly conceive that you can begin the film at this point. However, the montage evokes a sense of a real existence, an entirely differently way from Scorsese who implements specific elements of the Neo-Realist. Here, Allen is "putting his faith in the image,"⁵¹ hoping the audience is capable of extracting a factual reality from this monochrome pictorial collage of New York. Most importantly, the film's montage creates a new way at looking at the city that had experienced one of its lowest points in history.

Essentially, this reformulating of assertions is a recapitulation of the themes of the City Symphony films. These films require our willingness to explore the subtle nuances of modern technology and man's achievements through industrial means. As Davis asserts in the scene, "He adore New York City, he idolized it all out of proportion." With the blinking neon light of a hotel marquee, that reads Manhattan, to bridges and bustling streets, Davis' line denotes an ironic tone, particularly for those who had lived through this period. Allen carefully depicts these serene images of snow on the city streets and twinkling lights of the Empire Diner. "This a town that existed in Black and White and pulsed to the great tunes of George Gershwin," Davis proclaims, a self-reflexive moment that marks Allen's montage as a celebration of New York, a sentimental moment full of explosive tension between Davis' desire for some form of the past, while embracing the present. Images of parades, street vendors, and construction workers, all these images represent components that are pivotal in New York's greatness. However, underneath these images reveal grim verities: parades during this time were most often protest marches from municipal organizations and social groups protesting on the steps of City Hall and through out the city. Almost 30 percent of Construction workers during this time were out of work,⁵² and street vendors, a deregulated business left many open to harassment and violence, as well as, for a brief period, even outlawed.

An overhead shot of a luminous Yankee Stadium makes audiences ponder the glories of Yankee past with Ruth, Mantle, and DiMaggio, but one cannot neglect the ubiquitous arson cases that had made the Bronx appear as a war zone riddled with crime. Allen's montage fails to demonstrate New York's present condition, but instead, reveals its splendor and why so many at one point adored New York. For many New Yorkers, these images in *Manhattan* emitted hopefulness, a sensation many thought would never return. New York has always been the place

where people look for new beginnings, as Kurt Vonnegut asserts in his essay “New York: Who Needs It,” Manhattan Island, at its center, inspires utterly baseless optimism—even in me, even in drunks sleeping in doorways and in little old ladies whose houses are shopping bags.”⁵³

Manhattan sparked an ebullient energy with moviegoers, however tension resides within what the audience was feeling and what Allen’s characters were evolving into after New York’s hardships. These characters are not concerned with the city’s overall predicaments, instead, are isolated from the day-to-day hardships of New York. Their seclusion from the rest of New Yorkers struggling with privation reveals these characters as cold and incurious from what has occurred below the Upper East and West Side. Despite the fact that the beginning montage emits a sense of community and the images of a working class life firmly implanted, Allen’s montage does not represent the reality of New York, but instead an idealized vision rooted in the past. While reminiscing New York’s past, the present that Allen’s characters are in however, does not evoke the same sentimentality that *Manhattan*’s opening projects. Instead, Allen’s characters are not concerned with the past, but only interested to what New York has to offer. Isaac and his friend are detached from New York’s plights that signaled a shift from unity to one of individuality and Neoliberalism’s effects on those affluent citizens seeking the amenities that signified their prosperity.

The Postmodern Frontier

In the film, Allen plays Isaac Davis, a television writer who desires to write a book about New York, ironically, the city at this time was rewriting its own identity and how its citizens would function and live. As Davis and his friend Yale (Michael Murphy), along with Davis’ seventeen- year old girlfriend and Yale’s wife converse in the cozy confines of their table at

Elaine's on East 88th Street, a frenzy to colonize New York's abandoned buildings from its decline occurred. Perhaps more than any other commodity that New York had to offer, real estate became the catalyst that enabled developers with vision and with capital to entice those moving to the city that New York was once again open for business and safe to return. As industrial jobs dried up in the city, a new type of individual migrated to the city, one armed with a college diploma seeking their fortune on the abandoned wasteland that New York unfortunately had morphed into during the decade. Restructuring neighborhoods during this time-period represented the entrepreneurial spirit that turned New York into an urban land rush. As Jonathan Mahler points out, the thirst for a piece of New York real estate had began as early as the 1960s when David Rockefeller, head of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association proposed a plan that would have made SOHO, the area below Houston Street a entry way for those migrating to Wall Street.⁵⁴ Filled with office buildings, a sports stadium, and high end apartment towers, Rockefeller's vision was the beginning of a new phrase, *urban renewal*, that signaled transition and change that leveled old structures and build anew.

As SOHO's large spatial lofts were vacated and ignored, artist living in New York saw the area as place where they can work and live and most importantly, for cheap. In 1971 loft living in SOHO became legal for artists.⁵⁵ New York had its own version of a Renaissance period, an artist colony where creativity was the only currency. However, those looking on the outside saw the area where capitalistic dreams could thrive and attract those looking to experience American's version of Florence. By 1977 New York law stipulated that all residents living in SOHO "be certified artist was being blatantly ignored."⁵⁶ Anyone looking for cheap rent and with plenty of space were moving into the neighborhood. Artists, who were once poor and living in the neighborhood, were suddenly becoming rich and famous. Bitterness among the

residents poisoned the once euphoric air that hovered over SOHO. A moment that signaled the end of the era was in 1977 when former school- teacher Giorgio DeLuca opened the first Dean and DeLuca, a twenty-six hundred-square foot supermarket. Mahler points to this moment as a tipping point when neighborhoods such as SOHO morphed into a “theme park for the taste-fetishizing upwardly mobile.”⁵⁷ Even schoolteachers; employees of the state had the entrepreneurial spirit that transformed the city into a frenzy of new opportunities. Under the influence of the Neoliberal discourse, citizens are encouraged to extend beyond their day jobs, to envision grandiose schemes for personal satisfaction. For instance, the Westway project was New York’s plan to “rebuild the West Side Highway south of Forty-Second Street.”⁵⁸ The designs proposed a concrete tube structure underneath the Hudson and extending out that would hold parks and apartment buildings. Highways after World War II symbolized America’s pioneering spirit, the mobility of the few who had the courage to extend beyond the limits of their borders and envisioned what America had to offer. Writer Marshall Berman contends that the highway was the central symbol that embodied America’s boom after the war.⁵⁹ This project was an archetypal of New York’s fiscal problems according to Mayor hopeful Bella Abzug, who asserts, “This is exactly the kind of planning for special interest which has brought our city so many times to the verge of bankruptcy!”⁶⁰ Koch, another mayor hopeful agreed with Abzug, saying the project will be a breeding ground for private investors and a waste of tax payer dollars, but when Koch won the mayor race, he and along with newly elected Governor Hugh Carey reversed their position and construction commence. This mobilized vision of New York only fueled the consumer spirit of its citizens. For instance, Yale, a professor and friend of Isaac throughout the film is in the process of buying a Porsche. For Yale, the purchasing of a car represents more than the spirit of individuality that Neoliberal scholars believes it promotes, but

instead, it pinpoints the ideas of consumerism and the material goods that eventually represent our status in a free market society.

Writer Deborah Tudor points to Neoliberalism as an economic form of postmodernism, and through postmodernism, aspects of life essentially become commoditized. She proclaims that, “In its commodification of the individual, postmodernism encourages the idea that a life can be purchased and enhanced with options, like a car.”⁶¹ Yale’s Porsche represents a prosperous life, even if his personal life unravels due to his affair with Mary (Diane Keaton). As long as on the surface, his life evinces the amenities that his profession as a college professor can provide, Yale’s desire for consumer goods temporally distracts him from the domestic issues that his life currently revolves around. With Isaac, his attitudes toward the consumer goods that his life as a television writer has bestowed to him, speaks to the implicit tension that permeates throughout the film. When he meets Mary, Isaac finds her pretentious and unbearable. Tearing down the artistic figures that have influenced Isaac: Norman Mailer, Ingmar Bergman and Van Gogh, perceived instigators of broad modernist tastes according to Mary. However, after a black tie event at the Museum of Modern Art for Abzug, we see Isaac and Mary walking the streets. To their surprise, they connect and much like Annie and Alvy, their sardonic sense of humor is the central facet that leads to a brief romance. Isaac views her as a confident modernist woman who knows exactly what she wants out of life, but yet, Mary at times, projects a working class mentality with it comes to subject matters that are deemed taboo. “I’m from Philadelphia we don’t talk about things like that,” is the expression she utters to Isaac when she attempts to disconnect herself from intellectual conversations. For example, at the black tie event, when her friend discusses his film about a woman who dies due to her sexual orgasm, Mary appears uncomfortable about such topics, but Isaac instigates Mary’s friend and his absurd premise, but

most importantly, the scene displays Allen's contempt for those he deems as pretentious and projecting their elitist disposition. After the event, Mary and Isaac enter a diner still dressed in their formal attire; anomalies among the many dressed down patrons that are inside. They walk around the Upper East Side talking and viewing the city landscape during the early morning hours. Here Allen provides a dialectic scene to Yale's Porsche. Isaac does not need a car to signify his status among the privilege. In fact, he does not even know how to drive. His preference to walk around the city streets enables him to be entrenched with his nostalgia. An extreme long shot of Mary and Isaac looking over toward Queensboro Bridge provides a sentimental viewpoint of the New York in the early morning hours. As Isaac asserts to Mary, "This is really great city, I don't care what anybody says." Isaac's nostalgia blinds him of the growing misfortunes of those living in Queens.

Meanwhile, as Isaac reflects about the city's industrial accomplishments, banks continued to refused mortgages, Abzug fought for those living in the borough clinging to their homes. During her campaign stumping in Queens, "she demanded that New York State revoke the licenses of real estate brokers who engaged in blockbusting, the use of racial scare tactics to provoke panic selling among white homeowners."⁶² Queens and other neighborhoods across the five boroughs felt these tactics were the catalyst destroying neighborhoods. More detrimental was the influence of the Manhattan Institute, a right wing think tank headed by Roger Starr. Under his leadership, the idea of "Planned Shrinkage" developed during the city's debt crisis that divided New Yorkers as "productive" or "unproductive" and those regarded as "unproductive," should exit out of the city.⁶³ New York was participating in segregation on a massive scale not only with race, but also with class. According to Berman, "Once a neighborhood was targeted for extinction, state power could assault it in a structured and coordinated way by closing schools,

turning off water and electric, police stations, and health facilities shutting down.”⁶⁴ The urban system that defined New York and its citizens had disappeared due to those in power who saw impecunious inhabitants, mostly immigrants as unfit to live in their growing secluded fortress. Democracy, the right to live and choose a place to call home was somehow gone.

Meantime, back on the Upper East Side, Isaac senses change around his city. As Mary and him walk into Bloomingdales, Isaac notices an old building half way demolished, a piece of old New York slowly fading now into memory. Isaac, aware of the altering landscape utters to Mary, “You know this city is really changing.” Urban renewal even touched the once untouchable Upper East Side, making Isaac more seduced by the potent force of nostalgia.

Sitting in his apartment, Allen asserts the things that are worth living: Groucho Marx, Willie Mays, second Movement of the Juniper Symphony. Swedish movies, Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra, crab legs at Sam Woe’s, and Louis Armstrong’s “Potato Head Blues.” This mixture of high and low pop culture artifacts reflects the tension he feels among his current life and his youth. Isaac’s tastes reflect former shapes of himself and how they have formed his identity. Isaac’s tastes bring him solace in unstable times. Time has passed since he quit his job as television writer. At first, the move was presumptuous, but it has also restored creative autonomy in mercurial circumstances both, for Isaac and New York. Similarly, Charlie’s list in *Mean Streets* when he and Teresa are walking on the beach evokes his cultural identity. Teresa poses the question to Charlie, “What do you like?” Charlie retorts emphatically the predilections that life has to offer him. Charlie’s list defines his class and heritage: John Wayne, spaghetti with clam sauce, Mountains, and Frances of Assisi. These lists define their sensibilities as men constantly evolving and the cultural identities these men have forged throughout their lives in

New York. Art, food, and music, are the tangible reminders of who Charlie and Isaac are as New Yorkers and their search for purpose in the city's changing landscape.

Manhattan celebrates New York's past, although it is also aware of the city's present. Allen never expresses any profound sentiments about the future of his hometown, but rather only concerned with world he creates within the narrative and the specific dynamics of people he depicts. Although these conflicts within *Manhattan* are rather personal and free from collective social issues in New York, nevertheless, through the narrative world he creates, reality seeps through to reveal New York's current conditions as they were in the later part of the 1970s. By the time of the film's release in April of 1979, New York's gentrification process was slowly breaking apart the nucleus that defined so many neighborhoods and reshaping New York's identity once again as a safe and family friendly place to visit. Writer Stanley Corkin notes that films such as Allen's *Manhattan* "Treat this shift in real estate value and demographics as a fait accompli."⁶⁵ Corkin's assertion is only partly true. I surmise Isaac as someone fully aware of New York's evolving landscape, but contemplating its repercussions.

Sure, city streets in Allen's films are indeed safer, even the sounds of sirens take on different meanings when you hear them in *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*, compared to *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*. In *Annie Hall*, sirens can ruin orgasms during sex and when we hear them in *Manhattan*, Allen's characters appeared comfortably secure in their spread out lofts, protected from the violence and despair that lingers outside. Most importantly, Isaac does not entirely accept the city's fate as this social experiment for clean streets and moneyed personalities calling New York home under Neoliberalism, but desires a foundation so love can flourish and nostalgia as a constant presence during New York's transition toward a new decade.

⁴⁸ James Wolcott's memoir "Lucking Out: Getting Down and Semi-Dirty in Seventies New York" spends the last chapter talking about the impact of Allen's film *Manhattan* had on New Yorkers during the time of its release in the spring of 1979.

⁴⁹ Brint pg. 149

⁵⁰ Leonard's Quart's essay "Woody Allen's New York" is a brief, but informative take of Allen's depiction of the city throughout his entire career.

⁵¹ Andre Bazin's essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" discusses the principles of montage and the need for cinema to reflect more of the natural world.

⁵² Carroll pg. 58

⁵³ Harper's Magazine was a place where Vonnegut spent much of writing career in the 1970s discussing various issues about New York in the 1970s. Mahler also uses the quote in his book "The Bronx is Burning."

⁵⁴ Mahler pg. 167

⁵⁵ Mahler pg. 169

⁵⁶ Mahler pg. 171

⁵⁷ Mahler pg.171

⁵⁸ Mahler pg. 133

⁵⁹ Marshall Berman's book "All that is Solid Melts Into Air"

⁶⁰ Mahler pg. 135

⁶¹ Tudor's essay "Selling Nostalgia: Mad Men, Postmodernism and Neoliberalism" produced new insight into character's behavior in *Manhattan* and the lifestyles they were leading under New York's restructured space.

⁶² Mahler pg. 133

⁶³ Marshall Berman and Brian Berger's collection of essays titled "New York Calling" discuss New York's history starting with the 1970s and culminating in Mayor Bloomberg's last year in office.

⁶⁴ Berman pg.22

⁶⁵ Stanley Corkin's book "Starring New York" is a broad, but an insightful book on the films produced in New York during the 1970s. Once again, however, Corkin treats Scorsese and Allen as detached visions, instead, of attempting to compare the two side by side.

Conclusion

Much of these movies discussed in my research I come to realize speak to each other in compelling manners that reflect a New York sensibility. If different filmmakers produced these films, I would think I will be extracting entirely different elements from the mise en scene, but instead, these are films about New York by New Yorkers. There are particular moments when viewing these films that I found imagination partaking in a different kind of process. For instance, in *Taxi Driver*, after Travis and Betsy's date, Travis is on the phone apologizing about what occurred, the camera tracks away from him and we enter an empty hallway. The camera lingers for a moment before it returns to Travis, but for that brief moment, what if the camera moves forward down the hallway and outside. What would we see? Who will greet us on those sordid streets? These inquiries perhaps entice me to partake in the nostalgia that so many project when discussing New York during this time- period. Indeed, it is a formidable force, but felt unequivocally to remove myself from its influence. This scene induces for me what cinema induces in all of us: the dreaming facet and how for a brief moment, we are aware of someone behind the camera, that its not some disembodied apparatus, but a device that can record the present and essentially preserve the past for future insight.

In the book "Scorsese on Scorsese," the director mentions a shot in the film when Travis's taxi drives past the sign on Broadway that reads 'Fascination.' For me, this concept of fascination has been the galvanizing force of my research. I am fascinated with the past and memory, either coming to terms with my own history or others, but most importantly, how cinema can make us understand these often complicated concepts about the human condition. New York in the 70s

through the films of Martin Scorsese and Woody Allen in cinematic specifications are visually contrasting, but put underneath the watchful eyes, similarities begin to surface. Through violence and laughter, Allen and Scorsese confront the social issues that many New Yorkers were experiencing. With Scorsese, he deems the shocking acts of violence unavoidable that eventually lead to purification and redemption for his characters to progress. Allen finds laughter within the despair and sadness of relationships. Again, and similar to violence, laughing produces a healing effect, ultimately his characters succumb to the notion of progressing forward guided by the warm sentiments of absolution. In his book “Modern Hollywood: Horror and Comedy,” writer William Paul contends that, “Conflation of high and low culture often occurs during periods of change in society at large.”⁶⁶ For Allen and Scorsese, their films challenged viewers to reflect on the increasing anxieties of living in not only New York, but also other cities that felt the onslaught of change occur. Today, scholars and critics consider Allen and Scorsese as institutions. Their most recent out put from their oeuvre recall the films from this project, dealing with the same issues as in the 70s: Allen and Nostalgia in *Midnight In Paris* and Scorsese, dealing with ethnic groups and their assimilation into American society in *Gangs of New York*.

Scorsese and Allen forged vastly different identities of New York in the 1970s. It was a dying city to paraphrase Diane Keaton in *Annie Hall*, but able to resolved its issues through new ideologies toward the purpose of city and what it can provide its people. From two very different, and detailed visions, New York appeared serendipitous, and energetic, while at the same time alienated, and unsavory. However, both perspectives discuss the subject of increase anxiety of identification in an urban environ and how these characters seek to situate themselves in New York’s reshaping under Neoliberal ideologies. Woody Allen and Martin Scorsese captured the temperament of their beloved New York through their stories, as well as their self-reflexive

nature. Most importantly, these films are extensions of their creators, forever identified as auteurs at an urban crossroads.

⁶⁶ William Paul's book "Laughing Screaming," discusses the comedy and horror genres in attempt to find validation for their popularity and how these genres have affected the moving going public.

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