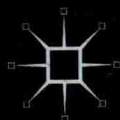


Edited by
Klara Stephanie Szlezák
D. E. Wynter

Referentiality and the Films of Woody Allen



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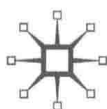
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Summary: "Referentiality and the Films of Woody Allen is a scholarly collection
that provides expansive exploration of the auteur's use of intertextuality,
referentiality, and fusion of media forms. Its scope is framed by Allen's
intermedial phase beginning in 1983 with *Zelig* and his most recent film.
While many chapters in the volume deal with texts, several delve into Allen's
process of referentiality, his accessing non-textual works, material objects,
and abstract concepts in the formation of his cinematic works. These objects
and concepts include a vast array of phenomena, such as sexual orientation,
historical events, time and space, geographic location, architecture, religion,
philosophy, visual images, music, magic and other performance art.
Characterized by international, interdisciplinary perspectives, this collection
elucidates points of departure within as well as outside of Allen's own oeuvre
to trace both artistic lineages and idiosyncratic
creations in Allen's overall filmic work."—Provided by publisher.

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Referentiality and the Films of Woody Allen

Foreword

It is highly likely that few, if any, audiences outside of Japan would know *Kokusai himitsu keisatsu: Kayaku no taru* (1964) were it not for Woody Allen's *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* (1966). A modest hit, especially amidst the doldrums of mid-60s American cinema, the film convinced the former gag writer and successful stand-up comedian to continue to work in cinema. Yet one hardly knows what to call Allen's effort in taking a Japanese spy thriller and evacuating its dialogue track in favor of an absurd plot and jokey repartee. Right at the start of his career Allen takes concepts of referentiality, intermediality, intertextuality, and collaboration to a place these terms, some not yet in scholarly discourse, were never meant to go. Did Allen have Bakhtin in mind with his quite literal "dialogic imagination" vis-a-vis the Japanese original? While postmodern theory has it that every text is an intertext and the French nouvelle vague produced countless examples of great cinema out of pastiche, parody, homage, referentiality, and reflexivity, Allen's project over the course of some six decades and almost 50 films has been something different: to create an oeuvre at once cinematically sophisticated and philosophically rigorous while retaining some basis in mainstream popularity. Numerous Academy Award wins and nominations, a number of box office hits, and a shelf-full of both academic and popular writings attest to the perhaps unprecedented success of his efforts.

Of course, it didn't seem so at the start. Few took 1969's *Take the Money and Run* as anything other than a comic use of documentary form to tell the story of a lovable loser. The *deformation* of the documentary mode is central to the comedy of the film as much as poor Virgil's hopelessness at any kind of criminal competence. And so in combining form with content Allen not only engages in his on-the-job learning of cinematic semblance, but along the way he invents a new genre: the mockumentary. The lovable loser, the schlemiel, would constitute Allen's on-screen persona over the course of another four films in the next six years. But behind the camera, Allen, the budding auteur, was learning his craft through a kind of collaboration through referentiality, intertextuality, and intermediality. This collaboration was not only between the auteur manqué and established masters—Bergman, of course, and Eisenstein, Kubrick, Bob Hope, and Groucho Marx—but also with the history of world cinema, including Hollywood film genres. Allen took an absurd

best-seller, David Reuben's *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex* But Were Afraid to Ask*—a book intended to make mainstream America comfortable with the sexual revolution happening all around them as the New Left and the Counter-Culture morphed into the “Me Generation”—and twisted it beyond all recognition. Using world cinema and Hollywood genres as his model to create seven short films, Allen turned cinephilia into a critical and commercial success. Relying on everything from Shakespearean costume drama to Antonioni-esque ennui to classic horror to high-gloss science fiction, Allen spoofs sexual anxiety and ideas of perversion all the while in dialogue with some of the most significant movements in world cinema and classic Hollywood. Compare the intellectually challenging reflexivity and referentiality of *Everything* to Herbert Ross's slick, solid but ultimately safe adaptation of Allen's Broadway hit *Play It Again, Sam* made that same year. All of the jokes, puns, and references to old movies are there in the play and in Allen's own screen adaptation. Taking nothing away from Ross—once among the most prolific of Hollywood's mainstream filmmakers—no cinephile would prefer *Sam* over *Everything*.

With *Sleeper* Allen comes into his own as both a director and screen actor of note. Channeling the sparse, antiseptic world of Kubrick's classic *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Allen's 1973 effort is a near-Swiftian satire of both a futuristic dystopia of epic incompetence and a kick-in-the-pants of then-current pop-cultural nonsense. Seen from the vantage-point of 2015, *Sleeper* almost requires the kind of on-the-scene witness as the characters in the film itself require of Miles Monroe to explain the puzzling artifacts and faded celebrities of 1970s America. Less so with *Love and Death*, the film we may fairly call Allen's first masterpiece. The look of the film is impeccable, its European tint perfectly molded by cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet. For the first time Allen extends his reach to encompass not just European models, but European talent working with the director of photography who had worked with Bresson and Demy. The references to Bergman are easy to spot: *The Seventh Seal* and *Persona* are the most obvious ones. And both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky make their way into this pseudo-Russian story of existential angst and thwarted love (the film is, of course, Allen's funniest work yet).

Many scholars, myself included, imagined *Annie Hall* as some kind of breakthrough for Allen. Certainly the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences agreed: the film won Best Picture, Best Writer, Best Director and Allen was nominated as Best Actor. Not since *Citizen Kane* and Orson Welles had someone been nominated for Picture, Writer,

Director, and Actor. (It would be churlish to note that Welles' film failed to win anything other than Best Original Screenplay.) The little schlemiel from Brooklyn was now set on a course where his films would garner Oscar nominations virtually routinely and the near-universal critical respect for his subsequent films would rank Allen in the forefront of American filmmakers.

Little is written about these first films any longer—understandable in light of the dazzling intellectual, philosophical, and cinematic maturity of so many films starting in the late 1970s and, with a slip-up here and there, continuing well into the new millennium. It is clear that these early films mark the efforts of an artist learning his craft, relying on a consistent, recognizable persona and a reliable sense of comedy while experimenting with cinematic grammar and style. We can see in these budding works the shape of things to come: the roots of *Zelig* in *Take the Money and Run*; of *Stardust Memories* in *Everything . . . about Sex*; of *Crimes and Misdemeanors* in *Love and Death*. Of course it is difficult to compare the sheer audacity of *Zelig* with the light-hearted *Take the Money*; the dark mood that overhangs *Stardust Memories* with the playful nonsense of *Sex . . .*. We are not here claiming that these initial films somehow deserve the scholarly attention or possess the intellectual heft of the later works. Perhaps they have received most of the attention they deserve, as steps along the way toward an unprecedented career achievement. But we should at least remind ourselves that Allen's penchant for quotation, referentiality, homage, dialogism, and a sensibility that extends across media and temporality was there at the start. Allen turned the "anxiety of influence" on its head by liberally borrowing from past masters, and dared critics, scholars, and audiences to take him seriously nevertheless as a deeply original artist. The splendid essays in this volume range across Allen's later films and across an impressive range of intertextual references. It's a tribute to these authors that they understand Allen's deep cultural and intellectual roots—as much as it is to Allen's complex cinema itself.

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Introduction

Klara Stephanie Szlezák and D. E. Wynter

It seems safe to posit that by the time this collection of essays is being read, there will be yet another film by Woody Allen, too recent for its exploration to be included. When we started this book, *Blue Jasmine* had just premiered. During the course of our work, *Magic in the Moonlight* premiered in theaters around the globe. And by the time we completed our volume, it was announced that Allen's latest film *Irrational Man* would open at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival. No doubt, it is a challenge for scholars to keep up with the pace of Allen's creativity and productivity.

This volume presents a look at Woody Allen's cinematic oeuvre that is as current as possible, including contributions on both *Blue Jasmine* (2013) and *Magic in the Moonlight* (2014). Yet what is equally central to this volume as the aspect of being current is the glance backward: the contributions to this collection explore both how Allen's latest works add to his overall oeuvre and how his earlier works continue to yield areas of inquiry and prove a rich source for ongoing scholarly investigation.

What seems equally safe to posit is that his most recent film will be teeming with allusions and references to other films and filmmakers, literature and other art forms, and Allen's own previous oeuvre. Allen has titled his latest film after William Barrett's *Irrational Man—A Study in Existentialism* (1958), the once controversial primer that first introduced existentialism in English to an American readership (Bell 1962). In *Irrational Man*, a film about a professor whose relationship with a student incites a grave existential dilemma, Allen revisits the territory of his campus-set domestic dramas *Husbands and Wives* (1992) and *Another Woman* (1983) to further explore themes of criminality and the value of human life, with allusions to Antonioni,

Dostoevsky, counter-culturalism, and Allen's own crime trilogy (*Crimes & Misdemeanors* [1989], *Match Point* [2005], and *Cassandra's Dream* [2007]).

While it might be true that Allen's "taste for quotation, parody, pastiche, [is] sometimes seen as an erasure of his artistic personality rather than part of it" (Menegaldo 69), the chapters in this collection demonstrate that it has in fact become a signature of Allen's filmmaking and testament to his intellect. Among the five parts that constitute the recent *Companion to Woody Allen* (2013), edited by renowned Woody Allen studies experts Peter Bailey and Sam Girgus, "Part IV: Influences/Intertextualities" addresses the "compelling evidence of how much the writings and thoughts of other writers' and thinkers' have worked their way into Allen's films" (Bailey, Introduction 4). *Referentiality and the Films of Woody Allen* is dedicated in its entirety to investigating the wealth, the diversity, and the complexity of the references in Allen's filmic work. Far from "an erasure of his artistic personality," his artistry spanning across textual and medial boundaries is unrivaled in filmmaking. It is employed for such diverse purposes as comic effect or the enhancement of tragic momentum, for purposes of characterization, the creation of ambience, and satire. As Allen approaches his 80th year, his taste for references has grown even richer.

The concept of "referentiality" that underlies this volume is decisively broad so as to enable scholarly gazes as diverse as Allen's use of references itself. Our understanding is based on the definition of referentiality as "reference to the external world (rather than to oneself, to language, or to a text). In language, this is exemplified in description; in visual media, depiction" (Chandler and Munday, n.pag.).

While many chapters in the volume deal with texts, several chapters explore Allen's process of accessing non-textual works and objects from the external world or "real world" in the formation of his cinematic works. These objects include a vast array of phenomena, such as sexual orientation, historical events, time and space, geographic location, architecture, religion, philosophy, visual images, music, magic, and other performance art. In this volume, referentiality provides the theoretical framework for new observations and expansive understanding of the strategies and phenomenon of Allen's process. By establishing primary points of focus, our framework guides investigation and identification of some of Allen's definitive processes of referentiality without being overly rigid or restrictive. The parameters of referentiality set forth in this collection are: intertextuality (see, e.g., Harel; Ingle; Wynter; Carreras-Kuntz, in this volume); reflexivity, self-referentiality, or meta-referentiality (see, e.g., Fuchs; Carreras-Kuntz; Schwanebeck,

in this volume); non-textual referentiality (see, e.g., Hall; Boitani; Havis; Szlezák, in this volume); and intermediality (see, e.g., Balestrini; Feyerabend; Boitani; Havis, in this volume). While these four parameters form a theoretical framework, any single film by Allen may encompass one, some, or all of these referential variants. Consequently, the collection is arranged thematically, which allows for more fluidity and inclusiveness in the scholars' analyses and discussions.

Julia Kristeva's principles of intertextuality play a critical part in the exegeses of a number of chapters in this collection, particularly in discussion of Allen's longtime "collaborators" Dostoevsky and Strindberg. However, because the scholarly advocates of intertextuality (including Roland Barthes) often "[deny] the possibility of reference to a reality beyond the intertextual network" (Clayton and Rothstein 52), we find it necessary to assert referentiality as another locus of examination. The references that Allen makes to filmmakers such as Fellini or Bergman are often more visual and phenomenological than narrative. We find further impetus to make this distinction between intertextuality and referentiality from Michael Riffaterre's statement that "The text refers not to objects outside itself, but to an intertext. The words of the text signify not by referring to things, but by presupposing other texts" (228). Allen's treatment of visual media, material objects, and "real" phenomena/occurrences, or those that the auteur has chosen to treat as real, such as magic, apparitions, and the afterlife, exists outside of Riffaterre's perspective. As this volume reveals, the breadth of Allen's work not only includes intertextuality but also extends beyond its boundaries.

Thus, this volume explores postmodern self-referentiality, which Peter Bailey affirms is "never completely absent from Allen's films" (*Reluctant Film Art* 19). Robert Stam's theory forms the basis and point of departure for the investigation of reflexivity, and the contributors in this volume address reflexivity in its duality, on the one hand exposing the devices and infrastructure of filmmaking, and on the other deliberately making the audiences conscious of the fact that they are watching a film. Such self-referentiality, according to Sabine Hake, has its roots in pre-World War I German films:

tableau-like frame compositions, long takes, and frontal play with direct glances at the cinema are its main characteristics... In these examples of diegetic self-referentiality, the process of filmmaking is invariably portrayed as a challenge and an adventure. Funny and grotesque situations abound, art infringes upon life, and life models itself on art (237–238).

Uncannily, traits of the Wilhelmine cinema are evident in many of Allen's films, including *Deconstructing Harry*, *Stardust Memories*, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, *Annie Hall*, *Bullets over Broadway*, and *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Allen's statement: "I'm true to my Germanic origins" (qtd. in Benayoun 157), as we see, is laden with intermedial subtext.

With regard to intermediality, Werner Wolf's exhaustive scholarship in the field, which spans two decades, informs our interpretations. The theory of referentiality as applied in this collection pertains to the auteur's narrative techniques (textual, visual, intermedial, acoustical), and also draws attention to the filmmaker's intentionality toward the viewer. In this regard, Allen references, that is to say, treats as real, things that would not ordinarily be treated so—and which viewers are forced to accept as real—thereby creating defamiliarized objects (textual, visual, intermedial, acoustical), through which human existence is examined.

The advancements of visual, industrial, and electronic media technologies have provided significant inspiration to Allen, who has applied these innovations not only to convey his narratives, but also as thematic signifiers, demonstrating Marshall McLuhan's dictum that "the medium is the message." For our purposes, intermediality refers to the employment of non-filmic media to carry a significant amount of narrative in a way that is distinctly different from cinema. A movie scene in which characters are watching television would not exemplify intermediality, but referentiality, whereas a film such as Woody Allen's *Zelig*, in which video interviews, authentic period documentary footage, and simulated period documentary footage are diegetically interwoven into film sequences creating the illusion of verisimilitude, is intermediality.

Wolf's articulation of intermediality encompasses various media, specifying it as a "transgression of boundaries between conventionally distinct media" that "comprises both 'intra-' and 'extra-compositional' relations between different media" (3). Allen breaches the mediated boundaries of film's form and infrastructure with other media in *Radio Days*, *Zelig*, and other works discussed in this collection, simultaneously deposing the primacy of the film medium in the conveying of a cinematic message, while expanding its possibilities. In his post-millennial films, such as *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, *Midnight in Paris*, and *To Rome with Love*, Allen has also explored live performance and fine arts as areas of intermedial and non-textual reference. In many cases, visual, industrial, and electronic media become objects of reference themselves, demonstrating intermediality—phenomena at the point of intersection between different media, or crossing their borders.