



# A «CASE» FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS

## THE UNCONSCIOUS AND SEXUALITY

### IN WOODY ALLEN'S FILMS <sup>1</sup>

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*«All thinking is no more than a circuitous path from the memory of satisfaction (a memory which has been adopted as a purposive idea) to an identical cathexis of the same memory which is hoped to attain once more through an intermediate stage of motor experiences».*

S. Freud<sup>3</sup>

*«What counts is that your work is part of your life every day. I make films for my pleasure. Even when I'm not aware of thinking about it the unconscious is still working hard».*

W. Allen<sup>4</sup>

The two quotes above show the axes of our *speech*: they refer to two modes of working, the work of the unconscious described in successive stages by Freud,<sup>5</sup> and the

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<sup>3</sup> Freud, S. (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams*. SE V: 602. The quotes which follow taken from Freud's works are from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (SE).

<sup>4</sup> Allen, W. (2005) *Io, Woody e Allen. Un regista si racconta*, edited by Stig Björkman, ed. Minimum fax, Roma, p. 144 and p. 284, originally published in Sweden with the title *Woody om Allen* (1993). Our translation. For our work, we have also referred to Baxter, J. (1998), *Woody Allen. A Biography*, Harper-CollinsPublishers, Inc., and to the more recent Lax, E. (2007) *Conversations with Woody Allen. His films, the movies and moviemaking*.

<sup>5</sup> The Freudian works from which our work has began are, amongst others: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (chapter VII) (1900), *The Unconscious* (1915), *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916-1917), *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933), *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (1938). A



work of the man, director, actor, artist of our time Woody Allen. The final result, if we succeed in our intent to advantageously compare one vs. the other, it will be a gain for psychoanalysis and a merit award for Allen.

## 1. SOME MORE ON CINEMA AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

There is a growing number of publications relating to cinema and psychoanalysis. Comparative studies and research highlight both proximity and difference, and they propose ever more complex keys for reading and understanding their link. Of course in our paper we do not propose to illustrate the wealth of all existent literature. We will limit ourselves to identify the two main approaches to put into context our research on the Woody Allen «case»: a case which will most certainly confirm the combination cinema-psychoanalysis, and also denote its exceptionality. Allen, in fact, uses psychoanalytical categories in a very particular way, very much in his own way. He is on the inside of the aforementioned combination, but on his own terms. In this way, Allen can become *a case for psychoanalysis*, and, as such, can offer a unique service to psychoanalytical science.

Scientific literature concerned with cinema and psychoanalysis can be put into two main categories:

- a) Those - directors, screenwriters, actors - who would dare to enter into the analysts' consulting room to reproduce both the conditions and the effects.
- b) Those who use the discoveries and conclusions of psychoanalysis to construct the subjects and the screenplay for their films.

Gabbard (2001)<sup>6</sup> writes of a 'long standing marriage' between cinema and psychoanalysis, and indicates their shared date of birth (1895), the year of the first *cinématographe* by the Lumière brothers, and the publication of *Studies on Hysteria* by Breuer and Freud. Other than their shared date of birth, cinema and psychoanalysis inaugurated in western civilization two new ways of treating the body: the body of the spectator sitting in a room and the body of a patient lying on a couch. Both of them are bodies subject to the same law of motion: the drive [*Trieb*]. They are however given movement in a new sense. In Freud's words (1905): «Being present as an interested

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subsequent reference has been G.B. Contri (1985) *Lavoro dell'inconscio e lavoro psicoanalitico*, Sic Edizioni, and G.B. Contri (1987), *Lexikon psicoanalitico e Enciclopedia*, Sic Edizioni.

<sup>6</sup> Gabbard, G.O. (2001) *The Impact of Psychoanalysis on the American Cinema. Annual of Psychoanalysis* 29:237-246.



spectator at a spectacle or play [*Schau-spiel*] does for adults what play does for children (...) to be a hero. And the playwright and actor enable him to do this by allowing him to identify himself with a hero. They spare him something, too. (...) Accordingly, his enjoyment is based on an illusion; (...) it is only a game, which can threaten no damage to his personal security».<sup>7</sup>

Metz (2006)<sup>8</sup> proposes a sharp comparison between the mirror and the cinema screen and maintains that «a film is like a mirror. However, at a certain point it differs from the primordial mirror, in as much as on the latter, anything can be projected, but there is however, only one thing that cannot ever be reflected: the body of the spectator». All the spectator can do is experience the ‘mechanism of identification’ to re-elaborate or re-work what he has seen on the screen in terms of his own experience.

a) From the cinematographic representation of the psychotherapist, the first of the two main interpretive areas results in a kind of crossed valuation between cinema and psychoanalysis. The cinematographic representation only manages to construct a sweetened or softened metaphor of the therapeutic setting, conditioned by a special kind of trivialization. For example, as Gabbard notes, on screen, psychologies, psychotherapies and psychoanalysis become mixed up and standardized. However, this weak metaphor does not remain neutral. The reputation of the psychotherapist under the spotlight does not appear to be very solid. Between irony and criticism the movie camera reflects back to us the precarious results of psychotherapeutic treatments.

The parable illustrated by Gabbard’s (2001) vast collection of ‘cinematographic mythology’, based around the therapist’s profession, spans from the idealization of the analyst (‘the golden age’) to his deterioration beginning in the 1960’s. Since then the analyst is represented as «part of a system that demands blind conformity to an obsolete and sterile set of social norms».<sup>9</sup>

It may be useful to cite a recommendation by Freud which we use as guidance. In *An Autobiographical Study* (1924)<sup>10</sup> he writes: «It [*the method of free association*, author entry] is left to the patient in all essentials to determine the course of the analysis and the arrangement of the material (...). In complete contrast to what happened with hypnotism and with the urging method, interrelated material makes its appearance at different times and at different points in the treatment. *To a spectator, therefore -*

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<sup>7</sup> Freud, S. (1905) *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage*, SE VII: 305-306 .

<sup>8</sup> Metz, Ch. (2006) *Cinema e psicanalisi*, ed. Marsilio. Our translation.

<sup>9</sup> Gabbard, G.O. (2001).

<sup>10</sup> Freud, S. (1925) *An Autobiographical Study*. SE XX: 41.



*though in fact there must be none - an analytic treatment would seem completely obscure».* (our emphasis).

Whoever might try to enter into the consulting room, either by knocking on the door or by peeping through the keyhole, would find an unusual subject, not immediately realizable nor easily performable: a relationship for only two people which offers space and time to work through an entire life beginning with pathology and aiming toward healing.

b) Musatti considered the relationship between cinema and psychoanalysis as a possible collaboration between various ways of looking at life, inaugurating a different line of interpretation on the relationship between cinema and psychoanalysis. To correctly interpret the dreams of his or her patient, the analyst must constantly bring himself and be aware of social, political and cultural life and «he must particularly be aware of cinematographic production». (C. Musatti, 1950)<sup>11</sup>

In fact the big screen, just like but in a different way to literature,<sup>12</sup> speaks with a certain vigor to our unconscious, caused by the particular capacity of our thought to echo or resonate images. On the strength of the similarity of those images, so we live them, with their real characters, but detached as if on 'another level' - and with unconscious fantasies also present. The wealth of elaboration used by thought when touching on such artistic productions, as Freud has described more than once, takes us first of all to what he has called *dream-work*. On this particular branch we can find directors and screenwriters who have used the discoveries of psychoanalysis to enrich, modify and above all provoke the audience.

Hitchcock films are an excellent example of an arsenal of techniques used by the director, who has a deep knowledge of the human psyche, with the aim of reproducing on screen and recreating in the spectator those dynamics used by the psychoanalyst. Another illustrious example which cannot be overlooked is F. Lang, who follows step by step the mechanisms of the *dream-work* in his masterpiece *The Woman in the Window* (1944).<sup>13</sup> Others, such as Hitchcock, Fellini and Bergmann greatly inspired the work of Allen, who early used psychoanalysis to construct his films. His characters are the fruits of psychotherapy and exactly for this reason psychotherapy is painted with a severe judgment. However, nothing much would be left of these films, there

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<sup>11</sup> Musatti, C. (1950), *Scritti sul cinema* (a cura di Dario Romano), Testo&Immagine, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> For more in-depth analysis on the relationship between psychoanalysis and different artistic forms, with particular regard to literature, see Orlando, F. (1987) *Per una teoria freudiana della letteratura*, Einaudi, and Lavagetto, M. (2001) *Freud. La letteratura e altro*, Einaudi.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding this director, it is worth mentioning also the character who made him famous even before his landing in the USA: Doctor Mabuse.



would be a collapse of the entire construction, if we were to eliminate the continuous and insistent references to psychoanalysis and in particular to Freudian works.

## 2. WOODY ALLEN'S CREATIVE PATH

Who is Woody Allen writing for?

For every new screenplay or new film, Allen does not turn to a group of his fans or *aficionados*, nor to the captains of the US film industry. He admits himself to get more consensus in Europe rather than in the USA.<sup>14</sup>

Allen Steward Königsberg,<sup>15</sup> now in his seventies, was born on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1935 in the Bronx, and spent his infancy and youth in Brooklyn. He remembers having seen an enormous number of films, for the most part top quality films. The cinema became very soon his second home. Great directors and great actors of the big screen were his intellectual companions during his formative years. Allen never stopped looking for 'masters', even if he did not finish his college. His life was really lived going against the tide.<sup>16</sup>

J. Baxter in his biography wrote that Allen became early a hermit.<sup>17</sup> Comedian, humorist, actor, director, screenwriter, writer, Allen does not identify himself at all with the character he invented and played in many of his films, and who he defines «a born coward, obsessed by women, a good heart but useless, clumsy and nervous».<sup>18</sup>

The search for a receiver or a partner is always present in his works in more ways than one - Allen creates cues for wonderful jokes or provocation. Two examples:

- The scene in the queue in the foyer of the cinema (*Annie Hall*, 1977) where he skips from the representation of reality to the world of fantasy, winking at the viewer when he argues with the media expert Marshall McLuhan.

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<sup>14</sup> Allen permits himself to attack via heavy irony the world of Hollywood, as for example in *Hollywood Ending* (2002). For a further example see Goretti, G. (1997) *L'incendio della Fenice e le difese collettive*, Rivista di Psicoanalisi, 43: 51-61.

<sup>15</sup> The pseudonym *Woody Allen* was adopted when he was 17 in honor of the jazz clarinet player Woody Herman.

<sup>16</sup> We do not want to focus on this to either glorify or savage his films. We only mention here Kaplan, E.A. (1993), *The Couch Affair: Gender and Race in Hollywood Transference*. Am. Imago, 50: 481-514, where she evaluates the complex judicial affair between Allen and Farrow.

<sup>17</sup> Baxter, J. (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Allen, W. (2005) p. 40.



- More recently in *Whatever Works* (2009), the protagonist's opening monologue («why should I tell you my story?») is needed by him to show that without that opening, in relationships nothing works and everything becomes lifeless. All of his works stimulate and bring into question the relationship between the unconscious and neurosis and their possible outcomes. As we see it, Woody Allen has understood and has been able to represent what matters in neurosis – if it is possible to achieve satisfaction in relationships.

According to this inter-relationship nucleus in his work, with the passing of the last ten years or so, both the public and the critics cannot have missed the enormity of his output<sup>19</sup> in his unique style. He has had a notable autonomy, independence and discretion with his choice of subjects. These are the traits which have accompanied him through the years and have brought him to full maturity as a dramatic author. Allen follows a special creative path: starting from the comedy genre, he crosses with great success the comedy until dealing masterfully with the dramatic genre.

Allen's fame is certainly linked right from the beginning to neurosis, its themes and its stereotypes. In a certain sense, the drama of neurosis is in fact all here: the neurotic subject is not actually a psychological *type*, but all around her everything conspires to persuade her of the typicalness of her conflict. Freud used neurosis as the key element to understand the *psychic apparatus*. Thanks to this, Freud was able to form many, if not all the results of psychoanalysis. Our research has led us to the conviction that in Allen there is a genuine esteem for neurosis, not because he aligns himself with neurotic inconclusiveness but because he recognizes and describes the centrality of the neurotic conflict and the captures which it opens for individual thought. In this, Allen is and remains on Freud's side.

A second point: Allen esteems neurosis and its processes of thought, such as repression [*Verdrangung*], but not the psychopathology in general. Other psychopathological frames, described as different thought processes are in fact judged harshly by Allen. They are:

- Narcissism. One cannot consider Allen a narcissist just because he is aware that he makes wonderful films: it would be like accusing a soccer-player of narcissism because he is able to shoot the goal which takes his team on to winning the world cup.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> He has been the director of 45 films and the screenwriter for over 50 films; in 40 of these he has acted in the role of the protagonist.

<sup>20</sup> See Sirois, F. (2002) *Le fantasme de Schéhérazade*, Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis 10: 73-80. The author takes a different view to ourselves, that the predominant role of humour is to protect narcissism, and in the case of Allen.





- Psychosis, correctly determined as a form of psychopathology difficult to treat. As far as we know, Allen's films do not treat case histories of psychosis.

- Perversions: Allen shows us his decided condemnation toward sexual perversions. He is aware that in a certain sense, dealing with them repulses him. So we only recall his heavy judgement about them. We only refer to the painful scene (in *Crimes and Measdemaneors*) in which the protagonist Cliff does not succeed in consoling his sister. She is weeping while she is telling him about a man whom she has had sex with but that then badly humiliated her.<sup>21</sup>

With regard to neurosis, Allen knew how to put an ample series of symptomatic formations in a scene. These include obsessive symptoms as well as symptoms loaded with different characteristics ripe for somatisation.

Within this collection we recall the special place regarding the stammer, in which the *ego* exists in the stammer «I, I, I...»: it is the symptom invented by, and made famous by Woody Allen since his beginnings in the film world. In real life it would seem that he is not affected by a stammer.<sup>22</sup>

From Freud we have learnt that the symptom is always a construction [*Symptombildung*, symptomatic formation]. In Allen, the applied stammer to the pronunciation of «I» is a particularly happy find, it signifies «I cannot be myself!». Allen uses the representation of a symptom to show synthetically the whole structure of neurosis or rather the state of the unconscious held in check by repression forced by the superego. As we know, the neurotic conflict is a real conflict, a battle like the famous one at Thermopylae, now to be fought inside the individual. As Lear (2005) underlines, «Freud thought there had to be a split in the personality (...). Freud would come to call this the superego. It earns the title *ego* because it exercises the authority and critical judgment of the subject. And it earns the title *superego* because it exercises critical judgment over the ego itself».<sup>23</sup>

From the many quotes by Woody Allen we have chosen to cite only a few which are very interesting and representative of his thought:

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<sup>21</sup> Regarding the theme of pornography he exclaimed «those films....they are so badly lit!», Allen, W. (2005) p.78. Our translation.

<sup>22</sup> The dubber who made Allen famous in Italy was the marvelous Oreste Lionello who died in 2009. Allen wanted to pay a public tribute to him with a video, notwithstanding the fact that the Italian actor had taken a stance against Allen during an interview in 2006. We cite him because Allen has always sought to maintain good relationships with actors and collaborators.

<sup>23</sup> Lear, J.(2005), *Freud*, Routledge, p. 168



I) «Oh, you're in analysis!», «Yes for 15 years», «15 years?», «Yes, I'm going to give it another year then I'm going to Lourdes». Allen has read Freud, how Semi (2004)<sup>24</sup> remembers: «...I do not think our cures can compete with those of Lourdes. There are so many more people who believe in the miracles of the Blessed Virgin than in the existence of the unconscious». (Freud, 1932)<sup>25</sup>

II) Isaac, the protagonist in *Manhattan*, says to his friend: «You shouldn't ask me for advice. When it comes to relationships with women, I'm the winner of the *Sigmund Freud Prize!*». This is the Italian version. In the original version, the joke sounds different: «I am the *August Strindberg Prize* winner!». Strindberg is the famous Swedish writer, whose misogyny is well known. Italian distributors dared change the original version, probably with the agreement of Allen: should there be such a prize, it should go to him. He is convinced that Freud had already prized neurosis, or better the neurotic subject. Freud was not giving merit to failure, on the contrary he was awarding it to the faculty of beginning a new process, a sort of petition of appeal (an expression of J. Lacan), having verified the inconclusiveness of neurosis. Neurosis is well represented and summarized in the phrase '*Play it again, Sam*' which evokes the compulsion to repeat [*Wiederholungszwang*], present in the stammer we have already discussed. The subject actively puts herself in painful and distressing situations and repeats the failures of previous experiences but she does not realize the moment in which she is about to fail again. On one hand she is able to attribute the cause of the latest failure to facts which can be found in the external reality, on the other hand she knows equally well that is not how things are. The neurotic, left to herself cannot resolve matters by helping herself, but meets with a plurality of destinies, not all of which are positive or favorable. There are many examples of this neurotic procedure and they are the *leitmotiv* of many themes of his films.

III) Another much celebrated quote, «God is dead, Marx is dead...and I'm not feeling too good myself today!», is a judgment comparable to a speech on the state of the Nation. All the 20<sup>th</sup> century has not in fact operated just for the wellbeing and happiness of the individual. The criticism of neurosis is assumed by Allen as an actual criticism of civilization which despises the events of the healthy individual. Allen knows very well that it is a well meaning criticism, even if it is almost never on the winning side and accompanied by anxiety. The neurotic *ego* masks with suffering and clumsiness his trouble to placate anxiety. It cannot be taken for granted that trusting

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<sup>24</sup> Semi, A.A. (2004) *Disagio della civiltà e scrittura psicoanalitica*. Rivista di Psicoanalisi, 50S: 73-84. Our translation.

<sup>25</sup> Freud, S. (1933), *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, SE XXII: 152.





civilization and institutions, brings with it real benefits for the individual: it is Freud's sense of severe judgment appearing in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930).

### 3. THE UNCONCIOUS AND SEXUALITY IN WOODY ALLEN'S SCENES

We will briefly present three examples taken from Allen's films with the scope of showing his unique way of representing the unconscious and sexuality. The latter have both been cultivated in the crisis:

- a) The unconscious is disabled to manage the most basic tasks of everyday life.
- b) Sexuality is a tyrannical command which forces the invention of tricks of every kind in the name of a coveted pleasure which is always unstable when it is not in fact reduced to a mirage. Allen's judgment can be recapped like this: there is not within mankind any instinct,<sup>26</sup> not sexual, not of survival, and certainly not destructive or murderous.<sup>27</sup>

*Play It Again, Sam* (1972). The plot: «Sam, a divorced cinema critic and a fan of *Casablanca*, asks advice from the ghost of Humphrey Bogart on how to treat women, but his shyness always gets the better of him. It finishes with him going to bed with the wife of his best friend, but in a final scene at the airport retracing the steps of the cult movie, Sam finally behaves in a way which would make Bogey proud».<sup>28</sup>

The identification with his idol takes him to end the conflict but also to the end of the love affair. For Allen, to play it again and again in *that* inconclusive way (which is neurosis) is evoked by the «*hero-superego* atmosphere» in *Casablanca*. In this way Allen not only makes the hero figure complex (as correctly noted by Gabbard and

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<sup>26</sup> On the distinction between the concepts of *instinct* and *drive* in Freud's work, see Laplanche, J., Butler J. (2007), *Drive and Instinct, Seduction and Otherness*, lecture presented at the 45<sup>th</sup> IPA Congress, Berlin. See also Contri, G.B. (2007), *Il pensiero di natura*, Sic Edizioni; and Genga, G.M., Pediconi, M.G. (eds.) *Pensare con Freud*, Sic Edizioni, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> As for the so called 'sexual instincts', reckonings with the 'sexology' were made quite early on, in *Everything you always wanted to know about sex (but were afraid to ask)*, 1972, when he had been behind the camera for only three years. With this film Allen brought justice to the grotesque sexologist, a figure who was in great expansion in those years.

<sup>28</sup> Mereghetti, P. (2006) *Il Mereghetti. Dizionario dei film*, Baldini Castoldi Dalai. Our translation.



Gabbard),<sup>29</sup> he also uses the title as a true *Witz*, thanks to the double significance of the verb *to play*.

If we think of the seduction scene ‘guided’ or better forced by the hallucination of superego Bogart, the advice from the ghost is not advice at all - it is an intimidation and an injunction. Allen is telling us «just look at what kind of trouble you will end up in if you follow that order: behave like *a man!*». It is a wonderful scene, who would be able to say he had managed to back out from such an order? Anyone could aim for success with a woman *like* he had seen it done or like he had heard it told, and then tell it as his own success maybe at the barber’s or in the gym. Sam the protagonist does not *want* to make a move on her, but *has to* in order to feel that he is a real man, and that he is behaving like a real man.<sup>30</sup>

Sexuality is presented like a constriction that cages the sexes within culturally dominating *love theories*. In this way it works in a background, a so called ‘unconscious’ which here has become the name of a tyrannical superego made ridiculous... it makes a big noise with those who submit without showing any resistance, but to whose advantage?<sup>31</sup>

***Crimes And Misdemeanors* (1989).** The film narrates two «parallel and intertwined stories. The first involves Judah, a wealthy ophthalmologist, frustrated by both his work and emotional life who is persecuted by his lover. The second involves Cliff, a nerdy and unsuccessful documentary film-maker. The developments are crimes and misdeeds (...) designing with refined geometric precision the *existential and moral drift* of humanity hauling itself toward the beginning of 2000». <sup>32</sup> (our emphasis).

There is no such thing as a ‘destructive instinct’: the drive always seeks satisfaction. When a story presents us with the bill in terms of dissatisfaction, delusion, failure, even crimes and misdeeds, we realize that the law that guided those acts was not the drive, but its perversion.

Allen treats crimes and misdeeds according to the need of justice which has its roots in Jewish tradition. In fact, because the assassin is not punished, he updates the Old

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<sup>29</sup> Gabbard, G.O., Gabbard, K. (2000) *Cinema e Psichiatria*, Raffaello Cortina Editore.

<sup>30</sup> Contri, G.B. (2005) *Una logica chiamata uomo* consultable on line at [www.studiumcartello.it](http://www.studiumcartello.it), in which he underlines the possible pathogenic effects of the language.

<sup>31</sup> According to Lear, while the superego is being built, «the angry feelings find their own way to re-emerge: in the form of critical internal voice set over against the ego (...). This voice is sometimes consciously heard; often it works unconsciously». Lear, J. (2005), p. 184.

<sup>32</sup> Mereghetti, P. (2006). Our translation.



Testament drama with the cry of the just toward God. In this way Allen meets another Jewish theme, that is imputability. In the final sequence of the film, Cliff is chosen by the murderer to hear his confession, denied to everyone (his wife, his daughter, rabbi and colleagues). Allen shows him as being unbearably alone, a scene of extreme realism: and to Allen all that remains is... the public. He has nothing left, only us. He seems showing the Jewish stereotype – a man alone who takes on all the sins of humanity. However, it is not a tragedy - the theme of this film is a long way removed from the canon of Greek tragedy. There is no *hubris*, *catharsis* or *nemesis*. Here the winner is the procedural dimension:

- 1) Did the act committed qualify as a crime?
- 2) Is it the investigations of the Court or an 'internal forum' of the same level which judges it according to justice?
- 3) Allen brings in the spectator to take the position of the Judge or the Witness. He hands over to us the same question which the unconscious continues to ask or give voice to. Allen asks himself and us which path of redemption or rehabilitation would allow an individual to return to live satisfactorily, bearing in mind there is the constant and active knowledge of pathology, crime, fault and lies.

It is the same Freudian provocation contained in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937).

**Vicky Cristina Barcelona (2008).** The plot. Two young and pretty American tourists, Vicky and Cristina, meet the painter Juan Antonio in Barcelona, and he immediately flirts with them. They accept his invitation to spend a weekend with him. Vicky is dedicated to her forthcoming marriage and this situation puts her in crisis. Cristina who is very exuberant and uninhibited is looking for adventure. The relationship between Cristina and Juan Antonio is complicated with the arrival of the painter's volatile ex-wife, Maria Elena, who is diffident and easily angered.

In this film Allen revisits in his own way *Elective Affinities* by Goethe, drawing the dangers and the insidiousness of the institution of marriage, which can reveal itself in more than one instance as an obstacle or a cage. Allen is trying to think of a relationship between the sexes over and above the *states of mind* tolerated culturally. He explores the range of possible deviations without agreeing on them. This film too is all out Freudian, it continues to search for satisfaction, but not via deviation. It does not give consent to the commonplace 'I am as satisfied to the same measure that I have transgressed'. It seeks satisfaction with respect to deviation, which finds refuge within



the institution of traditional marriage and is revealed as pretence and limitation. He also seizes on the fixation that such a relationship or tie is the breeding ground for future crimes and misdeeds, an example being the domestic crimes which we often read about in the daily newspapers.

Here one hears so clearly the echo of Freud's reasoning in his '*Civilized*' *Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908). Allen seems to be asking: «over and above the cultural theories practiced even by individual neurotics, is there a chance for success in a relationship between man and woman?». This question is always present through most of his films.

#### 4 WOODY ALLEN ON FREUD'S SIDE

Who is Woody Allen writing for?

His jokes are all from everyday life and sometimes seemingly banal situations. Even so, his films are able to provoke enormous acclaim and equal amounts of disdain.

a) Allen, through his films is looking for possible interlocutors. He continuously questions his spectators and calls them to participate, knowing that they can dissent or be full of acclaim. Allen uses fully and with great esteem the artistic medium of film. It is the same esteem that Freud had - he recognized in artistic and literary works a special privilege to portray, and in such a way practicing the cure for human relationships: a favorable way toward civilizing the man. This is one of the first reasons which bring Freud and Allen together.

b) The second reason refers to Judaism. Allen would not have existed without Freud, and Freud today would not be so well known to the public at large without Allen. It is not mere chance that both recognize they owe a lot to Jewish thought, even if it is with the modesty of an unbeliever. The Judaism of the unbelieving Freud<sup>33</sup> is the same as Allen's Judaism, as we say in Italy, 'they have both eaten at the same table'. They are both men who observe, think, and make public their thought, which is a political thought. In two different periods they were both taken by overlapping themes: civilization, modernity, love, crisis, contradiction, imputability, sexuality, inhibition, satisfaction, individual-masses, religion, open mind and so on.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See: Freud, S. (1926), *Address To The Society Of B'nai B'rith*, SE XX: 273.

<sup>34</sup> For example, at the end of *Picking up the pieces* (2000), the protagonist, who had dismembered his unfaithful, nymphomaniac wife, traced the moral of the story in this way: «So, what does all this mean?



In conclusion, we return to the special attention Allen reserved to neurosis, that is the unconscious and sexuality. He intended to 'save' the neurotic and give her a voice. The joke about the winner of the *Sigmund Freud Prize* confirms this: Freud never prized failure, just like the neurotic does not identify herself with failure. With neurosis the subject can't wait to liberate herself from automatic repetition (compulsion), only that, she cannot do it by herself, she needs a companion, a therapist. In this we find her ability to follow and profess the norm which Freud called the *pleasure principle* [Lustprinzip]. We can read:

- His untiring search for a partner who has the same level of thought, a search holds the same pleasure principle. The spectator, as we have seen is often put in this position, provoked and stimulated.<sup>35</sup>
- The repeated declaration of the limits of identification and suggestion, admirably described by Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). It is well represented by Allen in *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion* (2001).
- The particular emphasis given to the analysis of sexuality (or better still of sex life).

We finish our speech citing a further example from *Manhattan* (1977), in which the key of a man/woman relationship is closed in the scene of the conversation between the protagonists Mary and Isaac sitting on a bench at daybreak in "the big apple". In that moment we discover with relief that the relationship between the sexes is not made worse by incumbent sexual fantasies. How could this happen? Thanks to New York that here, with its beautiful skyline, «is one of the characters in the film».<sup>36</sup> The human universe is evoked by the «city that never sleeps», and it is the human being's adequate dimension. Behind Allen's camera, the small everyday anxieties of the New Yorkers become universal questions, they pertain to everybody without any prejudice. Allen does not stop to take into account of his formative years, actually he permits himself to be satirical about the same Jewish New York. For the two protagonists the metropolis is

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Bobo just did his duty and was tortured. Candy was an adulteress and went to heaven. The town's citizens had just massacred a policeman, and they received miracles. The Mayor had corrupted half the world, and would be re-elected. The Priest had betrayed his vows and gained a wife. I was madly in love and I will be put to death. All this should be fun? I reckon God is sending us a message: "if you can't keep up with the joke, go and get b..., go and get b.... go and get blessed!"» One would have to have a very personal idea about God to give him similar thought. Freud would have said that it was not enough "God of the philosophers". Allen never gives up looking for someone to regard as imputable, so he aspires toward the Ultimate Judgement. About Allen's Jewish humor, see Meghnagi, D. (1991), *Jewish Humour on Psychoanalysis*, *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 18: 223-228.

<sup>35</sup> See Silvio, J.R. (1994) *Woody Allen's "The Purple Rose of Cairo". A Psychoanalytic Allegory*, *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 22: 545-553.

<sup>36</sup> Allen, W. (2005) p. 126.



not a reason for alienation, but a place of human affairs - all affairs and dealings are possible, both good and bad. Allen does not want to be the Rule Police of the politically correct, neither does the apology of transgression. He has his own compass: a relationship, and it is not by chance that it is between a man and a woman. This relationship reveals itself as a source of continuous reorientation and correction - more than a metaphor of the analytical relationship.



The image above is from the famous poster for the film *Manhattan*, it depicts well the destiny Allen has managed to prefigure for a relationship oriented by the drive as law of motion. At the same time it represents the solution he predicted for neurosis. The two characters, sat talking on a bench portray: 1) the *drive* in its vocal form, 2) the man-woman relationship, 3) the 'human' city. As for sex, Allen does not herd them into the bedroom, he does not say to them «you must or must not have sex». It is as if the bench on which they are sitting is his couch.

This is his genius. In fact, with each analysis, we give precedence and privilege to talking, we treat speech as a drive and we create the conditions so that talking is not interrupted or obstructed by anything ('talking cure'). Allen represents on the big screen Freud's latest offering.

The path taken by the Jewish Woody Allen is discreet. He knows that otherwise he would fall within the boundaries of obscenity: when a man and woman are in the bedroom, what do they say and do? Is not this the problem of every neurotic and every moralist too? But, why should we be there to listen or to watch? It is here that Allen, like Freud and like every analyst, does not express rushed judgments. He wants to put us too, in the same position, so that we can consider the whole man/woman relationship





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without running the risk of us becoming *voyeurs*. Allen also invites us to keep up his same pace. That is why, basically, he is right when he makes his character say that he merits the *Sigmund Freud Prize*.



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