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Book Section:

Ellis, J. (2023) “Don't look back”: The relationship between Richard Linklater's Before... trilogy and Annie Hall. In: Ellis, J. and Sanchez-Arce, A.M., (eds.) Remembering Annie Hall. Bloomsbury , London , pp. 191-207. ISBN 9781501358470

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‘Don’t look back’: The relationship between Richard Linklater’s *Before ...* trilogy and *Annie Hall*

Jonathan Ellis

The Woody Allen Genome

Before Sunrise (1995) was not the first romantic comedy I saw at the cinema, but it was undoubtedly one of the most influential films on my development as both a critic and a person, alongside, you will not be surprised to hear given the focus of this book, *Annie Hall* (1977). I went to see the film with my best friend at the time, a fellow English literature undergraduate called Rob whose favourite film was *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), a film, like *Before Sunrise*, that is clearly inspired by *Annie Hall*. My relationship with Rob was similar to Alvy’s friendship with another Rob in *Annie Hall*. We talked a lot of rubbish about women, none of it based on experience. The year after *Before Sunrise*’s release, I bought a EuroRail ticket to Italy, ostensibly to visit a university friend in Bergamo, but with the not so secret desire to meet an Italian Celine somewhere between Venice and Rome. Rob flew to a summer camp in the United States looking for Sally. Neither of us were in luck. At the time of *Before Sunrise*’s release in 1995, Celine and Jesse felt a lot older than I did, even though the actors playing them, Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke, were only six and five years older than me. As the second and third films in the trilogy were released, *Before Sunset* in 2004 and *Before Midnight* in 2013, the age gap did not feel like much of a gap anymore. In an essay on the trilogy, Dennis Lim reflects on the very personal relationship people have with these films:

Especially for those who have aged with them, these films ask to be read reflexively, which is to say personally. Watching them entails a very particular

form of viewer participation: as Celine and Jesse openly wrestle with the transience of love, the deceptions of time, and the specter of mortality, we are obliged to do so as well, in ways that relate to our own lives.

(10)

The trilogy also asks to be read in dialogue with other romantic comedies, not just those directed by Woody Allen of course, though for the purposes of this chapter I am going to limit myself to the ways in which Richard Linklater's work flirts with and at the same time distances itself from the type of cinema popularized by Allen in what I am going to characterize as his middle-not-so-funny-period, roughly the long decade between the release of *Annie Hall* in 1977 and the release of *Husbands and Wives* in 1992.

One of the curious effects of teaching *Annie Hall* for more than a decade has been the realization that most of my students have already seen numerous versions of the film even if they have never watched *Annie Hall* itself. By this, I mean they have probably all seen at least one film or TV series influenced by *Annie Hall*. In 2014 Manohla Dargis and A. O. Scott published 'Woody's Other Family Tree' in *The New York Times*, a visual map of what they described as 'the Allen genome'. In addition to Allen's comic, intellectual and literary influences, they also list some of his cinematic heirs, including writer-directors like Nanni Moretti, Wes Anderson, Noah Baumbach, Greta Gerwig and Lena Dunham. Dargis and Scott's family tree is not meant to be definitive. Re-watching *Gilmore Girls* recently, I was struck by the constant stream of references to Allen's life and work and simultaneously by the thought that this would no longer be possible if the series were airing now. Lauren Graham's Lorelei Gilmore has many cinematic antecedents, particularly in Classic Hollywood, one of Lorelei's favorite film genres. At the same time, her character also acts and sounds a lot like the type of middle-aged commitment-phobe played by Allen in numerous films over the past fifty years. Confident about her taste in books, films and food but jittery about love and marriage, Lorelei behaves a lot like Alvy. *Talking as Fast as I Can* (2016), the title of her first collection of essays, applies equally to Allen's delivery of lines as her own. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon reflects on the frequency with which we read or see a so-called 'original' text 'after we have experienced the adaptation, thereby challenging the authority of any notion of priority. Multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically' (xiii). Helpfully for my consideration of how influence might be present in terms of acting styles and verbal delivery, she also discusses how character can be 'transported from one text to another' (11), an example of which would be Graham's presumably

unconscious channeling of 'the Woody Allen character' in *Gilmore Girls*. Influence of this kind is present even when filmmakers are pushing against it, as I think is the case with Linklater, who in interviews hardly ever mentions Allen, a squeamishness not shared by one of *Before Sunrise's* co-stars and co-writers Julie Delpy, who has repeatedly described herself as a Woody Allen fan and made at least two films – *2 Days in Paris* (2007) and *2 Days in New York* (2012) – that are as close to fan fiction of Allen's back catalogue as cinema gets without the element that makes Allen's influence so difficult to acknowledge nowadays, never mind address, Allen himself.

Passing through

I want to think now about the specific influence of *Annie Hall* on the *Before* trilogy, focusing initially on the character of Celine played by Julie Delpy and her relationship to Annie Hall played by Diane Keaton. In the first film, Celine is dressed a lot like Annie, though she is less hesitant than Annie is about sharing her feelings and opinions. It is not the case, I want to make clear, that Annie does not feel or think as much as Celine, more the fact that Annie begins the relationship intimidated by Alvy, who is happy to over-share his opinions when almost anybody else is in earshot. Alvy and Annie meet for the first time playing tennis before a hilariously awkward drink on Annie's terrace during which the audience learn what the characters actually think of each other via Allen's subtitles that reveal their unspoken feelings. The cinematic joke has a serious edge: Allen does not appear to have much faith in words as an effective means of communication. Celine and Jesse meet in a similar social occasion on a train, but with the significant difference that both are reading a book: Celine shares the cover of Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, and Jesse shares Klaus Kinski's *All I need Is Love*. From the outset, both characters are introduced to the audience and to each other as literate, perhaps even over-earnest readers, an impression confirmed when we spend more time in their company. Annie, we suspect, reads just as much as Alvy, but she does not have the confidence or discourse to compete with him when the conversation turns to literature. He famously dismisses her reading of Sylvia Plath and continually makes fun of her mannerisms and phrasing. For somebody who believes he is in love, Alvy has a funny way of showing it. Does he love Annie as she is when he meets her or the idea of a mature Annie sometime in the future once she has been transformed by

his teaching? As many Allen critics have observed, there is a Pygmalion element to Alvy's 'romantic' behaviour. For Foster Hirsch: 'Their relationship is based on the premise that Annie is an idiot; and once she begins to question that, once she begins, however tentatively, to strike out on her own, cultivating friends and developing interests, the affair is doomed' (86). Christopher J. Knight is just as critical of Alvy's intentions, but more optimistic about Annie's escape, summarizing the film hopefully as 'Galatea's triumph over Pygmalion'.

Celine and Jesse are artists *and* muses. It is difficult to make the case that one dominates over the other. They exchange roles like exchanging hats. *Before Sunrise* is not immune to gender politics or to men talking over women. Celine's pent-up frustration at Jesse for turning her into his muse explodes in the third film in the trilogy, but is present as a warning note in the first film too. She gently makes fun of his desire to kiss her on the Ferris wheel, and is suspicious of romantic gestures like sleeping together on their first night, worried, with good reason as it turns out, that he might transform their time together into a romantic story for other people. In terms of the film's dialogue, they have an equal number of lines. They also actively enjoy listening to each other. Screenshots from the film create the mistaken impression that they fall in love with each other via looking. Consider the images in context and it is clear they primarily fall in love through listening. Alvy and Annie constantly talk at cross-purposes. When Annie, reflecting on her first session in analysis, means to say, 'Will it change my life?' but instead says, 'Will it change my wife?', we see how language creates disharmony rather than intimacy in their relationship. Do they ever really hear what the other is saying?

According to Rob Stone, 'walking and talking is what characters in the cinema of Richard Linklater do best' (105). As Stone later points out, the subject of death utterly dominates Celine and Jesse's conversation, more than love, certainly more than sex. So far, so Allenesque. Yet once again there are differences as David Denby picks up in his 2013 review of *Before Midnight*: 'Woody Allen, repeating Godard's audacity in *Breathless*, created walking-and-talking sequences in *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*, but not with the kind of sustained takes that Linklater pulls off, some of which go on for five or six minutes, the camera steadily receding before the actors as they stroll through city streets and gardens.' The walking-and-talking sequences in Linklater's films are not just longer than Allen's. They appear a crucial element of being alive, connecting couples with each other and with the wider networks of friends and strangers of which they are a part. In *Before Sunrise*, for example, almost every conversation involves somebody

other than Celine or Jesse: two actors on a bridge, a palm reader, a street poet, a bartender. The audience arguably resents these interruptions more than the main characters who incorporate these other lives into their developing love story. A cameo, in other words, is more than a cameo in Linklater's world. It is an important reminder of our interconnectedness to and with each other, a reminder, too, that every person is unique. In Allen's films, there are one or two unique people at best; everybody else are making up the numbers. Intelligence rather than kindness is equated with specialness. Stupid people may be happier than Alvy, but he is not particularly interested to know why. Celine and Jesse's story, for all its intimacy, is always in dialogue with other people.

Other people do not need to be physically present in Linklater's films to be important. Celine's relationship with her grandmother, who dies between the first and second film and is the reason Celine misses their planned reunion in Vienna six months after the first meeting, is as important to her as Annie's relationship with her grandmother (the famous Grammy Hall). In fact, grandmothers are important to both characters at different points in the trilogy. One of Jesse's first childhood memories is connected to his great-grandmother. His memory of seeing her ghost is one of one of the most affecting stories in *Before Sunrise* and crucial to Celine trusting him. In the third film, Jesse learns of his grandmother's death and wonders whether to attend the funeral. Linklater even dedicated the first film to his grandparents. Allen is not interested in older people in this way, even as he has become old himself. His films are mainly about mid-life crises even if they involve younger or indeed older actors.

As Celine and Jesse age throughout the trilogy, their life experiences become closer to Alvy and Annie's. This does not become apparent until the second and third films in the trilogy where we learn that Celine, like Annie, is a singer, and that Jesse, like Alvy, is a writer. If Alvy falls in love with Annie when he hears her sing, perhaps Jesse does the same in *Before Sunset*. 'I fucked up my entire life because of the way you sing', he says, only half-jokingly, in *Before Midnight*. Might Alvy be thinking the same? Rob Stone describes *Before Sunrise* as a 'musical without singing or dancing' (120). The 'music' in this film, he states, 'is the dialogue' (120). *Annie Hall* fit this description too. A duet of sorts between two singers: Alvy by name and Annie by vocation. *Annie Hall* is not a conventional musical any more than *Before Sunset* is (in fact, it probably contains less incidental music than any other Woody Allen film), but both films share a conception of music as significant sound that we might fall in love to and also with, conversation and silence being forms of music too.

Before Sunset, like *Annie Hall*, begins with a break-up or at least what sounds like a serious argument: a couple arguing in German that Linklater does not subtitle. Celine and Jesse break the ice by discussing the failure or perhaps even the inability of old people to listen to each other. Do young people love differently than the old?, the film asks. Alternatively, do all relationships turn sour, however and wherever they begin? In Allen's film, we know Alvy and Annie have broken up. Watching the film we assess Alvy's memories to see what happened and what went wrong. In Alvy's words: 'I keep sifting the pieces of the relationship through my mind and examining my life and trying to figure out where did the screw up come' (4). In Linklater's trilogy, we watch memories as they are happening: time, as it were, before it has the chance to become memorable. For me, this is the main difference between a film like *Annie Hall* and a film like *Before Sunrise* and more generally between the philosophy of a director like Allen and the philosophy of a director like Linklater. Alvy mourns Annie, even as he lets her go. It is not that he is incapable of pleasure, as the original title of the film (*Anhedronia*) has it, but that he is incapable of enjoying new pleasure in the present, knowing, even as he is experiencing it, that such pleasure is temporary. His remembering is thus always a form of anticipatory mourning, even if the memories themselves are positive. Linklater, it seems to me, has far more in common with what Yiyun Li calls an artist's responsibility *not* 'to manipulate the memories of my characters' (65). 'Memory', Li writes, 'is a collection of moments rearranged – recollected – to create a narrative. Moments, defined by a tangible space, are like sculptures and paintings. But moments are always individual notes of music; none will hold still forever. In the instant they are swept up in time – in that shift from space to time, memory is melodrama' (58). Allen has fun rearranging moments as memory; Linklater attempts to intervene as little as possible.

The lobster scene in *Annie Hall* is a good example of this. For me it is the most magical scene in the entire film because it seems as if Allen and Keaton are not really acting, as if we have caught them goofing around before the camera rolls, messing up lines and walking into the camera. It has the unscripted bumpiness and business of experience rather than the rehearsed sheen of memory. It is, of course, a moment that Alvy, and by extension Allen, keeps recollecting and reshooting. After breaking up with Annie the first time, Alvy returns to the house with a new girlfriend. The dialogue and props are the same, including the lobsters, but without Annie there to laugh at Alvy's jokes the scene falls flat. Alvy is not the only person to do this. Annie does so too, photographing the scene as it is happening and producing black-and-white still images of the scene

to decorate her apartment. The lobster scene generates at least several lobster scenes, as single moments always become multiple on being remembered, whether fondly or sadly. Does the second lobster scene lessen the emotional effect of the first scene or make it more perfect?

Linklater's take on the lobster scene occurs in the Allen-esque space of a record store, specifically in a listening booth, where Celine and Jesse listen to a folk song by Kath Bloom, glancing at each other as they do, each looking away when they sense the other's gaze on them (Figure 10.1). Robin Wood, in his essay 'Rethinking Romantic Love,' admitted to being caught by and caught out by the scene, an experience I can relate to:

Even on first viewing I told myself that I would 'one day' analyze in detail the scene in the listening booth of the record store, in which nothing happens except that Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy either do or don't look at each other, their eyes never quite meeting. After a dozen viewings I abandoned the project. ... With no camera movement, no editing, no movement within the frame except for the slight movement of the actors' heads, nothing on the soundtrack but a not-very-distinguished song that may vaguely suggest what is going on in the characters' minds and seems sometimes to motivate their 'looks' ... it completely resists analysis, defies verbal description. All one can say is that it is the cinema's most perfect depiction, in just over one minute of 'real' time, at once concrete and intangible, of two people beginning to realize that they are falling in love.

(330–1)



Figure 10.1 Celine and Jesse falling in love in a record store: *Before Sunrise* (1995).

'The cinema's most perfect depiction [...] of two people beginning to realise they are falling in love.' Isn't this the lobster scene as well, its magic emphasized by the realism of Alvy's attempt to recreate it?

If it is tempting for Celine and Jesse to revisit this moment, it must be equally tempting for the filmmaker. Jesse presumably remembers listening to Bloom's song with Celine in *This Time*, his novel about their affair. It is the book that he reads from in Shakespeare & Co when they meet again in Paris nine years after their initial night in Vienna. But our cinematic encounter, *our* moment, is not spoiled by Linklater revisiting the places again, or at least not revisiting them with Celine and Jesse present. At the end of the first film, he collects images of nearly all of the places that they have passed through during their time together in Vienna. But he shows them as they are *now* not as they were *then*, in the cold light of dawn without the people that made them special. This idea of 'passing through' is picked up in the first film – both Celine and Jesse are literally 'passing through' Vienna on their way home – and in the latest film, *Before Midnight*, when a widow uses the phrase about the death of her husband: 'We're just passing through.' Allen gives us a similar montage of places towards the conclusion of *Annie Hall* with the significant difference that his slide show is a repetition of earlier scenes with Alvy and Annie together again. Allen, like Alvy, cannot help turning moments into memories, something live into something almost live. Linklater keeps the film running, life turning. One looks back, the other at least sideways.

The sideways glance is everywhere in Linklater's work (Figure 10.2). In part, this is a formal necessity. If you want to keep two characters in the same shot,



Figure 10.2 Looking sideways: *Before Midnight* (2013).

particularly if they are walking towards the camera, the main way the actor can acknowledge what the other person is doing or saying is by turning their face. Such gestures are noticed by the camera – indeed, the camera is there to record them – but not always or even very often by the other person. It is a gestural rather than a spoken aside to the cinema audience. Two of my favourite gestural but crucially unseen and thus non-reciprocated asides happen in the first and second films in the trilogy. In *Before Sunrise*, on their first tram ride together, Jesse reaches out to touch Celine's hair but withdraws his hand before she can notice. Celine repeats the gesture in a taxi-ride in *Before Sunset*, almost but not quite touching Jesse without him ever realizing. The filmmakers, by this point Delpy and Hawke are credited as joint scriptwriters, are conscious of returning to the past and repeating a moment that has already happened. But, unlike in *Annie Hall*, nostalgia is resisted. Jesse is conscious of his desire to touch Celine on the tram, but Celine is not. The same happens in reverse nine years later in Paris. Audience members of the film, not the characters in the film, notice the repetition of gestures. The repetition of moments is moving because we notice them. Without us there, the meaning of each gesture and its eventual success is lost. Celine is precociously aware of the importance of meaning being generated by more than one or two people, even when thinking about a romantic couple. 'If there's any God', she suggests, 'he wouldn't be in any one of us, not you, not me, but just this space in between'. In cinematic terms, *mise en scène* is 'this space in between' where extra-diegetic spectators (you and I) get the chance both to eavesdrop on two people falling in love and notice the non-verbal gestures that at different times both Celine and Jesse miss by looking the wrong way. Eugenie Brinkema calls this 'the spacing that is the measure of love' (328). In Linklater's trilogy, love occurs between characters and also in our love for the film.

I do not find this spacing in Allen's films, or if there is space for us to interpret gestures, it is always from the male character's perspective. There is hardly a single scene in which Annie does or says something that Alvy does not notice. For this reason, we are always more involved in what Alvy feels about Annie than what Annie feels about Alvy. We get one side of the story, not both.

Don't look back

Let me pursue this idea about looking a little further in relation to a scene from Linklater's 2014 film, *Boyhood*. It is probably the most dramatic scene in the entire film. The mother, played by Patricia Arquette, arrives to rescue

her children, Mason and Samantha, from their alcoholic stepfather's house. Mason and Samantha both look back at crucial moments in the scene: Mason at his stepbrother and stepsister, presumably for the last time, Samantha at the house itself and all it has represented. Most films would allow its characters a longer look back. In Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), Malick allows the characters a long farewell when they leave their childhood home behind. Peculiarly, the house returns their gaze, as if it, too, were a character in the film. Olivia (Mason and Samantha's mother) prevents any kind of formal goodbye. 'Don't look back,' she tells them, breaking her own advice to look back one last time herself before returning to focus on the road ahead. This is clearly a significant moment in the characters' lives – for Olivia, it represents a second marriage breaking down, for her children, yet another uprooting – but what interests me here is its significance for cinema history and its break with making moments like this one melodramatic. Linklater places his faith in a relatively new form of storytelling for fictional cinema, what I am going to call, borrowing the title of Sarah Manguso's book, ongoingness.

Manguso explores this idea in a non-fiction book called *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary* (2015), in which she reflects on different forms of record keeping through her own decision to keep a diary for the last twenty-five years. Interestingly, Manguso does not include a single diary entry in the book. 'I decided,' she writes, 'that the only way to represent the diary in this book would be either to include the entire thing untouched – which would have required an additional eight thousand pages – or to include none of it' (94). The book is less about her individual diary, then, and more about what we choose to remember and whether forgetting might be a more healthy way to live. Manguso is particularly compelling on our attraction to the idea of life as a series of vivid moments. 'I tried to record each moment,' she admits, 'but time isn't made of moments; it contains moments. There is more to it than moments' (5). 'I started keeping a diary in earnest,' she explains, 'when I started finding myself in moments that were too full' (11):

At an art opening in the late eighties, I held a plastic cup of wine and stood in front of a painting next to a friend I loved. It was all too much. I stayed partly contained in the moment until that night, when I wrote down everything that had happened and everything I remembered thinking while it had happened and everything I thought while recording what I remembered had happened.

(11)

The problem is not 'today', she suggests, 'it's tomorrow. I'd be able to recover from today if it weren't for tomorrow. There should be extra days, buffer days, between the real days' (11). Manguso's solution to this dilemma is to not to abandon diary writing but to abandon the notion that we can contain time in writing. 'Perhaps all anxiety might derive from a fixation on moments', she concludes, 'an inability to accept life as ongoing' (79).

Ongoingness allows her to 'contemplate time as that very time, that very subject of one's contemplation, disappears' (72). It is a form of radical forgetting. This is not necessarily sad, at least in Manguso's version of events:

The best thing about time passing is the privilege of running out of it, of watching the wave of mortality break over me and everyone I know. No more time, no more potential. The privilege of ruling things out. Finishing. Knowing I'm finished. And knowing time will go on without me. [...] I came to understand that the forgotten moments are the price of continued participation in life, a force indifferent to time.

(83, 85)

There is much to absorb here, not least Manguso's belief that remembering may not necessarily be good for us, that we need to structure our lives not in relation to what has come before or what might happen tomorrow but what is happening now, here. How, she asks, do we 'inhabit time' in a way that is not 'a character flaw'? 'Remember the lessons of the past. Imagine the possibilities of the future. And attend to the present, the only part of time that doesn't require the use of memory' (27). *Boyhood* was twelve years in the making. Linklater cast four actors in the role of a family, gathering them together each year to continue the story. This is, of course, not the first time he had observed the effect of a relationship over time. *Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight* were filmed over the course of eighteen years with a nine-year gap between each film. If Linklater continues the story, we are overdue a fourth film. There are significant ellipses both in each film and between films. In *Before Sunrise*, Linklater chooses not to include the sex scene the film has been building towards up to this point. Between *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset*, Jesse becomes a father and finishes his first novel. Between *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight*, Celine and Jesse have finally become a couple and had children. As Manguso advises, the characters in these films certainly 'attend to the present'. Dead time is not edited out, nor are awkward silences. Time, in other words, 'isn't made of moments; it contains moments'.

This is even clearer in *Boyhood*. As Linklater explains, he wanted the film to seem 'like the memory of a young life, just rolling through time':

So a movie of memories, but which ones exactly? With such a vast twelve-year canvas spread out before us, the question was what exactly to fill it with. There could be all the big events and 'firsts' of a maturing person, but why were so many of those moments for me now residing in some dusty file with a label reading 'yes, I remember, but kind of boring and not very original.' And why were so many random, seemingly inconsequential moments having such extended long runs in my memory? Why could I still feel and see certain things from several decades before as if they were ever-present? The looks on people's faces, the conversations, the exact lighting, tone, and energy of a day.

(8)

It is difficult to explain the cumulative emotional effect of the film on the viewer. Isn't it just a relatively simple presentation of moments, one after the other? As Linklater points out, none of them is particularly memorable in the traditional sense. There are few if any 'big events' or 'firsts'. Indeed, for the majority of the film they are the type of moments we probably want to forget or are surprised that we remember. As Manguso admits with a degree of frustration: 'I can't seem to forget what I want to forget' (32). This is also the case with Mason, whose most vivid memories are not necessarily those moments in which he or his family are close or particularly happy. Indeed, many of the scenes we remember most depict arguments and breakdowns of one variety or another: Mason and his sister Samantha quarrelling in the car, the mother's rescue of her two children from the house of their drunken stepfather already mentioned, Mason's break up with his high school sweetheart. If Mason is haunted by any of these experiences, he does not let on. He appears, like Manguso, 'to accept life as ongoing'.

One of my favourite sequences in the film occurs approximately halfway in when, after yet another house move, Mason is befriended by a girl from school. The sequence is in three parts: Mason being briefly roughed up in the toilet, his long walk home with a girl he does not appear to know very well, and his arrival at the end of his mother's psychology class where she has been discussing John Bowlby's attachment theory. In nearly every coming-of-age film I can think of the first scene would have some kind of echo or follow-up later on in the story, but not here. The two boys have no more than a small walk-on role. It is not that Mason shrugs off the bullies completely. He does remember the moment, after all. But in giving it so little screen time, Linklater suggests that it is just another part of the day, another part of growing up. The scene that follows is mostly a

long single take of Mason and Jill walking and talking as they move down an alleyway, past various houses and parking lots. Mason is hoping to catch a lift home with his mother, and Jill is simply hanging out. They discuss books, his impressions of the city and whether he is going to a party later. Nothing really happens. The two teenagers are passing the time as teenagers everywhere pass the time. References to reading *Twilight* give it a specific timeframe, but this is not about late Noughties America so much as it about the beauty and strangeness of daily living, what Linklater calls the 'energy of a day', what Manguso calls 'ongoingness'.

I have seen *Boyhood* many times now, first at the cinema, several times at home. My love for it has if anything deepened. Perhaps *Boyhood* caught me at a vulnerable time when my own son was about to start primary school? Perhaps being a similar age to Ethan Hawke was like watching myself grow up? Peter Bradshaw, in his review for *The Guardian*, admitted to loving the film 'more than I can say. And there is hardly a better, or nobler thing a film can do than inspire love'. 'In some ways', he goes on,

the movie invites us to see Mason from an estranged-dad's-eye-view, alert to sudden little changes and leaps in height. As an unestranged dad myself, I scrutinised Coltrane at the beginning of each scene, fascinated and weirdly anxious to see if and how he'd grown. But the point is that all parents are estranged, continually and suddenly waking up to how their children are growing, progressively assuming the separateness and privacy of adulthood.

If the film is, as Bradshaw observes, partly imagined from the father's mainly absent perspective, it is just as astute on the mother's mainly present perspective. The father's absence allows him to see Mason grow up, but the mother's closeness makes this almost impossible. This is why in one of the film's most shattering scenes, she finds his departure for college so emotionally shattering. 'I knew this day was coming', she says. 'I just didn't know you were going to be so fucking happy to be leaving.' (The film is not just about boyhood either. The story of Mason's sister, Samantha, played by Linklater's own daughter, Lorelei Linklater, is just as bewitching.)

Ongoingness is more than simply a formal decision to avoid flashback, though this is its most obvious feature. It is more than a love of long takes and tracking shots, though this, too, is something we note in all of Linklater's films. Rather it places the viewer with Celine and Jesse, or perhaps more accurately somewhere between them, in the privileged position of seeing two people fall in love or

attempt to remain in love, as in the listening booth in the first film, or in the car journey from the airport in the third film. 'I like the idea,' Linklater admitted, of being 'able to look at either Jesse or Celine – of not letting film syntax lead you toward either one of them' (qtd in Horne 2013, 33). Allen's camera leads and points; Linklater's lingers.

'Don't look back.' Three words of advice that most of us fail to follow. Does a day or even an hour pass by when we are not looking back? At what we looked like last year. At what we thought or felt this morning. At who we loved when we were teenagers. At who loved us when we were children. To look back is to remember but also to mourn, for others and for our own younger selves or for the selves we might have been. These activities are part of being human, but perhaps there are implicit time limits on mourning that do not apply to remembering? John Donne's seventeenth-century poem 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning' still feels relevant on this subject. Donne implores the reader to 'make no noise/ No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move' (120). Emotion, or rather the signs of emotion, the 'tear-floods' and 'sigh-tempests,' are strictly banned, not to be seen or heard in polite company. If this sounds like ancient history, the words of a seventeenth-century poet that have no place in our share-all-and-share-immediately twenty-first-century culture, we do not have to look very far to find contemporary reiterations of the same idea. That it is basically fine to mourn as long as you do not do it for too long or around too many people.

Time travel

Films, like people, are often anxious to return to the land of the living, to make new memories as opposed to reworking old ones. One of my favourite conclusions to any film is the ending of *Annie Hall* where after watching Alvy and Annie say goodbye from outside the café, we then go inside to watch them part for good. Allen keeps the intimate details of what we presume to be one of their last conversations private. We can only imagine what they are saying. He thus keeps nostalgia and sentimentality, particularly about romantic love, at arm's length. Note not just the glass screen that prevents us from listening in but also the stark window frame that separates Alvy on the left of the screen from Annie on the right. It is a two-shot that stresses division. Alvy has overcome his phobia of both flying and Los Angeles to attempt to win Annie back. When this

fails, he rewrites the conclusion to his first play to perfect in art what he cannot get right in life. The film we are watching is another piece of art that Allen as opposed to Alvy perfects, but he perfects it by showing most Hollywood endings to be fake. Alvy and Annie are more than just friends, but they are no more than friends. The former couple remains uncoupled.

It would be easy to end here, contemplating Alvy and Annie in relative close-up, but Allen instead finishes on a New York street. In doing so, he places the spectator back in the café as if occupying the table Alvy and Annie have just vacated, too late to hear what they had to say. We are on the wrong side of the glass window, prevented from listening in. Instead, we watch Alvy and Annie go their separate ways once the flashing signal gives them permission to go. Don't walk. Walk. The decision to end on the street, on people carrying on their lives indifferent to Alvy and Annie's existence, is for me an important questioning of nostalgia, of dwelling on memories that are simply that, memories. Allen does not prevent us looking back on the film we have just seen – the flashback structure of the film is to some extent the very essence of nostalgia – but he does prevent us remaining there. It is odd to be sitting at Alvy and Annie's table at the end of the film. Revisiting old haunts from movies is what we tend to do after the film has finished, not in the very last frames of the film. The ending encapsulates the feeling we often have at the end of a film we have loved. Sitting in the dark, looking up at the screen, we do not want to leave yet. And so we sit through the credits until the film definitively concludes. Allen includes this dead time before the credits roll. It gives us time to adjust to time continuing, to the present beginning again.

Dead time is how most of us experience time. We have relatively few moments that we might describe as 'magical'. *Annie Hall* collects them, remembers them, but struggles to let them go. The ending of the film is the only time that Allen lets time pass without interrupting it, whether by breaking the fourth wall, splitting the screen in two, or turning the relationship between Alvy and Annie into a cartoon. Every character in *Annie Hall* exists in relation to Alvy. Even strangers on the street have an opinion on his affairs. This is partly true of Linklater's first film in the trilogy where nearly everybody Celine and Jesse meet is in a mood to help them, from the palm reader in the café to the barman who gifts them a free bottle of wine. Over the course of the trilogy, however, Linklater increasingly resists this temptation to see one's own life as any more representative or significant than anybody else's. As Celine and Jesse mature, Linklater's understanding of the genre of romantic comedy matures too.

‘Think of this as time travel’, Jesse says to Celine in the first film, a motif that is picked up on in all three films. Jesse, like Alvy, also has a problem distinguishing between ‘fantasy and reality’. In the original script, his attempt to kiss Celine on the Ferris wheel borrows Alvy’s similar argument in *Annie Hall*: ‘I propose we jump in time to that moment when we would do naturally do that, probably a couple of hours from now after a certain amount of awkwardness and stuff’. Celine, unlike Annie, resists this line: ‘How come every time you want me to do something, you start talking about time.’ It is a conversation they revisit in *Before Midnight* where Jesse apologizes to Celine by pretending to write her a letter from the future. In *Annie Hall*, characters *do* time travel, from Alvy’s childhood classroom to Annie’s high school dates. In the *Before* trilogy, time travel can only be imagined and talked about. The past cannot be revisited.

Both experiences of time are real, of course. We move, like Alvy, forwards and backwards continually in memory, but we are also stuck, like Celine and Jesse, in the bodies and lives we exist in from day to day.

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