**“Not a Morose Type”: The Windsor Font and *Annie Hall***

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Alongside the thick-rimmed spectacles, jazz soundtracks, and long takes packed with caustic dialogue, the Windsor typeface used in Woody Allen’s title sequences is one of the most recognisable ingredients of his signature style. As type designer Tobias Frere-Jones put it recently, “If you take Windsor and set it centered, just a couple of words, white on black, you will not be able to think of anything else but a Woody Allen movie” (Spooner 2019, 20). Before any of the star-studded casts or the work of Allen’s extraordinary cinematographers grace the screen, viewers are greeted by Windsor’s familiar blend of classic and whimsical features, highlighted by simple white-on-black title cards, and setting the scene for Allen’s own blend of arthouse and commercial aspirations. This chapter will focus on Allen’s first use of Windsor for the opening titles of *Annie Hall* (1977), examining its typographical provenance and its place in the history of film title design. Attending to the material features and history of the typeface – first produced in 1905 by the industrial type foundry Stephenson Blake – helps us understand the role Windsor plays in the negotiation of art and commerce throughout Allen’s oeuvre, I argue, in so far as those opening credits frame our expectations for the films that follow. But before diving into Windsor’s history and the wild variety of 1970s title design, I want to revisit one of *Annie Hall*’s best-known scenes and the easily overlooked – indeed, nearly imperceptible – reference to typography at its centre.

**The McLuhan Fallacy**

For many viewers, Marshall McLuhan might be better known for his *Annie Hall* cameo than his once-influential theories of media. As Paddy Scannell writes, “By the end of the 1960s, McLuhan was a spent rocket and in the next decade he fell sharply out of fashion, overtaken by new marxisms and structuralisms which took a disparaging view of him as the ideologue of corporate, capitalist America” (2007, 136). McLuhan’s waning authority comes through in accounts of *Annie Hall*’s production, where Allen says he would have preferred someone else for the famous scene. “I tried many people,” he tells Stig Björkman, “and McLuhan finally agreed to do it. He was not my first choice. My first choice was Fellini, because it would be more natural if people were standing in line talking about movie, that they would be talking about Fellini” (2004, 79). This is clear from the dialogue, where the unnamed academic behind Annie and Alvy begins his rant with the assertion that a recent Fellini film was “not one of his best” and “lacks a cohesive structure.” It is only after extensive discussion of Fellini as a “technical” and “indulgent” filmmaker, and a shift in focus to Annie and Alvy’s conversation about therapy and sexual problems, that the man revives his diatribe with a mention of McLuhan. Briefly, McLuhan’s views on television are shoehorned in before Alvy addresses the camera, prompting a debate resolved by McLuhan’s entrance. The humour still works regardless of McLuhan’s reputation, of course. We’ve all encountered such boors, and McLuhan fulfils the fantasy of having an expert to back us up. But the dialogue complicates the joke, distracting us from the specific error in the man’s pontification, and from considering implications for the film’s aesthetic positions.

Russell Horton, the actor playing the obnoxious man, admits his dialogue “is essentially all about Fellini, and there’s only one last thing about McLuhan because they suddenly had him” (Breznican 2017). That “one last thing” follows the character’s mention of “the influence of television,” explaining to his unfortunate date how “Marshall McLuhan deals with it in terms of it being a high intensity, you understand, a hot medium.” This is the moment when Allen’s Alvy interrupts – “What I wouldn’t give for a large sock of horse manure!” – complaining directly to camera until the man notices. Horton and others have pointed out the nonsensicality of McLuhan’s retort, with various opinions on whether the line “You mean my whole fallacy is wrong!” is knowing satire of academic jargon, and whether it should be credited to Allen or McLuhan.[[1]](#endnote-1) However, no one seems to notice that it also remains unclear whether the man in the queue has actually made a mistake at the point he is interrupted.

The distinction between “hot” and “cool” media receives its most extensive treatment in McLuhan’s *Understanding Media*. The book, first published in 1964, was enormously influential in the emerging field of media studies, and likely enough to have appeared on the syllabus for “a class at Columbia called TV, Media, and Culture” taught by a fictional academic in the mid-70s. In it, McLuhan defines his binary categories by the relative involvement of the audience. Film is a “hot” medium, he suggests, because it offers a large amount of sensory information, compared to a “cool one like TV,” which leaves more to be “filled in or completed by the audience” (1964, 24-25). In the movie line man’s defence, the audible dialogue leaves it ambiguous whether he has gotten this backwards. (In either case, the error is certainly not egregious enough to suggest he knows “nothing” of McLuhan’s work, as McLuhan quips.) But even if we understand “it” in the line “McLuhan deals with it in terms of it being a high intensity, you understand, a hot medium” to refer to film, rather than television, the almost inaudible speech that continues under Alvy’s complaint suggests a definite point of confusion. The man appears to say “...as opposed to, uh, as opposed to print, which is essentially linear, or...,” before he trails off, noticing and addressing Alvy.[[2]](#endnote-2)

This is a mistake, though it comes after Alvy has had enough. McLuhan is adamant in *Understanding Media* and elsewhere that print should be considered a “hot” medium, due to the way it structures thought in a mechanised visual context. His previous book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962), also draws on the work of Walter Ong (his former student) in order to establish print’s detachment from speech and handwriting on the basis of its “increased sophistication in visual presentation” which “is part of the evolution of typography, showing clearly how the use of printing moved the word away from its original association with sound and treated it as a ‘thing’ in space” (1962, 174). Following these lines of thought, McLuhan emphasises print’s visual orientation in relation to other commercial media:

Visually, print is very much more “high definition” than manuscript. Print was, that is to say, a very “hot” medium coming into a world that for thousands of years had been served by the “cool” medium of script. Thus our own “roaring twenties” were the first to feel the hot movie medium and also the hot radio medium. It was the first great consumer age. So with print Europe experienced its first consumer phrase, for not only is print a consumer medium and commodity, but it taught men how to organize all other activities on a systematic lineal basis (137).

Thus, this throwaway line by an unnamed character, dismissing print’s visual impact through a garbled application of McLuhan’s work, raises vital questions we might direct toward the on-screen text at the start of *Annie Hall* and Allen’s subsequent films. Recovered from background muttering, the small error gestures to print’s “hot” medium, full of “high intensity” or “high definition” visual data. Such visual potency makes title typography an integral part of a film’s design, less a matter of conveying information than presenting another visual object or “a ‘thing’ in space,” in Ong’s words. Learning from the movie line man’s mistake and his latent comparison of TV and film to print in *Annie Hall*, we can begin to see how the mechanised, “essentially linear” nature of typography as a “consumer medium and commodity” intersects with negotiations of visual and consumer culture across Allen’s oeuvre. More specifically, the Windsor typeface that has become a trademark since its first use in *Annie Hall’s* opening titles can be revisited as a site for these negotiations of uniformity and marketability, in relation to the film’s and Allen’s more general concern with commercial or artistic status.

**“It’s Just Plain Chicken”**

In interviews from the early 1990s, Woody Allen gives his assessment of movie title design in the years leading up to *Annie Hall*: “It had really got out of hand in the United States. There was a time during the sixties, when the titles got to be like *The Pink Panther* [1963]. The producers would put aside $250,000 for the title sequence. It would be one of the main things in the movie” (Björkman 2004, 76). This corresponds with Noah Gittell’s account, in an article lamenting Netflix’s “skip credits” feature. “By the mid-1960s,” he writes, “studio movies were paying vast amounts of money for elaborate, animated title sequences that added little of value to the film, such as those featured in the *Pink Panther* movies” (2017). Although Gittell references a scene from *Annie Hall* preceding the one discussed above, acknowledging his affinity with Alvy Singer, “who refuses to go into a foreign film when Annie arrives to the theater two minutes late,” there is, ironically, no mention of how Woody Allen’s films fit into his potted history of title design. Nevertheless, the 1970s decline Gittell notes for elaborate animated or narrative sequences, inspired by graphic designers like Saul Bass or directors like Alfred Hitchcock, mirrors the slow evolution of Allen’s titles in that same period.

The art nouveau, Aubrey Beardsley-esque opening to *What’s New, Pussycat?* (1965), designed by Richard Williams, is typical of the animated *Pink Panther*-inspired title sequences that Allen criticises, and which Gittell suggests “added little of value to the film.”[[3]](#endnote-3) Though Allen wrote, acted in, but wouldn’t have been responsible for the titles of *Pussycat*, his directorial debut the following year, *What’s Up, Tiger Lily?* (1966), is similar in more than its title. At what would have been a relatively high cost for a film made by dubbing and re-editing a Japanese original, the title sequence designed by Phill Norman has a cartoon version of Allen frolicking among colourful pin-up stills reminiscent of James Bond films, accompanied by the first of several original songs by the Lovin’ Spoonful, who also appear in the film. Allen’s first completely original directorial effort, *Take the Money and Run* (1969), begins with a more straightforward filmed sequence, with credits superimposed over shots of Allen’s character being led to his prison cell. From here, the development of his titles can be traced through the vibrant, animated opening of *Bananas* (1971), with Marvin Hamlisch’s original song “Quiero la Noche”; and the word-by-word titles of *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (1972), with its credits over footage of rabbits and Cole Porter accompaniment; towards the more staid white-on-black credits of *Sleeper* (1973) and *Love and Death* (1975), with their respective big band and Prokofiev soundtracks. The shift in the early 70s is acknowledged by Allen, working towards his use of Windsor for *Annie Hall* (1977):

I had done some fancy titles on *Bananas* and *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* …, and then I thought to myself, “It’s silly to spend money on titles! It’s a very American stupid habit. I’m going to get the cheapest titles I can, just a plain announcement.” And I picked the typeface that I liked, and I never changed it after that. Because, what do titles mean? It’s just simple information (Björkman 2004, 76).

In practice, this money-saving approach meant parting ways with Norman Gorbaty, who designed the titles for *Bananas*, *Everything You Always Wanted*, and *Sleeper*. A company called Computer Opticals produced the title cards for all six films from *Love and Death* (1975) to *Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy* (1982), and Allen has never worked with a named designer since, instead using various New York-based effects firms. But even among those mid-70s films gradually adopting a simpler design, there is a further evolution in Allen's typeface choices, belying his account of having “picked the typeface that I liked” and stuck with it. *Bananas* had reverted to *Tiger Lily*’s use of cartoonish Cooper Black, while *Everything You Always Wanted* employed a textbook-like Baskerville in keeping with its mock-educational premise. Although the stark, centred titles for *Sleeper* and *Love and Death* settled on a layout similar to that of later films, their use of Souvenir and Century Schoolbook typefaces show further tweaks en route toward Windsor. Moreover, the notion of finding Windsor and “never chang[ing] it after that” ignores the fact that *Interiors* (1978), the film immediately after *Annie Hall*,continued to explore other possibilities with its use of News Gothic, and that the title of his next film, *Manhattan* (1979), appears only in a shot of the neon sign on the Manhattan Hotel.

When Björkman suggests to Allen that the Windsor titles “have become a trademark for your films” and that Ingmar Bergman’s later simplified titles might have been an influence, Allen remains practical: “I didn’t know that, I hadn’t thought about that. […] I think it’s just fine. It costs no money at all” (Björkman 2004, 76). Without mentioning Allen, however, the French film critic, Michel Choin, in his study of *Words on Screen*,identifies a wider mid-century trend:

The completely black or monochromatic background never goes out of fashion, but it was rare between 1930 and 1960 other than in “auteur” films. Certain directors created and maintained personal styles for their credit sequences as part of their signature. These were generally frugal looking, on a neutral (often black) background. (2017, 38).

This chimes with interpretations of Allen’s Windsor as part of his “signature” as an “auteur,” as well as the appeal of something “neutral” and “frugal looking,” in response to more garish title sequences. The opening of *Annie Hall* can be viewed as the culmination of approaches across Allen’s first decade of filmmaking, in the silence and succinctness of its nine single-credit title cards naming main crew and no cast members. Yet, despite his recollection, Windsor’s history, its features, and wider trends in title design show there was nothing plain or simple about the choice of typeface, or the context for that decision.

**“‘Cause I’m Anal”**

Filling gaps in Allen’s vague account, an online community of typography enthusiasts have conducted more detailed investigations around his use of Windsor. Some of this has drawn out fascinating possibilities. When the Romanian graphic designer Kit Paul published a short post about Allen and Windsor on his blog in June 2006, an American student named Randy J Hunt replied with this anecdote within a couple of hours:

I’m currently taking a typeface design course with Ed Benguiat, and just last night he described a time when he would have breakfast at the same New Jersey diner every morning. Among the others that would dine there was Woody Allen. On one occasion, referring to Benguiat as a “printer,” Allen asked him what a good typeface was. Benguiat had an affinity for Windsor and suggested it to him that morning (Paul 2006).

Benguiat and Allen would certainly have had plenty to talk about. The artist and type designer grew up in Brooklyn, and was an accomplished jazz musician, who performed with Allen’s namesake and idol, Woody Herman. More importantly, Benguiat also had an impressive record in film, having designed the logotypes for blockbusters like *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *Super Fly* (1972). Furthermore, his work with Photo-Lettering Inc (or PLINC) and the International Typeface Corporation (ITC) and their pioneering developments in photo-composition and digital typesetting would have given Benguiat a unique sense of the way different typefaces perform on screen. Benguiat’s interpretations of older faces like Caslon or Bookman, his own Souvenir (used in Allen’s *Sleeper*),and other “Benguiat” named designs for ITC now typify a 1970s visual style, establishing the nostalgic vibe for films like Quentin Tarantino’s *Jackie Brown* in 1997, using Benguiat’s Caslon variant.

Given Windsor’s comparable blend of classic and modern touches, the story of Benguiat’s recommendation seems entirely plausible. Further internet detective-work around Allen’s title design appears to muddy the history of Windsor itself, however. Alongside the Benguiat story, many accounts, from Kit Paul’s blog post to newspaper items about Allen’s love of Windsor, refer to the specific variant as “EF Windsor” and either Elongated or Light Condensed. A *Guardian* article from 2011 acknowledges the debates online, asking, “Which one is it really – Elongated or Light Condensed?” (Glancey 2011). Another emergent consensus is the sole attribution of Windsor as having been “designed by Eleisha Pechey in 1905 for the Sheffield type foundry Stephenson, Blake,” according to that same *Guardian* write-up. These points of simplification not only mask a more complex background, but together suggest a cultural attitude towards type design that privileges individual authorship over its industrial context. In this regard, the fragmented history of Windsor echoes tensions between commercial and auteur cinema in *Annie Hall*.

The designation of “EF Windsor,” wherever it began, implies that Allen uses a licensed version of Windsor produced in by the German design firm Elsner+Flake, which was only founded in 1986, and whose main business is in publishing a library of more than 2,500 digitised typefaces, old and new. While it is easy enough to see how the mistake might proliferate with someone comparing Allen’s titles to whatever images are available through online font libraries, the small slippage is also symptomatic of the type industry’s changing fortunes. Allen’s adoption of Windsor for *Annie Hall* coincides with a prolonged upheaval as traditional “hot metal” printing gave way to photographic and digital methods. In that sense, the notion of Allen’s Windsor being attributed to either Elsner+Flake or Stephenson Blake as the original owner of the design is neither more nor less accurate than saying his Windsor belonged to the digital effects company, Computer Opticals – who would have produced *Annie Hall*’s title cards from their own images of Windsor, and without any physical type involved. Debating the difference between the Elongated or Light Condensed styles or weights similarly overlooks the fact that these are images of letters, rather than actual printing from Stephenson Blake’s named variants, and easily stretched or modified as needed in its photographic form. Moreover, it suggests an authorial consistency not borne out by the films themselves. The sizes of Allen’s titles have fluctuated throughout his career, with no subsequent film coming close to the height of “Annie Hall.” The weight varies too, with those from the mid-80s, *Broadway Danny Rose* onwards (when Allen primarily used another New York firm, The Optical House), noticeably heavier than earlier films. If the uppercase “H” of *Annie Hall* looks more or less like the Windsor Light Condensed on Stephenson Blake’s specimen sheets, with its wider stance and longer crossbar, the same letter in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) is both narrower and heavier, more consistent with the “H” at the start of *Hollywood Ending* (2002). There is a sense in which each film’s titles, if not each title card within each film, must be taken on its own terms as a visual composition.

Crediting Windsor to a single designer, aligned with this projection of authorial consistency, is more tenuous. The claim that the typeface was “designed by Eleisha Pechey in 1905” is firstly undercut by the fact that Pechey died in 1902. Some sources, including Wikipedia and Luc Devroye’s encyclopaedia of type design information, specify that William Kirkwood was responsible for actually cutting the Windsor punches (used to make the moulds for casting type) from Pechey’s designs posthumously. Legal records for a copyright case I’ll return to in my conclusion show that Windsor was registered on 2 March 1904, which conceivably pre-dates Stephenson Blake’s first offering of the type the following year. In any event, the nature of industrial type design and Stephenson Blake’s company structure means that although “Windsor’s design has often been attributed to Eleisha Pechey (1931-1902),” as Paul McNeil writes in his *Visual History of Type*, “it is more likely that the type was drawn by anonymous staff members in the foundry’s drawing office” (2017, 177). While questioning Pechey’s attribution as Windsor’s individual creator, however, we can also see where his role in the company may have influenced its design in legible ways.

**“What Is That Your Business?”**

John Stephenson and James Blake established what was originally a file and tool-making company in the summer of 1818, with a £600 inheritance from Blake’s recently deceased uncle. Over the next two centuries, Stephenson Blake & Co. would become the largest and last of the UK’s industrial type foundries, introducing influential designs like Impact, Granby, and Playbill, while gradually acquiring other foundries and licenses for Baskerville, Clarendon, Georgian, and other classic English typefaces, before ceasing type production in 2005. Elisha Pechey (it’s unclear where the misspelling of his first name is introduced, with only one “e” in all historical documents) joined the company in 1863, serving as chief clerk in Sheffield until 1873, when he was sent to manage its London office. Following Pechey’s transfer, “the London Manager and his staff became the true antenna of the company,” Roy Millington writes in his comprehensive history of Stephenson Blake (2002, 83). Tensions between the sales office in London and foundry in Sheffield are personified in the relationship between Pechey and director (and son of founder) Henry Stephenson. As Millington writes: “Pechey was not one to hold his tongue and his all too frequent demands commercially and typographically fell on deaf ears” (85). An 1887 letter gives some sense of the gap between Pechey’s commercial drive and Stephenson’s emphasis on maintaining quality and good working conditions: “There is no doubt in my mind,” Pechey writes, “that the effects of your engineers and fitters must be unrelaxed to keep pace with the growth of your business. … I am afraid this is the only foundry that has ever found it necessary to adopt stunting and repressive measures of this kind, but I fancy you have never had sufficient faith in the growth of your business” (Millington 2002, 84). Debating a new design in 1894, Pechey is even more passive aggressive, giving a clearer sense of the intersection between creative and commercial concerns:

Your deference to my view as to the new Old Style is flattering, but puzzling. You have a more or less definite ideal in your mind, which I am afraid is different from mine. You agree as to the fatness of hairline and mainstroke and gauge being as now, and I agree to the De Vinne form of letter being adopted. My ambition had been to get a distinctly new character of Old Style, but I see no reason why I should desire to further my own views on such a speculative subject against your opinion and those you have consulted (Millington 2002, 85).

Neither man lived to see Windsor in production. Pechey died still working at aged seventy-one in 1902, after falling ill on a trip to North America, where he hoped to expand the company’s business. Henry Stephenson died two years later, still working at age seventy-seven. From their correspondence, we see the importance of specialised language and attention to detail with regards to a typeface’s physical features; and in many ways, Windsor reflects Pechey’s ambition (and Stephenson’s resistance) toward “a distinctly new character of Old Style” – which may have delayed its production until after their deaths. Like the Old Style series and other turn-of-the-century typefaces, Windsor combines modern touches with an intricate serif style. Both are loosely related to eighteenth-century neoclassical ancestors like Baskerville or older variants of Garamond, whose serifs maintain a closer link with handwritten styles than the industrial, modernist sans serifs increasingly used for display texts in advertising throughout the twentieth-century. More specifically, Windsor shares with Old Style what are known as “adnate” (as opposed to “abrupt”) serifs, where the transition from the main part of a letter to the serif is more gradual. Both typefaces have an “oblique axis” as well, meaning its rounded shapes appear to be rotated slightly anti-clockwise, so that the thinner parts at the top and bottom are slightly off-centre. But other features also give Windsor what Pechey might have thought of as “a distinctly new character.” The crossbars on its uppercase, for instance, are generally quite low, relative to the standard “x-height” – meaning the height of lowercase characters with no ascending strokes, such as “n” or “e”. The “A” in “Annie Hall” or “Woody Allen” is a clear example. Many characters have their own flourishes, such as the tails on the upper “Q” or lower “g”, the large bowls of the upper “P” and “R,” or the distinctive curl of the upper “J” and hooked arch of the lowercase “f.” Cumulatively, these touches define the Windsor look. The sharp angle of its lowercase serifs, when combined with its rounded “beaks” and stubby feet, further mark the typeface’s unique personality. But Windsor’s signature quirk, I would suggest, is the exaggerated slope of its lowercase “shoulders”, which make the lowercase “m,” “n,” or “h” appear as if they’re kicking out their right “legs,” and which, along with the teardrop shape and modulated stroke of rounded characters like the upper “O” or lower “b” and “d,” make the letters much thicker on the bottom, giving an overall impression of sitting more heavily upon or almost sagging into the baseline.

Again, the effect of these features is anything but plain or simple. Its “many odd forms in both cases,” as described in a 1962 *Encyclopedia of Type Faces*, are also what make Windsor better suited to use in titling than for a longer main text (Turner Berry 1962, 196). In Stephenson Blake’s own specimen books, used for advertising available typefaces, Windsor is included with other display faces, intended for titles, advertising, and signage. Viewers will note that the scene on Annie’s balcony uses a simple sans serif for its subtitles; and the more eagle-eyed might spot that the small copyright notice under “A Jack Rollins – Charles H. Joffe Production” in the end credits of *Manhattan* also retains a sans serif. Such decisions adhere to the paradox at the start of Robert Bringhurst’s authoritative *Elements of Typographical Style*: “In a world rife with unsolicited messages, typography must often draw attention to itself before it will be read. Yet in order to be read, it must relinquish the attention it has drawn” (2012, 17). A mid-century brochure for Windsor attempts to bridge these competing needs, insisting it “ATTRACTS ATTENTION” (in uppercase and its outline variant) but also “reads so well” (in its standard weight). Despite such claims, Windsor’s idiosyncrasies have left it rarely used as a composition face for a body of text. In Bringhurst’s terms, its design quirks mean it attracts too much attention. In McLuhan’s terms, Windsor exemplifies the overload of visual information that makes print such a hot medium.

**“Seems Like Old Times”**

Another general effect of Windsor is its sense of nostalgia, partly due to the historical layers in its design and partly due to associations accrued in use. While McNeil’s *Visual History of Type* finds in Windsor “a distinctly English, Edwardian feel,” Bethany Heck describes it for the *Font Review Journal* as a “bit of a grab-bag”: “its formal elements feel haphazardly pilfered from various trends from Art Nouveau as well as more conservative and versatile serifs from the era” (2018). Indeed, the brochure mentioned above has Windsor “shewn [*sic*] here with stock ornaments of the period” in the form of Mucha-esque women with flowing gowns and flowers. Windsor’s “odd blend of refinement and whimsy,” Heck suggests, “have made it a go-to choice for designers seeking to tap into nostalgic undertones.” Ingrid Haidegger’s study of “the art of movie titling” – where Allen’s Windsor is the “most notable” among “rare cases” in which a typeface becomes linked to a director (2015, 433) – says this innate quality of Windsor’s design “suggests a certain feeling of nostalgia, which is a central element in almost every film” of his.

Windsor’s vague, “grab-bag” sense of nostalgia is complicated, however, by its renewed popularity at the time *Annie Hall* was made. Four decades later, it becomes impossible to disentangle whatever historical hodgepodge was worked into its design at the turn of the twentieth century from the connotations accrued through use by Allen and others. In Andy Sturdevant’s reading, the adoption of Windsor from *Annie Hall* onward was less about looking back to a previous era than following contemporary trends. When Allen “began using it in the 1970s,” he writes, “it was a much more common typeface, and was visual shorthand for a certain cosmopolitan deadpan quality prevalent in that era” (2016). For many, Sturdevant suggests an immediate reference point would have been the awning of Max’s Kansas City, a New York club frequented by famous artists, writers, and up-and-coming rock and punk acts throughout the 70s. Others would have encountered Windsor on the covers of Stewart Brand’s era-defining *Whole Earth Catalog*,first published in 1968. A third, even more ubiquitous appearance was the credit sequence for the sitcom *All in the Family*, the most-watched television show in the US each year between 1971 and 1976. Of course, the idea that *Annie Hall* might have been knowingly following these trends is muddied by the fact that the film itself rejects all three cultural forms so explicitly. We might think of Alvy’s wariness of Shelley Duvall’s character’s *Rolling Stone* crowd or his teasing Annie about a “rock concert” date. At other points, Alvy is literally sickened by Rob’s *All in the Family*-like sitcom and TV in general; and we can imagine the hippyish aura of the *Whole Earth Catalog* typifying much of what he despises about LA, from its health food to the far-out guests of Tony Lacey’s party, along with the film’s frequent spoofing of drug culture. Rather than suggest that Allen’s adoption of Windsor is therefore ironic, these incongruities – along with its use in toy and food packaging of the period (Heck says “McDonald’s was quite fond of it in the late 70’s and early 80’s”) – point to the typeface’s versatility. While the link between Allen’s nostalgic content and Windsor’s nostalgic design might seem straightforward, the typeface’s popularity in the period in which it becomes his “signature” typeface again shows the complexity of that choice.

Moreover, Allen was hardly the only filmmaker using Windsor for titles at the time, nor the only one using it to connote nostalgia. Mark Rydell’s 1969 adaptation of William Faulkner’s final novel, *The Reivers* (subtitled *A Reminiscence*), put Steve McQueen in a 1905 setting, curiously coincidental with Windsor’s initial production, while George Roy Hill’s *The Great Waldo Pepper* (1975) employed a heavy Windsor to set the scene for a 1920s flying drama with Robert Redford. Westerns set in the late 1800s, like *Billy Two Hats* (1974) and *Heaven’s Gate* (1980), also used Windsor prominently enough to make it a pointed echo for *City Slickers*’ titlesin 1991. Amidst these wider contexts, Heck’s essay on Windsor shows it becoming “a visual shorthand to signal ‘this is about the 70’s’” without ever mentioning Allen. Other recent uses on the US cover of Eimear McBride’s 2016 coming-of-age novel, *The Lesser Bohemians* or *New York Magazine’s* “Doomed Earth Catalog” issue in 2017 attest to this delayed retro effect, similarly tapped into by the cover of Allen’s *Mere Anarchy* (2007), his first collection of new writing since 1980’s *Side Effects*. Allen’s 2020 autobiography, *Apropos of Nothing*, also uses a staid variant of Windsor in white-on-black for its cover.

**“It’s Like a Visual Poem”**

Beyond a nostalgia either inherent in design or accumulated in use, I suggested Ed Benguiat’s recommendation of Windsor may have stemmed from his experience with text on screen. Windsor’s bottom-heavy strokes and shapes might be more conducive to vertical presentation on screen, for instance, giving the impression of physical weight. Heck also finds its distinctive shoulders “make the line of text feel as if it’s a living thing, crawling across the page,” which might be experienced as a cinematic tension between its kinetic design and static layout, retaining the subtlest hint of those earlier animated sequences. In any case, Windsor’s abstract material features mean its visual presence usurps its function as “simple information,” in Allen’s words. As Eric Gill writes in his celebrated *Essay on Typography* (1931): “a good piece of lettering is as beautiful a thing to see as any sculpture or painted picture” (122). Here, “a good piece of lettering” refers not only to the design of the typeface, but also its setting. Rather than view Windsor as a choice made for *Annie Hall* and “never changed” since, every title card for every Woody Allen film is the result of countless decisions. I mentioned variations in weight and size above, but these decisions include relative sizes too – where “Starring” or “Edited by” for individual credits are always smaller, for example. Perhaps uniquely, the “and” in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is also noticeably smaller than the two nouns. Design decisions include the space between individual letters (compare the tight *Midnight in Paris* with *To Rome With Love* among consecutive examples[[4]](#endnote-4)), as well as word-spacing (compare *Hannah and Her Sisters* to the more cramped *A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy*), and line-spacing (compare the words of *Mighty Aphrodite*, almost touching, to the gaps in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*). The latter is also contingent upon line-break choices, of course, given that there’s no practical reason why *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion* should fit on a single line while *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* should isolate the “a” so unusually amidst three lines. These tiny decisions, however conscious or unconscious, contribute to an overall effect for each film.

Keeping Gill’s words in mind, a full appraisal of Allen’s commitment to Windsor depends on viewing those title cards as visual compositions – or “a thing to see” – as much as mere announcements. As for McLuhan and Ong, the words become “a ‘thing’ in space.” In that regard, the choice of Windsor for *Annie Hall* also needs re-situating within historical and aesthetic continuities between the simple white-on-black titles of the 1970s and the rise of bespoke “logotypes” in the same period. The work of influential designers bridges what might seem like a disconnect between the “auteur” style noted by Choin and brand-savvy image-text creations like Benguiat’s *Planet of the Apes*. Two of the most prolific title designers, Wayne Fitzgerald and Dan Perri, mix their love of Windsor with logotypes quite freely. Fitzgerald used Windsor for three films directed by Michael Cimino – *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974), *Heaven’s Gate* (1980), and *The Sicilian* (1987) – as well as hits like *Funny Lady* (1975) and the later *City Slickers* (1991). But he is also responsible for the distinctive logotypes of *Escape to Witch Mountain* (1975), *Battlestar Galactica* (1978), and *Footloose* (1984). The contrast is even more striking between Dan Perri’s use of Windsor for Robert Zemeckis’s debut, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* (1978), Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1986), and Adrian Lyne’s *Nine 1/2 Weeks* (1986) and his instantly recognisable logotypes for *Taxi Driver* (1976) and both *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in the same year *Annie Hall* was released. Just as importantly, Fitzgerald and Perri both worked on films with cinematographer Gordon Willis – Fitzgerald on the first two *Godfather* films and Perri on *All the President’s Men* (1976) – in the years just before Willis and Allen began their long collaboration with *Annie Hall*.

These working relationships mean that even when Allen stopped using title designers, ostensibly to save money, his surprising choice to work with Willis – and their successful partnership on his next eight films – meant a greater emphasis on visual possibilities in general, while retaining a link to designers whose work defined the period. The fluidly with which Willis and others move between a seeming categorical divide between plain text titles and logotypes helps emphasise their visual equivalence, bringing together the “hot” media of print and film in the intricacies of typographic and cinematographic design. Rather than see Windsor as a simple rejection of industry trends, viewing it within this spectrum links it to tensions between art and commerce in *Annie Hall* and much of Allen’s work. In an interview from 1978, Allen describes *Annie Hall* as a “weird hybrid of very dramatic influences on a funny film,” before going into detail:

All the devices of *Annie Hall* are devices one generally associates with films of Bergmans or Buñuels. It’s not shot like a comedy. It’s low-lit. There’s long master shots that go on forever. It’s not edited like a comedy. The devices – the split-screen devices and subtitling – are things you don’t associate with comedy, but the film itself is a comedy. So it becomes an odd kind of experiment (Linehan 1978).

He might have mentioned the silent titles among “things you don’t associate with comedy.”

**“The Cast of *The Godfather*”**

At a time when titles were becoming both serious art and serious business – after 1960s titles had gotten so “out of hand,” in Allen’s estimation – the openings for the first two *Godfather* films become a useful final comparison. The centred white-on-black titles at the start of *The Godfather* (1972) are even more basic than *Annie Hall*’s, with only “Paramount Pictures Presents” followed by the famous logotype. *The Godfather Part II* (1974) begins with a silent close-up of Al Pacino having his hand kissed, though the opening titles are similarly restricted to a studio credit and the logotype with “Part II” added. The gravity of what is to come is obvious, balanced with the marketability of such a striking design. The original Gothic typeface that S. Neil Fujita created for the cover of Mario Puzo’s 1969 novel establishes a consistent brand for Coppola’s series, and for posters and other advertising. Although the *Godfather* joke in *Annie Hall* might be a playful reference to Gordon Willis’s resumé, the film’s titles show Allen responding with his own brand, with a more subtly ornate, but similarly distinctive typeface.

On the other hand, early wavering in his use of Windsor and the fact that it has only been used on Allen’s posters since *Whatever Works* (2009) highlights the degree to which a strictly commercial reading of Allen’s Windsor might be another backward projection. Notwithstanding the minor variations noted above, it is only through its persistence across five decades that Windsor becomes a brand aligned with his nostalgic style. In other words, the reading of its design as inherently nostalgic becomes tautological when we cannot avoid reading it as a callback to his own earlier work. When a younger filmmaker like Alfonso Cuaron observes in 2015 that Allen “is such an important and unique link in cinematic history, connecting the traditions of Old Hollywood with those of French cinema and linking them to the most contemporary film-making styles,” that link is partly a matter of content and partly a matter of sheer longevity (Solomons 2015, 7). Allen and Windsor offer a material connection to the early decades of the twentieth century in which they were “born” and the period in the 1970s and 80s when they both assumed a new prominence.

Yet, any simple identification between them is also troubled by this tangled history and the tangled relationship between art and industry. Just as it would be impossible to give sole credit for the *Godfather* logotype to Francis Ford Coppola, Gordon Willis, Wayne Fitzgerald, S. Neil Fujita, or Mario Puzo, the dubious attribution of Windsor solely to Elisha Pechey or the choice for *Annie Hall* solely to Woody Allen masks the manner by which such decisions and designs emerge collaboratively in an industrial context, driven home by the anonymity of Allen’s title design firms since the mid-70s and of poster designers adopting Windsor in recent years. Rather than view his Windsor credits as an unassuming throwback, the use of then-new computer effects technology to fashion cheaper title sequences gestures toward the constructed nature of nostalgia in general. At the same time, re-evaluating our authorial or auteur-bound investments in Windsor as a “signature” allows us to see how the “high intensity” of print itself persists in the face of industrial and technological changes.

As Eric Gill finally admits, “our argument here is not that industrialism has made things worse, but that it has inevitably made them different” (1931, 74). Gill remains convinced, however, of the “incompatibility” between “the typography of industrialism” and what he calls “humane typography” (1931, 69-70). If this seems analogous to an apparent divide between arthouse and mainstream cinema, it’s also clear that the thrill of Allen’s best work lies in the “weird hybridity” of seemingly incompatible elements, mixing genres, styles, and conventions. Windsor retains a parallel hybridity in its “grab-bag” of physical features. In a 1916 court case regarding Stephenson Blake’s copyright on Windsor, the question of whether type design should be categorised as “fine art” or “industrial design” is finally decided on that grounds that, legally, the latter supersedes and includes the former (*Law Times* 1916, 666-669; *Solicitors’ Journal* 1916-17, 55-56). Conceptually, however, McLuhan shows that print has been “a consumer medium and commodity” at least since Gutenberg, offering a stream of visual data in a mechanised “hot medium”. In that sense, separating a typographical choice from cinema’s visual composition or treating a particular typeface as somehow anti-commercial would repeat the movie line man’s unheard mistake.

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1. Philip Marchand, in his biography *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998),suggests this was McLuhan’s “favorite put-down for hecklers” (270). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The latter part of this line is omitted from online transcriptions and the published screenplay in *Four Films of Woody Allen* (London: Faber, 1982), p. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. In addition to those reproduced here, screenshots of many of Allen’s title sequences can be viewed at Christian Annyas’s *Movie Titles Still Collections* online. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. NB: The letter gaps in *To Rome With Love* are the result of the lowercase Os and the I following uppercase T, R, and W, which a typesetter or graphic designer would normally adjust for visual consistency. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)