

London School of Economics and Political Science

**Celluloid love: Audiences and representations of romantic
love in late capitalism**

BENJAMÍN DE LA PAVA VÉLEZ

A thesis submitted to the Department of Media and Communications of the
London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

London, March 2017

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent.

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

I declare that my thesis consists of 95,071 words.

Abstract

My doctoral research analyses contemporary North American romantic films and the meanings brought to and made from them by socially and economically diverse audiences in London. It does so in the context of a historicised and ideologically alert account of connections between biological, psychoanalytic, anthropological and sociological theorisations of romantic love and its screen depictions. In particular, my audience-led textual analysis of discourses of Euro-American romantic love is driven by an engagement with three claims: First, that neoliberal or late-capitalist individualism has engendered a 'crisis of romantic love' which has reshaped the social and personal promises of coupledness and intimacy. Second, that popular film, the prime contemporary medium of representation for romance, cynically portrays this supposed crisis in an effort to capitalise on audience fears; and third, that audiences of these films experience the 'crisis', fashioning their romantic identities and practices in its shadow.

Methodologically, the study involved a reflexive and recursive textual analysis of five North American films: *Blue Valentine*, *(500) Days of Summer*, *Don Jon*, *Her*, and *Once*. Using these films, I carried out 36 group interviews with (87) inhabitants of the multicultural Borough of Hackney, in East London, the results of which then fed into and informed my readings of the films. Subsequent thematic coding of group interviews revealed overlapping areas pertinent to the project: Technology, class, gender and coupledness. Findings include the suggestion that both romantic films and their audiences in Western Europe are currently adapting strategies, practices and ideas of romantic love and relationships to a new environment of precarious intimacy, technological mediation, and anxiety over economic, professional and personal stability.

My analysis concludes that while intersections of class, race and gender continue to inflect audience experience and meaning-making, the current romantic environment that audiences are navigating - and that romantic films purportedly represent - is indeed markedly different from that of the last century. However, claims about the crisis of romantic love are not only greatly exaggerated, but usually also erroneously conflate the pain, anxiety and frailty of contemporary relationships and intimacy with a narcissistic, ego-centric definition of love as a form of consumption.

Table of contents

Declaration	2
Abstract	3
Table of contents.....	4
List of Tables and figures	7
Acknowledgements	8
INTRODUCTION	9
1.1 Dipping my toes into the water.....	11
1.2 First research question. Gender, Class and films	15
1.3 Second research question. Romantic love in film and audiences	16
1.4 Third research question. Identity and film audiences.....	17
1.5 The thesis.....	18
CHAPTER 2: CELLULOID LOVE: ROMANCE, IDEOLOGY AND SELF COMMODIFICATION	20
2.1 Introduction.....	20
2.2 Biological approaches to love	23
2.3 Psychosocial approaches to love	24
2.4 Psychoanalytic theory and Eros.....	28
2.4.1 Eros and Plato.....	29
2.4.2 Narcissism, identification, and difference.....	33
2.5 Feminist and queer theories on love	37
2.6 Historical and sociological approaches to love	44
2.6.1 Denis de Rougemont and the foundational myth of romantic love	44
2.6.2 Intimacy in contemporary sociological approaches to love.....	47
2.6.3 Self-commoditised love.....	49
2.7 (Romantic) Identity	51
2.7.1 (Projective) identification.....	53
2.8 Ideology.....	54
2.8.1 Marx and Althusser	54
2.8.2 Gramsci and counter-hegemony.....	57
2.9 Conclusion	59
CHAPTER 3: AUDIENCE RESEARCH, AUDIENCES OF ROMANCE.....	61
3.1 Spectatorship, gendered viewing and verisimilitude.....	61
3.2 Effects, Uses & Gratifications approaches and cognitive film theory.....	66
3.2.1 Cognitive film theory	69
3.3 The Incorporation/Resistance paradigm and the ethnographic turn.....	71
3.4 Liminality.....	76
3.4.1 Van Gennep and Turner's Liminal	76
3.4.2 Communitas and liminoid	77
3.4.3 Romance, cinema-going and the liminoid.....	78
3.4.4 Liminality and ideology	82
3.5 From the women's films and melodrama to the bromance	83
3.6 Romantic Audiences	90
3.6.1 New orientations in audience research	96
3.6.2 New (studies of) romance	97

3.7 Today's audiences	101
3.8 Conclusion	104
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY.....	106
4.1 Introduction	107
4.2.1 Film sampling	109
4.2.2 Early textual analysis	112
4.3 Operationalization of research questions and the discussion guide	118
4.4 Group and individual interviews	121
4.4.1 Epistemological considerations.....	121
4.4.2 Group then individual interviews.....	124
4.4.3 Ethics and reflexivity of a man interviewing (mostly) women	128
4.4.4 Reciprocity.....	130
4.5 Sampling	131
4.6 Audience-led textual analysis	133
4.7 Conclusions and reflections	139
CHAPTER 5: LOVE AND TECHNOLOGY: CONTROL, AFFORDANCES AND PREJUDICE	141
5.1 Introduction	141
5.2 Technology.....	144
5.2.1 Trust, control and mistrust.....	145
5.2.2 Commodified love, commodified subject	150
5.3 Hooking-up culture.....	156
5.3.1 Gender in hooking-up	162
5.4 Romantic Affordances	165
5.5 641	167
5.5.1 Numbers and female purity	174
5.6 Same rules do not apply: Ideology, gender and sexuality	178
CHAPTER 6: A CLASS APART: LOVE, EXPECTATION, AND THE MIDDLE-CLASS CONSTRUCTION OF SELF	183
6.1 Introduction	183
6.2 Production and characteristics of <i>Blue Valentine</i> and <i>Once</i>	184
6.3 Of realism and 'not-meant-to-work' romances	186
6.4 On characters of a romance and discourses of romance.....	190
6.5 Platonic love in the era of globalisation.....	196
6.6 A Studio for love.....	201
6.7 A Motel or the classed rules of the game.....	203
CHAPTER 7: OF HAPPY ENDINGS AND NEW MEN	211
7.1 Introduction	211
7.2 "How many times can you fall in love before you can't anymore?"	213
7.3 And then it ends.....	215
7.4 Beyond the happily ever after.....	223
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	238
8.1 Introduction	238
8.2 Theory, methods and the personal.....	239
8.3 Summary of findings.....	244
8.3.1 Commoditization of love and self	245
8.3.2 Classed love	247
8.3.3 Teleology of romance?	248
8.3.4 Masculinities	249
8.4 Achievements and ways forward	251

REFERENCES	253
APPENDICES	295
Appendix 1: List of romantic films released between 2004-2014.....	295
Appendix 2: Informed Consent form.....	300
Appendix 3: Socio-demographic sheet	301
Appendix 4: Film summaries	303
Appendix 4a: Summary of Blue Valentine	303
Appendix 4b: Summary of Once	306
Appendix 4c: Summary of Don Jon	308
Appendix 4d: Summary of (500) Days of Summer.....	310
Appendix 4e: Summary of Her	313
Appendix 5: Film mind-maps	315
Appendix 5a: Mind-maps for Blue Valentine	315
Appendix 5b: Mind-map for Once.....	316
Appendix 5c: Mind-map for Don Jon.....	317
Appendix 5d: Mind-map for (500) Days of Summer	318
Appendix 5e: Mind-map for Her	319
Appendix 6: Group and individual interview guide	320
Appendix 7: Socio-demographic table of participants.....	321

List of Tables and figures

Figure 2.1 John Lee's love styles	25
Figure 2.2 Eight kinds of love based on the three vertices of Robert Sternberg's triangular theory of love	28
Figure 3.1 Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (Illustration by Stuart Hall)	72
Figure 3.2 The circuit of culture (Taken from Du Gay et. al, 1997)	75
Table 4.1 Operationalization of Research Questions	120-121
Figure 5.1 Theodore and Samantha on a date	168
Figure 5.2 Samantha tells Theodore she's fallen in love with 641 other people	169
Figure 5.3 Ending montage of Don Jon. Jon has learnt true intimacy with Esther	179
Figure 6.1 Dean then and now	193
Figure 6.2 the Girl and the Guy negotiate the studio rental	202
Figure 6.3 Dean in the motel	206
Figure 7.1 Last scene in Blue Valentine. Dean walks away	217
Figure 7.2 Split-screen sequence in (500) Days of Summer	231
Figure 7.3 Summer and Tom's last meeting. In this scene Summer restores Tom's romanticism	236

Acknowledgements

It is only fitting that in a thesis dealing with love, I recognise the love of my family who've supported me through it all. Pilar, your undying belief in me is what's got me to where I am today. Alonso, I can't wait to race you. Hilda, your emails have always put a grin on my face. Nubia, you spoil me to no end.

Shakuntala Banaji. I've yet to meet a more inspiring human being. Your courage, passion, empathy, support, feedback, and care have helped this project and me more than I can ever repay you for.

To those who collaborated with me, to those who opened their doors to a guy who wanted to screen some films and talk to people, thank you.

Camilo, Camilo and Manuel, my brothers from another mother.

Throughout this journey, I've met a few people who I cherish dearly: César, Daniel, Fabien, Felix, Nauris, Rafal, Yanning, Valeriy, and Xiaoxi. The jokes, the booze, the hugs, the talks, the rants, the tears, the laughter, the films, the walks, the music, the games. The love.

Thank you for the academic and professional support and opportunities: Dr. Myria Georgiou, Prof. Sonia Livingstone, Dr. Leslie Haddon, James Deeley, Cath Bennett, Nicole Garnier, Michael Etheridge, Prof. Mary Morgan, Jane Hindle, and Paul Sullivan.

My former lovers, thank you as well. Except K.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Colombia joined the nation branding bandwagon with the motto: ‘Colombia is passion.’¹ The logo was a white heart on a red background. This exemplified a private sector effort to promote the ‘hard-working’ nature of Colombians and Colombian private companies in order to boost exports. While marketing experts aimed to highlight what we call ‘berraquera,’ which can be roughly understood as an entrepreneurial attitude to overcome unfavourable odds and situations, they forgot the socio-political and cultural aspects of what Colombian passion is: A country with the dubious record of the longest lasting civil conflict in the world;² a country, that before that conflict began, lived through one of its bloodiest times, aptly called ‘La Violencia’;³ a country where gender violence is rife;⁴ a country that lived through the bloody times of Pablo Escobar; a country where the president at that time, and its military killed over 3,000 innocent farmers, students, and union leaders and dubbed them as guerrilla members.⁵ I, like many other of my fellow undergraduate students in Anthropology in Bogotá, felt beyond sickened. I acknowledge my formation and sensibility as an anthropologist in Colombia played a crucial role in developing an interest in this ‘passion’ that the branding spoke of. This is in great part because a large body of Colombian anthropology deals with the many facets of the conflict, including one which no matter the time, is hard to stomach: massacres⁶.

¹ See <http://www.semana.com/especiales/articulo/colombia-pasion/79583-3>

² https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflicto_armado_interno_en_Colombia and <http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/informeGeneral/> This report, published in 2013, by the CNMH (National Centre for Historic Memory) estimates 5,7 Colombians have been internally displaced, over 220,000 dead, over 25,000 disappeared and around 30,000 kidnappings during the conflict. The 220,000 number however, is misleading, as it counts only deaths and not other forms of being affected by the conflict like landmines, car-bombs, torture, child-recruiting, sexual and gender violence, to name a handful. If one account for this, the number jumps to almost 6 million people.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Violencia

⁴ <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/justicia/cifras-de-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-en-colombia/16758400> . <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/la-muerte-rosa-elvira-cely-crimen-abominable/258867-3> This is the case of a woman raped, beaten, and impaled in a park. <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/americalatina/201511241054029806-colombia-violencia-genero-cifras/> . In Colombia, knowing the full extent of gender and sexual violence has been impossible to assert given not just under-reporting, but also because this type of violence within guerrilla groups and by them is almost never reported. In

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%22False_positives%22_scandal

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bojay%C3%A1_massacre , https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masacre_de_El_Salado https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mapirip%C3%A1n_Massacre . Three of almost 2,000 massacres.

In the ‘anthropology of conflict,’ with an emphasis on massacres, we learned that the perpetrator tends to de-humanize his/her victim. Further, when massacres are such a common occurrence and an effective way to terrorize the population (adding the centralist governmental ineptitude to do anything about them), the perpetrators, at some point, learn to enjoy this (Guzmán, Fals Borda, & Umaña, 2005; Suárez, 2008; Uribe, 1990, 2004; Uribe & Vásquez, 1995). Some become passionate about it.

Against this national historical background, I also experienced – and continue to experience – a deep personal struggle with regards to forms of masculinity and my own romantic life. I once had a girlfriend who enjoyed dancing. ‘Me vas a extrañar’ by the *Binomio de Oro*⁷ plays during a party at a friend of ours. The song’s theme? A man has had an affair with another woman and impregnated her. Fearing god’s wrath, he wants to have the baby. The catch? Most of the song deals with how the first woman will *definitely* miss the guy if she decides to leave him; affair, baby, other woman and all.⁸ I – uncomfortable with the patriarchal discourses embedded, refuse to dance or even sing along to this song. My girlfriend, however, has no problem doing both. Fast forward to an argument between us. I, supposedly calm and collected, ask my girlfriend to stop crying, to stop being so emotional. I even ask her to stop for a while and think of how her arguments, riddled with emotions, are not as valid as mine, which are ‘filled with logic, and with reason’. She accuses me of being cold, and cries inconsolably; I remain convinced that I am right but nevertheless want to console her. I make no move to do so. Born to a generation of parents, and into a culture that extolled the roles of ‘women-as-carers’, as belonging to the kitchen and emotional and ‘fathers-as-providers’ who do not cry⁹, in a very *machista* country, how exactly should a man that does not wish to love

<http://www.verdadabierta.com/desde-regiones/5996-veinte-anos-de-una-guerra-sin-limites-en-uraba> In Urabá alone, there have been at least one hundred massacres.

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_51Ero8Vc4

⁸ This woman, according to the latest ‘science’ on relationships and competition, should be thankful the man cheated on her, as this is an ‘evolutionary adaptive’ lesson she can use to spot prime males next time... (See Morris, Beaussart, Reiber, & Krajewski, 2016).

⁹ Laura King (2015), in her history of family men in Britain from 1914 to 1960 eloquently points out that the idea of ‘men-as-provider’ is a comfortable myth that undermines the different modes in which men engaged in masculinity and fatherhood. These different modes have continuously paved the way for ‘new men’ as well as new ‘crisis of masculinity.’ There is no such history in Colombia, so I can’t say how cross-culturally applicable it would be, considering the historical and present influence of ‘machismo’ in Latin America. Nonetheless, intriguing.

in the same manner as his paternal figures, biological and putative, love? How should he 'be' inside a relationship in a way that will foster love, in a nation that seems addicted to violent conflict?

Late in my studies, a professor in charge of Contemporary Anthropological Theory wanted to study the nation branding phenomena embodied by 'Colombia is passion' through the lens of sociological classics like Durkheim and Simmel. By this point I had been avidly reading up on passion and nationalism, and had tangentially heard of *amour-passion*.¹⁰ Through this course, I got to know the works of Eva Illouz on commoditised love, Denis de Rougemont and his history of romantic love in the west, and Anthony Giddens on intimacy. My interest shifted from nation branding to the diverse histories and connections of romantic love to social phenomena. Likewise, as a cinephile, I became more and more intrigued when dissecting films' romantic plots and subplots. Fuelled by many, many discussions with my closest friends on cinema, and some of my favourite films of all time, reading Roland Barthes' (1990) *A Lover's Discourse*, Jacques Derrida (1997) *Politics of Friendship* and Emmanuel Levinas' (1969) *Totality and Infinity*, I became obsessed—or if you prefer the irony—*passionate* about romantic love, intimacy, relationships, and the beloved/other. Perhaps in future, I will delve further into Storgic love. In any case, it is fair to say that, at the time, I was as in love with the idea of *what it means to be in love*, as I was with a particular someone: my then girlfriend. This is how I came to conceive of a project dealing with romantic love in cinema and with audiences' responses to it.

1.1 Dipping my toes into the water

In the West, there are three main ways in which Romantic Love in film has been studied: First, as an ideological construct that serves to reify and reinforce capitalist consumer society, commoditization and alienation, patriarchal socio-cultural values and mandates,

¹⁰ Anthony Giddens understands amour-passion as the predecessor of romantic love. While he sees them both as a combination of an spiritual love combined with a sexual desire, the difference lies in that romantic love also contained a self-reflexivity, whereas amour-passion was understood as an overwhelming force for the individual.

nationalistic values, naturalization of colonial history and colonialism and the maintenance of the *status quo* (Illouz, 1997; McKee, 2009; Sharot, 2010; Shary, 2011; Smith Jr., 2009). Second, as a satire, a critique of bourgeois values and capitalist culture, as ideological critique; particularly focused in the works of Douglas Sirk and Woody Allen (Gledhill, 1987a; Wartenberg, 1999). The third route has taken a formal and/or historical approach, detailing the technical, aesthetic and narrative devices of melodrama and women's films and how these have changed depending on broader social and cultural historical processes (Elsaesser, 1987a; Nowell-Smith, 1987; Vincendeau, 1989).

The works within these three proposed divisions have focused primarily on the cultural product itself and not on the production conditions or the reception of texts. There was a general disregard for the audiences' romantic experiences and their engagements with romantic films coming from film studies, philosophy and psychoanalytic approaches. This shortfall began to be addressed by researchers of international cinema and literary traditions in the 1980s and beyond, and as part of the British Cultural Studies tradition (Ang, 1985; Banaji, 2002, 2006; Iglesias Prieto, 2004; Livingstone, 1989; Radway, 1984). In the last couple of years, however, rather than *talking* to audiences about romantic films, audience research on romantic films has become increasingly circumscribed to analysing online comments from platforms like IMDb or returned 'back' to textual approaches (Alberti, 2013a; Deleyto, 2003; K. Gibson & Wolske, 2011; Kalviknes Bore, 2011; Modleski, 2014). It would seem that there is a belief that theoretically, nothing more useful can be ascertained via audience discussion. However, at least in the context of London, at a time when traditional British masculinity has been argued to be in crisis, when buying a house is almost impossible for young couples¹¹, with the proliferation of zero hour contracts and the casualization of much young labour¹², with technology through dating apps becoming increasingly important for how a certain sector of the

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/may/04/first-time-buyers-need-to-earn-77000-a-year-to-live-in-london> and <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/08/millennials-the-mobile-and-the-stuck/497255/>

¹² <http://theconversation.com/is-job-insecurity-becoming-the-norm-for-young-people-22311> and (Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015; Hudson, 2014; Standing, 2008)

population meets their romantic partners,¹³ what, if anything, has changed in both the representations of romantic love and the audiences who interpret them? In other words, in the current romantic panorama¹⁴, with its possibilities, its constraints and its challenges, this thesis seeks to explore potential shifts as well as some continuities both on and off-screen.

I have chosen to focus on film for several reasons: First, I follow the argument that films act as a primary vehicle for carrying, producing and experiencing the cultural symbols and practices of romantic love, partly because cinema grants love and romance an audiovisual life and narrative reach that it lacked when depicted in painting, print, theatre or music (Dowd & Pallotta, 2000; Evans & Deleyto, 1998; Illouz, 1997; Shary, 2011; Shumway, 2003). Arguably, TV provides this as well, but it does so by spreading out the romantic narrative over several episodes, seasons even. In contrast, the film formats permit the condensed in-depth exploration of specific romantic themes that do not ask of the audience previous knowledge of the characters or their relationship. Further, some of these themes, like sex, polyamory, and same sex relationships have had marginal to no exploration in *popular* TV shows¹⁵. This entails both for cinema and my research design, that by focusing on film, there's a wider and richer pool of romantic narratives and audiences to choose from.

Further, David Shumway (2003) argues that romantic films speak not only of romantic love on screen, but are also a commentary on romantic practices and ideals in society. He argues that films do more than just 'reflect' the changing ideals and practices of 'romantic love' in the 'West', they also contribute to shaping them. This research project takes a similar starting point as Shumway's but is crucially different. Whereas Shumway assumes

¹³ See https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/archive/downloads/publications/Me-MySpouse_GlobalReport.pdf <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/5-facts-about-online-dating/> and (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012).

¹⁴ This is not to say that there haven't been and are other economic crises, natural and social events, wars, cultural debates and revolutions that have constrained and inflected gender relations, and *greatly* coloured the possibilities for romantic love and intimacy across the globe. Indeed, the work of Cherry Potter (2002) highlights this in the case of Hollywood. Rather, I merely wish to highlight some of the socioeconomic conditions that impinge on the pursuit of love, particularly for young adults.

¹⁵ A notable exception was the TV show *The L word*.

that a purely textual approach to romantic films is sufficient for disentangling all aspects of their purpose, meaning and resonance, I argue that it is necessary to also analyse audiences and their different relationships to romantic films because it is in the interaction between audiences and texts, *and beyond* as Nakassis (2016) argues, that it is possible to understand the shifting patterns of emphasis in meaning-making and the ways in which individuals, groups, contexts and circumstances play a role in filmic meaning.

This project, at its core a sociological one, is also interested in contrasting and interrogating the claims of key authors who've worked on intimacy, romantic love and relationships. The changes and shifts these authors have identified, and the logics behind them, such as intimacy's growing importance as a point of tension between established institutions with connotations of value and virtue in western societies – for instance marriage, and the growing focus on the 'self' before the 'us,' increased periods of sensual and sexual exploration, a shift from the social to the individual promise of happiness, and romantic love's intertwinement with consumerism and capitalism, are elements this thesis seeks to support, nuance, critique and elaborate on based on the fieldwork and in the context of London (Bauman, 2003, 2007; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997, 2007; Sennett, 1996). Another objective is to contribute to the debates on the processes, shifts and continuities of representations romantic love. Thus, the films that I have chosen I have done so loosely following the idea of the 'event' film as proposed by Thomas Austin (2002). That is, I have chosen films that were highly successful economically, critically and/or popularly, emphasising narrative innovations they brought to the genre (See section 4.2.1 for an in-depth explanation of the selection criteria).

This project is based on two additional axes: First, it looks to understand how the competing discourses surrounding love, intimacy and relationships, are valued and adopted by people for certain discursive effects and second, what boundaries, oppositions and juxtapositions are employed by films and audiences (cf. Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Dromm, 2002; Gornick, 1997; Gould, 1963; Hendrick, 1992; Luhmann, 1986; Martin, 1993; Ortega y Gasset, 1957). It is in the tensions, the disruptive moments where cultural phenomena must be positioned. It is via an analysis of

these disruptions, with their myriad contexts and connotations, that it becomes possible to suggest how this contested field unfolds, to ascertain if it is changing, or simply has the appearance of change, and to establish the ‘strategies’ and the ‘tactics’ of its ‘users’ (Certeau, 1984). Thus, in order to inquire about this ‘self’ before the ‘us’ of romance, I explored how it is being represented in cinema and through figure(s) of love, borrowing from Roland Barthes’ concept. I explore one of these tensions through an analysis of the ambiguous/unhappy ending in several contemporary romantic films, like *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance, 2010) and *Once* (Carney, 2007). In order to connect this to the two axes, I will analyse these endings through an audience-led textual analysis (See section 4.6).

In the remainder of this section, I turn to my research questions and their genealogy.

1.2 First research question. Gender, Class and films

United through music, the platonic couple in *Once* (Carney, 2007) is put to the test time and time again over the financial instability of an aspiring musician and the reduced means of the flower seller who helps him. In a similar situation are the characters in *Something Borrowed* (Greenfield, 2011), but as upper-middle class individuals, financial worries do not get in the way of their love affairs. One is a film where the couple cannot partake in dates or other contemporary romantic practices because of their class position, the other is a film devoted entirely to the changes in the couple through contemporary romantic practices like dating and going out. Eva Illouz (1997) argues in her book *Consuming the Romantic Utopia* that different media, film included, play a central role in the changes to Romantic Love as a concept and a practice. Illouz traces the history of romantic love from the beginning of the twentieth century and its shift from Victorian ‘private’ ideals and utilitarian customs to a more ‘public’ and hedonistic consumer/leisure oriented *practice* of love. Based on this shift, she argues that both how we talk about love (and connected to this, how we conceive it) and our romantic practices are informed by our class position. Furthermore, there is an existing tension about the cultural competences —borrowing the term from Bourdieu (1984)— and a self-perceived lack of them, the ‘ironic distance’ of the middle and upper classes clashing continuously with the apparent ‘over-identification’ of

the working class. This is not unique to film or to romantic love, but rather it traverses through both, according to Illouz. Illouz' work, however, focuses on print media; film is only dealt with marginally. My project seeks to foreground films and their 'intended' audiences given their importance in the reproduction and contestation of romantic ideology. This is so because films feed on and reflect on contemporary romantic practices while also proposing a set of subject positions which the audiences, in an 'ideal' case, would take on completely. This, however, is hardly the case most of the time. Antonio Gramsci (1971) did not believe that subjects were docile and always ready to comply with ideologically hegemonic elements. Hence, while he did not actually use the term *counter hegemony* to account for those moments, movements, groups, those sparks and bursts that challenged the Status quo, he articulates the notion of what has since come to be named as counter hegemony. What's at stake for this project with these considerations is to broaden scholarly perspectives on a 'politics of love': to discuss how it is the relationship between moment, film, audience, socio-economic and cultural factors that influence and create spaces for counter-hegemonic discourses or identities, and to explore their afterlife once the ending credits roll. With this backdrop, **the first research question** this project will address is: *What kinds of gender and class identities are identifiable through representations of love in contemporary North American romantic films?*

1.3 Second research question. Romantic love in film and audiences

Melodrama is a popular genre because it has a unique appeal and method of delivering its message based on displaying and evoking emotions, invoking the audience's emotional and affective participation. Romance films demand from the audience a complete 'suspension of disbelief', a great degree of identification and an emotional commitment to the story. Additionally, Thomas Elsaesser (1987a) argues that in melodrama, the construction of pathos is used to deal with psychological problems and sexual repression. He also understands pathos as a crucial element to melodrama as it allows melodrama to go beyond empirical realism, to elaborate plots and make twists and exaggerations. Affects are part of the text, inform its reading and as such their meaning is not fixed. What is at stake is the 'reality effect' (Aumont, 1992; Barthes, 1977) of the scene, the

ability to convince and be convinced. Logos and pathos are not necessarily opposed. The verisimilitude of a scene can be coupled with an affect (and often is) to provide a reader with a lasting identification with one or more of the elements of the scene, or with the scene itself. This, of course, is not the only possible relation that can come out of the filmic experience and because of it, **the second research question** I aim to answer is, *how do the different affects that love scenes produce in audiences relate to individual audience members' experiences of social reality and their conceptions of love and self?*

1.4 Third research question. Identity and film audiences

Why is the background blurred in a scene where A and B are about to kiss for the first time? Is there a reason behind the fact that the female lead is seldom taller than the male lead? Is it random happenstance that intimate moments on screen are lighted with a warm, yellow side light? This list of questions might have very different answers, pertaining to contexts of both production and reception. Few elements in commercial cinema are left to chance; a controlled environment is after all one of the key differences between cinema and 'real life'. Then, the hundreds of choices behind a full commercial feature that begins with a script and ends with its release can be seen as a unity of conscious decisions of what to show, and *ergo*, of what to hide, exclude or ignore. Film scholars who focus on melodrama have pointed out several prominent elements in these films: thematic music, close up shots, triangular desire based plots, internalization of conflict, and an ambivalent relation to realism (Doane, 1988; Gledhill, 1987; Vincendeau, 1989; Williams, 1998). However, the popularity of melodrama as a genre has partly paved the way for other (sub) genres like 'chick-flicks', rom-coms and 'indie' films that adapt, follow and borrow these elements without using them prescriptively. Further, as Neale and Krutnik (1990) argue, the resilience of the romantic film, drama, comedy and drama-comedy is due to the adaptability the subject of romantic love has to historic changes. It is necessary to look how historic changes affect representations of love on-screen and how people, who experience these changes in and out of the film, negotiate, and articulate these representations through their own life-worlds. In light of all these issues, the **third research question** I would like to put forward is: *How do 'intended' audiences*

interpret, react to, negotiate and appropriate representations of romantic love in the construction of their own romantic behaviours and aspirations?

Borrowing from Martin Barker's (2006) concept of 'viewing strategy', the questions above also indicate that film viewing involves a range of aesthetic, sensuous, emotional, cognitive and imaginative processes all converging to form the experience of watching. These 'viewing strategies' are considered here not only for their relevance of speaking about the filmic experience but also about the ideas, practices and personal experiences that inform them. Before I proceed to discussions of theory, methodology and empirical data that concerns my questions, I will outline the shape of the thesis.

1.5 The thesis

Chapter one has put forward both my personal interest and the questions I aim to answer in this project. In particular, I'm interested at looking at the intersection of emotions, class, and gender in contemporary romantic films audience reception. **Chapter two** will discuss the key and overarching theoretical concepts and discussions through the thesis. I trace how different disciplines have conceptualised romantic love, from evolutionary Biology to Queer theory and elucidate the main discussions these disciplines have about love. From this, I also outline my use of the main concepts of this thesis: identity, ideology, hegemony and how this relate to film spectatorship. In **chapter three** I connect the concepts examined in chapter two to the history of reception studies and its different schools of thought and methods, ranging from the 'effects' tradition, *Screen* theory, British Cultural Studies to contemporary approaches. In this chapter, I privilege audience studies that have dealt with romantic love and its representations.

Chapter four deals with the methodology adopted, laying out the grounds for what I call 'audience-led' textual analysis. **Chapter five** addresses issues of episodic sexuality, monogamy, online dating and technology based on discussions of two films: *Her* (Jonze, 2013) and *Don Jon* (Gordon-Levitt, 2013). It introduces the concept of 'romantic affordances' to highlight how emotions, fantasy, past romantic experiences and the

everyday are intermeshed in audiences' articulations of their romantic identities through representations of romantic love. This entails considering the possible ideological contradictions and the relationship audiences' own positioning. At the same time, it contests the idea that technology and late-stage capitalism are seen as reducing romantic love to a simple series of economic decisions by showcasing how different audiences navigate these new affordances and develop tactics of their own. **Chapter six** focuses on how class affects the position audiences take vis-à-vis two working-class romances, *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance, 2010) and *Once* (Carney, 2007). I analyse how the different discourse of love present in the films (romanticism, intimacy, and Platonism), as embodied by the characters and their situation, work to bring class as an enabler and a hurdle for relationships to work while at the same time reproducing problematic ideologies of gender roles. To do this, I also explore how ideas of realism in *Blue Valentine* and of fantasy in *Once* (in the form of an impossible love) work in opposite ways to highlight or 'naturalise' the adoption of either perspective.

Chapter seven further elaborates how gender roles in films are received, contested, and negotiated by audiences. In this chapter, I go back to *Blue Valentine* while also including *(500) Days of Summer* (Webb, 2009). In doing so, I make use of the literature and history of melodrama and women's films to understand audiences' reactions to differences and continuities between these two genres and the elements the two films borrow from or innovate on. Further, as part of the analysis of gender roles, I explore audiences' reactions to the new type of 'feminised masculinity' exemplified by the character of Tom in *(500) Days of Summer*. I contend that Tom's masculinity is competing for hegemony with a classic masculinity. Finally, I gauge how the 'unhappy' endings of these films are received and articulated by audiences, highlighting how fragility and contingency are increasingly normative aspects of our contemporary romantic identities. In **chapter eight**, I reflect on the empirical work and how the results from it answered the research questions. Thus, I conclude by looking back at how the conceptual framework and methodology to consider the potential and limitations of the study, summarising its findings and considering ways forward for future research.

CHAPTER 2: CELLULOID LOVE: ROMANCE, IDEOLOGY AND SELF COMMODIFICATION

2.1 Introduction

When it comes to cinema, few things are as fruitful for narratives as love. The merging of the visual power of cinema with narratives of love allows the latter to take on textures, forms and shapes it previously did not know beyond a reader's imagination. The visualisation and spread of these representations furthers their recognition across different classes and ages, prompting a distinct imagery and iconography to be associated with love; this includes scenes that we now knowingly (Barker & Brooks, 1998) call romantic: the first kiss, the tender or erotic gaze from afar, the holding of hands, the sunset reunion. This is not to say that the images appearing in cinema are what construed certain actions and emotions as romantic in the first place, but rather that with the inception of film, there was an audio-visual way to 'standardise,' 'consolidate' and 'reproduce' a common idea of romantic love.

Final Cut: Ladies and Gentlemen (2012) beautifully illustrates this point. Director and editor György Pálfi tells a story of a man who meets a woman, falls in love with her in the first night they meet; he fights her former lover and marries her, just to be faced with the trials and tribulations of everyday life shortly afterwards. This is a story one has probably watched, read and heard countless times: Pálfi's accomplishment, however, lies in using clips from 450 different films to weave the narrative.

Roland Barthes (1990) had done something similar in his book *A lover's discourse: Fragments* recollecting fragments of books (fiction and non-fiction alike) and creating a typology of different situations, emotions, affects and ideas about romantic love. He calls these 'figures of love' that

take shape insofar as we can recognize, in passing discourse, something that has been read, heard, felt. The figure is outlined (like a sign) and memorable (like an image or a tale). A figure is established if at least someone can say "*That's so true! I recognize that scene of language.*" (1990, p. 4)

From the ‘first kiss’, failure, jealousy, idealisation, atonement, this can’t go on, love’s languor to the moment of the ‘nose’ —when the lover recognises the first faults in the loved one’s physique and character, Barthes’ list of fragments is a rich list of elements of love that allows us to understand love not as a seamless unit, but rather as a pastiche of experiences, affects and practices that are in a constant struggle for coherence and harmony. That love lends itself to this sort of atomization is exactly what makes it such a rich subject for cinema, malleable into a canon, a genre, a set of visual clues the audience can easily recognize. Furthermore, it is through the recognition of these figures that people organise their romantic identities in media representations and beyond, fragmentarily so, looking, longing, and safeguarding coherence between the many figures.

This fragmentation can be found in all the approaches that have sought to study love to this day. This is not a mere coincidence, nor is it the caprice of stubborn researchers who attempt to wholly partition love into clean, non-overlapping elements. This, I argue, is because love is experienced, thought of, felt, idealised, remembered, seen and practiced in fragments, in ‘figures’, more so than any other concept and/or idea one can think of (the ‘one’ here, as it is the concept of love, is circumscribed to Western societies and should not be construed as unproblematically applicable to other cultures and areas). This is not only because love can refer to love to a person, to a thing, to an animal, to an idea (religious and non-religious), but because love is more than the sum of its fragments, yet it can be fully expressed through them. This can be illustrated by the caricaturizing of other concepts such as honesty and loyalty. It is possible to define honest as “always telling the truth” and loyalty” as “staying by your side, no matter what” but if one tries, without recurring to the Judeo-Christian religious formulation of ‘God is love,’ to do such thing with love is impossible. Instead, formulations such as ‘love is finding he has left you half of the cake in the fridge despite being triple chocolate,’ ‘love is when he hugs you so hard after you’ve had a bad day,’ ‘love is being able to speak without talking,’ ‘love is when he makes you laugh even when you’re mad at him,’ ‘love is that kiss you never forget.’ These formulations, proposed by the participants of this project’s fieldwork, are some of a plethora one can think, experience, remember and has seen. But to reduce love to one aphorism is impossible, even to the greatest of writers, thinkers, and scholars.

Despite love's elusiveness to full categorisation, different disciplines have tried to come up with taxonomies, categories, sub concepts, modes of operationalization, theories and hermeneutics of love. In this chapter and based on the degree of interest the study of love demands of the discipline, I focus on biological, psychosocial, psychoanalytic, philosophical and sociological approaches to love. I emphasise the last three as these recognise and value love as a cultural historical ideological construct that privileges certain forms of associations and sexual orientations over others. In the sociological approaches to romantic love, I do not focus on interpersonal communication theories like Social Penetration theory, Expectancy Violation theory, Politeness theory, Systems perspectives, the dialectical perspective or the social exchange theory¹⁶ for two main reasons: Given their focus on the communicational exchange between actors, systems and subjects, these theories describe romantic love as a communicational construct, leaving them ill equipped to account for two crucial elements of romantic love: the lived experience (as it is told to a third party, the researcher)¹⁷ and love as an idea – as a concept imagined, thought and dreamed of, individually and socially (as it is told in a film). Thus, I will focus on those approaches that have understood romantic love as a concept and as a practice.

I omit two major approaches for similar reasons: literary and religious literature. I largely omit the literary tradition as it is simply too vast to fit in this literature review. Likewise for the religious literature (See Singer, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c for a three-volume abbreviated historical and philosophical discussion that contains multiple references to literature and Judeo-Christianity). Further, while it's undeniable that in a Western context, talking about romantic love means connecting it to Christianity, religious literature contains an explanatory shift from the one opted for in this project. Religious literature is too focused on divine love. This is a problem as it makes human love only a subsidiary of the divine. Thus, any form of love is analysed insofar as it fits or does not fit the project of divine love. This is a problem as it displaces historical, economic, social, and cultural contexts in which love is conceptualised, and practiced. Thus, any links to the religious

¹⁶ See Dainton & Zelle, 2015 for a summary of some of these theories and perspectives.

¹⁷ If one were to investigate exchanges between lovers, then these theories and propositions would be invaluable, but that is not the case in this project.

here will be done within secular philosophical and sociological frameworks. I also recognise that now scholars in fields as seemingly distant as economics and law have produced work on love but these are not the concern of this project.

2.2 Biological approaches to love

From evolutionary biology, evolutionary anthropology to neuroscience, approaches in this field use experiments, questionnaires, models, taxonomies and evolutionary theory to study love. Much of the research in these fields owes to two researchers and their theories and models: Harry Harlow and John Bowlby. Harlow (1958, 1974; Vicedo, 2010) worked with socialisation amongst primates and identified five different kinds of love: maternal, paternal, peer love, heterosexual love and the infant's love of the mother. This love, he argued, was based on both unlearned behaviours and sociocultural learned processes. This meant that an attachment process, beginning during infancy was crucial to develop into healthy mature individuals. Healthy here means successful sexual behaviour. Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1981), a proponent of attachment theory, argued that attachment, caregiving and sex were innate motivational systems that had evolved during the course of millennia as they helped to increase the likelihood infants would reach maturity and reproduce. He suggested infants develop three types of attachment: secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. Building on these two authors and others (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Buss, 1988, 2006; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kenrick, 1987; Mellen, 1981; Rubin, 1970; Rubin, Anne, & Charles, 1981; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) the main contributions of this field can be summed in three main points:

- Love is an evolutionary strategy to protect one's genes (through reproduction) with a difference on how males and females act. Males seek to spread and protect their reproduction possibilities while females seek to secure their offspring security to reach maturity (differential parental investment model). In this regard, something like jealousy is a male's way of securing his own reproduction over other males and the female chooses based on the resources of the male (Buss, 2000).

- Love is an evolutionary strategy of attachment (kinship) to heighten possibilities of survival and reaching maturity for infants. Attachment theory highlights love as composed of both positive and negative aspects that are expressed in adult relationships based on the attachment developed during infancy. In turn, depending on the type of attachment developed, strategies and biases of attachment, caregiving and sexual behaviours are either hyper or deactivated.
- Love is a universal adaptive function of humans and it is not reserved just to them (Buss, 2002; Chisholm, 1999; Jankowiak, 1995). This is because humans live in groups and love provides an efficient and lasting mode of consolidating groups, reproduction and survival.

In the neurosciences, coming from the aforementioned approaches, some have even gone as far as to claim that love is an addiction, a chemical imbalance in the brain that produces selection and judgement biases (Fisher, 2004; Peele, 1975). Helen Fisher and her colleagues reached this conclusion after conducting fMRI brain scans of students who self-reported as ‘having fallen madly in love.’ These researchers found – or thought that they had found – that love activates the reward system of the brain that produces dopamine and oxytocin and distinguished a positive addiction, falling in love, to a negative one, romantic rejection (Aron et al., 2005; Fisher, 2014; Fisher, Aron, & Brown, 2005). The media and further popular attention that these approaches receive is easy to understand: they boil down love to simple functions, chemical reactions, practices and above all, serve as a rationalisation matrix from which no love figure escapes. However, as will become evident in later chapters, I disagree strongly with these universalistic claims and with the apolitical nature of conceptualising love as a simple mechanism to further one’s survival.

2.3 Psychosocial approaches to love

Greatly influenced by the biological approaches and driven by a positivistic research ethic, social psychologists have studied love trying to theorize, model, and conceptualize it. They have, however, stumbled upon the problem of the social. That is, the almost

infinite ways love is spoken, thought of and acted on. In recognition of this, the most influential of these scholars have developed taxonomies and scales of love. While problems such as the ahistorical individualistic approach of psychology pervade this approach, the taxonomies developed are helpful to work on a coding framework of love and to a more nuanced consideration of romantic love. Ellen Berscheid (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Berscheid, 1988, 2002; Berscheid & Regan, 2005; Berscheid, 1999) categorized the different schemes of love into four different ones: Attachment love, compassionate love, companionate love/liking and romantic love. Berscheid's theorising of love includes two further elements: the dyad of love/like and lust. The difference between loving and liking isn't just a matter of degrees in the same scale. Rather, there are qualitative differences between states of arousal and contextual cues between the two. Lust constitutes a determining anchor of the type of love/like between two individual actors. The two starkest examples are romantic and companionate love, in this taxonomy equated with initial liking with and without, respectively, sexual desire.

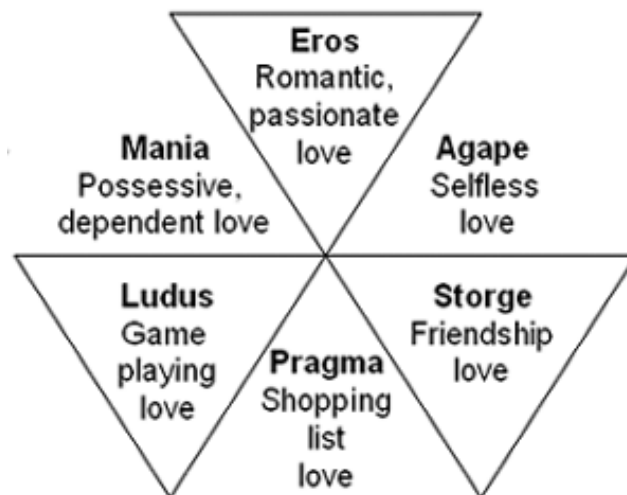


Fig 2.1 John Lee's love styles

Susan and Clyde Hendrick (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 2002, 1989; Hendrick, 1992) have, over the course of decades of work, developed a taxonomy and scale of love styles, inspired by John Alan Lee's (1973) love styles. These styles are divided in three primary and three secondary styles. The primary styles are: Eros, Ludus and Storge. The secondary styles are: Pragma, Mania and Agape. Below I outline a short definition and main characteristics of each style:

- Eros: a style based on strong emotional and physical attraction to the beloved, even before knowing her/him. The lover must be self-confident and there is the idea that the relationship with the beloved is inevitable.
- Ludus: or love-as-a-game. In this style, love is to be played with several partners at a time. Emotions and attachments are highly controlled or suppressed. It requires a high level of skill and knowledge of the rules of love to play successfully. Two filmic takes on this can be seen in *Alfie* (Gilbert, 1966; Shyer, 2004) and *Broken Flowers* (Jarmusch, 2005). Both films star womanizers who, after several romantic affairs with women with whom they avoid any type of commitment, they start to question their ways.
- Storge: or love-as-friendship. This type of love lacks the passion and excitement of the previous two and is more akin to a friendly, quiet and calm attachment. It's the type of love to grow over a long period of time.
- Pragma: or love-as-desired-qualities. This kind of love prizes the search for a compatible partner above anything else. This compatibility is measured in a list of qualities he/she shops for based on whether the desired commitment is short or long-term.
- Mania: It can be understood as a failed Eros or Ludus type of love. Whether it fails because it lacks self-confidence, knowledge or cannot believe in the love given to him/her, it is obsessive, over-intense, anxious and constantly looking for reassurance. Young Werther is the epitome of this love.
- Agape: Selfless love. The agapic lover places the beloved's welfare and concerns above her/his own. It combines characteristics of Storge and Eros. Thus, it is only experienced sporadically, very rarely in a pure form. It owes its name to the type of love long preached by Christian priests like St. Augustine and St. Thomas.

Both Lee and Hendrick & Hendrick recognise that people rarely experience, practice and feel love in these pure types. Not only that, this is not an exhaustive categorisation, with styles of love arising from the combination of two or more of these styles, like ludic eros or storgic eros. Importantly, these researchers recognise that these love styles are affected

by individual and demographic factors (e.g., self-esteem and gender). Furthermore, Lee highlights that it is not a matter of the love-style that best fits the lover but rather that the lover idealises and seeks to practice a certain style or mixture of styles.

This double layered conceptualization of love is what drove Robert Sternberg to refine his Triangular Theory of Love (1986) to what he termed the Duplex Theory of Love (Sternberg & Weis, 2006). The initial theory posed that the three vertices that (metaphorically) compose, metaphorically, love are intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. Intimacy refers to closeness and bonding. Passion to the drive to romance, physical attraction and sexual intercourse. Decision and commitment are understood as conscious decisions to love and commit to love and be in a relationship with the beloved. There are eight possible permutations of these vertices, which Sternberg considers to be the kinds of love possible in a relationship (See fig 2.2). In the reformulated version of the theory, Sternberg argues that

‘Love does not involve just a single triangle. Rather, it involves a great number of triangles, only some of which are of major theoretical and practical interest. For example, it is possible to contrast real and ideal triangles. One has not only a triangle representing his or her love for the other, but also a triangle representing an ideal other for that relationship.’ (2006, p. 187)

Sternberg’s theory is the first approach mentioned that recognises the ideal aspect of romantic love. This recognition led him to formulate that these love triangles come from stories and thus, love as a story should be theorized. Sternberg’s approach marks a turn from tests, questionnaires, experiments, models and scales of love to a more qualitative, textual, practice-based approach. Suffice to say, while this was novel for social psychologists, many other disciplines have conceptualized love as a story that contains practices, emotions and ideas for far longer. Furthermore, Sternberg’s and Hendrick & Hendrick’s propositions about love have an underlying problem: They sanitise love as mostly a positive phenomenon with a few negative kinks all of which are the result of *individual* deficiencies of an element or type of love.

	Intimacy	Passion	Commitment
Nonlove	-	-	-
Liking	+	-	-
Infatuated Love	-	+	-
Empty Love	-	-	+
Romantic Love	+	+	-
Companionate Love	+	-	+
Fatuous Love	-	+	+
Consummate Love	+	+	+

fig 2.2 Eight kinds of love based on the three vertices of Robert Sternberg's triangular theory of love

Thus, while love-as-a-story is a crucial development towards a culturally situated, contextualised and political notion of love, it is important to consider that any love story cannot be reduced to individual attitudes towards a particular element of the story.

Stories are larger than individuals and though certainly shaped by them, they also shape them. John Lee (1998) has argued that it is far more fruitful to think of the love styles and their possible combinations as ideologies of love, including sex styles, that are as liberating as they are prescriptive, and they are socialised. In the following section I will outline two approaches that have sought to understand love as an ideology: psychoanalytic and socio-philosophical approaches to love.

2.4 Psychoanalytic theory and Eros

Psychoanalysis can be broadly understood as a compliment to attachment theory but with a heavy focus on internal processes of attachment and how these affect individual and social development of a person. Unlike in attachment theory, however, these internal processes are not seen as genetic and/or innate. Rather, they are rooted in the 'unconsciousness' and are largely dependent on one's childhood attachments. A summary of the gargantuan number of concepts, theories, elements and critiques of psychoanalysis is outside the scope of this chapter. I focus on how scholars have used, modified and critiqued concepts belonging to psychoanalysis to think about love. It should be noted

that in psychoanalysis, love is characterized by two things: first, an intrinsic link with sexuality and the sex drive and second, it is almost entirely interested in the love between paternal figures and the infant. The love one experiences in these relationships is then seen as feeding and informing the kind of love one can develop towards everything else. In the subsections below I will summarise and highlight a few concepts of psychoanalysis and socio-philosophical works and their relationship to romantic love.

2.4.1 *Eros and Plato*

One of the most important perspectives here that still informs a great deal of today's romantic discourse is Plato's account of love. It focuses on *Eros*—usually understood to mean a sexual passion, a desire for an object—, and the search of a greater good.

Diotima/Plato (1953) understands both as the search and the end product to be the Form of Beauty. Beauty in Ancient Greece is *harmonious* and as such it is good because the parts that make it and their connections must be. Plato sees sexual attraction as a deficient step to truly love, to love Beauty, sanitizing Eros of its sexual component. Furthermore, he argues that love among people is not the greatest love to be had and thus is flawed, it is merely a path towards recognizing beauty in a person's soul and then moving forward to recognize Beauty in itself. Plato puts forth the idea of a hierarchy of love, *scala amoris*, on top being Beauty, abstract Beauty. Plato insists that love must be reproductive, but for Plato this meant the reproduction, the conception of one's own theories and concepts, of knowledge; in short, Love of Beauty should lead to philosophy. There are two main critiques of this vision of love: First, it implies a quality-based love, denying the possibility of 'fully' loving a person (Vlastos, 1973). Second, there is an egocentric character, because it is focused in the lover's pursuit and not so much in the beloved, seen as an object of the lover's desires and goals (Nygren, 1969; Soble, 1989, 1990; Vlastos, 1973). This claim has been widely disputed on the basis that Plato never equated Eros with desire as he believed desire was not dependent on the lack of something (Dixon, 2007; Haden, 1979; Kosman, 1976; Levy, 1979) like psychoanalytical theories of desire conceptualize it to be. Despite these philosophical criticisms, a more informal understanding of platonic love still permeates much of our understanding of romantic love as a love impossible, whatever the reasons might be, to fulfil and carry out

in the realm of the everyday. Thus, platonic love and Plato's love are not the same thing nor do they refer to the same type of drive, but there are several elements they share and that are now common in other discourses of love. The hierarchical structure of this love, its conjecture as an upward path towards 'enlightenment' and the impossibility of its fulfilment in an earthly realm are all elements that have transpired and influence other discourses of love, including the discourse of intimacy which sets itself as a contemporary sublimation of these elements. In chapter 6, this type of love will be exemplified via analysis of the film *Once* (Carney, 2007).

Sigmund Freud (1922), based on an arguably poor reading of Plato's work, conceptualised Eros as an uncontrollable instinct to live. This, in Freud's work, was unavoidably linked to a sexual *drive* but he argued it also contained an energy to produce, to commune and create —a *drive* in psychoanalytic theory is an innate urge that seeks satisfaction in material objects or physical actions. In Plato, Eros was an otherworldly energy void of sexuality that was unattainable as it wasn't embodied. Freud, however, thinks of Eros as a sublimating power where the suppression of one's libido can be channelled to cultural pursuits. Furthermore, Freud goes on to oppose Eros to Thanatos, the death drive (2010). Eros is the ultimate desire for wholeness, for the creation and preservation of life. Eros, driven by libidinal energy, is largely involved with sexuality but it is not explained fully by it. Creativity, self-actualization, self-fulfilment, cooperation and bonding are also expressions of Eros. Thus, romantic love is one of the possible ways humans experience Eros. The importance of Eros as the life drive lies in its utopian dimension, clearly exemplified in Herbert Marcuse's (1966) work *Eros and Civilization*. Marcuse seeks to rethink Freud's dictum that humanity is organised around the repression of (sexual) instincts and their channelling into productive, organised endeavours. This repression causes guilt to be an organising principle of society and makes happiness unattainable. Following a Marxist-psychoanalytic philosophical line of thought, he posits the idea of a non-repressive society, where a pleasure principle (Eros) organizes a new civilization where creativity, automatized labour and libido instead of guilt are the drivers of progress. Aided by automatized material production, Marcuse believed a socialist society could accomplish this reconfiguration of societal organisation.

The reality principle of repression finds its historically situated version in the performance principle,

which is that of an acquisitive and antagonistic society in the process of constant expansion, presupposes a long development during which domination has been increasingly rationalized: control over social labor now reproduces society on a large scale and under improving conditions. For a long way, the interests of domination and the interests of the whole coincide: the profitable utilization of the productive apparatus fulfils the needs and faculties of individuals. For the vast majority of the population, the scope and mode of satisfaction are determined by their own labor; but their labor is work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live. And it becomes the more alien the more specialized the division of labor becomes. Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work, they do not fulfil their own needs and faculties but work in *alienation*. (p. 45)

Thus, Marcuse recognises that work is a necessity of life, but he takes issue with what he terms surplus repression, or the organisation of labour not per the needs of the worker, but rather to the benefit of the capitalist. Thus, the reality and performance principles are capitalist drives that organise production and desires through oppression, domination and alienation. Against this, Marcuse champions a new intersubjective and libidinal subjectivity that seeks to break the separation between the senses and reason and that searches for harmony and gratification instead of domination and oppression (Kellner, 1999). This is what he terms a “rationality of gratification,” whereby Eros reconfigures Logos to help envision and build a better world.

Erich Fromm is another scholar who engaged in an ideological psychoanalytic-Marxist reading of love. In his book *The Art of Loving* (1974), Fromm rallies against the perception that love is something we *passively* fall into. Rather, he suggests that we think of it as a skill a man can teach himself. Quite notably, that up to this point, in the work of these three authors, *men are the ones who love, women are just the love object*. For Fromm, there are four core elements of love: knowledge, care, responsibility and respect. These elements are never clear-cut as they are bound to different socio-cultural and historical understandings. Thus, a great deal about learning to love comes with the *real* understanding of these elements. A fifth element for Fromm which is crucial is self-love. Self-love means to know-thyself, care for oneself, respecting oneself and being responsible for one's actions.

Fromm identifies two problems that stops us from truly loving ourselves and others in capitalist societies. First, is that self-love turns into narcissism and egocentric attitudes towards loving another. This in turn means that we love some qualities of the beloved, not the whole of the beloved. In addition, Fromm also believed this fostered a harmful relationship to one's community as the lover was too focused on one single person to love all his community. Second, paradoxically as he accepts it, is that in our efforts to battle aloneness and alienation, we seek to fully merge with the beloved, which is problematic as we lose our individuality and in the process, force the other to lose theirs. Fromm proposes the idea of a mature love, which he conceives as opposed to the narcissistic, goal-centred, functionalist, quality based immature love of Western societies. This type of love recognises the individuality of each being and does not attempt to either assimilate, merge or alienate, but to love (through a deep knowledge of) all of humanity. Fromm argues that mature love is best understood as a paradoxical thought of belonging to and not belonging (to a union of love) at the same time.

This is linked to the psychoanalytic distinction one can make between mature love and narcissistic love. According to Julia Kristeva (1987), 'the lover is a narcissist with an *object*.' (p.33). She further writes:

The lover, in fact, reconciles narcissism and hysteria. As far as he is concerned, there is an idealizable other who returns his own ideal image (that is the narcissistic moment), but he is nevertheless an other. It is essential for the lover to maintain the existence of that ideal other and to be able to imagine himself familiar, merging with him, and even indistinguishable from him. In amorous hysteria the ideal Other is a reality, not a metaphor. (p.33)

In psychoanalytic terms, this means that the ego has been able to deal with the trauma of the pre-Oedipal loss of the ideal by recognition of the *difference* of the *object*. This is mature love. 'Object' here is to be understood another human being, initially the mother, and in Freud usually a woman (Kristeva is far more ambivalent). Narcissism, in Freud (1924), is divided in two: a primary/normal and a secondary narcissism. The primary/normal narcissism is the libidinal energy that is connected to the instinct of self-preservation that becomes one of the first mediation between the id and the ego. The secondary narcissism is when there is a withdrawal of libidinal energy towards objects and is fully directed at a self that is neither an ego ideal nor a subject. The harm contained in the secondary

narcissism is that it withdraws the subject from the object-world. Narcissistic love is where the connection to the *real* object-world is rejected and the self becomes the model on which one chooses love-objects. As Sue Gottlieb (2011) argues, this means that narcissistic love is a quest for determination, control of the love-object to appease the anxiety of the self.

2.4.2 Narcissism, identification, and difference

Marcuse and Fromm's work consolidated a line of ideological thought on love and capitalism that has been continued by other scholars and researchers. It follows a certain linear premise to love in a capitalist society:

- The human condition is one of isolation, solitude and damnation to aloneness.
- Humans live in a constant struggle for attachment, for appreciation, recognition and communion because of this.
- Because humans are, ultimately, selfish creatures they constantly fail in these pursuits. This failure and instinct of narcissism has been heightened by capitalism.
- This is so because capitalism has made of the self a quantifiable and divisible set of categories. This alienates humans from one another, making it impossible for them to truly recognise themselves as such and even less so others.
- Love is both a cure and a poison of this capitalist malady.
- It is a poison because 'loving capitalistically' is based around self-satisfaction, instead of intimating with the beloved, recognising and acknowledging them as human. That is, this love is more concerned with a narcissistic pursuit of self-pleasure and self-desire.
- Love can be a cure, a positive force, because it can help us, when 'properly' practiced, to truly know other human beings and battle the alienation of capitalism. This positive force is very reminiscent of what Victor Turner termed as *communitas* (See section 3.4.2).

Zygmunt Bauman and Alain Badiou are two scholars who fall in this line of thought. For Bauman (2003), love in a 'liquid world' is characterised by the consumerist co-optation of its ideals. That is, the bond, the relationship becomes a commodity and the loved one is a bag of qualities we go out shopping for. When one

gets bored of this ‘bag,’ Bauman argues, we simply throw it away and go out shopping again, sometimes ‘recycling’ a few of the qualities. Of utmost importance for this ‘liquid love’ is to manage distances, to never fully commit to a relationship or a person, because in liquid modernity we are all uprooted and narcissistic. The main quality of a liquid lover then is one who can navigate the line of connection with others while preserving his/her own self-interests. As with much of his Eurocentric work, Bauman works in extremes. The liquid lover is a western elite that oppresses, by emotionally and morally detaching from, the underworld. Again, as is the case, consumerist romantic love is analytically extended to the impossibility of loving the Other. Bauman then asserts that there are no ‘local solutions for globally produced problems.’ (p.115) and that to battle the never-ending individualisation and de-territorialisation of contemporary consumer globalisation, liquid individuals must seek globally aimed plans with local solutions. This uplifting glimmer of hope, however, cannot be retroactively sought after in couple romantic love.

This pessimistic outlook on love because of economic liberalism and ‘rampant’ narcissism has also been explored by authors like Christopher Lasch (1977), Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Richard Sennett (1998). These authors lamented that love has become too narrowed focused, as Paul Adams (2005) suggests on Sennett,

the fundamental problem was a lack of balance between private and public worlds caused by an overemphasis on love at the expense of cool and detached modes of engagement... what we see is a collapse of attachment and involvement to a narrow sphere—from the cosmos to the hearth, from civil society to the narcissistic and possessive microcosm of family and friends. (p.53)

Thus, one can recognise two types of love: One is telluric, broad and community based. This love was corrupted by capitalism and turned into a narcissistic, (semi) detached, narrow love. The invasion of love into a public, civil sphere is understood as damaging and undermining more rational, manly forms of attachment and social engagement. The heterosexist and patriarchal connotations of this opposition have been critiqued and explored at length by feminist scholars, most notably Lauren Berlant (2008, 2000, 2012). The opposition between the domestic and the public

spheres as gendered spaces is explored in chapter 7, with reference to *Blue Valentine* and *(500) Days of Summer*. The narcissistic, alienated pessimistic outlook on love and its relationship with technology I discuss in chapter 5, with reference to *Her*.

Alain Badiou (2009) follows a similar logic to Bauman's but he does believe in the possibility of a 'true' romantic love that is not subservient to consumer capitalist logic. *In praise of love* continues the nostalgia of a seemingly lost, utopic uncorrupted love by capitalism, while acknowledging three elements characteristic of it. First, is that love is impossible without a degree of risk. A person must make a leap of love, to adventure to be nastily surprised yet also to be overwhelmed by affection in true love. This is why, Badiou argues, love as a sort of economic exchange of favours (sexual and otherwise), qualities and traits is nothing but vulgar narcissistic hedonism made possible and fostered by a liberal capitalist logic that looks to minimise risks everywhere. In this notion of risk as inherent to true love, Badiou makes a nod to both Plato and Christianity, but rather than looking at love as having a transcendental otherworldly quality—which is part of the root of the problem—he pleads to understand love as having an immanent quality:

Christianity grasped perfectly that there is an element in the apparent contingency of love that can't be reduced to that contingency. But it immediately raised it to the level of transcendence, and that is the root of the problem. This universal element I too recognize in love as immanent. But Christianity has somehow managed to elevate it and refocus it onto a transcendent power. It's an ideal that was already partly present in Plato, through the idea of the Good. It is a brilliant first manipulation of the power of love and one we must now bring back to earth. I mean we must demonstrate that love really does have universal power, but that it is simply the opportunity we are given to enjoy a positive, creative, affirmative experience of difference. The Other, no doubt, but without the "Almighty-Other", without the "Great Other" of transcendence. (p.65-66)

In this view, the possibility of love lies in the recognition and push for an immanent experience of difference. Contrary to the religious sublimation of love towards a transcendent power (god), Badiou considers this search and experience of difference as a combative, grounded pursuit. This position is akin to ones taken by scholars like Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber and Jacques Derrida in regards of how *the experience of difference can be a tool against the alienation of contemporary capitalist societies*. He, however, is against a politics of love, as in love one does not deal with enemies—as one must in

politics— only with the creative play between identity and difference. Thus, for Badiou, love remains anchored in the intrapersonal and intimate, and in linking it back to Plato, he argues that it is based on a ‘truth procedure’ of two. A truth procedure is the continuous, strenuous yet rewarding quest for truth of exploring, experiencing and developing the world from the perspective of difference and not identity. It is in this search of truth that love is universal, yet personal. This makes Badiou’s project distinct from Agape insofar as agape is the downward sublimation of Eros through a sanctioned religious union and his is grounded in an earthly other. This is reminiscent of Freud’s (1922) position on the intensity of the couple, where its intertwining is one of the most subversive energies one can envision.

Contrary to Badiou, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (Hardt, 2011, 2014, Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004, 2011), have recently pursued a politics of love. Their position is decidedly agapic and community based. The origin of this pursuit, Hardt says, lies in that feeling ‘like love’ one feels in the ‘really good’ protests. Initially, Hardt and Negri proposed that

Love—in the production of affective networks, schemes of cooperation, and social subjectivities—is an economic power. Conceived in this way love is not, as it is often characterized, spontaneous or passive. It does not simply happen to us, as if it were an event that mystically arrives from elsewhere. Instead it is an action, a biopolitical event, planned and realized in common. (2011, p. 180)

Here, these authors are echoing the notion of love as active, not passive that authors like Fromm proposed. Furthermore, they also highlight the need to go beyond an intimate and private conceptualization of love. In other words, a loving subject is not *just* an intimate subject, must also be a civil one. Thus, a political notion of love would

First, it would have to extend across social scales and create bonds that are at once intimate and social, destroying conventional divisions between public and private. Second, it would have to operate in a field of multiplicity and function through not unification but the encounter and interaction of differences. Finally, a political love must transform us, that is, it must designate a becoming such that in love, in our encounter with others we constantly become different. Love is thus always a risk in which we abandon some of our attachments to this world in the hope of creating another, better one. I consider these qualities the primarily pillars of a research agenda for discovering today a political concept of love. (Hardt, 2011, p. 678)

Hardt & Negri reject identity politics as a base for a politics of love as, even when they are in the service of a subordinate minority, these movements are too narrow in their scope and run the risk of being reactionary. Love, according to these two scholars, can be one of the powerful forces that could eventually replace private property, as it is in the strength and endurance of the social bond love can (ideally) provide that they encounter its transformative power, both individually and socially.

There are a few elements that tie all these authors to Freud and his work on the concept of Eros. First, they all believe, as Freud proposed, that delayed gratification is a nobler pursuit than immediate (read: sexual) gratification. This is because it permits to think, experience and promote love at a level beyond the closed, intimate space of the family and friends. Second, love is ultimately and mostly a positive thing with a negative underside that should and can be fought against. It is also hardly surprising that this negative aspect is usually related to a sexual drive, intimate hedonism and personal narcissism. These elements are understood as the corruption of the noble, anticapitalistic side of love; much like Freud advocated for the repression of the sexual drive to delay gratification and channel this energy towards cultural pursuits. This side of love is experienced and lived first as a couple, and through this experience we can, and should, extend it to bond with Others. Only by refusing to yield to the personal and individual Same it is possible to truly love.

2.5 Feminist and queer theories on love

Feminist and queer scholarship has had a long-standing interest in a critical engagement with romantic love, its forms, practices (both public and private), ideology and affects. A full engagement with the enormous body of work put out over the decades by feminist and queer scholars is simply impossible in here. I will divide, for the sake of clarity, divide the positions here as 'positive' and 'negative' in relation to love. This should not be understood as a fatalistic and deterministic outlook on romantic love, but rather as to how different authors have argued that love, in its entirety or because of some ideological

elements of it, is ultimately a positive or negative ideological force, with an emphasis on its material and psychic effects for women.

Given the renewed interest by philosophers and researchers on the political possibilities of love, feminist and queer scholars have engaged in dialogue and critique of certain elements contained in the work of these authors, particularly in the case of Hardt & Negri. In this section, I will delineate the most important elements of these critiques as they help to nuance and complicate the panorama of the politics of love. Eleanor Wilkinson (2016) has criticized their conceptualization of love on two grounds: First for creating a too fixed hierarchy of 'loves' and second, for not considering the negative affects contained in the experience of love-as-communion. Berating identity politics and self-love as too narrow, reactionary and against the 'love of difference' misses the importance that these movements

can be about both self-actualization, *and* a way of transcending the self, as a way to imagine "relationality" "outside the elisions of identity politics" (Nash, 2013, p. 5)... We must recognize the absolute crucial political role of both self-love and identity politics, specially for those who have spent their lives oppressed, excluded, silenced, and subject to violence. Self-love and identity politics are not narcissistic distractions, they are lifelines. (p.5-6)

Thus, there is a conflation of the types of love that lead to a rejection of difference, like Sarah Ahmed (2004) has already criticised in her work on white-nationalist movements that speak of "love your own race" to give a positive spin on a supremacist ideology with subaltern groups that speak of self-love as a reaffirmation of their worth in the face of oppression, violence and precarious conditions, like feminist chicana movements.

Hardt's account of love, Wilkinson argues, is too homogenising in the experience of love as it pays little to no attention to how different bodies experience a communal event like a protest. In other words, just because Michael Hardt has felt something like love during a protest, this does not mean everyone else has felt in this way. People can feel angry, bored, scared, harassed, unsafe, thrilled, etc. Omitting the differential way we experience love leads Hardt to have a vision of love as joy that does not conceive of the less desirable aspects of an affective experience that can also have political potential like anger, and frustration. For Wilkinson, this means that 'rather than dividing love into good

and bad forms, a truly political understanding of love would recognize the messiness, ambiguities and unruliness of affective life.’ (p.10) This point of critique is further elaborated by Lauren Berlant (2011) in her response to Hardt’s theory. Berlant calls for a consideration of ambivalence in any attempt to properly conceptualise love. Ambivalence in love means to understand its potentially non-reciprocated form, or asymmetrically so. It also contains the understanding that love, or intimacy in Berlant’s work, can be irrational, and that the lines between egalitarian exchanges and subtle domination attempts over love objects can be easily lost at any point. Thus, for Berlant is better to start at the point of attachment rather than of love as in this way, love would be but one of the ways in which we relate to the world without reducing it to a desired-for world that love aims for.

Berlant (1997, 2001, 2008, 2012) has also written extensively on love and intimacy. Researching news, films, books and other cultural texts, Berlant has traced a shift in the separation between the public and private spheres, particularly in the US. This shift, she argues is that intimate and ‘private’ matters have been increasingly brought to a public discussion on citizenship. This discussion of citizenship looks to regulate and sanction heteronormative, coupled sexual and romantic behaviour (here understood primarily through marriage) as the highest and solely acceptable form of romantic attachment. This has been accompanied then by a cultural output that has sought to legitimize a certain feminine subject:

the woman who was adequate to its version of normal femininity was as powerful as a feminist would aspire to be, but she was *mainly* invested in the family and cognate emotional networks. She was socially important because she could mediate the worldly temptations of capitalist culture and the processes of family intimacy. Then, as payback for her absorption in the service economy of family life and social reproduction *and* for her own mental and physical health, she was encouraged to fulfil her sexuality, but only through monogamous heteromartial practice. (2008, p.178-79)

This mixture of liberties and constraints then sets the stage for the unequal ground on which romantic relationships are built. Furthermore, it is because of these tensions that the project of a normal ideology of love has been filled with self-help and therapeutic manuals to help once the project of love fails. This point has also been explored by Eva

Illouz (2012) who considers that it is in the institutionalization of romantic arrangements and the uneven expectations and promises they deliver to men and women that the emancipatory and egalitarian project of romantic love turns instead to pain and misery. I also explore this in chapter 6 through an analysis of *Blue Valentine*. Despite this, both Illouz and Berlant remain ‘cautiously optimistic’ about love. This is in part, because just like Janice Radway (1984), and Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (1995), these authors share a belief that given romantic love’s narrative pervasiveness in our culture, explorations in the subversive potential of its narrative conventions can provide women with ways to fashion alternatives towards more egalitarian modes of romantic relationships while still recognising its utopian dimension. The transgressive potential of narratives of romantic love is something I explore in chapters 5 and 7, by exploring the narratives of *Her* and *(500) Days of Summer* and how they deal with monogamy and masculinities, respectively. This potential is analysed through an audience-led textual analysis that encompasses answers to the first two research questions of this project.

One of the earliest critiques of romantic love can be traced back to Simone de Beauvoir’s (1972) *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir writes about love as a gendered experience that is in the periphery of a man’s life but at the core of a woman’s, or so it has been socially constructed. Thus, a woman is *a woman* as she confirms her lovingness, whereas a man is constituted as such through his success elsewhere. Thus, altruism, self-abnegation and devotion to an Other are pillars of a woman’s *womanliness*. This, according to de Beauvoir, is neither innate nor from time immemorial. It is a patriarchal historical and economic ideology that ultimately serves a phallic logic of servitude for women. This patriarchal ideology works through two overarching dualisms: ‘Life versus Spirit’ and ‘immanence versus transcendence.’ These aren’t clear cut from one another but the first, life vs spirit, can be understood in terms of the orientation of one’s own life purpose. A life oriented towards Life is repetitive, confined and not a proper human life. It is not so because it simply aims to replicate life. In contrast, a life oriented towards the Spirit is one that looks above biological imperatives and is instructed by creativity and a desire to build, invent, master, control something. The second dualism is immanence versus transcendence. This dualism refers to actions and the attitudes towards life contained therein. An immanent life is one of repetition, stagnation and conservation of the already

known. A transcendent life, on the contrary, seeks originality and looks to shape *possible* futures to his/her own accord. This type of life is de Beauvoir's most highly valued, very much a Platonic position.

These dualisms take on a social and embodied life through life instructions and situations that are differently scripted for men and women, such as child bearing, career seeking, marriage, etc. These lead de Beauvoir to place these dualisms jointly with that of men vs women because the cultural, social and economic scripts tend to put women, throughout her lifetime, in the Life-immanent extreme. The role of love here is to make a woman believe that it is in her complete identification, merger and submission (through marriage and child bearing) to a man that her life is fulfilled. This role of romantic love is both facilitated and augmented by the economic, educational, and social constraints and precariousness of women. Thus, it is possible to speak of a romantic ideology that acts on three different aspects: First, is that womanhood is insufficient without the companionship offered by a man. Second, enabled by the first element, a woman's sexuality is both enabled and legitimised as part of her identity by such companionship. Finally, the value of such sexualised identity is valued largely depending on how men decide to value this at the time of romantic engagement. Simone de Beauvoir is unmistakably pessimistic against romantic love as a form of existential fulfilment because it deprives women of the possibility of self-determination.

This asymmetry of power in relationships and the primacy of couple love and marriage as the highest/noblest forms of love has been the source of much feminist critique (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Berlant, 2008, 2012b; Ferguson & Jonasdottir, 2014; Firestone, 1979; Johnson, 2012; Jonasdottir, 1991; Wilkinson, 2013; Wilkinson & Bell, 2012). De Beauvoir's work is not only still relevant by itself, but also in how it resonates, as Paul Johnson remarks, with the hierarchies of romantic love(s) when one adds the monogamous-polyamorous and heterosexual versus non-heterosexuals dyads. He argues that it is in the denial of considering polyamory, same-sex love, episodic sexuality and other non-conventional relationships the quality of love discourses that the supremacy of the supremacy of the heterosexual, marriage-sanctioned and reproductive love is based on. This asymmetry is connected to the first two research questions of this project. On

the one hand, film representations of romantic love can help to reinforce reactionary, patriarchal ideologies of romantic love and gender identities, as I discuss in chapters 6 and 7 with reference to *Once*, *Blue Valentine* and *(500) Days of Summer* (RQ1). On the other hand, audiences, articulate their reading of the romantic narrative and the gender-roles they portray based on their own position, which involves the possibility of transgressive, compliant or retrograde readings, which I explore in-depth in chapter 5 through an analysis of *Her* (RQ2).

Thus, the work of much feminist scholarship about love can be divided as being concerned with two things: First, challenging the economic, social and cultural inequalities and structure that furthers a patriarchal heterosexist ideology of love in favour of a wider conceptualization of love. As an example, in film and film studies, this can be related to Laura Mulvey and Annette Kuhn's (Kuhn, 1994; Mulvey, 1989) proposal of a feminist film practice. This proposal was articulated on several levels: to challenge the male gaze that dominates narrative cinema by exploring possible female gazes and their narrative possibilities. Part of this was done by encouraging women to create cinematic experiences as well as demanding better gender equality in casts and crew. Renatta Grossi (2014) has written how heterosexual couple love, as sanctioned by marriage, is written in the very legal frameworks governing many nation-states, leaving out until recently other forms of love. Ana Jónasdóttir (1991; Jónasdóttir & Ferguson, 2014) has coined the term *love power* to refer to the empowerment and possibility of flourishing that a subject receives when he is loved by another subject. This love power is a necessity for individuals to nourish and live socially, both giving and receiving it. She argues that the way that our love relationships are structured are ones in which men, through the exploitation of a woman's love power, come to have a 'surplus worthiness' that allows them to define themselves in and out of the relationship. Women, in the other hand, are left in the precarious position of being dependant on the constant giving away of their love power in order to get some recognition. Alongside Ann Ferguson, they argue that a feminist conceptualization of love must challenge couple-love and marriage as the objective of a woman's life while recognising the potential of other types of bonds.

Second, it has also meant an engagement with ideas of heterosexuality, monogamy and gender roles. The concern here is how to conceive, live and practice more egalitarian interpersonal relationships. This means addressing the expectations, roles and ideas of coupledness and romantic love as they are socio-culturally scripted and lived out. This entails a politicisation of the intimate, the personal and private as loci of struggle and reconfiguration. Luci Irigaray (2012) argues that the key for this to happen lies in the recognition that our current way of amorous relationship is dominated by subject-object relationships and that a shift towards subject-subject relationships is necessary. She proposes to change from 'I love you' as the 'you' in this expression is an object of my desire to 'I love to you'. This entails, according to Irigaray, a recognition of the 'twoness' of a relationship. By recognising this, it is possible to love a subject while respecting their 'otherness' instead of reducing them to an appendix of oneself.

A similar position can be seen in bell hooks' *All about love* (2000). hooks proposes that we ought *to understand love as a verb, rather than a noun*. She suggests that by understanding just how much work is needed for love to work and how it can be found in more than the expected places (nuclear family and partner), it is possible to go further from the narcissistic, sex and desire-driven version of love towards one where service with and for others is valued by all parties. For hooks, this means that men must learn to receive and give love instead of basing their love on sexual performance. For women, she argues that self-love is necessary if women are to establish relationships that are not toxic and based on antiquated gender roles. This self-love includes a search for self-determination that includes both their relationship with others and a personal self-fulfilment. Thus, for hooks, as for many other feminist scholars (K. R. Allen & Walker, 1992; Bryson, 2014; Gordon, Benner, & Noddings, 1996; Lynch, 2014), there must be a consensual redefinition of the ethical and political dimension of caregiving within relationships as work with value valuable that cannot be reduced to just a woman's 'role' or 'duty.' This dimension of redefining care-giving, self-determination, monogamy, marriage and heteronormativity is a concern of all three research questions of this project, as this is a continuous project of romantic self that cuts across class, gender, representations and affects.

2.6 Historical and sociological approaches to love

In this section I will outline approaches to love that do not fit into previous sections as they share neither a psychoanalytic nor a Marxist theoretical conceptual framework.

The first one is Denis de Rougemont's (1983) *Love in the Western World*, a historic-literary study of the roots and elements of romantic love that has been hugely influential, in particular with its dissection of the different elements of romantic love in literature and popular culture. The second are three sociological studies on love in contemporary societies that have generated much dialogue surrounding the ideas contained therein: Eva Illouz study of the evolution of contemporary relationships, Niklas Luhmann and Anthony Giddens' study on the transformation of intimacy and romantic relationships.

2.6.1 Denis de Rougemont and the foundational myth of romantic love

In his book *Love in the Western World* (1983) de Rougemont argues that the myth of *Tristan and Isolde* is the foundational myth of romantic love –also called courtly love— as it contains all the elements we identify with romance in it. This myth in turn, is structurally and narratively a mixture of the meeting of several cultures and ideas of passion. There are three main sources which provide the character of courtly love: First off there's Platonism, which provides the idea of the divine nature of the loved one, the idea of the otherworldly feeling of love and the idea of love as transcending to a higher state. Secondly, from the druidic beliefs of the north we have the idea of woman as a divine being, as Eros; the idea of chivalric pride and the separation between light and shadow. Finally, from Manichaeism we owe the dualist conception of love and the idea that the material realm is perennially unhappy, true happiness can only be found after death. While some of these traits are far more easily relatable to modern notions of love, one need think no further than films like *Ghost* (Zucker, 1990), *P.S. I love you* (LaGravenese, 2007), and *If I stay* (Cutler, 2014) to see how death, the afterlife and other elements listed above are still in play in narratives of romantic love. These examples also illustrate that their use nowadays is far more ludic and playful than the strict and structured explanation de Rougemont offers in their medieval use.

Besides these sources, de Rougemont identifies the triadic structure of love, as many other authors do as well, as its basic narrative element. This means that love contains two subjects who display affection towards each other and a third subject acting as the obstacle which stands in between the consummation of the first two's love. Likewise, he considers desire, even if coincidentally, much like in psychoanalysis, increasing as the distance from the subject and the desired object increasing and only possible as long as such distance exists. In other words, it is only possible to desire that which we do not possess. According to de Rougemont, from this idea springs the difference between loving another subject and loving the idea of love. This, in turn, constitutes the great opposition he finds in romantic love: that between *agape* and *eros*. An opposition that further develops into the binary of loveless-marriage and passionate affair, before-marriage and after-marriage, love-as-passion and love-as-constancy, to name a couple. This opposition has been extensively worked in film, in particular during the first half of the twentieth century (See Potter, 2002; Shumway, 2003).

De Rougemont typifies this tension between *Eros* and *Agape* as a clash between the destructive, individualistic, fatalistic eros/romantic love and a communal, perseverant, virtuous agape/marriage. This is in line with his views on marriage, the increasing divorce rates of the first half of the twentieth century and the first World War, which led him to argue that stronger communal ties were needed to avoid the dissolution of society. Furthermore, his argument speaks of a fundamental shift in the nature of marriage: the introduction of personal choice, and in consequence, of love, which will be crucial in decades to come. While marriage as an institution dates even further back than the twelfth century, it is only until the seventeenth-eighteenth century that its nature starts to experiment significant changes. Previously an institution that sought to maintain and create kinship, wealth and affinities, marriages were arranged and sought after depending on their social and economic viability for both parties involved. With the popularization of free choice in marriage—which is linked as well to new forms of wealth acquisition and distribution that were not related to one's family—, romantic love starts to play an increasingly important role in bringing and maintaining couples together. The promise of love and fulfilment thus becomes internal and intrinsic to the idea of marriage.

There are works, as De Rougemont points out, take the triadic and tragic structure of romantic love and subvert it to further another subject or plotline, to complicate the romantic narrative itself, or to challenge (depending of the time the work was written in) canonical elements of romance. In some cases, it involves complicating the idea of the male-as-hero or saviour, others involve adding a fourth element to disrupt the triad, in some cases the tragic faith of romantic lovers is defused (but not through marriage) and in others, the very idea of romantic love is shown as an illusion or a tool used, sometimes, maliciously to further a personal interest. It is not the objective of this section nor is it in its scope to write a history of the romantic literature. Rather, I will condense a series of elements that were either popularised, born or widely used by literary and filmic works dealing with romantic love.

Although impossible to unite all works of romance under one rubric, it is possible to collect a set of elements they all share, and indeed, that all romantic stories touch upon, even if it is only tangentially. First is the triadic structure of romantic love, which I have mentioned above, in which there is a subject that loves, a subject that is loved and a disruptive element come into play. This pull-and-push between the three creates a necessary second element: distance. Love, sometimes in the guise of desire or lust, cannot work without a distance between the lovers, a distance usually brought on by the third element (e.g., a paternal figure, divorce, war, a journey, etc.). This distance, in turn, requires a resolution, usually by bridging it through marriage (at least in these works) or by death, the tragic ending par excellence. It is only a recent development that such distance remains either unabridged or left in a limbo, like in *Beginners* (Mills, 2010. See chapter 7 for a discussion of the importance of such narrative shift). A fourth factor, that is not present all the time but it is a dominant is individualization and the privatization of desire. By privatization of desire I mean not only the choosing of partner through romantic love rather than through social obligations but also how romantic love operates inwards, towards the individual, rather than towards broader social phenomena. The dissection of De Rougemont's work here serves two main functions: to illustrate the different narrative, ideological and affective elements of romantic love for both audiences

and films and to guide the project in answering all three research questions in the empirical chapters.

2.6.2 Intimacy in contemporary sociological approaches to love

Niklas Luhmann work, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy* (1986), elaborates in a distinct way the opposition between Eros/Agape that de Rougemont also wrote about. Starting on the 17th and 18th centuries, Luhmann argues that because of the division between married life and romantic passion, in literature, romance novels, theatre and in behaviour manuals, a codification of love begun to be widespread. This codification of love is a set of rules, of tropes, of oppositions and stages that everyone goes through in their intimate relationships. The learning and living out of these codes was possible, according to Luhmann, because for the first time it was possible for women to reject the advances of their suitors. Not only this, but Luhmann suggests that ‘interpersonal interpenetrations’ between two lovers acquire a highly individualized and precarious nature. Interpersonal interpenetrations are the communicational exchanges people have where they showcase their qualities, preferences, flaws and other individual traits. Luhmann argues that communicating these can be incredibly difficult because of the unstable nature and downright incommunicability of some. It is through the codes of love that the gaps in this communication can be bridged. Finally, for Luhmann, it is important that this codification of love serves a higher social purpose, as remaining in a highly individualized, atomised communicational exchange threatens to erode the foundation of the social. This foundation is the family and thus for Luhmann, the ideal ending is marriage.

Luhmann’s view of love as mostly a communicational, disembodied practice is outdated and not without criticism (See Illouz, 1997). However, his argument that there was a shift during the 17th-18th century in the codification of intimacy has been echoed by Anthony Giddens (1992) when he wrote that

Romantic love, which began to make its presence felt from the late eighteenth century onwards, drew upon such ideals and incorporated elements of *amour passion*, while nevertheless becoming distinct from both. Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual’s life — a formula which radically

extended the reflexivity of sublime love. The telling of a story is one of the meanings of 'romance', but this story became individualised, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes... The complex of ideas associated with romantic love for the first time associated love with freedom, both being seen as normatively desirable states. Passionate love has always been liberating, but only in the sense of generating a break with routine and duty. It was precisely this quality of *amour passion* which set it apart from existing institutions. Ideals of romantic love, by contrast, inserted themselves directly into the emergent ties between freedom and self-realisation. (p. 39-40)

Romantic love's individualised, normative and liberating condition sets it as the intimate paradigm that sought to reconcile Eros and agape, the all-encompassing sexual desire of amour passion with the routine and duty of married life. At the same time, the idea of the narrative and its individualized nature begins a process of romantic rationalization whereby the lover believes it is in her/his power to control the decisions that lead to her/his happiness and romantic fulfilment. Giddens argues that by uprooting the intimate from transgenerational practices, socio-economic contracts and kinship alliances, this risked creating anxieties and ontological insecurities in an individual's romantic life. By ontological insecurity, Giddens refers to the gradual loss of grip by traditions and social institutions in an individual's life (he attributed this to modernisation as a process in general). This in turn, generates the anxiety of searching how to anchor one's position in society through processes of personal and interpersonal realization. In regards to romantic relationships and intimacy, it meant that the constraints of the family, arranged marriages, class, race, and space were greatly diminished, if not completely evaporated, in favour of making love one of the most noble forms of self-realization. However, no longer did a romantic relationship warranted the economic, social and personal security it did in times past.

Giddens has coined the term 'pure relationship' to refer to,

It [a pure relationship] refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it. (1992, 58)

This pure relationship, Giddens argued, was the ideal culmination, in the late twentieth century, of the consolidation of the individualised nature of intimacy and romantic love. This was helped by its democratization, understood here as the access of women to education, the job market, by processes of globalization and the growth of expert systems. For Giddens, expert systems are forms of organization and management of large bodies of information that help rule our lives in contemporary societies. In the case of the pure relationship, the main expert systems are those of therapy, self-therapy and constant self-interrogation. Thus, this means that the pure relationship is based around a project of self-disclosure, sexual and communicational intimacy and the promise of self-development. Films like *When Harry Met Sally* (Reiner, 1989), *Sleepless in Seattle* (Ephron, 1993), *You've Got Mail* (Ephron, 1998) provide examples of the idealised realisation of the supposedly 'pure' relationship. According to Giddens, the problem with the pure relationship is that the ties one builds with another can, at any point, be dissolved as they are not anchored in any social, cultural or economic institution. The anxiety contained in pure relationships leads to addictive behaviours, such as alcoholism, eating disorders, drug abuse, and sex addiction. The latter is partly attributed to an increased period of sexual experimentation and avoidance of commitment. This mind boggling analytical jump from the frailty of contemporary relationships to their addiction substitutes underlines Giddens' own detachment with empirical work (See Gross & Simmons, 2002; Sica, 1986). The idea of the pure relationship has been criticized for its lack of understanding of the gendered inequality of many contemporary relationships in regards to housework, gender roles, sexual satisfaction, monetary control, child-care and caregiving arrangements, and men's emotional stunted development (Connell, 2000, 2006; Jamieson, 1999). For this project, in chapter 5, I explore the 'problematic' of episodic sexuality through an analysis of a narrative element in *Her*. In chapter 7, I tackle the contingency of contemporary romantic love and relationships to try to answer how this affects both their representations on-screen and the articulation of the audiences' romantic identities (RQ1 and RQ3).

2.6.3 Self-commoditised love

Eva Illouz' (1997) *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* traces the different changes the concept of love has experienced at the turn of the twentieth century and its growing intermeshing with the sphere of consumption, focusing on the study of several media outlets and contemporary romantic practices. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Illouz argues there is a shift from Victorian 'private' ideals and utilitarian customs to a more 'public' and hedonistic consumer/leisure oriented *practice* of love. She identifies two main changes: the boom of 'dating' and the abandonment of the 'visits' and a dual process she calls of 'romanticisation of commodities' and 'commodification of romance.' Based on this shift, she argues that both how we talk about love (and connected to this, how we conceive it) and our romantic practices are informed by our class position. Furthermore, there is an existing tension about the cultural competences —borrowing the term from Bourdieu (1984)— and a self-perceived lack of them, the 'ironic distance' of the middle and upper classes clashing continuously with the apparent 'over-identification' of the working class.

She examines the boom in dating through the idea of the liminoid (see section 3.4.2), arguing that romantic activities common on dates possess many of the elements of a *secular ritual* and indeed position themselves in a temporality that is different from that of everyday life, a *romantic love time*. This liminoid time, increasingly defined by consumption – ritualistic activities that privilege lavish spending and luxury - coexists with activities that only indirectly or explicitly reject the mediation of consumption and consumer culture. The latter kind of activities appeal to the element of selflessness, the rejection of material inclinations of the self that is so enticing to the bourgeois postmodern *ethos*. This, according to Illouz points to a tension and a game of class positions and the different enjoyments and valuations each individual derives from a given romantic activity. The dialectic between the pleasure of love and the class games it invokes in contemporary societies becomes a source of much rationalization and self-control from lovers. As a final point, Illouz argues that an individual's love discourse is influenced by her/his class position twofold: it articulates with a self-perception of one's 'cultural competences' or lack of them and a position in the spectrum of cultural identification or of 'ironic distance' taken in regards of the practices of love. Illouz' work is particularly poignant and relevant for the 6th chapter of this thesis, where through an audience-led

textual analysis of Once and Blue Valentine, I analyse the tension between romantic love and class in order to answer the first two research questions of this project.

2.7 (Romantic) Identity

As evident thus far, with romantic love, there is a great emphasis nowadays on the self-fashioning of one's own romantic self. The narrativization of one's own romantic ideals, attitudes, practices, affects and experiences is a constitutive element of what I will call in this thesis 'romantic identity.' This is the primary concern of the first research question of this project. Considered as a subset of a person's identity, other elements are gender, sexuality, race, class, age, education level, religiosity. In this section I will succinctly outline a few of the elements of sociological conceptualizations of identity. I do not consider psychoanalytic and psychological long histories with the concept for the main reason that they are hyper-individualistic and largely non-ideological. Thus, the starting points of consideration of the notion of identity in this project are sociological in nature. First is the idea of the instability of identities. Identities are unstable because they are constantly negotiated, contingent, and self-reflected on. Authors like Zygmunt Bauman (2004) and Scott Lash (1987) have used the term *bricoleur*, borrowing it from Claude Lévi-Strauss, to refer to identity construction. A *bricoleur* is one who builds something with whatever is at hand. This means that identity is a continuous process, it is always incomplete. This lends a fragmentary, fluctuating character to late modernity identities that Bauman, in a similar vein to authors like Anthony Giddens (1991) assumes to be different from those of early modernity, which were anchored on kinship, myths, rites, religion and strong social ties. The 'whatever is at hand' in identity are historical, and context-dependent ideological discourses of gender, sexuality, class, race, power, love, kinship, nation. Second, Bauman argues that in late(liquid) modernity, identities are grounded in socialization and self-reflection. In other words, identities are performative (See Berger, 1974; Goffman, 2004). Third is the tension between identification and distancing that produces identities. Stuart Hall argued (1996) that 'identities are constructed through, not outside, difference.' (p. 4) This means that through a process of distinction, of exclusion of *what is not*, of marking differences, identities are constructed.

This, he recognises, unavoidably begets a parallel process of the construction of a sameness. These two processes are in constant destabilizing tension, individually, socially and ideologically. This means that the affirmation of a certain identity always contains the rejection, usually thought as inferior, of another(s). This affirmatory/rejection struggle of identities is inscribed in larger ideological struggles over hegemony and sub-alterity.

With these points in mind, a 'romantic identity' is the union point between sexual, gender, class, race identities and the different subject positions taken in different aspects of the competing romantic ideologies of the moment. As I highlighted in section 2.3, there are six main love 'styles': Eros, Ludus, Storge, Pragma, Mania and Agape. Each of these 'styles' had an accompanying sex style, or preferred sexual practices. John Lee (1998) called them ideologies as they represented not just ideas in the abstract, but also practices and prescriptions that were socialized and lived out communally. As such, he believed that it was nigh impossible to find 'pure' states of the different kinds of love. The qualities, traits, affects and practices contained in these ideologies are gendered, as it is exemplified in figures such as *Don Juan*, the male ludic lover par excellence, or the *femme fatale*, the female erotic lover. Also, in the privileging and expectation of caregiving roles that is usually pushed onto women vis-à-vis the providing role for men. In other practice-based terms, which are also gendered, it encompasses attitudes regarding things like: who pays on the first date? the dilemma of sexual intercourse after X amount of dates, household duties, to resolve an argument on site or after sleeping it over, to name a handful. Though the heterosexual, coupled, married love continues to be the pervading hegemonic ideology surrounding much of the ideology of romantic love, to understand of romantic love as a monolithic ideology would be counterproductive. In different studies of romantic films in North America, authors like David Shumway (2003) and Cherry Potter (2002) highlight that the romantic love is suffused with ideas of many differing other discourses (intimacy, devotion, friendship, Platonism, etc.) that act as counterweights, exert contradictions and open spaces for different modes of interpersonal associations. As both authors suggest, cinema has been the privileged vehicle for the reproduction, contestation and historical reflection on the larger shifts in intimacy and romantic love in the west, particularly in the twentieth century, which is why this project gives primacy to the relationship between romantic love, films and ideology.

2.7.1 (*Projective*) identification

In addition to the three ways in which Romantic Love has been dealt with in cinema (See introduction), Edgar Morin (2005) developed the concept of ‘projective identifications’ to deal with how cinematic images influence an individual’s construction and negotiation of her/his identity. Of all the ‘polymorphic projective identifications’ that cinema produces, Morin signals Love as the ultimate one, because

We identify with the loved one, with his joys and misfortunes, experiencing feelings that are properly his. We project ourselves onto him, that is, we identify him with ourselves, cherishing him, what is more, with all the love that we carry within ourselves. His photos, his trinkets, his handkerchiefs, his house, are all infused with his presence. Inanimate objects are impregnated with his soul and force us to love them (pp.89-90)

Martin Barker (1989, 2005) has criticized the concept of identification on three grounds. First, the roots of the concept lie in the mass culture critiques of media and its consideration of identification as a single, universal process which differentiates different classes from each other. Second, is that identification itself is not an empirically observable phenomenon because it takes place (supposedly) in a mental space. Finally, he contends, it possesses little explanatory power for audience research because it has been taken as a simple synonym for engagement. This means, according to Barker, that it fails to ask why there are many forms of engagement between text an audience and the text. Barker’s critique is largely aimed at the need of consideration that audiences develop different types of relationships with a given film that depend on many factors. However, by overemphasising only the empirically observable, Barker’s critique fails to understand that many of the forms of audience engagement with media products *are*, at one point or at all, rhetorical. This does not make them less real, affecting or engaging. What I will focus is in his demand to understand the relationship between texts and audiences pluralistically. In her work with teenage female school students in South London playing video games, Diane Carr (2005) argues that the potential of fantastical ‘identification’ with female avatars did not play a significant role in the students’ interest in a videogame, perhaps ‘because the pleasures of “identification” are overrated. Or, perhaps such pleasures are dependent on the contexts of play.’ (p. 475). This she argues, may have been to do with the public setting

of her fieldwork (players gathered in a room with consoles and PCs to play games provided by the researchers). Thus, it is important to understand the possibility of non-emotional projective modes of engagement as well as how the social context of consumption might affect identification and other modes of engagement.

It is with this critique in mind that I find Morin's proposition illuminating because it allows us to get away from the analytic binary of romantic love in film either reinforcing or contesting particular ideologies, as well as not understanding identification as being gender-fixed. Instead, the focus is on the *ambivalence* of Love in film as both potentially reinforcing and contesting certain ideologies at different moments. Morin's concept is appropriate for this project because it recognises that love is experienced, on and off-screen, fragmentarily. Thus, the idea of projective identifications is one of the main links between all three research questions of the project. This project chooses to inquire about audiences and how, primarily, their class and gender positions and romantic experiences influence their reading of a film but also how filmic meanings then proceed to be incorporated in re-configurations of audiences' romantic practices. At the same time, this ambivalence is related to one of the characteristics of love-as-commodity, its liminality (Illouz, 1997). The liminal is a moment for utopian thinking, of exposing ideologies and subverting hierarchies but it can also help to reinforce them, to strengthen ideologies and to reduce the effectiveness of counter-hegemonic acts. While I discuss liminality in depth in chapter 3, in the next and final section of this chapter, I focus in the concept of ideology to further elucidate its importance to this project.

2.8 Ideology

2.8.1 *Marx and Althusser*

Marx's comprehensive volume of work, some in collaboration with Friedrich Engels, is the cornerstone of the modern understanding and posterior developments of the concept of ideology. Early on, he conceives it as a veil that acts and is present in the superstructure, obfuscating the economic base and production relationships of the system to the proletariat, a False Consciousness acting on the working class that would not allow them

to act, think and see in accord to their ‘real’ class position and that benefitted the ruling class (Marx & Engels, 1972). Refining this premise, and broadening its reach, Ideology for Marx (Marx, 1970; Marx & Engels, 1967) was the set of ideas of the dominant class that were passed down through the different socio-cultural elements/institutions of the economic superstructure in an specific historical context.

From this follows an elaboration of ideology as a product of the superstructure as a description of the human being. Through ideology, such description is distorted and deformed of the real conditions of production and life of people. This is partly what is known as ‘False Consciousness’ (Eagleton, 1991). This distortion and deformation is a direct consequence of the elite’s interest to keep their stronghold of dominance over the proletariat. This entails that all ideas are a product of this dominant elite, both the ideas of the ruling class —which Marx famously said ‘are in every epoch the ruling ideas’ (Marx & Engels, 1972) — and those of the dominated class. This is so because the ruling class owns not only the means of production of material but also the means of production of ideas/spiritual goods.

These points were contested by Louis Althusser (Althusser, 1969; Althusser & Balibar, 1971; Althusser & Matheron, 1997). Influenced by the work of Jaques Lacan, Althusser argues for two major changes in Marxism: First, to focus in the structure and not the individual for we cannot fully recognize an individual prior to its societal interaction (Althusser & Balibar, 1971). Second, Althusser (1972) maintains we cannot reach ‘the Real’ and thus ‘false consciousness’ as a concept is of little use; we are stuck at the level of ‘reality’. In this view, a subject’s values, beliefs, preferences, biases, taste and taboos, then, are inculcated by what Althusser (1972) calls the *ideological practice* which, in turn, is constituted by Ideological State Apparatuses. This would suggest that it is through interactions, rituals, exchanges and everyday flows between the ISAs and practices that individuals not only learn how to be subjects but ideological subjects. Althusser named this process *interpellation*. And since it is highly impractical for every individual to carry scripts for all the ideological subjects s/he will ‘interpret’ in her/his daily life, Althusser (1972; Althusser & Balibar, 1971) claims ideology is ahistorical. This rigid approach to Marxism has been criticized by scholars like Stuart Hall (1985), who argued that Althusser’s model

left no room for the subject to resist or contest the interpellation of ideology or ideology itself.

Despite this, interpellation and Althusser's other concepts have been widely used and appropriated in film studies. Christian Metz (1974, 1981) and Jean Louis Baudry (1978, 1985) both use the concept extensively to inform their theory of the cinematic apparatus. Known as the 'institutional' mode of spectatorship (Mayne, 1998), it posits that through an analysis of the film-as-text, it is possible to theorize and account for the subjects cinema constructed. In other words, it is possible, according to these authors, to know how audiences read a particular film and are interpellated as subjects of a given ideology through a careful analysis of the text and the underlying production elements of it (See Baudry, 1985; Metz, 1981). This is facilitated through the 'reality effect' the cinematic apparatus provides, easing the film viewer's resistance and co-opting him/her to comply ideologically. Despite the criticisms levelled against this model both inside and out of Film Studies (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010; Hall, 1985; Mayne, 1998; Mulvey, 1989; Shohat & Stam, 1996), the idea that a film provides the viewer certain ideologically charged subject positions and interpellates her/him through them is still widely accepted. The problem lies in the corollary idea that for scholars working solely under this perspective, it is possible to discern the 'spectator' from theory alone and the ideological relationship between spectator and film.

Against this perspective of the infantilized, passive, imprisoned, invisible spectator, it is possible to find an author like bell hooks (hooks, 1999), who, writes about what she terms as 'the oppositional gaze.' This oppositional gaze is an act of looking, of choosing not to identify with the subjects presented by the cinema done by black female spectators who, aware of their own race, class and gender position resist, reject, mock and appropriate through this gaze the subjectivities cinema presents. But this is not an isolated response but part of a larger group of scholars who, although with a shared interest in Marxism, have considered ideology more in tune with the writings of another widely influential Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci.

2.8.2 Gramsci and counter-hegemony

Gramsci (1971) identifies two forms of political control: domination or direct physical coercion (e.g., police and the military) and *cultural hegemony* which refers to both ideological control and consent. Gramsci argued that no regime or system can sustain itself on the basis of coercion and brute force and that in the long run it has to appeal to its foundation, its inhabitants. In order to do so, the dominating class utilizes moral, religious, ethical beliefs and practices that help and support their project, something he coins as 'hegemony'. Its presence and dispersion throughout society means, for Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971), that it is internalized, naturalized by the population and becomes 'common sense'. As pointed out previously, Gramsci coins the term *counter-hegemony* to account for when individuals and groups challenge Ideology through actions, movements and thoughts (1971, 1995). Since for Gramsci all humans were intellectuals (some were trained as such, called traditional intellectuals) the first step to build a *counter-hegemony* was to lift the 'veil' of ideology, to be able to see the conditions of production of material objects and conditions. It is important to understand that struggles over hegemony entail the production of new hegemonic ideologies that look to displace prevailing ones. Gramsci saw this as a positive characteristic of hegemony, as it could provide the mass of the population with, in the case of Gramsci, ways to contest fascism through different means. In chapter 7, I explore this with regard to representations of gender identities in film, with a close focus on *(500) Days of Summer*.

Gramsci is an influential thinker of a shift in certain theories of ideology towards a more 'humanistic' perspective, privileging culture as the locus of ideological reproduction and contestation (Eagleton, 1991; Gardiner, 1992; Thompson, 1990; Zizek, 1994). Raymond Williams (1977), Stuart Hall (1973), Ien Ang (1985), David Morley (1980, 1986) and John Fiske (1987) are some of the scholars who took on this Gramsci-influenced approach. Focusing on television rather than film, scholars within this tradition, later known as 'British Cultural Studies', researched the audiences' responses, activities and readings of different shows. In them, they sought to study and focus in the counter-hegemonic practices of different subjects and groups. For example, Ang (1985) studied the letter responses of women to the soap opera *Dallas*. According to Ang, the understandings of

these women were informed by two main elements: knowledge of the elements of a 'melodramatic imagination', borrowing the term from Peter Brooks (1996), and 'emotional realism'. The latter can be understood as a reading at a more connotative level, an internal level of what is felt to be real. This realism stands in contrast with an empirical realism, according to Ang, but they are situated and address different levels and, I would add, moments of readings.

For this project, in order to answer questions on identity, class and emotions, this division between 'emotional' and 'empirical' realism is helpful to consider the relationship between what is shown on screen, what and how is it read, what is felt and what is experienced. This helps to articulate the contradictions, contestation and embodiment of hegemonic discourses. At the same time, I also consider that there is an uneven entry level of cultural competences when it comes to enjoying a romantic film, something I explore in-depth in chapter 6. But while Brook's concept is suitable, I will adhere to the works of authors like Annette Kuhn (1994), Sara Ahmed (2004) and Lauren Berlant (1997, 2000, 2008), who have all written and worked on film, romance, intimacy, gender, emotions and ideology. These authors agree that romance contributes to the construction of gendered subjects according to the dominant Patriarchal ideology where the female is made subordinated to a male partner, only complete when she is with him (See also Chaudhuri, 2006; De Lauretis, 1986; Ebert, 1988). This has contributed to construct gender and interpersonal relationships as a binary and in a fatalistic, natural way. These authors also argue that cinema and love also offer possibilities to disrupt and contest the dominant ideologies, but they consider, in the case of cinema, alternative textual options, not the audiences as the locus of this.

This leads me to the final consideration of the role of ideology in this project. Both 'sides' of the ideology provide a solid foundation on which to study both texts and audiences. Gramsci and cultural studies move away from the textual-centric view of the Althusser influenced film studies and in a way permit to 'expect the unexpected' from the text-audience interaction, particularly from the latter. On the other hand, the idea of subject positions already contained within the film text allows for a preliminary consideration of a

possible typology of viewers, modes of viewing, ways of readings and pleasures derived which is not only analytically insightful but methodologically helpful for the project.

2.9 Conclusion

Biological and psychological conceptualisations of love will be, where appropriate, criticised for their lack of understanding of the political, historical and context-dependent characteristics of love. Thus, the concept of love used here understands the importance of historical shifts in our understanding, experience and conceptualization of it. Again, I emphasise that I only speak of love insofar as contemporary, urban, Western societies are concerned, as some of the points elaborated in this chapter have different experiential histories and are lived out differently in other areas of the world. The works of Anthony Giddens (1993), Eva Illouz (1997, 2012) and some of the Marxist positions of section 2.4.2 bring up several points necessary for context. First, is the consideration of love as a social and ideological construction. Second, the individualisation of interpersonal relationships from the social and kinship contract-transaction they used to be. Third, the narrativization of one's romantic self, based on a constant dual process of self-disclosure and self-interrogation. Fourth, the contingency of contemporary relationships and the anxiety this generates. Based on these points, the concept of romantic identity as I outlined in section 2.7 is crucial. It helps to highlight the aspects of romantic love that are fragmentary, ambivalent and always in a process of construction. Fifth, the commoditization of romance in late-capitalism. This commoditization, experienced acutely in the practices of romantic love, makes the concept of the 'liminoid' of interest to pursue. This being said, Giddens' and Illouz' positions are largely apolitical and detached, and thus inadequate to understanding fully the politics of the intimate. However, the Marxist positions of section 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 are also too narrow in their understanding of love, creating oppositions between 'good' and 'bad' love that privilege a communal, public-civic based love while deriding the intimate as a site of political struggle.

I find in the feminist critique of these seemingly critical (yet all written by men) positions that there is a richer position to understand romantic love as an academic and political

concept. In this regard, the starting point of the conceptualisation of romantic love here is the understanding that patriarchal, hetero-marital couple, romantic love is the hegemonic ideology of love —thus understanding ideology and hegemony from the point of Antonio Gramsci's work. This ideology contains a gendered and class division of roles, that has been constructed to privilege men's position subordinating and sub-valuing women, their emotions, care-giving, roles and demands. At the same time, the concept recognises the utopian, positive dimension that the pursuit of such romantic love holds for many women (and men). A feminist conceptualisation of love understands the ambivalence, potentially divergent, fragmentary and intersectional experience of this hegemonic romantic love and the counter-hegemonies that feminist and queer theories have pushed forward, theoretically and practically. At the same time, a feminist concept of love seeks to *widen* its acceptable forms, personal and social undertakings beyond heteromarital, coupled love in order to promote the acceptability pluralistic sexual, romantic and intimacy ethics. With this in mind, I move on to the next chapter to articulate how these concepts will be articulated in representations of romantic films and their audiences.

CHAPTER 3: AUDIENCE RESEARCH, AUDIENCES OF ROMANCE

3.1 Spectatorship, gendered viewing and verisimilitude

The film audience, as Tomas Austin (2002) points out, is an under researched area in an otherwise saturated field. The reasons for this are debatable. However, amongst the ones consistently cited, first and foremost is the difficulty of physically locating and defining these ‘audiences’ as media become more diffuse and deterritorialised. Others, like Jostein Gripsrud (2002) counter, arguing that quantitatively, given film’s paradigmatic status as mass-medium early in the twentieth century, scholarly interest and research on film audiences and related themes outnumber any other type of research and writing on the film medium. Further, Gripsrud highlights that this empirical interest in audiences was somewhat lost in the 60s and 70s, being replaced with an interest in film as art, and as text. Since, then two primary strands of research have dealt with film in one way or another and neither has considered it a priority to study audiences. First, is the approach usually termed ‘Screen Theory’, where the text is not only privileged in analysis, it is considered enough to suggest modes of spectatorship allowed by a given text. That is, as Judith Mayne (1998) suggests, researchers in line with this considered that a subject’s reading of a text could be extracted from the analysis of the ideological or psychoanalytic analysis of a film’s narrative with its encoded intended meanings. The spectator in such an analysis is a result of textual processes posed by the film, a monolithic vessel of monological synthesis. Instead of research actual audiences, these are assumed as at one with the spectral viewer, an ideologically compliant ideal. This approach was extremely popular in Europe in the 1970s, and though it has met enormous criticism since then, it still provides several valuable ideas which I will explore in later chapters. Laura Mulvey’s (1975) provocative essay on cinematic pleasure and the male gaze is considered a seminal example of this tradition. In it, Mulvey argues that the female cinematic spectator enjoys filmic texts, accepts the patriarchal ideology presented therein, identifies with a passive female image, and only through an adoption of a male gaze gains a form of masochistic pleasure. Mary Ann Doane (1982) builds on and counter Mulvey’s argument with the suggestion that the female spectator, because of the psychic steps required to enjoy

mainstream films—which she terms as cross-dressing or masquerading—leaves female spectatorship open to the possibility of subverting the ideological naturalisation of gender. However, Doane does concede that when it comes to women's films, the pleasure is masochistic given that the identifying process is masculine. Both Mulvey's and Doane's account of the (female) spectator have faced many criticisms, primarily for their complete omission of actual film audiences and the complex and contradictory viewing positions taken up (Banaji, 2002; De Lauretis, 1994; Doane, 1982; Silverman, 1996). This position, as Mayne suggests, stems from

The assumption of 1970's film theory was that the particular characteristics of the classical cinema encourage oedipal desire through the looking structures that make the woman object of the look and man its subject, as well as through conventions of plot and characterization...oedipal desire suggests that the subject of the classical cinema is male. (1996, p. 23).

Tania Modleski (1984), in *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*, analyses soap operas, romances and gothic novels in an effort to understand exactly what makes these mediated narratives so appealing to women. Through a psychoanalytic and clinical psychology framework, Modleski characterizes romance readers as hysterics and soap opera viewers as housewives, suggesting that these cultural products act as an addiction-fuelling narcotic that leaves their subjects as hopeless patriarchal junkies. Female spectatorship, according to Modleski, is divided in two types: an ideal mother and a villainess. In the text, the villainess is the character set up to be hated by women, thus reinforcing their position as mothers. Seiter et. al (1989) criticized Modleski for pushing her middle-class arm-chair analysis of these texts without bothering to pursue actual readers or viewers. While this critique is fair, it is also interesting to consider how Modleski's own condition influenced this decision to pursue a textual analysis and her subsequent work. In their ethnographic study (Ibid, 1989), they found very differing views from their working-class participants. They argued that

The “successful” production of the (abstract and “ideal”) feminine subject is restricted and altered by the contradictions of women's own experiences. Class, among other factors, plays a major role in how our respondents make sense of the text. The experience of working-class women clearly conflicts in substantial ways with the soap opera's representation of a woman's problems, problems some women identified as upper or middle-class. This makes the limitless sympathy that Modleski's textual position demands impossible for them. The class discrepancy

between textual representation and their personal experience constituted the primary criticism of the programs. (p. 241)

The dichotomy of Modleski's model is undone, in part, by the class position of the audience. Moreover, they add that their participants were not interested in the sympathy of the mother and did not despise the villainess. Rather, they admired her transgressions. This is because Modleski's division did not account for the possibility of spectatorship being a fragmentary activity where different aspects of a subject's intersectional experience of womanhood are engaged in different ways, at different times. Modleski's work sits between Screen theory and the then booming academic interest in academic studies of romance.

Around the same time as Modleski's work, literary critics Ann Barr Snitow (1979) and Kay Mussell (1984) published their studies on romantic fiction. Both authors regard the genre, pejoratively, as a fantasy (Snitow specifically refers to it as pornography for women) that prevents women from truly living in the real world by infantilizing them and detaching them from their actual material conditions. This is related to classic Marxist accounts of false consciousness (See section 2.8.1). Influenced by these accounts, albeit with a slightly more sociological approach, it is possible to find the work of Annette Kuhn (1994) and Elizabeth Cowie (1997), who take gender and film working primarily from an ideological basis, yet open to contestation. Cowie challenged the idea of a singular text-reader position, suggesting instead that the relationship between spectator and text is constituted by a set of continuous looks that constantly (re)positioned the text-subject. The intermittency of these looks and subjectivities provides only partial identifications for women (see section 2.7.1 for a discussion on identification). Kuhn argued that sociological approaches to Cinema were based around judgments and valuations made by critics, which took these valuations at face value, with a gross neglect of the cinematographic elements. In her structural analysis, Kuhn highlights five elements to understand how meaning is produced *for* the subject of the filmic text: Textual gratification, cinematic address, suture, cinematic apparatus and the look. Significantly, in these categories and their articulation, is that neither text-as-meaningful nor the subject exist *a priori* from one another. However, the subject, because of the interpellation (see

section 2.8.1) of the ideologies in the text, is shaped by the text. This crucial analytical link is what permits these works to talk about spectators, of subjectivities. These are discursive by-products of ideological, textual and subtexts within a particular style of film, in this case, classical Cinema, never actual flesh and blood viewers of films.

The construction of an interpellatable and interpellated subject through a filmic text is only possible because it operates on the assumption that such text's narrative attempts to create an illusion of reality. In scenic terms, and following Jacques Aumont (1992), the illusion of reality is only possible because every film, besides developing in time and producing a sensation of volume, possesses a fiction effect. The illusion presents itself in terms of the image perception and credibility, provoking an impression of reality in the spectator through scenic rules and specific codes –close-ups, depth of field, film editing, etc. For example, in a film like *(500) Days of Summer* (2009), there are close-ups of the female lead, focusing on several of her facial and body features with a voiceover of the male lead praising them while they are together, and berating them when broken-hearted. The combination of this element seeks to emulate the mental images we all have of the traits we praise of the beloved. The illusion or effect of reality attributed to narrative cinema has been treated in terms of verisimilitude.

Tzvetan Todorov (1970, 1977) lists several meanings of the term verisimilitude. To Aristotle, verisimilitude was the grouping of what is possible to the common view, in opposition to the set of what is possible to the wise people. Post-Enlightenment tradition recovered that idea enhancing it with a second type of verisimilitude, not so different from the first and not entirely absent from the Greek philosopher's thought: it's verisimilar what adjusts to the laws of an established genre. In these two cases, verisimilitude is defined by discourses and presents itself as a *corpus effect*: the rules of a genre emanate from the previous works of the genre. Finally, nowadays another use is predominant: 'one talks of the verisimilitude of a work to the extent in which it tries to make us believe it conforms with the real and not to its own set of norms; put in another way, verisimilitude is the mask with which the text laws are disguised, and that we must assume as a direct relationship with reality' (1970, p. 11, personal translation).

Cinematographic verisimilitude, according to Christian Metz (1991, 2002), can be understood on two levels. There was a time when cinema had its well-defined genres – western, crime drama, melodrama– and they would not mix. Each genre had its own verisimilitude, so any other possibilities were impossible. However, these genres aged and they started to confound with each other. With the evolution of the industry, nowadays genres mix up is something usual –for example, *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009) combines false documentary with science fiction, and *They Came Together* (Wain, 2014) combines both romantic comedy with parody. This genre mix up can be understood through Rick Altman’s (1999) semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach to genre. Arguing against synchronic, ahistorical and semiotic approaches to genre, Altman initially proposed understanding genres as a combination of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion.’ The semantics were the list of recognisable elements of a genre (locations, characters, situations, shots, etc), while the syntactics was related to the established and possible relationships between these elements. Altman later included the pragmatics, to accounts for both institutions (studios, film producers) and audiences (critics, scholars, laymen), highlighting the importance of *users* and *uses* in contributing to shape genres¹⁸. Thus, in this view, the combination of genres can be understood (depending on the mix up) as part of cycles responding to historical changes and pushes from producers seeking to cater to broader audiences. Thus, genre repackaging has become a standard practice in the post-classical film production. Yet, the verisimilitude is maintained through the maintenance of certain key semantic and syntactic elements (e.g., the romantic couple, the final hero-villain encounter.)

In a more general perspective, cinema has functioned as one vast genre, with its list of specific authorized contents and its catalogue of filmable subjects and tones. This last one is the censorship of verisimilitude: it doesn’t deal with the subjects, but with how to approach them, it is concerned with the very own content of the movies. It targets the forms, the way in which the movie talks about what it talks, what it says, and the explicit

¹⁸ Altman uses the example of the woman’s film and the scholarship in the 70s and 80s surrounding these films (some reviewed in this chapter) to highlight, according to him, the power of critics in shaping genre conventions and limits post facto (See Garrett, 2007 for a critique of Altman's position).

face of its content. For this reason, the constraint of verisimilitude aims towards every film, independent of its subject.

That's how, supposedly, cinema defines what Foucault (1977) called 'the limits of the speakable'. The verisimilar feature attempts to persuade that the conventions used to restrict the possibilities are not discursive or writing rules, they are not conventions at all. The effect of this, as envisioned and done by the film director, verifiable in the content of the film, is actually the effect of the nature of things and answers to the intrinsic characteristics of the represented subject. The verisimilar feature thinks of itself—and pretends that we comply—, as directly translatable in terms of reality. There finds verisimilitude its full use: it's about making the whole thing look real.

Thus, narrative cinema, in its fabrication of an illusion of reality, it's an ideological work that seeks the status of natural, normal and acceptable in detriment of others (such as contestation, multiple discourses, potentially competing versions of reality). The keyword here is illusion, as it both constitutes the 'ideal' positioning of the subject as *the* meaning to be taken from a text and opens the possibility of subversion, however minor in narrative (fictional) cinema. This idea of verisimilitude and the division between reality and illusion it invites, plus the recognition of media texts as ideological texts, has also been researched by scholars in the British Cultural Studies tradition, usually referred as 'modality' (Section 3.5). The difference, as it is well known, is that the latter worked empirically to understand the relationship between audience and texts. In the next section, before proceeding to the BCCS tradition, I will outline three parallel approaches of media studies popular in the US.

3.2 Effects, Uses & Gratifications approaches and cognitive film theory

I will outline the main characteristics, proponents and positions of each research paradigm while highlighting their relevance, or lack thereof, for this project. Nicholas Abercrombie and Bryan Longhurst (1998) have classified three paradigms: Behavioural, Incorporation/Resistance and Spectator/Performance in the story of audience research.

This is but one of the many ways of telling and categorising the story of the field (cf. Alasuutari, 1999). Livingstone (2013) adds a fourth paradigm that she terms as the 'Participation' paradigm to encompass shifts and continuities in audience studies at the turn of the century. These paradigms are not to be considered in a natural sciences kind of way, but rather as a 'network of assumptions which prescribe what kinds of issues are proper research problems' (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, 1).

The first paradigm, the behavioural, consists of two separate strands of work usually known as the 'effects' and the 'uses and gratifications' theories/approaches of mass media. The former, known as the 'hypodermic needle' or the 'magic bullet' theory, has been heavily criticized by the latter as too simplistic and top-down heavy, with little to no regard for audiences themselves, who were considered as simple, undifferentiated passive recipients of the media message. It does share however, the overriding assumption of plausible effects of the media on individuals and a functionalist perspective of the media (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973). Before the elaboration of the 'uses and gratifications' theory, however, came the 'two-step flow' theory from Paul F. Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) that sought to revise the one-step flow effects theory. Two seminal studies, the People's Choice and the Payne Fund studies ignited a debate mid-twentieth century about how exactly mass media exerted effects over the mass audience: directly (Payne Fund) or through opinion leaders (People's Choice). Lazarsfeld argued that instead of a direct effect of the media on audiences, the information of the medium was filtered through opinion leaders. Audiences then contrast the information from these leaders and the message of the media to interpret the information. By including opinion leaders as a secondary medium through which the message reached and affected people, it also concerned itself with comprehension and interpretation by individuals, thus enabling the questions of why and how do individuals receive the message to be put forth in audience reception studies (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Later effect approaches have sought to sophisticate, methodologically and theoretically, the studies in hopes of finding the ever elusive 'media effects.' One of such attempts is known as the 'cultivation process' (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986) whereby the idea lies in the (quantitative) research of effects that stem from long-term engagement with a medium. This approach, based around

studies on propaganda, persuasion and voting, is ill-suited for the project as it lacks an understanding of the audience as diverse, active and heterogeneous. Moreover, because it posits the idea that the media can have an effect, it understands the meaning and message of media texts as monolithic. This is at odds with the ambivalent and fragmentary concept of love I work with.

The ‘uses and gratifications’ approach to media tried to address in some ways the gross neglect of the reception side of communication of the ‘effects’ theory. As an audience-centred approach, it seeks to understand what social and psychological needs the audience satisfied through the consumption of certain media. Elihu Katz sums up the approach:

It argues that people bend the media to their needs more readily than the media overpower them; that the media are at least as much agents of diversion and entertainment as of information and influence. It argues, moreover, that the selection of media and content, and the uses to which they are put, are considerably influenced by social role and psychological predisposition. Viewing the media in this way permits one to ask not only how the media gratify and influence individuals but how and why they are differentially integrated into social institutions. Thus, if individuals select certain media, or certain types of content, in their roles as citizens, or consumers, or church members, we gain insight into the relationship between the attributes of the media (real or perceived) and the social and psychological functions which they serve. (Katz et al., 1973, p. 165)

The overarching question of this approach is *what people do with the media*. Katz et. al (1973) suggested four main types of uses and the gratifications people gained from media consumption: information/education, entertainment, identification, and personal relationships (see also McQuail, 1987). According to this theory, for example entertainment, in the form of escapism would be a prominent reason why people consume romantic films. Another possibility would be identification with the characters. An early study of this approach is Herta Herzog’s (1944) study of soap opera radio listeners. Herzog did not study the content of the soap operas alone, she also questioned, through focus groups, female listeners on what they listened, what they did with the texts and why they listened to them. Like much work in the ‘uses and gratifications’ paradigm, she created a typology based on the responses of her participants. She identified three main types of motivations for listening to the daytime soap operas: emotional, cognitive

and projective/identification (wishful thinking). Forward a few decades into the 1970's with the study of television taking the forefront of academic interest in audience reception, and it is possible to find the works of Blumler, McQuail and Brown (1972) and of Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) as attempts to refine and formalize the approach. The former was a study of motivations to watch political television shows with a typology of four needs and gratifications the result from it: Diversion, personal relationship, personal identity and surveillance. The latter followed a very similar vein, with a survey developed to find out what individual 'needs' were satisfied by using media, ending up with a typology of five 'needs': Cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and tension release. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) crystallized these empirical efforts in five points about the media-text-audience relationship: the audience is active and goal oriented, people have uses/needs they seek to satisfy through the media, audience actively link a certain media with a gratification need, media compete with other sources for need satisfaction and people are self-aware enough of their own use to report it accurately to the researcher. Following critiques regarding the individualistic and psychologistic nature of the approach, its theoretical vagueness and methodological confusion (See Elliott, 1974; Swanson, 1977), proponents of the approach sought to refine all these aspects in efforts to maintain its relevance in audience reception studies, resulting in more nuanced approaches. This has included revisions of methods to include qualitative tools like interviews and ethnography. This entails a concern of these scholars in expanding the levels of analysis. Theoretically, the internet has brought conceptual sophistication to account for the different modes and purposes of use, while a great deal of attention has been given to the importance of the social context of the audience in their use of media and its implications beyond individualistic gratifications (See Rubin, 1983; Ruggiero, 2000; Windahl, 1981).

3.2.1 Cognitive film theory

This approach, that many consistently remark, should not be understood as a unified theory, but rather as a research tradition that has sought and seeks to develop alternative explanatory frameworks of film viewing, came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to the claims of psychoanalytic and semiotic approaches of the 1970s. I do not

attempt here a full engagement with all who work under a cognitivist perspective given the wide array of fields, professions and (competing) perspectives that make use of it, as it is out of the scope of this project (See and cf. Anderson, 1998; Bordwell, 1986, 1989; Carroll, 1996, 2003; Currie, 1995; Nannicelli & Taberham, 2014; Plantinga, 2009; Plantinga & Smith, 1999; Shimamura, 2013; Tan, 1996). Rather, I will focus on outlining some of the basic tenets and how they might relate to my research project. Thus, it should be clear that the perspectives highlighted here are not representative of ‘the’ tradition, simply because there is none. One of the main concerns of those championing this approach has been to come up with scientific, empirical, verifiable and potentially replicable evidence (through experiments, surveys, neuroscientific, ocular-centric methods) of the schemata, heuristics and cognitive tools used for interpretation and making sense of a film. This entails a consideration of the viewer as a conscious, rational, *motivated*, goal oriented actor that possesses natural, universal tools for the perception, processing and interpretation of cues provided by the audiovisual material (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996). This audiovisual material as Robert Stam (2000a) writes, is understood as acting on two levels: the *synzhet* (the organization of the elements of the story) and the *fabula* (the basis of the story). Further, one key concern is the status of the film as either an illusion(s) or a veridical depiction and thus, what to believe of what is being processed (See Allen, 1995; Anderson, 1998; Currie, 1995).

Before any of this, however, an overarching question remains: Why engage with audiovisual material at all? Ed S. Tan (1996) proposes that it is ‘interest,’ understood as an affect, that guides our rational and emotional attraction to a film (closely followed by empathy). Noel Carroll (2003), Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Plantinga, 2009; Plantinga & Smith, 1999) broadly argue it is emotions, or more precisely cognitive emotions. That is,

emotions have reasons. In other words, our emotional response to texts (and other phenomena) is dependent in part on how we evaluate and assimilate textual information. Thus the rhetoric of a text is not simply about ideas, but also about emotional responses. Cognitive film theory argues that in responding to films, thinking and feeling are intimately related. (Plantinga, 2002, pp. 24-25)

Significantly then, emotions are not viewed as opposed to cognition, but rather they are seen to work to inform and guide it. Emotions stand ‘alongside’ with affects, moods and bodily responses, like the startle response, that while part of the cinematic experience, do not necessarily engage cognitive processes. Here, the representation of emotions cedes priority to its eliciting and processing by the audience. Thus, there is a recognition that those who produce the films do so with the aim of provoking certain conscious processes that enable and guide the engagement with the narrative and its elements. Thus, a film guides the audiences emotionally and cognitively (through recognizable cues and events), encouraging their interest, their concern for certainty and meaning, with the audiences responding in kind, as this is a pleasurable act (Oatley, 2013; Plantinga, 2013; Smith, 2007; Tan, 2013). As an approach opposed to grand-theorising, cognitive theory’s strength lies in its ability to provide detailed and concise work on certain aspects of the experience of cinema, like specific emotional responses and their link to certain cues, narration, and the sympathetic or empathic relationships that audiences establish with a film’s characters. However, as an approach focused on models and patterns, it deals less effectively with *difference*, assuming instead a blanket (white, male, heterosexual, middle-class) spectator. This is partly to do with the focus on naturalistic responses as well as on the culturally shared, which means that it harbours little to no interest about things related to the individual romantic experience that each person brings to their viewing, as well as the interest in the abstract, like the concept of love itself. Moreover, at times this approach is at odds with the politically and ideologically oriented conceptualization of love taken up in this project. In the next section, I will move on to outlining another response to Screen theory, British Cultural studies.

3.3 The Incorporation/Resistance paradigm and the ethnographic turn

This paradigm, of which the British Cultural Studies tradition is a big part, came about partly as a response to the ‘effects theory tradition and also as a response to literary criticism of the 1970s. It also obeyed certain historical circumstances, like the post-war consumer boom and globalization (Katz, 1980). The Contemporary Centre of Cultural Studies, following Perti Alasuutari’s (1999) division of three waves in audience reception

studies, throughout the ‘discipline’s’ history there has been a measured but mechanistic approach to audiences (exemplified by Hall’s initial writings), an over celebration of the audience’s agency and a call back to the examination of the political, ideological and economic constraints on such agency (See Morley, 2006). Much work in this area owes to Stuart Hall’s (1973) seminal work on ‘Encoding/Decoding’. Hall explains the model through this illustration:

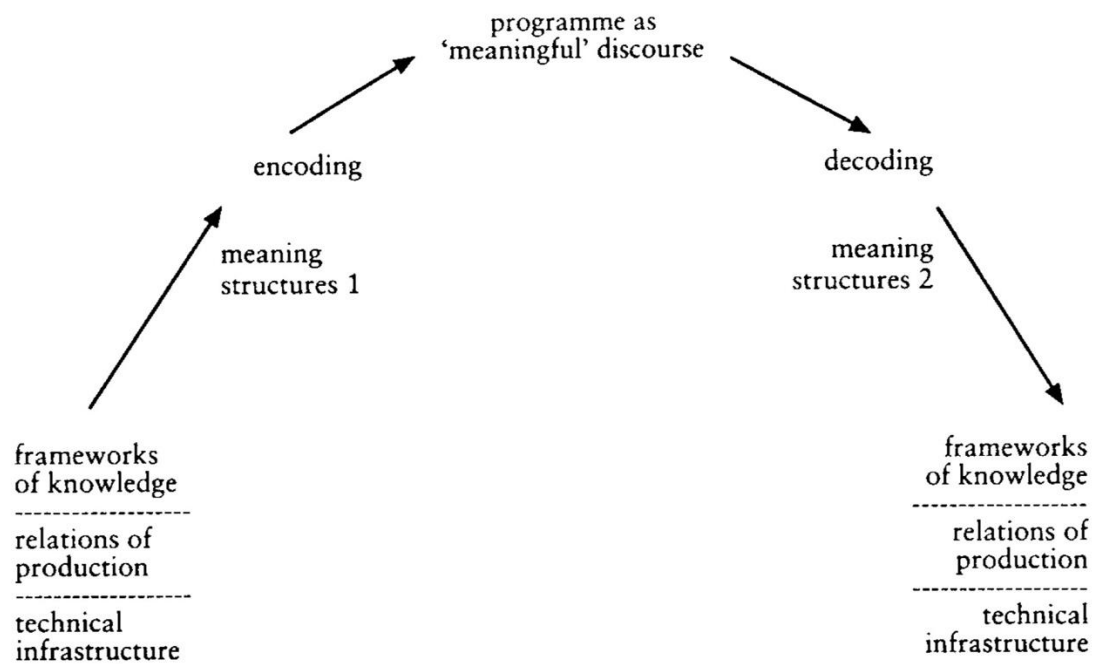


fig 3.1 Stuart Hall’s encoding/ decoding model (Illustration by Stuart Hall)

Hall breaks down the model into ‘moments’: the moment of encoding, the moment of the text and the moment of decoding. The first moment encompasses the infrastructure and the necessary economic conditions needed to produce a media text. Second, to produce the text, these institutional structures of broadcasting use a technical (types of shots, lightning, script-writing, angles, etc.) knowledge and draw on cultural topics, agendas and ideas of the audience to frame the message(s). Finally, the audience decode the message, articulating an interpretation. These interpretations, or readings, can be broadly divided into *dominant*, *negotiated* and *oppositional* readings. This stems, Hall argues, from a ‘lack of fit’ between the encoding and the decoding of the message. The dominant reading is one where the preferred reading of the text is largely accepted by the audience whereas the oppositional rejects this reading and uses an alternative explanatory

framework for the message. The negotiated reading is where some aspects are accepted while others rejected. The range of readings, Hall argued, is dependent on the cultural, economic and social background of the individual. This is not to say that there are as many interpretations as there are individuals, rather, it is possible to identify how different groups in society respond in particular ways to the same text. Hall was particularly interested in how social class played a role in differentiating the decoding of a message. His interest was twofold: First, in how the uneven distribution of knowledge and cultural competences necessary to decode a message affect the assumed competences and knowledge at the moment of encoding. Second, how the class-position affects the reading of the text and the articulation of identity.

The encoding/decoding model shifts from a technical understanding of the media text to a semiotic one. This shift understands the text working on two levels: denotation and connotation. A technical understanding of the media, say of a romantic film like *Gone with the Wind*, posits that the message of the film is that of a woman and her romantic affairs and misfortunes with two men, with the American Civil War as the background. Hall's model would add that there is a connotative level where race, class and gender hegemonic ideologies, like the glorification of slavery and the idealisation of the upper class, are also at play. This connotative level of the message, which Hall articulated through Gramsci's work on hegemony (see section 2.8.2), plays a crucial role in the maintenance and (re)production of power asymmetries between the different identifiable classes. Two of the criticisms most commonly levelled against Hall's model are the notions of 'preferred readings' and the problematic assumption of three main readings (Barker, 2006; Moores, 1993; Pillai, 1992; Wren-Lewis, 1983). The critique of the 'preferred reading' was aimed at where exactly could researchers find it empirically and whether the researchers' personal biases might influence the selection of it. The idea of 'preferred readings' was criticized for assuming not only an essentialist, coherent and singular identity on the part of the audiences, but also for overplaying the economic dimension of the communicational exchange.

Perhaps one of the most important studies to follow Hall's encoding-decoding theory and further develop it is David Morley's (1980) *Nationwide* study. Morley showed two

programmes to twenty-nine groups of people, recording the ensuing discussion. Each group was formed as representing a particular socio-economic position: Students, apprentices, managers and trade unionists. Morley hypothesized these different groups would provide interpretations to *Nationwide* depending on three main positions: the dominant, the negotiated and the oppositional decoding. These positions followed the idea that there was a hegemonic preferred reading of the text and the comprehension and interpretation of this code would thus be mostly mapped out across the spectrum of acceptance, negotiation and rejection of it. Morley's study was paramount to ground the, until then, overly theoretical work of the IRP paradigm as it matched and showed possible relationships between text and audience. One of the developments Morley found was on how members of particular subcultures tended to interpret things in similar ways. This, he argued, made it possible to frame individual readings within shared cultural practices and hermeneutics. Thus, sharing the same class-background was not enough to warrant the same type of interpretation. Morley argued it was extremely important to pay attention to the different institutions and contexts in which subjects of a similar milieu were positioned to understand why they provide different interpretations. But even if there were overlaps and internal differences in the clusters of interpretation that Morley identified in this study, he was always stern in his argument that the productive work and engagement of audiences was limited. The study has been criticized on several aspects: An ambiguous conceptualization of the audience, the artificiality of the study's setting and the possible social desirability bias of the reports (see Bertrand & Hughes, 2005).

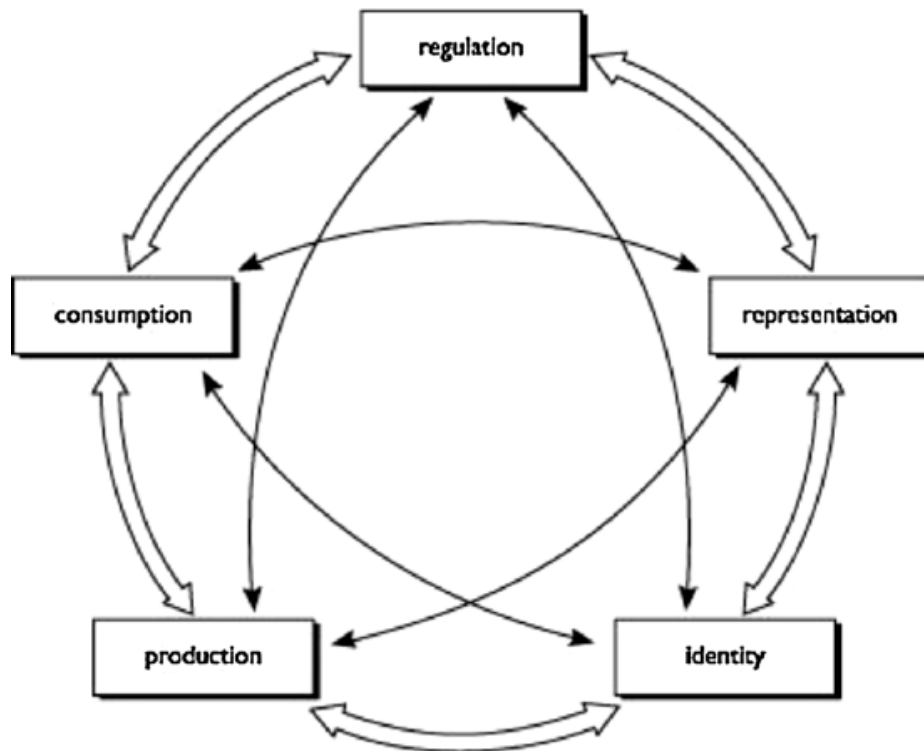


fig 3.2 The circuit of culture (Taken from Du Gay et. al, 1997)

Originally a theoretical 'work-in-progress', another refinement of the model through an empirical study of the Sony Walkman gave way to what is known today as the 'circuit of culture' (Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997). This study took the interest of the interplay between production and interpretation but instead of considering in the form of a rather unidirectional flow from producer to consumer, it argued this is a constant dialogue between the two. They argued that meaning-making was articulated in several inter-connected sites that fed onto one another at different points. This allowed the approach to bypasses textual, ideological and materialist assumptions of signification. They identified five main points to be studied in the circuit of culture: production, consumption, regulation, identity and representation. In order to study culture then, 'one should at least explore how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use' (p. 3). The connections between the points of the circuit are not necessarily present or important all the time, but their appearances and reappearances is what helps construct texts as an ongoing process of signification and interpretation. It is through this constant dialogue that notions of power, fixation of meaning and possibilities of resistance come to the fore.

The circuit of culture and the encoding/decoding model were a theoretical side of a burgeoning interest on audiences as a pivotal element of media research. Alongside Hall and du Gay, researchers like John B. Thompson (1995), John Fiske (1987, 2010), Paul Willis (1990) and James Lull (1988) also contributed to a dialogue about audiences, their roles, their readings, their relationship with the media they consume. This dialogue has shaped a radically different picture of what researchers conceptualize audiences to be. Alasuutari (1999) suggests that after the first wave of reception studies, there was a turn towards *ethnographies of the audience*. He highlights three reasons that contributed to this gradual shift: First, due to the influence of burgeoning feminist theory, there was an increased interest in identity politics, in particular in what regards to gender — Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) have termed this the shift from the Incorporation/Resistance paradigm to the spectacle/performance paradigm. Second, a growing interest in the social use and lives of television and finally, researchers became more interested at doing work from the ‘audience’s end of the chain’ (p. 7). Thus, it should come as no surprise that from the mid-eighties and early nineties, some of the most recognizable works dealt with media texts that had a clearly marked gendered appeal, soap operas in particular. Before moving on to look at ethnographies in the penultimate section, the next section deals with the concept of liminality and its connection to romantic love (see section 2.6.3 on self-commoditized love and Eva Illouz’ work) in order to highlight how the pleasures and audience appeals of romantic love and its media texts can be understood through this concept.

3.4 Liminality

3.4.1 Van Gennep and Turner’s Liminal

Arnold van Gennep (1960) first coined the term in 1960. His work served as a basis for Victor Turner’s (1977) work, who popularized its use. Van Gennep considers liminality as the ‘extraction’, the displacement of something (or someone) during the ritual to detach him/her from cultural boundaries or to transform it into something anew. As a stage of a

ritual, it has both an entry and exit point, constrained by time and space. Turner expands on this idea, this threshold between worlds to develop the role of the liminal in symbolic acts, in rituals. As an anthropologist particularly interested in rites of passages, Turner considered one of its stages was the liminal stage, where the boundaries of the sacred and the profane, the taboo and the normal were subverted, inversed or wiped out for as long as the ritual took place. Turner (1982) saw symbolism at the heart of the ritual. In other words, although practices and the narrative/staging of the ritual are there for ‘everyone’ to see, there is a thicker layer of meanings and webs of knowledge to be untangled and brought up. This is in line with symbolic anthropology’s argument that ‘little things speak of greater ones’ (Geertz, 1973). This theoretical alignment potentially permits to connect a seemingly individual or ‘unique’ response of an audience or a cinematic text to a greater framework of analysis of socio-economic and cultural factors already mentioned before (i.e., class, discourses of love).

3.4.2 *Communitas and liminoid*

Closely related to liminality is the concept of *communitas* (Turner, 1977), derived from the notion of ‘anti-structure’. Turner understands *communitas* as the fusion of a group of individuals into a unity for a brief period of time during a ritual moment, usually during the liminal stages. This fusion entails the supposed erosion of social, economic and cultural individual denominators, but only if the ritual studied belongs to an ‘agricultural society’. In more ‘complex societies’, Turner (1982) suggests the liminal has a revolutionary spark but structural elements are still present —they are *played* with, though. Turner (1967, 1974, 1977, 1982) placed a strong emphasis on what he believed were the differences of ‘tribal and early agricultural’, ‘low-complexity’ societies and post industrial revolution, ‘complex’ societies. This structural-functionalism has been widely criticized for its implicit neo-colonialist notion of a linear evolution of a human group which, at its end, had the European/western nation-state as a role model (De Sousa Santos, 1998; Ulloa, 2000).

Regardless, Turner uses this problematic distinction to differentiate between the ‘liminal’ and ‘liminoid’, the latter being the stage of the industrialized rituals. Turner (1982) distinguishes three main points of difference between the two concepts: First, the liminal,

following van Gennep, maintains a clear point of entry and exit in ‘agricultural societies’ but in industrialized societies there is no clear delimitation, allowing for a more ‘ludic’ display. This is related to the division between work and leisure that exists in the latter kind of societies. In other words, liminoid rituals require the individual’s *will* to enter. For example a person wishing to see a movie will voluntarily queue up (or go online) to buy her/his tickets and later, sit down and enjoy the film.

Second, a liminal period is taken seriously and is highly codified in those ‘pre-modern’ societies whereas in modern ones, the liminal is *played* with, it has an element of innovation and spontaneity, of challenging standards, structures and other dominant societal elements not usually present in the rituals of the former type of societies. This also entails, for Turner, that the profane-sacred division liminality played a role in in ‘low complexity’ societies is blurred in more ‘complex’, industrialized societies. A liminoid ritual, therefore, does not have such a rigid structure or produces such a big break with the rhythm of everyday life as a liminal one. This meant, in Turner’s eyes, that temporality in liminoid rituals is fit into the everyday, rather than causing a schism in it.

For this project, liminality as a concept is related to romantic love and film in at least two levels: First, on a textual level and second, accounting for the experience of cinema-going as a liminoid ritual. At the first level, the interaction of these two elements provides a ground to understand how gender and class identities can be shaped and what the affects while watching a film might be. This is explored in-depth in chapter 6, based on an analysis of *Blue Valentine* and *Once*, though it is also present in chapter 7. Thus, this concept provides a common thread on which to consider the research questions while maintaining the balance between the film, the audiences and the socio-cultural context that informs *commoditized love*. To make this work, however, there must be a stronger delineation of how romantic love, film and ideology work together with liminality, to which I will dedicate the remainder of this section. I will do so by first outlining both its relationship with the filmic text as well as with the experience of cinema-going.

3.4.3 Romance, cinema-going and the liminoid

Roland Barthes (1990), in his famous *Lovers Discourse* says that relationships have no place, they are an *atopos*, impossible to locate anywhere. Barthes argues that love is experienced as something different, where one is not oneself but rather one's own image acting out one's love towards the beloved. José Ortega y Gasset (1957) also writes about the experience of love being different from any other because it is as if it were from a different dimension, from a distinct and unique world comprised of two. In other words, this distinctiveness of love, of the relationship, of the lover and the beloved of a different time and space is highlighted by Eva Illouz (1997) who claims contemporary romantic practices invoke a liminal time lived and experienced differently from the non-romantic time of our lives, a moment she calls 'romantic time'. This 'romantic time' is characterized by a reluctance to be constrained by economic or social factors, a desire to go past them and a search for unique experiences. This, Illouz continues, relates to the ideology of commoditized romantic love, where leisure is considered to be a sine qua non condition of the consumer and free spending during leisure time is compliant with neoliberal capitalist consumer politics of personal expression. Textually then, romance operates by positioning this 'romantic time' at the forefront, juxtaposed to the monotonous everyday life in various ways. In so doing, the narrative opens the way for ideological reproduction and/or critique. In a film like *(500) Days of Summer* (Webb, 2009), this is evident by the difference between the workplace of the lovers and their dates (See chapter 7 for an analysis of this).

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1996; Stam, 1989) point out spectatorship can be a liminal experience. Loosely borrowing from Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnival (1984), they argue that cinema as a space brackets and voids socio-cultural identities and allow for a period of 'dreams and self-fashioning' (p. 165). Likewise, Steve Darné (2000), in his ethnography of cinema-going in India, argues that men like to watch films as a 'liminal escape' from reality. In them, they like progressive, adventurous, feisty women; stories of marriages for love, of 'fighting for love', of going against the chaste system and overcoming the family opposition to a marriage of love. But as much as his respondents liked these characters and the plot twists 'at-odds' with Indian traditions, they also stated their preference to marry somebody within their own caste, to settle down with girls that were more conservative and overall, not as feisty as their filmic counterparts. In short, 'liminality' when related to cinema going, can constitute a moment sought after for its

promise of freedom, of unconstrained daydreaming and inversion of the everyday. But this can be experienced as a magical moment, an escape to a fantasy, an impossible world that makes it able to cope with the ‘real world’.

Alongside this, historical research on audiences and cinema-going through different periods, contexts and circumstances has shed light on the practices, the motives and the significance of the experience of cinema-going. Robert C. Allen (1990) identified four major aspects of historical research on film audiences: Exhibition (the how and where films were screened), audiences (social composition), performance and activation/meaning-making (See Biltereyst, Lotze, & Meers, 2012; Biltereyst, Maltby, & Meers, 2011; Kuhn, Biltereyst, & Meers, 2017¹⁹; Maltby, Biltereyst, & Meers, 2011 for a compilation and overview of studies and contributions in this area). Here I emphasise contributions about the historical social experience of female cinema-going and how these might help to understand cinema-going itself as a *romantic activity*. I do this because as Peter Krämer (1998) argues, ‘until the mid-1960s, Hollywood had viewed women, particularly mature women in charge of regular film outings with their husbands and children, as the key audience with a range of films, including the industry’s most important releases.’ (p. 615; see also Richards, 1994). Miriam Hansen (1991), focusing on North American silent cinema, writes that the possibility of cinema-going, infused with an egalitarian appeal, to an extent, granted visibility for women and immigrants (See also Haller, 2012). This, she connects to a transformation in the public sphere, an incipient feminisation of it. At the same time, the cinema was becoming an alternative public sphere, one of relative inclusion for the middle class. Janet Staiger’s (1992, 2000) work, based on a breadth of case studies from the silent era up to the films of Woody Allen²⁰ — taking what she terms as a historical materialist approach to cinema —, is a response to a focus on the text-reader relationship. It highlights how historical contexts and their shifts or changes as well as the audience’s intersectional identities affect the reception of texts. That is, how context, at micro and macro levels, influences the reading of a text at any and various points in time.

¹⁹ The whole issue of *Memory Studies*, 2017, vol 10, issue 1, is devoted to memory and the historical experience of cinema-going.

²⁰ For an example of the opposite, a dedicated case study of one film, *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), see Helen Taylor’s (1989) *Scarlett’s Women: “Gone with the Wind” and its female fans*.

Staiger also argues for an understanding of reception beyond the cognitive rational framework and the triad of ‘preferred-negotiated-oppositional, recognizing other activities and pleasures like concern with the verisimilar, affective experiences, aesthetics, spectator-character relationships, narrational sources, and discourses that surround the making, distribution and/or reception of a film, like violence in *A Clockwork Orange*, (Kubrick, 1971)²¹. Jackie Stacey’s (1994) seminal work, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, uses fan letters from *women*, and a questionnaire to sketch the relationship that female audiences had with the movie stars of 1940s and 1950s Britain. In a critique of psychoanalytic, ahistorical spectatorship studies, Stacey argues for the historical and local positioning of the audience to understand the *gendered* relationship audiences develop with cinema-going, movies and movie stars.

She delineates three main discourses arising from the letters written to her: Identification²², consumption and escapism. The latter is linked to the cinema as a physical, sensuous space to escape the material precarity of home at times of war. During the period discussed, identification was based on the differences between audiences and the movie stars, while after the war, with the post-war consumption boom, this shifted to emphasise their similarities, aided by a plethora of available commodities with which to accomplish this. Annette Kuhn builds on Stacey’s work with a project of cinema reception and consumption in Britain during the 1930s. She uses the term ‘ethnohistory’ to signal her determination in using oral accounts (gathered through extended interviews and questionnaires) as well as archival material to draw out the myriad of accounts—their motives, pleasures, logics, and codes— of the practice of cinema-going. One of these accounts is that of courting and romance during cinema going. Kuhn points out that the experience of the romantic film, narratively, while important for some in its enabling of identifications, idealisations and projections of the audience onto and from the text, is just a fraction of the ‘all-encompassing somatic, sensuous and affective involvement in the cinema experience.’ (p. 147) Kuhn (2002) writes:

²¹ Martin Barker and Kate Brook’s (1998) case study of Judge Dredd and its audience is a good example of this type of analysis of audiences contextualized engagement.

²² Contrary to the use in psychoanalysis, where the emphasis lies in unconscious processes, Stacey’s elaboration of identification focuses on conscious memories, although it recognizes the importance that fantasy plays in these.

Cinemas are remembered as places where courting could be conducted in relative comfort and privacy...associated exclusively with one kind of cinema: the sumptuous new picture palace [supercinema]... These cinemas are the heterotopias²³ of courtship... Cinemas as physical spaces – as *places* – embody all these qualities of **liminality** and heterogeneity: they are very much part of the built environment, and yet they conjoin the mundanity and materiality of bricks and mortars with the worlds of fantasy and imagination (pp. 140-141, bold mine)

Kuhn also points out that at the time, an invitation to go to the cinema was an express signal of (heteronormative) romantic interest. This wasn't to any cinema, but to a super cinema, with additional treating to food and sweets, and, ideally, to the backrow, where double seats were available. For some, this was the (highly codified) entry-point to courting²⁴. Thus, the experience of cinema-going was an important 'romantic time' (Illouz, 1997), conditioned by economic conditions, that contrasted with the everyday. Importantly, it also signalled an entry into (young) adulthood. Part of this meant a connection between courting, cinema and sex, often evoked by the pictorial depictions. The work of these authors contributes to the understanding of romance, cinema and liminality as playing out on various (affective, cognitive social and ideological) levels, some of which have continued to this day, others not so much.

3.4.4 Liminality and ideology

Turner (1982) argues that liminal phenomena tended to be 'eufunctional' —that is, beneficial— to the structure of a system while liminoid phenomena, 'on the other hand, are often parts of social critiques or even revolutionary manifestoes...exposing the injustices, the inefficiencies, and immoralities of the mainstream economic and political structures and organizations' (p. 86). Then, the liminoid ritual performance can constitute an action that disrupts and is subversive to hegemonic formations and ideological precepts, as Homi Bhabha argues (1994). If this is so, then romance on and off screen can't be easily discarded or glorified as servile or counter-hegemonic to a cultural elite. Rather, it is the *ambiguity* of romantic love, working for and against cultural mandates, as the satires of

²³ See (Foucault, 1986) for a definition of the concept and (Kuhn, 2004) for her elaboration of it.

²⁴ See (McIver, 2009) for a case study of one cinema in Liverpool during the same time period. Significantly, in McIver's findings, the finding of a partner also meant the end of cinema-going.

Douglas Sirk show (Gledhill, 1987a), that provides a rich and vast space for liminality to enter and ‘play’. Then, it is part of this project to look for those moments in the text, in the audience and in the couple where a ‘politics of romantic love’ and the role of the liminal/liminoid can be discerned, classified and studied.

In line with this, performativity theorists like Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Elin Diamond (1996) suggest these liminoid moments can allow for an embodiment, a way of revealing the patriarchal ideology of gender roles and gender construction by denaturalizing that which in the everyday is taken for granted. There are fracture lines through which affect and liminality show up and act as a counter-balance at different levels of the exchange between the media product and the audience. But while there might be room for ‘optimism’, David Shumway (2003) argues that screwball comedies and their revival in the 1980’s and 1990’s work as a mystification of marriage. In a critique of Stanley Cavell (1981), who wrote on screwball comedies and their potential to spark a reflection on marriage, Shumway argues that marriage is portrayed antithetically to romance in these comedies and their successors. This leaves the latter as too ‘unreal’ to be true, strengthening, according to Shumway, marriage as the unequivocal, unavoidable, desirable ‘real’ ending. But as I already pointed out, Shumway only focuses on the textual level, without giving any weight to the audience, who are seen only as dupes of the mystification of the film ideology. Thus, I consider that to avoid falling into either extreme of the romantic love-ideology characterization, it is necessary to further delve into the text-audience dyad and how it can be said to work with and against romantic love. This juxtaposition will be explored further in chapter 6 through an analysis of *Once* and *Blue Valentine*. Before then, I will start by reviewing the literature on melodrama, woman’s film and romantic comedies, focusing on their narrative, and ideologically discursive characteristics. I will highlight changes and continuities in order to understand the liminal possibilities of watching cinema as mapped out by the texts.

3.5 From the women’s films and melodrama to the bromance

In film, the genres that have been theorised and understood to appeal the most to women, and/or which scholars suggest cater to and are aimed at them are: melodrama, woman's film (also known as weepies), screwball comedy, and romantic comedy (See Evans & Deleyto, 1998; Gledhill, 1987). For simplicity's sake, I will outline the characteristics of each genre in this order, emphasising the romantic comedy and its shifts, departures and continuities with other genres. Because it is outside the scope of this chapter, novels, theatre plays, romances and other cultural texts that feature women and were written by and apparently for them will not feature (See Frantz & Murphy Selinger, 2012; Mussell, 1984; Owen, 1997; Radway, 1984 for different research on women's texts and popular romance fiction). I do recognise, however, the significant impact that these texts had on the construction of the canon and characteristics of the film genres I will speak of.

Despite numerous studies of each, there is no clear-cut conceptual distinction between melodrama and the woman's film. Melodrama, in its simplest definition, is a dramatic mood or technique, in which the heightening of emotions through the narrative, characters and *mise-en-scène* (where applicable) is sought as a means to evoke strong affective reactions from the audience. Having disturbed the status quo of suburban family life or small town existence via a sense of menace and excess, this device usually concludes a film or sequence on a morally reassuring note. Melodrama then, can be understood as a form of storytelling adaptable to many artistic needs and forms. In cinema, melodrama is used extensively across many genres and narratives. Its origins can be traced to the eighteenth century, to the then illegal forms of theatre, the ban on the spoken word, sentimental drama and French post-revolutionary romantic dramas (See Elsaesser, 1987; Gledhill, 1987). However, as Peter Brooks (1996) and Christine Gledhill (1987b) have pointed out, in its modern incarnation, melodrama is too fragmented to truly fit the category of a genre. That is not to say that there are not some continuities across the different dramatic mediums that utilise melodrama. As Brooks (*ibid.*) highlights, melodrama follows an 'expressionist aesthetic' (which varies in intensity depending on the medium), music and nonverbal language play an important role in its signifying practices and the importance of some psychoanalytic themes, e.g. the rule of the father.

Saliently, Brooks also adds that melodrama focuses on personal relationships and their conflicts, micro-struggles of power usually put forward as moral contradictions to be solved. This involves a 'simplification' (projection) of moral, social and psychological signs into characters; usually victims, heroes, couples and/or virtuous. This projection of moral absolutes, as Ien Ang (1985) highlights, is substituted in soap operas with contradictions and ambivalences of characters that allow these texts to delay melodrama's reassuring ending. Thomas Elsaesser (1987) in his seminal essay on melodrama establishes these points and develops them in relation to cinema, highlighting that

[m]elodrama is iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home and/or the small town setting, its emotional pattern is that of panic and latent hysteria, reinforced stylistically by a complex handling of space in interiors...to the point where the world seems totally predetermined and pervaded by 'meaning' and interpretable signs (p.62)

Melodrama can thus be understood as encompassing four major themes: Sexuality, relationships, class and space. These themes have received widespread attention from researchers who linked them to issues around realism, ideology, hegemony and feminism (See Doane, Mellencamp, & Williams, 1984; Gledhill, 1987; Kaplan, 2000; Radner & Stringer, 2011; van Zoonen, 1994). The treatment of these is of interest here in regards to two forms melodrama has taken in cinema: the family melodrama and the woman's film. The former, broadly speaking, deals with family relationships and the creation of such bonds, usually through marriage. When it comes to the woman's film, Gledhill says that 'there appears to be no absolute line of demarcation between melodrama and the woman's film but rather, a contest between them over the construction and meaning of the domestic, of personal life, and the place of men and women in this' (1987b: 36). That is, embedded across supposed differences between melodrama and woman's film is a larger question regarding representation, ideological positions and address. The woman's film is better understood through its address to a (female) audience. Maria Laplace (1987) suggests that women's films can be

distinguished by its female protagonist, female point of view and its narrative which most often revolved around the traditional realism of women's experience: the familial, the domestic, the romantic —those arenas where love, emotion and relationships take precedence over action and events. One of the most important aspects of the genre is the prominent place it accords to relationships between

women. A central issue, then, in any investigation of the woman's film is the problematic of female subjectivity, agency and desire in Hollywood cinema. (p.139)

The 'problem' of female subjectivity remains a pivotal point of romantic films nowadays, especially in relationship to how it enables and/or disables male subjectivity in line with patriarchal norms for specific cultures. In classic Hollywood cinema (and with notable exceptions such as *Now, Voyager* (Rapper, 1942), this was usually through the eventual subordination of the former to the latter. The films analysed here present a slightly different picture. Laplace highlights the repression (and subsequent education) of female sexuality, the confinement of the female lead to domestic, closed off spaces and the victim status of the female lead as key features of the woman's film. Laplace also identifies three discourses that came from a woman's circuit of culture to inform the genre: consumerism, the female's star persona and women's fiction. The latter, produced by and for women albeit with little distinction between or attention to issues of intersectionality regarding race and class, served as a way to create interstices in the otherwise patriarchal hegemonic discourse of Hollywood.

After the heyday of the woman's film and melodramas of classic Hollywood, the popularity of romantic comedies increased substantially. Although romantic dramas still occupy a privileged position, they have increasingly become epochal or fantastic films, set in another time and exploring different conditions of love and relationships to those audiences might themselves experience. Examples of this can be seen in *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997), *Anna and the King* (Tennant, 1999), *The English Patient* (Minghella, 1996), *Pride and Prejudice* (Wright, 2005), *Atonement* (Wright, 2007), *Ghost* (Zucker, 1990), *Forever Young* (Milner, 1992), *City of Angels* (Silberling, 1998), and *Shakespeare in Love* (Madden, 1998). Such isolation from the everyday permits the rescue of reactionary ideas of heterosexual love and *amour passion* which entail a return to melodramatic forms of narrative articulation. By distancing narratives from present sociocultural and economic contexts, nostalgia, and a presumption of 'authenticity' permit the idealisation of a romantic love narrative set in another time. The narrative, while not directly, then opposes its version of a 'truer' love against a contemporary one, which is represented as cynical, jaded or of lesser value. Thus, many romantic films can be understood as

providing a thorough exploration of atavistic and escapist forms of romantic love (See chapter 2 for a discussion on romantic love). On the other hand, from the ‘sex comedies’ of the 1950s and early 60s, the ‘nervous romances’ of the 1970s, the ‘new romances’ of the 1980s to the ‘self-conscious romances’ and ‘friendship romances’ of the 1990s and the ‘post-modern romances’ of the 2000s (Dowd & Pallotta, 2000; Evans & Deleyto, 1998; McDonald, 2007; Neale & Krutnik, 1990), a constant of the genre has been its resilience through its ability to adapt to historical changes while maintaining a rigid codified structure (Neale & Krutnik, 1990). The genre is particularly responsive to what some term as ‘crises of marriage’ and shifting attitudes towards sex, romantic love and relationships (Deleyto, 2003; Lent, 1995; Shumway, 2003).

Furthermore, as Shumway (ibid.) argues, romantic comedies have adopted and explored competing and contradictory discourses of love, juxtaposing romantic love with intimacy and companionate love. This means that while many of the elements, themes and traits of melodrama and the woman’s film have remained a staple of romantic comedies, romantic comedy has sought to actively play, contravene and explore canon deviation in one or several of these aspects. Thus, it can be argued that the history of romantic comedy is one of both progressive and reactionary discourses pulling against each other and being meshed into individual narratives that concede in some ideological aspects while also looking to explore ambiguities, contradictions and changes in others. Shakuntala Banaji (2007) has identified this tension also in her discussion of Indian cross-border (with Pakistan) romances. There she argues for

the need for an understanding of Hindi film spectatorship as being heterogeneous, psychologically contradictory, always emotionally engaged – whether through individual or altruistic fantasies and critiques. Such spectatorship is also always built around the potential of texts to be read as fragmentary and internally divergent, articulating radical positions at odds with their own (frequently socially retrograde) dominant discourses but also inviting complex —and threatening— pleasures through fleeting or more extended participation in compelling ‘reactionary’ ideological positions and equally compelling ‘anti-authoritarian’ personal ones. (p. 174-5)

A clear example of the fragmented and divergent potential of texts can be seen in the film *Friends with Benefits* (Gluck, 2011), which takes as its starting point the figure of heterosexual friends with benefits, a new form of relationship where friends with no

apparent or agreed need for a deeper emotional connection acknowledge their physical desire and have occasional sexual intercourse. The film starts by exploring how this somewhat new configuration of a relationship might work for the different parties involved and moves through the tensions when their understandings of friendship, love and need clash. It ends, however, by having the two lead characters declare their wish to enter a conventional heterosexual romantic relationship.

This 'pull-and-push' has been taking place also in the trends scholars have identified throughout decades of the romantic genre²⁵. From the near-global conservative backlash against women's independence in the fifties, the burgeoning youthful hedonism of the sixties, the re-evaluation of masculinity (embodied in a new beta male figure) and the incursion of feminism into popular culture (See Potter, 2002), to the 'neo-traditionalist' or even post-feminist comedies of the eighties and nineties that sought to revitalize hegemonic gender roles and the institution of heterosexual marriage (McDonald, 2007). During the nineties and the 2000s, two things have characterised the romantic comedy genre: friendship and a renewed interest in gender roles, in particular the role of men. The first element has already been pointed out by Celestino Deleyto (2003) who suggested:

It is as if the new climate of social and sexual equality between men and women had rendered heterosexual desire less vital, as if the perfectly codified conventions that have been valid for so long had lost much of their meaning and become nothing more than picturesque museum pieces—to be admired but not believed. Disenchanted by this state of affairs the genre has started to explore other types of relationships between people and to consider their incorporation into their plots... Friendships between men, between women, or between men and women have started to proliferate in the space of romantic comedy. (p.181-2)

This exploration of the tensions between friendship qua friendship and friendship as a prelude to romantic love in romantic comedy is not new, however. In Bollywood this tension is highlighted in the romantic triangle of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hain* (*Something's Happening*, Johar, 1998) discussed at length by Banaji (2006), while *Annie Hall* (Allen, 1977) foregrounds this topic and films like *When Harry Met Sally* (Reiner, 1989), *My Best*

²⁵ This is something not unique to the West, as the cases of Tehran, Bombay and Shanghai illustrate.

Friend's Wedding (Hogan, 1997) and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*²⁶ (Newell, 1994) explore it in depth. They all are, not coincidentally, some of the most enduring romantic films of the past decades because as David Shumway (2003) argues, they blend the discourse of romantic love with a modern sensibility towards the discourse of intimacy that is lacking in other films, while including differing nods to possible shortcomings of marriage as institution. The novelty lies in the emergence of same sex friendship eclipsing or replacing the typical heterosexual romantic ending. Although there have been recent examples of female friendship comedies, from *Bridesmaids* (Feig, 2011) and *The Heat* (Feig, 2013) to the recent remake of *Ghostbusters* (Feig, 2016)²⁷, this tendency has been dominated by male friendships, fittingly named (bro)mances.

The 'bromance' subgenre of romantic comedies can be characterised by an acute recognition of the genre's conventions and an exploration of masculinity, homophilia, homophobia, misogyny and romantic love (Alberti, 2013a, 2013b; Greven, 2011; Peberdy, 2011; Rehling, 2009). Long a staple of Indian cinema in various languages, but pioneered in Hollywood by Judd Apatow, bromances are part of a larger trend that includes 'beta male' comedies, like *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (Stoller, 2008) and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (Apatow, 2005), where a latent crisis of white, straight, (mostly) American masculinity finds expression through the figure of the 'abject' (if one is to follow psychoanalytic analysis, see Kristeva, 1987; Modleski, 2014), the idea of the bifurcated male hero (See Alberti, 2013a) and the 'redeemed male loser' (Greven, 2011). Greven and Alberti suggest that the novelty of bromances and beta male comedies lies in the 'homo-confused' bond that male characters endure, which presents a challenge – or even a threat – to the culmination of heterosexual relationships in marriage, without challenging the hegemonic desirability of marriage as a goal. Furthermore, in these comedies that seek to appeal to both men and women, homo-erotic moments and homophilic tension often replaces sequences of heterosexual attraction. Despite this, the resolution of these

²⁶ Alongside friendship, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, with films like *Notting Hill* (Michell, 1999) and *French Kiss* (Kasdan, 1995) were, according to Diane Negra (2006), also part of a trend to treat tourism and the luxury of mobility of white, (upper) middle-class women as a catalyst for self and/or romantic fulfilment, enabled by the encounter of the 'authentic,' the 'real' (land and lover) elsewhere.

²⁷ It is worthy of mention the TV series *Friends*, and *Sex and the City* are examples of this that preceded these films.

conflicts and obstacles is what paves the way for heterosexual relationships to take place. Thus, the exploration of already adult male coming-of-age, pathos and new forms of male relationships are embedded in a framework of the melodramatised, feminised man-child who must overcome his sexual anxieties and reconfigure his own *maleness* in order, yet again, to woo a woman. Lastly, women in these type of films are hardly present, and in a sense misogynised and masculinised. Successful, assertive, pragmatic, they represent a trigger for the male characters' anxieties and a constant reminder of the self-loathing and deprecation this new masculinity must endure before a finale which reasserts patriarchal order.

In parallel to these two subgenres are 'anxious romances,' as Alberti (2013b) terms them. These can be broadly understood as the independent or semi-independent productions of North American cinema, particularly mumblecore. Mumblecore is a style of film that privileges dialogue, is low-budget, uses improvisation and largely deals with the lives of white, college-educated, urban, mostly heterosexual people in their 20s and 30s. The term 'anxious' refers to both the continuation from the nervous romances and their questioning of marriage, romantic love and relationships and the personal, professional and economic instability that surrounds their own personal lives. The so-called 'crisis of marriage' that fuelled the nervous romances, the third source of anxiety, has become a commonality of the 21st Century. This means that these films cannot be considered 'comedies of remarriage' as marriage itself is either marginalised or not present at all.

In the remainder of this chapter I explore the other part of the dyad: audiences. I will emphasise how audience research has dealt specifically with romantic audiences.

3.6 Romantic Audiences

One of the most recognisable aspects of audiences' relationship with romantic media texts is the double articulation of liminality they bring. On one hand, there is the physical retreat from everyday concerns. On the other, there is the psychic retreat that these films might provide. This has usually been termed 'escapism', or is usually linked to notions of verisimilitude and fantasy, but as work on audiences shows, this 'escape' is not as

straightforward as conceived in earlier spectatorship studies. Richard Dyer (2002) links this to the utopian sensibilities and possibilities that the consumption of media can warrant for audiences as they are juxtaposed with the scarcity and precarity (moral, material, emotional) of contemporary everyday life, a point also elaborated by Jackie Stacey.

Working with this juxtaposition between everyday life and the realm of the possible, three of the most important works of audience research to come from the ethnographic turn in reception studies and the increasing influence of British Cultural studies are Janice Radway's (1984) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, Sonia Livingstone's (1989) *Making Sense of Television* and Ien Ang's (1985) *Watching Dallas: soap opera and melodramatic imagination*. Two reasons lead me to pursue these works instead of others: First, their differing theoretical and methodological approaches to audiences. Second, their considerations of romance as a *feminine* genre and the relationships and attitudes women develop towards it. In other words, while aforementioned accounts like Modleski's, Mulvey's and (early) Kuhn's chose an authoritative voice to speak for women, these works are characterized by their awareness of listening and 'letting' women speak. Radway's departure from a dominant textual approach — like Ann Barr Snitow's that proposed romance novels to be pornography for women that subdued them to a patriarchal ideology; Snitow never spoke to actual romance readers— by remarking on the need to approach romance novels not just from the comfort of the critic and the text but to compliment, compare and analyse reader's responses as well was a pioneering decision at the beginning of the 1980s. She interviewed forty-two women from a small town in the Mid-West of the United States and coupled it with a brief questionnaire and textual analysis. The crucial importance of this move is generally recognized as twofold: First, she showed empirically how interpretative communities differ in the prioritization, identification and selection of narrative elements in their readings. Thus, while feminist literary critics using textual analysis derided the female protagonists for ending up subservient to the hero, female readers, admired features that suggested heroines were strong, independent women. Second, her work brought to the fore the discussion of *pleasures* from the text as a plausible form of ideological resistance, not as a form of false consciousness as discussed by the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 1976; Adorno &

Horkheimer, 2002; Adorno & Rabinbach, 1975; Kracauer, 1947, 1995)²⁸. It must be noted, however, that the understanding of pleasures in Radway's work was very much inscribed in the incorporation/resistance paradigm, that is, as positions regarding power distribution asymmetries. On pleasure, she argues that

Dot and her customers see the act of reading as combative and compensatory. It is combative in the sense that it enables them to refuse the other directed social role prescribed for them by their position within the institution of marriage. In picking up a book...they refuse temporarily their family's otherwise constant demand that they attend to the wants of others even as they act deliberately to do something for their own private pleasure. Their activity is compensatory, then, in that it permits them to focus on themselves and to carve out a solitary space within an arena where their self-interest is usually identified with the interests of others and where they are defined as a public resource to be mined at will by the family. For them, romance reading addresses needs created in them but not met by patriarchal institutions and engendering practices. (p. 211)

That is, Radway conceived that the pleasure readers derived from the heroines as escapist and compensatory of the material situation many found themselves in. She argued this had to do with the possibility of resisting, ephemerally so, by abandoning their everyday life and identify with heroines, situations and emotions that provided them with the nurture that their family life did not. Furthermore, this was not a mere individual pleasure; rather it was shared with others from a similar milieu and situations. Coupled with this was a clear distinction between 'ideal' and 'failed' romances, where the difference lied in that the misdemeanours, mistakes and hurtful attitudes of the man were either explained by a background to make sense of them (and thus, redeemable) or not. Yet, despite the oppositional and utopic potential of readings of the narrow circumscription of their role as wives, mothers and housewives, romance narratives are still normative and patriarchal and did not ultimately challenge the social values, relations and structures of patriarchal marriage.

²⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) wrote on pleasure: "Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction: not by its natural structure (which collapses under reflection), but by signals. Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided." (p. 137)

Sonia Livingstone's (1989, 1991) work on the soap opera *Coronation Street* is an attempt to go beyond the dominant textual and dominant audience perspectives that ruled the field throughout the eighties. Livingstone chose a narrative from the show, prepared a questionnaire and administered it to 42 regular viewers. Participants were asked to *retell* a plot of the show: A woman returned to town to live with her father and his new wife. The daughter began a romance with an older man who had had an affair with the father's current wife some time ago. The father opposed the marriage of the two based on this. It is clear this choice of narrative is reminiscent of romantic love's foundational myth, *Tristan and Isolde*. Livingstone argued there were two main possible positions in this case: a) true love would triumph over the paternal opposition (embodied in the father's aversion and prejudices) or youthful naivety and relentlessness topples paternal wisdom. This argument is reminiscent of Hall's encoding/decoding model and the three possible readings it suggested (dominant, negotiated and oppositional). The first position she termed as 'romantics', the latter as 'cynics.' As a necessary step to show how complex the text-reader relationship is, she further adds two other positions: the 'negotiated romantics' and the 'negotiated cynics.' These two positions mainly sided with true love or paternal wisdom respectively, but also conceded that there might be an element of truth in the father's warnings (negotiated romantics) and/or that the father's opposition was too stern (negotiated cynics). Interestingly so, across all these positions there was a spectrum of opinions about the couple's love, ranging from complete belief to utter mistrust. Livingstone argued that meaning and sense emerged from the interaction between text and reader where neither exerted complete control or had absolute freedom over the other.

The third of the seminal works of the 1980s audience reception studies came from Ien Ang (1985) and her study of letters from the audience of the TV show *Dallas*, a North American night-time soap opera at the peak of its popularity globally at the time. In it, Ang read and analysed over 40 letters from viewers of the show and what it meant to them, how they articulated and understood the narrative with its plot twists and devices. Ang showed that rather than being duped by the contradictions and excesses of the text, the viewers are aware of its fantastic nature. One of the work's most ground-breaking contributions to the field was on the aspect of pleasure. During the 1980s, the cultural

ambiance was very much dominated, at least with respects to cultural elites, by the post-Marxist disdain of the popular and American forms of culture. Hall's encoding/decoding model and subsequent work thus had no consideration for the possibility of enjoyment of a text; only the dialectical struggle had relevance. Ang's work reacts to this, suggesting that the pejorative outlook on Dallas had to do with the consideration of its viewers as duped masses and, by and large, feminised.

The development of a politics of pleasure from a feminist perspective was, then, one of the main objectives of the book. This context gave to the overarching response Ang received: viewers derived immense, diverse pleasures and identifications from the show yet constantly found themselves apologizing for doing so. Even thirty years later, my participants repeatedly expressed this sentiment, especially during the discussions of those films perceived to be middle/low-brow (*Don Jon*, *Once* and *500 Days of Summer*). This apologetic pleasure comes from the difference between *Dallas* and its competition the also soap opera *Dynasty*. While the former was a melodrama that demanded serious attachment, and exploited the pathos of the genre; *Dynasty* diverged in a self-reflexive, ironic camp detached style. In other words, 'by the 1990s "straight" melodrama has become unfashionable, while irony has become trendy and cool' (Ang, 2007, p. 22). This was further represented in the two types of pleasure Ang identified in her work: One that privileged the emotional realism of melodramatic imagination while the other found in the distancing effect of ironic pleasure. The first kind of viewer enjoyed being swept away by the tragic structure of feeling, the overwhelming of emotions coming from countless plot twists, narrative devices and elements. Emotional engagement and attachment with characters or an element is crucial to this to this pleasure.

The second mode, ironic detachment, activated and operated a distance between the text and the viewer, a mode 'informed by a more intellectually distancing, superior subject position which could afford having pleasure in the show while simultaneously expressing a confident knowingness about its supposedly "low" quality.' (Ang, 2007, p. 22) Irony as distance, Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 2010) also shows in his work about the social construction of taste, evokes a class difference marked by a clear symbolic violence between those unable to 'enlighten' themselves and recognize the lowly position a certain

object inhabits in a given field and those who use different methods to create distance between them as subjects and that which they have a taste for. This distance, or lack thereof, is only possible if the subject possesses a cultural capital based around the field and the positions those objects inhabit. When it comes to night time soap operas then, it becomes a crucial distinction between seeing them as melodramas and thus as possible rapturous and captivating narratives and seeing them as soap operas, ‘low brow’ entertainment. This does not mean some viewers have it and others do not. If you will, with the emotional pleasure, suspension of disbelief may also include a suspension of this knowledge. Discerning the type of aesthetics, technical, narrative and production elements being used permit this distance and bridge a schism between fiction and reality through irony, a more masculine pleasure. Those who do not develop a farcical relationship to the text allow themselves to travel back and forth from the text to their everyday. These two modes of enjoyment are, if not necessarily complete opposites, at least clearly partitioned as requiring and embodying two distinctive pleasures derived from a romantic text. Ang’s study highlights the importance of the recognition of emotions in the process of interpretation, articulation and enjoyment.

These researchers were working in a new field and following a then widespread interest in the debate of effects, ideology, power and subjective agency —later, identity, context and uses. While their contributions have been noted, there are a few aspects that further research, including my own, has sought to address: First, audiences constitute a key component in their works. However, be this as it may, they are overwhelmingly so audiences of television, not of cinema. Second, their theorization and understanding of romantic love was underdeveloped and that they barely, if at all, mention cinema and its rich tradition of romances (See chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion on romantic love). Finally, the reception and articulation of romantic love depends on four factors: a melodramatic imagination/cultural repertoire of romance/ideal romance, the text, the intersectionality of audiences, and the context of consumption. As illuminating and helpful as their typologies can be, they also commit to a facile division between the ‘real’ and the ‘fantastic’, between ‘romantic imagination’ and ‘romantic practice.’ Perhaps this division can be accepted more easily with the peculiarities of romances for television, but I find this is not the case for the realist tradition of cinema (of which all my selected films

can be said to belong). It is possible to trace some new attempts to track and research film audiences or audiencing (still a somewhat marginalized topic) I would like to discuss, highlighting either their theoretical and/or methodological innovations and continuities focusing on romantic audiences of film.

3.6.1 New orientations in audience research

Between those studies' time and today, theories, debates, methods and concepts have changed significantly. The 'New Audience Research' tradition has been somewhat superseded by a focus on debates on participation and the 'audience or publics', convergence, mediation, participation, media practices and big data, fed in partly by changes to our relationship with media consumption (See Couldry, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2013; Mathieu et al., 2016; Silverstone, 2006). It must be noted, however, there is a certain conceptual and methodological continuum; surveys, interviews, focus groups and ethnographies continue to dominate, while questions of literacy, text-reader, and structure-agency are still prevalent in today's research agenda (See Livingstone & Das, 2013; Zaborowski & Dhaenens, 2016). In regards to the audiences or audiencing processes I'm interested in, I have highlighted above three works on romance and its audiences, though these works were not alone in their interest of soap operas and text-audience relationships (See Brown, 1994; Hobson, 1982; Katz & Liebes, 1990). They encapsulate a refinement in methods and theoretical nuance and sophistication (at the time) we have grown used to in the field.

While it is possible to identify that in the last decade online media has become the mainstay interest of media scholars, there was an 'interim' period before its boom. During this period, the spectator/performance paradigm and debates around the 'active audience' dominated a great deal of academic attention up until a decade or so (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Alasuutari, 1999; Livingstone, 2000). The link between these two lie in the questions of power and context. While these distinctions are not to be taken as a clear-cut separation of interests, methods and concepts from previous paradigms or works, there was a distinct shift from questions of power and ideology to

enquiries over identity and everyday life. The notion of the active audience was based around three ideas:

First audiences must interpret what they see even to construct the message as meaningful and orderly, however routine this interpretation may be. Second, audiences diverge in their interpretations, generating different understandings from the same text. Third, the experience of viewing stands at the interface between the media (and their interpretations) and the rest of viewers' lives, with all the concerns experiences and knowledge which this involves. (Livingstone, 2000, p. 177)

Illustrative as this excerpt is of several points that the dominant audience perspective levelled against the dominant textual approach, it also highlights what the third paradigm sought to address in contrast to previous ones. Audiences began to be looked at as a locatable, graspable, researchable 'thing,' a misleading account that too easily missed the interaction between history-text-audience-context by treating the second and third as concrete wholes (Ang, 1990). Instead, John Fiske (1992) proposed the verb 'audienicing' to refer to the active and continuous process of cultural meaning making and exchange of these meanings instead of a sequestered private static event. The idea of the audience as performance, of the audience or audienicing as practice has followed this idea, trying to add to the research foci of reception the elements of iteration and wider contexts of media consumption (See Nightingale, 2011). Though both considerations have proved crucial for researchers in the area, my focus lies with the latter as films, do not necessarily evoke the repetitive interaction that television or new media do. More to the point, one of my research questions aims to deal with the different ways in which the context and experiences of love of a person interact with her/his reading of a film, or particular sequences of it. In other words, how the interpretative work of the audience speaks not just of individuals, but of larger social groups and attitudes towards, in this case, romantic love and interpersonal relationships.

3.6.2 New (studies of) romance

I will now highlight three different studies of audiences of romantic films that have incorporated the critiques above to produce more nuanced accounts of 'audienicing'. First, drawing from audience studies, film history and political economy, with an

emphasis on marketing strategies, Thomas Austin's (2002) work on three Hollywood productions places importance on a multi-dimensional approach to films as socio-economic and cultural textual products. He uses as case studies, dubbing them 'event' films, three films: *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven, 1992), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Coppola, 1992) and *Natural Born Killers* (Stone, 1994), dubbing them as 'event' films. An 'event' film, is not only a wildly economic successful film but also one that generates public controversy, e.g. depictions of sexuality and violence in *Natural Born Killers*. With this consideration, Austin argues that 'understanding how cultural forms work within contemporary society also requires an investigation of institutional context and commercial strategies and practices, as media consumption clearly does not happen in isolation from these operations.' (p. 14) For Austin, this entails understanding the films as a 'dispersible text'. That is, a text produced with certain commercial, economic and inter-textual strategies and operations in mind. Further, these operations and strategies, which are targeted to specific groups of the population, attempt to influence and privilege certain readings of the film, though they do not fully fix them. Moreover, the marketing and distributional strategies employed serve to cement films as commodities. With a clear picture of how a given film is positioned, marketed (i.e., interviews with cast, media reports, press sensationalism), 'hyped' up, and distributed, Austin's approach is completed via audience research on how contextually positioned subjects receive, interpret and articulate their pleasures of the film, its 'hype' (its contentious quality), and its commoditization. Austin's work is ambitious in its scope and nuanced in its articulation of the different 'life' stages a film goes through economically, socio-culturally and individually. From his work, I take into my own study the rationale on how to choose and study film, emphasising in this thesis, the continued life of films.

Norma Iglesias-Prieto's (2004) work on the reception of the film *Danzón* (Novaro, 1991), takes a focus on articulations and inflections of gender at three levels: First, on the feminine gaze of the director, María Novaro. Second, on the construction of masculine-feminine subjectivities through cinema and finally, on their reception by gendered subjects with specific sexual orientations. *Danzón* is about a woman who moves from Mexico City to Veracruz in search of a lost lover. Using discussion groups segregated by age, sexual orientation, gender, and place of origin, Iglesias Prieto's research shows how a

director's attempt at challenging dominant patriarchal cinematic codes are received, interpreted, and given differing levels of significance depending on her four chosen variables. For example, for her female participants, the female lead of the film was celebrated because of her complexity. This was attributed in part because this is a female character with agency, contrary to dominant portrayals of the feminine in (Mexican) cinema. They also praised the film for its nuanced, feminine telling story of Mexico. On the other hand, the young, male, Mexican, heterosexual participants derided this type of storytelling, based around micro-stories with an emphasis on the sensual, as boring or lacking in 'transcendence' (See de Beauvoir's discussion of this in section 2.5). In comparison, all variables constant bar place of origin, her Spaniard participants saw the film as a dual journey of the female lead towards her own liberation. Her analysis and research highlight how there are many inflective moments that affect the reception of the discursive aspects of a film, her focus on gender. The work of Iglesias-Prieto serves as an eloquent counter-argument to Barker's critique of identification (section 2.7.1). By segregating the groups and choosing the film she chose, her analysis highlights one of the most illuminating aspects of audiences' identification: the constant tension between self-affirmation and 'others,' between specificity and generalisation.

Finally, Shakuntala Banaji's (2006) work on Bollywood audiences of primarily romantic Hindi films in Bombay and London. Her research is based on participant observation at over 80 film showings, brief public interviews and 36 in depth interviews. Working at two urban sites, she explores different audiences' interpretations and pleasures, articulating connections between place of origin, gender, age, religious beliefs, sexuality, masculinities and femininities, ethnicity, violence, terrorism, and nation. With a plethora of subjects explored, her work highlights that the interpretative act of an audience reading and responding to a text is not a singular process but is a multi-dimensional matrix full of inflections, connections and counter-intuitive projections. That is, interpretation is usually fragmentary, and, at points, contradictory. She calls attention to the manner in which the intersectionality of audiences comes to the fore in pleasures and ideological critiques, and in the attribution of significance, and/or rejection of certain sequences and elements of a film and its ideological discourses. Banaji's work highlights the importance of *context*.

Banaji argues

That the immediate context of the social act of viewing Hindi films in a group, along with members of an audience, in a quasi-public space such as a cinema hall or a crowded living room, can have a profound impact on the nature of spectatorship, inflecting and even colouring entirely the experience of film viewing and the interpretation of particular sequences in films. (p. 176; author's emphasis)

Context, in Banaji's work, can be understood as a relationship between the physical (cinema hall, living room), and social (alone, with relatives, with friends) condition of film viewing, and the *intersectionality* of a subject's identity, where intersectionality is understood as always politicised, and never a stand in for some form of diversity. In addition to this, she suggests that it is important to pay attention to the larger historical and socio-political contexts in which a film is produced and released and how these affect the both momentary interpretation and audiences' memories of films. Given the intermeshing of the narrative, sensuous, sartorial, and musical elements 'it appears that *emotional and material realism are often mutually interdependent...a suspension of disbelief has to be earned and is not automatically granted* to a Hindi film text' (p.168). This entails a further refinement of the politics of pleasure, of emotional engagement and ironic, rational detachment by admitting the possibility of their coexistence at the same time.

Further, Banaji argues that when understanding *why* audiences interpret and articulate their pleasures and interpretations of sequences in different ways, it is important to consider the experiences and background of the interpreter as well as the different claims of truth of the text. Importantly, she argues that a detached mode of engagement with an element of a film becomes nigh impossible for those audiences – and those scholars – who have experienced something similar in their lives. Her analysis showcases the importance of going beyond the text-audience dyad and understanding the contextual nuances at every level that affect the interaction between films and audiences. Banaji's and Iglesias-Prieto's work help to influence several aspects of my project: First, the importance of understanding that the context of reception is influenced in a myriad of ways by the intersectionality of a subject. This entails understanding that interpretation can be contradictory, fragmentary and ambiguous. Thus, it is paramount, when highlighting variations and overlaps in perspectives, to also analyse how different subjects articulate particular elements of their subjectivity to understand these variations and

overlaps. Further, that the construction of these interpretations differs from a group setting to an individual one, and that memory is a political and ideological act. Finally, in this thesis I seek to further elucidate the multi-directional relationship that emotional realism, the verisimilar, ideology and pleasure have both in representations of romantic love, as well as in their interpretations.

3.7 Today's audiences

If one were, for narrative purposes, to sum up extremely briefly the story of the different theoretical, methodological and conceptual perspectives highlighted thus far in this chapter it would be something like: Text, to text-reader/spectator, to text-audience, to text-audience-context, to text-audience-context-intersectionality. In this conjuncture, what has changed and what has continued to hold the interest of researchers? Although by no means exhaustive, I would like to highlight a few strands that new audience research has followed to understand novelties and continuities. First has been the concern with the online. Methodologically speaking, as it is to be expected, interviews, focus groups, self-completion questionnaires and surveys continue to be widely used for audience research, film audiences being no exception. The online somewhat thwarts this, and, seduces because of it. The concern of performativity and new modes of media consumption and engagement has drawn researchers to now look online for film audiences, taking online comments, reviews and forums as proxies to study attitudes, pleasures, interpretations and other elements audience research is known for (Bore & Hickman, 2013; Davis & Michelle, 2011; Kalviknes-Bore, 2011, 2012; Ridanpää, 2014; K. Weir & Dunne, 2014). One of such platforms that commands some interest is the Internet Movie Database or IMDb. Take for example, Liesbet van Zoonen's (2007) research on performance of politics. Drawing on 549 comments and reviews of four different television and films that deal with politics, van Zoonen aims to study how these comments reveal a 'performance of the political self'. She acknowledges a major drawback of this kind of data: 'one does not know who is behind the posting, why the individual sent in a comment or how postings relate to people's 'real-life' politics. In other words, it is unclear what these postings represent.' (p.535) Furthermore, other studies suggest there is a clear gender bias in reviews and online comments made about

films, privileging male and/or masculinized texts (Boyle, 2014; Otterbacher, 2011, 2013). Thus, not only is there an uncertainty on how to approach online comments and the performative acts they contain, the platforms that enable online comments, reviews and interactions profile certain types of identities and qualities. This is before mentioning the literacy and materials required to post online, two elements that are often overlooked in research design like van Zoonen's. While the curiosity invoked by the novelty of these modes of audience interaction is understandable, while also acknowledging that research costs are greatly reduced with these new online methods, it is crucial then, to complement any sort of research into online audiences with actual film audiences, where gathering of socio-demographic data and face-to-face interaction provides an excellent comparison point to the weaknesses and strengths of the kind of data found in online comments and reviews. Otherwise, the richness and effect the context has in the moment of media consumption is lost, hindering the quality of analysis.

Connected to the online, in today's media environment, researchers are also cognizant that people consume films in a myriad of ways. Constantine Nakassis (2016), in his study of Tamil cinema and youth in India draws the importance of style and interdiscursivity in understanding film consumption. That is,

Filmic *style* is inherently interdiscursive, always pointing to another *stylish* act. And it is reflexively so. Style, as I've argued, is always presented in quotes. That which is cited is always marked in one way or another as not quite one's own, as a reanimation of some other act originating from another, more statusful subject or object. The performativity of film to do style is contingent on this citationality, the ability of the citation to figure *this* performance here and now as an instance of *style* by virtue of its grounding in *another* cited performance, which, in being so cited, is figured as its originary moment. (p. 217)

What Nakassis' highlights are that the film and the audience do not end when the film ends. Rather, by articulating their pleasures, and identities through specific elements of a filmic text, audiences reform and perform the text not just mimicking it, but by bricolaging it to fit their personal agenda. This citationality he speaks of, is paramount to understand the allure films can have over our projects of self. In addition to this, it considers that a film's enduring cultural life is largely dependent on its performativity by

audiences (See also Aran-Ramspott, Medina-Bravo, & Rodrigo-Alsina, 2015; Hollinshead, 2011).

Connected to this recognition of modalities of consumption, is also a renewed, if not novel, interest in the spaces of this consumption. If context is so important in how we consume media, then in an age of globalisation and of many ways of consuming films, how have the spatiality of the cinema and audiences been influenced? On the one hand, there's been an interest in the consumption of films by diasporic communities. A project by Smets, Vandeveldel, Meers et. al, looking at several diasporas in Belgium (Indian, Turkish, Moroccan, Jewish), has emphasised the act of cinema-going and how it helps to negotiate and (re)produce gender identities as well as to construct and maintain ideas of communities, families and values at one level; highlighting the importance of the social context of consumption and interpretation at another; and recognising how transnational and local flows of distribution and exhibition are affected by the particularities of a specific diaspora and how this affects the distance a diasporic film culture may or may not have from the mainstream (Smets, Van Bauwel, Meers, & Vande Winkel, 2016; Smets, Vandeveldel, Meers, Vande Winkel, & Van Bauwel, 2013; Vandeveldel, Meers, Van Bauwel, & Vande Winkel, 2015; See also Smets, 2012). Others have looked at how contemporary geopolitics are represented and are involved in the negotiation of national, trans-national and local (urban/rural) identities (Anaz, 2014; Aveyard, 2012; Cochrane, 2011).

Finally, ethnographic or participant observation exercises with particular groups also continue to be of interest, though with a clear distinction between media scholars who perform an audience ethnography and visual anthropologists (cf. Bertolli Filho, 2015; Bradby, 2013; Iglesias-Prieto, 2012; Marx, 2014; Smets, 2012; Wilson & Stewart, 2008). The former tend to prefer the (re)creation of a cinematic setting with a group of people and watch a film, having a set of themes for discussion in mind. Visual anthropologists, on the other hand, tend to either document a classic ethnography through audio-visual media or hand the tools to create audiovisual material to groups of people they are interested in. A third kind of ethnographic work that deals with a specific set of film audiences are those that deal with film festivals. Usually the realm of political economy

and structural research, there is a growing interest in these audiences and their experience, their political agency and identities (See Ateşman, 2015; Dickson, 2015; Martinez, Frances, Agirre, & Manias-Muñoz, 2015). As it is usually the case with disciplinary boundaries and media studies, these are rather diffuse. Studies of the former kind tend to stick to the idea of the cinema as *the* place, ritually so, on which to perform their research whereas visual ethnography tends to be more interested in the interpretations and representations of things created through audiovisual media.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the main theoretical and empirical approaches to reception studies. It is possible to divide these as textual and audience-driven studies. The former, represented by the effects tradition and the spectatorship studies. The latter in the Uses and Gratifications and the British Cultural Studies perspectives. What separates both pairs is their ideological or utilitarian perspective on the media. The latter is shared by both the effects and Uses and Gratifications perspectives. As it is outlined in the introduction and in chapter 2 of this project, I consider romantic love and thus audiencing on love, a political, ideological project. Moving forward then, I will mainly draw from the Cultural Studies tradition and to a lesser extent, spectatorship studies. Like many other audience researchers interested in cinema, the inalienable relationship between psychoanalysis and cinema must be recognised (See Elsaesser, 2009; Mayne, 1998; Smelik, 2001). Early Screen theory, and to a lesser extend the film apparatus theory (see section 2.8.1 and 3.1), offers an initially compelling way to understand the ideological messages embedded in narrative cinema, its claims to ‘reality,’ pleasures and identities by the spectator. Through an ocularcentric appropriation of psychoanalysis, early Screen theory poses that the film text has a set of pre-inscribed meanings. These meanings, in narrative cinema²⁹, because it aims to emulate reality, are dominant, patriarchal ideological tools that seek the status of ‘normal.’ Further, early Screen theory posits that given the

²⁹ For those writing from a Screen or film apparatus perspective, there was a clear difference between narrative and art cinema. The former seeks to etch out contradictions in favor of a resolution of the conflict, in support of dominant ideologies. The latter, because it can blur ideological positions and have greater affective impact, has the potential to challenge the dominant gaze.

affective and aesthetic qualities of cinema, it structures two main types of pleasures: scopophilia and narcissistic identification. In addition to this, the spectator of narrative cinema is considered as a passive entity that was submissive to the film ideological apparatus, partly enabled through the lure of the cinematic pleasures. Finally, Screen theorists emphasise the importance of gender in all these elements. I admit that, as I outlined in the first section of this chapter, there have been many developments of this early position sketched out here. Further, there has also been a turn towards phenomenology and the work of Gilles Deleuze in the past few years (See Plantinga, 2009; Rushton, 2009).

The criticisms of Screen theory, many of them coming from the British Cultural Studies tradition help to enrich the picture of reception. First, was the structural overemphasis on the text. This meant three things: a methodological neglect of the audience. Second, an over-celebration of the authorial power of the writer to ‘unveil’ the psycho-ideological workings of the text. Finally, a reductionist, monolithic account of spectator pleasures and identifications. While acknowledging media as ideological and with ‘preferred readings’, the work of audience researchers, some of them highlighted in this chapter, has shown the importance of ‘speaking’ to actual audiences. By doing so, we’ve come to understand the many ways people read texts, articulate their pleasures and identities. Research from this tradition has shown that the meanings and claims of truth of any media text are read differently depending the socio-economic and historical context of the reception and the intersectionality of the subject reading. At the same time, by understanding the reading of a text as fragmentary, ambivalent at times and contradictory, it becomes possible to understand why certain ideological elements of a text are read in particular ways. This is not to say that there are an infinite number of possible readings, but rather that how subjects position themselves vis-à-vis the ideological positions of a text open the way to indifference, ideological affirmation, resistance, incredulity, identification, and other modes of engagement. Moreover, it is with the understanding that pleasures may be precarious and that identities are not fixed, yet neither of these are unbound, that it becomes important to understand how different modes of engagement speak of their relationship with the ideological work of the text and the reception of this work by the audience. In other words, it is important to

consider that any given film contains ideologies that cut across gender, sex, race, class, in a particular socio-economic and historical context. At the same time, the intersectionality of a subject affects how at different moments of a reading different modes of engagement come to the fore.

It is with these considerations regarding audiences in mind that I move forward to the methodological chapter of this thesis outlining how I operationalised these theoretical considerations about audience research.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will reflect on the methodological decisions of this project. In chapter 3, I noted that it is positioned mainly in the Cultural Studies tradition, while also partially drawing on Screen Theory. This thesis deals with ordinary viewers' engagements with romantic films. More specifically, it is interested in ordinary viewers' interpretations, emotions, attitudes and judgments in relation to the romantic elements of romance films, and the connections between these elements and romance in their own everyday lives. As a project concerned with the intersection of films, identities, class, gender, ideologies and affects, it is clear that in order to grasp the myriad of possible engagements, the project needs to pay attention to films as texts, with their 'preferred' readings, and the spectrum of possible articulations audiences can express. As highlighted in section 3.6.2, an attention to context and the embeddedness of media consumption is also necessary. Further, because this project works from a critical, feminist perspective, the methods employed obey ethical as well as theoretical demands fitting the conceptual framework. With these research objectives in mind, I divided the research into four stages of data collection and analysis. Each stage was designed to help create grounds, questions and hypotheses for the next stages to improve and determine needed changes or potential shifts in the research questions. Although I outline these stages as discrete units, they work to constitute a recursive audience-led textual analysis of the chosen films.

The first and continuous stage was a thematic textual analysis of the films. Lothar Mikos (2014) suggests that the analysis of films contains three levels of meaning making: the intentions of the producers, the structure of the film and audience reception. The analysis of themes, intentions and formal aspects of films helps to identify possible salience, points of discussion with audiences and helps to familiarise the researcher with the text. At the same time, this stage is *recursive* because as the research highlighted in section 3.6 illustrates, it is crucial to *revise the initial textual analysis* once audience data about interpretation and meaning has been collected. Alongside the textual analysis, I compiled a set of materials ranging from magazine articles, essays, online comments and reviews of my chosen romantic films. This set of materials served two functions: First, to help contextualise the films and their contexts of production and consumption. Second, to aid myself in

anticipating possible audience readings and in highlighting certain elements of the films discussed to my interview participants.

The second stage was a pilot study to probe, contrast and identify preliminary categories of analysis of the participants vis-à-vis the ones I identified in stage one. The pilot study also sought to experiment with the *group interview* format for data collection, and to consider if it was a good fit for the research questions posed by my thesis. The pilot study was divided in two segments: a film screening and a group discussion. The combination of these two elements was based around the need to examine how screening a film or portions of films could work to animate or suffocate the audience's conversation.

The third stage of the project consisted of a series of group and individual interview sessions attached to film screenings, much like during the pilot study. During the group interview sessions, I used visual and interactive materials to stimulate interaction and discussion amongst my participants. The goal of these discussions was to get the participants to share their perspective on the films screened, on romantic films in a broader perspective, to push them to creatively modify the films to suit their ideas and desires and to embolden them to share their views, experiences and ideas about romantic love in contemporary society. Because in a group setting certain topics, or perceptions might not be expressed fully by some participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Millward, 2012), taking advantage of the more personal setting of a one-on-one interview, I further inquired about personal romantic experiences and how these influence how s/he reads a particular film.

The fourth stage of the research project consisted of going back to the initial textual analyses, and based on the results from the group and individual interviews, re-coding, reconsidering and modifying the analysis by building in the insights of audiences. Both this and the previous stage form the main tool to answer the research questions of this project. The operationalization of these research questions will be explained in section 4.3.

4.2 Initial methodological considerations

4.2.1 Film sampling

When interested in films and audiences, there were four elements I needed to consider for the design of my research: Films, recruitment, fatigue and interaction. The consideration of romance and films goes beyond the genre itself because as David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson (1985) found, 95 per cent of North American films made before 1960 contained at least one romantic subplot. Though I do not know for certain if such a high percentage has maintained in the following 56 years, it was my educated guess that it would be still pretty high. Thus, I set out a timeline and a set of basic criteria to create a list of possible films to analyse and discuss in the focus groups. I, quite easily, found over 75 films that fulfilled the criteria of:

- Must have been released between 2004 and 2012 (later extended to 2014)
- English used as main language
- Romance is the main element of the plot
- Movie must have at least broken even through box office and DVD sales³⁰
- Must have had nationwide release (US taken as basis)
- If a limited release, it must have been a festival circuit film

I'm well aware that effectively though very wide, these criteria paradoxically also discriminate against cinema produced outside Hollywood. However, the reach and cultural influence of cinema produced and consumed in the US cannot be understated. Also, given that my fieldwork took place in London, it made practical sense to circumscribe an initial list of films with these criteria. The final point of the criteria also acknowledges that consumption of art-house cinema in London is probably higher than in many other cities and as such, successful cinema of this kind was fairly well known amongst audiences (See Appendix 1 for the list of films). Also, my own knowledge and to a degree, taste in films helped me with the initial selection of films, which I then enhanced through IMDb by going through similar and 'suggested films' as well as film

³⁰ Corroborated through officeboxmojo.com, imdb.com and Wikipedia.org.

lists that the films I knew were on³¹. From this initial sample, I began to sketch out the main attractions, the narrative innovations and differentiating traits of each film while linking them to discourses of love. For example, with *The Time Traveller's Wife* (Schwentke, 2009), time travelling as a plot-enabling device was linked to a nostalgia over the 'waiting bride' figure, the feminine devotion to a man enabled by romantic love. Many other films use time manipulation alongside other elements to drive the narrative, like *The Lake House* (Agresti, 2006), *Ghost of Girlfriends' Past* (Waters, 2009), *The Future* (July, 2011), and *One Day* (Scherfig, 2011). Other films are set in a different time, like *Revolutionary Road* (Mendes, 2009), *Walk the Line* (Mangold, 2005), *Bright Star* (Campion, 2009), *Atonement* (Wright, 2007) and *Pride and Prejudice* (Wright, 2005) and have a considerable component of nostalgia attached. Another set of films takes the brief encounter, which I sketched as a form of time, as their setting like *Weekend* (Haigh, 2011), *Elizabethtown* (Crowe, 2005), and *Before Sunset* (Linklater, 2004). Time can be, of course, linked up to class, as the work of Eva Illouz (1997, 2012) shows. But this connection is enabled through both dating and what she has termed as 'romantic time.' Thus, while it would be unfair to say these films would not have helped me pursue a sociological analysis of romantic love, their plausible links to sociological underpinnings such as class, gender, and race were to a large degree, diegetically contained or secondary to other elements. While not subtracting the importance of the time element, to narrow down the possible films in my thesis sample, I began to seek out ones where sociological issues of class, gender and race were more explicitly part of the plot. When I looked at this link, I wanted to avoid the narrative 'erasure' of the class divide, that films like *Love and other Drugs* (Zwick, 2010), *Music and Lyrics* (Lawrence, 2007) and *Begin Again* (Carney, 2013) contain, and examples of 'reformed masculinity' as in *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990). I did, however, wish to retain the main sociological configurations of these films in my final sample – so, except for *Weekend*, none of the aforementioned films touched issues of gender in non-heteronormative ways, and the leads of all these films were white, side-stepping race

³¹ On the webpage for most films on IMDb, below the initial information of the film, which contains trailers, images and rating, there is an algorithmically selection of similar films, usually 12. These tend to be selected thematically or because they contain a shared member of cast (or director, in some cases). Further, on the right side of the webpage, IMDb also showcases user made lists of films, actors, and/or actresses that are linked with the displayed film. For example, in the webpage of *Titanic*, it displays '30 best films' and 'Greatest chick flicks!'

relations. I also wanted to focus on *original* narratives set in the present. This is not to say I looked for ‘*the*’ film that touched on all of these subjects and still fulfilled the essential criteria outlined above. Further, it bears clarifying, time wasn’t the only element I identified in the sample I drew, the supernatural (*Ruby Sparks*, *The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud*), death (*Restless*, *Amour*), childhood (*Little Manhattan*, *Moonrise Kingdom*), sexuality (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, *Weekend*, *A Single Man*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Beginners*, *Plan B*, *Blue is the Warmest Color*), and polyphony (*Something Borrowed*, *2046*, *Love, Actually*), to name a few, were also present. Of course, there were overlaps between plenty of these films. And, while the vast majority of these films do not deviate from the conflict resolution structure of the romance genre, the process of sketching their particularities did allow me to single out several films that I felt, and still feel, would permit a richer, more innovative interaction between myself, the text, and an audience during the discussion stage. At this stage, where an impossible number of films were still in contention, I put my research questions about the axes of class, gender and race to the fore, prioritising the choice of at least three films that clearly dealt in these themes. I singled out the following films: *Weekend* (Haigh, 2011), *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (Kechiche, 2013), *Once* (Carney, 2007), *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance, 2010), *(500) Days of Summer* (Webb, 2009), *Juno* (Reitman, 2007), *Sideways* (Payne, 2004), *Broken Flowers* (Jarmusch, 2005), *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (Allen, 2008), *Match Point* (Allen, 2005), and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004). This is where the recollection of box office records (compared to budget), reviews, nominations and other gathered material also helped to guide my decision as I assumed, correctly, that this would help with future recruitment of audiences. Finally, I decided to focus on the heterosexual romance as I was aware that LGBTQ romances would not attract the same ordinary cross-section of the population of East London that I hoped, and to an extent managed to, attract. Thus, via this extensive process of accretion and elimination of films and narrative elements, I purposefully chose the first three films that I used for fieldwork: *Once*, *Blue Valentine*, and *(500) Days of Summer*. This was due, in part, to the themes explored in the films: contingency and fragility of relationships in *Blue Valentine* and *(500) Days of Summer*, female agency and masculinity in *(500) Days of Summer*, and platonic, impossible love in *Once*. The themes and topics these films deal with are those that a great deal of the literature reviewed in chapter 2 has also explored. Thus, I expected that the films I chose would resonate with the experiences and ideas of

participants of romantic love, intimacy and relationships. In other words, loosely borrowing from Thomas Austin's (2002) notion of 'event' films (section 3.6.2), I chose these films not only because they were economically and critically successful, but also because they received wider cultural interest. That being said, I tried to recruit audiences for a fourth film, *Top Five* (Rock, 2014), a romantic comedy with a primarily Black cast, directed by and starring Chris Rock. Tellingly, I struggled to find participants interested in this film. During the group discussions of these three films, which took place from March – July 2014, the topics of technology and gender roles were overwhelmingly prominent in the general discussions about romantic love, intimacy and relationships that usually followed from the one focused on the film. I decided to include *Don Jon* (Gordon-Levitt, 2013), and *Her* (Jonze, 2013) in my sample of films to further sharpen the data I was gathering on these two topics. I chose these two films as they had been released months prior to the beginning of my fieldwork and I considered that they would provide a gateway to rich discussions about not just technology and gender roles, but also about intimacy, class, and masculinity.

4.2.2 Early textual analysis

I watched each of the five films three times before moving to the pilot study and the data collection. As mentioned throughout chapter 2, following the work of the British Cultural Studies tradition, I work with the idea that films, seen as texts, are produced with flexible sets of encoded meanings and preferred readings. Thus, the significance of an early textual analysis lies in articulating and anticipating a conjunction of these two elements. The role of individual and group interviews is to help contrast, refine, and at moments, surprise or undermine the initial impressions of the researcher.

To group the elements into different themes and categories of address and levels of reading, I used the work of Roland Barthes on codes and 'figures of love' (1974, 1990), of Gilles Deleuze on cinematic images (1986, 1989) and of James Monaco (2009). The codes Barthes identifies are: The Hermeneutic, the proairetic, the semantic, symbolic and cultural. While belonging to a structural matrix to read a text, here I focused on the hermeneutic code, proairetic and symbolic codes. As they privilege mystery, actions and

symbols, these codes are useful to locate moments in the film which are intensely felt and spoken of by audiences. Alongside this, in his book *A lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Barthes argues that any attempt to write on, about or of love can only be done through 'figures', pieces of discourse (1990). He mentions over 60 'figures' or moments, actions, thoughts and emotions a lover can experience. These include the declaration, the anxious wait, the kiss, being mad, embarrassment, compassion and jealousy. His typology of 'love figures' is not only still applicable to romantic films and to romantic experiences of the respondents, it also lends itself perfectly to the fragmented and sometimes contradictory ways in which we – as subjects and as audiences – speak of and about love. Further, because the 'figures of love' as Barthes conceived of them are based on a common cultural recognition of their possible modes of representation (see section 2.1), I emphasised the most recognisable cues of each film.

This is where Gilles Deleuze's (1986, 1989) and James Monaco's (2009) work come in. The former works from a philosophical perspective and focuses on auteurs, but draws a useful separation between types of images in cinema and the affects and emotions they convey. Dividing images by perception, action, affect, recognition, dream, Mirror and crystal images, Deleuze advances a philosophical programme for the reading of films. I take advantage of the fact that his divisions of images are not technical, but rather based on perception, to use them to categorize the scenes and the emotions reported. Monaco's work is based around the division between the *mise-en-scène* and the *montage*. Within this, he makes a compositional breakdown of the moving image, suggesting the *mise-en-scène* comprises the following elements: screen ratio, screen frame, screen planes, multiple images, superimpositions, shot distance, focus, angle, point of view and camera movement. The *montage* consists of editing, continuity cutting and the cut. Although superficial (Rose, 2001), this compositional breakdown can help to identify the elements present in scenes and how they are constructed. However, because my focus is not a formalist one, I did not aim to identify all these compositional elements in every scene but rather those that might call the attention of my interview participants or my own as particularly interesting, innovative and formally connected to the previous two categories. For example, as will be seen in chapter 7, (500) *Days of Summer*'s editing and framing style caught the eye of a lot of participants. But the symbolism of the colour blue, which the director Marc Webb

avowedly used *to represent love*, was not picked up by any of my participants.³² Therefore, while I initially considered blue, it lost its relevance for my final audience-led textual analysis. Thus, focusing on formal elements and particular representations of figures of love was helpful to draw the discussion guides of each film (see appendix 5a-5e), anticipating interest in certain sequences, themes, or elements of the film.

In addition, I initially complemented the themes through the work of Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998), who in their work on *Judge Dredd*, developed a model of investigating a film and its audiences consisting of four stages. Incredibly ambitious and out of the scope of this project, it does include what they call a ‘Vocabulary of Involvement and Pleasure’, a collection of sixteen different elements on the ways a viewer can relate to a film. Applying these elements to their film of choice, they narrowed these elements and produce the six specific ways in which their respondents related to the film. They developed their categories to be as distinct from one another as possible, although they recognise that film-goers might adopt different orientations throughout the film and that there is some room for overlapping. This project took the *idea* and applied it to create a preliminary typology that served to anticipate the participants’ answers during the fieldwork stages, considering the differences between an action film based on a famous comic and romantic films. Barker and Brooks point out that these answers jump from comic book to film to other para-textual elements. Positionality towards a film, however, is neither fixed nor whole. Enjoyment of one element does not necessarily correlate with enjoyment of another or even the film. I drew five preliminary categories of analysis: fantasy-seeking, star-gazing, realist viewer, guilty pleasure and emotion-looking. These categories, I drew based on much of the literature on romance and audiences I outlined in chapter 3. Fantasy-seeking relation to a romantic film is that where the spectator actively wants a film that deals with fantastic romantic themes or has a ‘feel-good’ element to it. Star-gazing orientations to films is where a viewer is attracted to an actor or actress and the romantic films in which they perform. I understand as a realist viewer those who acknowledge the fantastic element of some romantic films and thus prefer more ‘realistic’ films. A guilty pleasure orientation is one where the fantastic element is recognized but is

³² Taken from the (500) Days of Summer DVD director’s commentary.

still preferred over ‘grittier’ and ‘sadder’ films. Emotion-looking is the relation where the viewer wants to be overcome by emotions, affects and feelings while watching a film.

Thus, the initial textual analysis considered how formal and narrative elements of a given film may influence, or activate certain modes of involvement and pleasures without attempting to fix or close meaning. Rather, the emphasis of this analysis was to anticipate possibilities, and patterns later to be contrasted with the interview data. I consider this audience-led textual analysis in depth in section 4.6. I also ran a pilot study to test, among other things, how ‘close’ or ‘removed’ my textual analysis was to what, and how participants read two of the chosen films – which in turn has implications for the assertiveness of much other textual film analysis.

4.2.3 Pilot study

Before the bulk of the group and individual interviews took place, I held three pilot group interviews with students from LSE, UCL and Birkbeck University, screening *Blue Valentine* twice and *Her* once. A well-known limitation of using students for research is that they represent a select group of the population and thus, the data gathered is potentially heavily-skewed (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Landis & Kuhn, 1957; Silverman, 2013). In my case, this skew meant progressive, liberal, secular views on romantic love, family and marriage. Despite this, my intention for the pilot had several grounds: On the one hand, I wanted to test the early textual analysis I had done and the discussion guide I developed from it. Second, I wanted to explore whether showing the whole film and having a discussion afterwards was a viable option or if it was better to select certain sequences and to show clips to the groups. Finally, I wanted to see if the small group setting was a good fit for the research questions of the project.

I held the pilot study at different rooms of the London School of Economics at Aldwych, early in 2014. Besides piloting the discussion guide, I also monitored and asked the participants how tired they felt during the interviews. In one of the sessions of *Blue Valentine* I showed the full film and carried out a subsequent discussion. In the second session, I showed several clips to the participants. In the session with *Her*, I, again showed

the full film. Based on the contrasting experiences of these sessions, I decided to show the full film instead of clips to my future group interviewees. This is, in no small part, because in the group that watched clips, instead of story-making and completing the story with their own ideas and experiences, as I expected, participants were far more eager to see the excluded bits of the film. Further, the discussions of the whole film allowed for a smoother transition and extrapolation of the participants' own ideas, experiences and emotions regarding romantic love and relationships.

Besides the topical discussion, I also enquired from pilot group participants about how they perceived me and my moderation and questioning. My interest in doing this was twofold: to fine tune my mode of address and deal with hierarchies in group settings. Coming from a context in which I had worked only with the Spanish language, where there are strict communicational rules regarding hierarchies which can influence rapport and flow of communication, the pilot study served as an exercise on interviewing participants in English. Alongside this point, I wanted to explore how I, both as a man and as a researcher on love, was perceived and received by women. As much literature on feminist research suggests (Doucet & Mauthner, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Maynard & Purvis, 1994), there is a unique richness and openness in qualitative data gathering when women interview/talk with other women. Further, Deborah Tannen's (1995) work highlights that women might not express themselves the way they would like to in public in the presence of a man. Thus, during the pilot focus groups, I asked participants about my performance and how they perceived my tone with questions and overall presentation. Significantly, I was also very interested in how they perceived me as a man, trying to speak with them about romantic love (See section 4.3.2). Following feedback from the participants, I softened my tone of voice, changed my articulation of certain themes and subjects, and gained more confidence for the fieldwork in how to approach participants and the subject of discussions.

The pilot study also served a great deal to see how interaction and discussion flow could be affected by different demographic traits. According to David Stewart (1990), group interview discussions benefit from a partial homogenization of the participants background as people are more likely to feel at ease when surrounded by others they

perceive as similar. Thus, I aimed to have the students within a certain age range, race and gender. For the bulk of the fieldwork, however, after two or three sessions in one film, I started to mix the groups as I had interested subjects of different races, creed, occupation and ages. As John Levine and Richard Moreland (1998) suggest, diversity in interview groups has the potential of increasing the ranges of perspectives and enriching the overall themes of discussion.

At the beginning of the pilot. I presented my participants with a consent form and a sheet of paper requesting some of their socio-demographic data right after the film's screening (See Appendix 2 for a sample informed consent form and Appendix 3 for a sample demographic sheet). When some of them received the informed consent form, they felt uncomfortable and this created hesitation in their participation. I had advertised the pilot study as an opportunity to watch a film and help a doctoral researcher in a casual, friendly environment, and asking for consent and some right to data right away did not help to nourish such an environment. The 'formality' of the consent form struck was at odds with this. To remedy this, I added a category in the socio-demographic form participants were given to fill to give themselves a 'fake name.' I expected, based on previous research experiences doing this, that this would cause amusement and prompt, by some, a question or two. The rationale was wider as well. As I intended to create as much as possible a relaxed, intimate environment of watching and participation, this addition to the form allowed me to break the ice in many focus groups, create a small initial rapport and ease the tense environment focus groups usually have. As I progressed during the fieldwork, I encouraged participants, in a playful manner, to pick names that weren't 'repeated.' As such, the names the participants gave themselves have been respected, and in the cases they opted out of this, I have still given them alternative names to protect their identity. Additionally, I introduced these papers as an optional thing that would help me tremendously but that participants were free to fill in as they wanted or leave information out. Only three participants declined to fill out the papers.

Finally, during the pilot study I probed participants about potential subjects, themes or debates they were interested in that I may have not touched upon. I also tested projective and hypothetical questions. Furthermore, I was also interested in the transition between

discussing love in the films and in real life. Knowing very well that circumscribing the discussion to just one film would not yield a lengthy and rich discussion, I used the information provided by the pilot study to enhance the discussion of romantic love in general to add a few subjects participants felt were important or compelling to discuss. Based on this, I modified the discussion guide to proceed to data collection via group and individual interviews. In the next sections, I illustrate how I drew up my discussion guides through an operationalisation of the research questions and then I explain why I chose this method and how it worked for the project.

4.3 Operationalization of research questions and the discussion guide

To carry out the groups and individual interviews I developed a discussion guide that would allow me to drive the discussion from introductory, warm up questions to answers for the research questions. Having made the decision to break the discussion between the films and contemporary romance, I built mind-maps for each film (See appendix 5a-5e) highlighting scenes, sequences, character traits, plot elements and themes. These helped me go from the general questions about the film to probe and direct the discussion towards specific points of interest. For example, for *Blue Valentine*, I was very interested in asking about the character Dean. Given his working class aesthetization as an adult and romantic heartthrob when younger, I was curious about the participants' ideas of him before and after. Thus, this was a crucial element I had in my graph and fit, in the discussion guide, in the section of identity. The data I gathered from this helped to answer the third research question directly and to a lesser extent, the first (RQ.1: *What kinds of gender and class identities are identifiable through the representations of love in contemporary North American romantic films?* and RQ.3: *How do 'intended' audiences interpret, react to, negotiate and appropriate representations of romantic love in the construction of their own romantic behaviours and aspirations?*).

To build the discussion guide, visualise the questions and flow of the focus groups, I unpacked the research questions into key concepts and possible sub-questions. Though research questions were phrased seemingly to encapsulate romance on screen, the

overarching theme of romantic love serves for fluidity not only in the conversation, but also in the operationalization. The first research question deals with three main concepts: reading, identity and representation. In other words, the first question is interested in *perceptions of the romantic self* and of those *representations* it may connect to. As such, it was crucial to put forward questions about particular scenes and the participant's perspective on it as well as using projective questions and stories to grasp different positions and degrees of identification and/or rejection. In this project, given how I theorise and understand identity (see section 2.7), this positionality of subjects on different elements of romantic love is how I sought, methodologically, to inquire about identity and class. This does not mean that I took what participants said at face value, rather that I focused on how participants constructed their own position about social class in respect to the positions on class invited by the film (Banaji, 2006). The rationale for choosing scenes and examples, as mentioned in the section above, was based around Roland Barthes' (1990) concept of 'figures of love' as well as around possible formal and phenomenological typologies to thematically analyse films.

The second question was specifically concerned with the intersectional gender and class aspects of romantic love. As mentioned in section 2.5, feminist research makes clear that as part of our shared cultural repertoire of romantic love and relationships, there is a gendered division of roles, based on a patriarchal ideology that undermines women's agency and potential for self-determination. Understanding this, I listed as 'Romantic hexis' the expected behaviours, roles and ideas each gender (in a heterosexual relationship) ought to have in a relationship (e.g., man as active, woman as passive; men as provider, woman as carer). As 'blindness of love,' I aimed to inquire about the possibility of such, and of the clash of different romantic discourses (romantic vs intimacy; see chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of this). Questions here, as mentioned with *Blue Valentine's* character Dean, were helped by elements of the films: Samantha's submissive demeanour in *Her*, the 'macho' and 'bimbo' archetypes in *Don Jon*, the working class setting of *Once*, among other factors. Helping myself to figures and tropes of love like 'love is blind', 'Cinderella/Pretty Woman' or 'work it out', I probed participants into attitudes they reproached, had experienced, angsted about, and/or fantasized about, emphasizing what they perceived to be the gap between fantasy and reality (or lack thereof).

My third and final research question sought to inquire about the affective, emotional and potentially lasting relationship between film and audience. Furthermore, it also was interested in how this relationship is connected to the participant's wider romantic ethos and ideas. The key concepts I jotted down here were based on one of the main positions of literary and feminist theory: that love is not an insulated, asocial or isolated emotional, individual phenomenon. Rather, it reverberates into other emotions, and constantly feeds on them (See Evans, 2003; Kipnis, 2003; Wilkinson & Bell, 2012). As mentioned in chapter 2, in the context of a patriarchal hegemonic ideology, the emotional labour of love is, largely, a feminised labour. Though, as mentioned previously, romantic love connects all three research questions, here the focus was in trying to highlight the emotional aspect of both film watching and of romantic love. I did this by posing a few 'abstract' questions about romantic love and relationships for the audiences to lay out initial insights. I followed up with questions more related to their own personal experiences. Questions for this section were posed in such a way to elicit emotional responses, done by phrasing about extremes of situations, themes, scenes, characters and topics of relationships. These questions, because of what they were aiming to answer, were asked once rapport had been established and above all, while showing myself invested in them (Doucet & Mauthner, 2012; Oakley, 1997).

Table 4.1 Operationalization of Research Questions

Research Question	Key Concepts	Possible questions
How do "intended" audiences read, react, manipulate, negotiate and appropriate representations of romantic love in the construction of their romantic identities?	Reading Identity: Identification Distancing Rejection Representation	What do you think of X? Do you see something of yourself in X? (What? Follow up) What was your favourite scene? Why? Who do you identify with in the film?
What are the gender and class identities identifiable through the representations of love in romance films?	Romantic hexis 'Blindness' of love Identity	Do you think love can work if people are from a different background? What did you think of the roles played by X and Y in the film?

		What would you never accept your partner to tell you?
And what are the different affects love scenes produce in audiences and how do these affects relate to the audience's conception of love and self?	Disillusion Fantasy and Reality Anger Longing Expectations Cynicism	Is there something of the film that struck you? What is or are the most memorable things of the film for you? How does it compare to real life for you? What do you think it's the biggest problem relationships face today?

Because of this imperfect division, the fragmentary nature of speaking about love, the main projective method used (films) and the casual, intimate environment I sought to create during the group interview, some questions and contributions answered more than one questions or referred to more than one topic or key concept identified. I do not see this as a problem as romantic love isn't a subject one can easily compartmentalise or should try to. Furthermore, the transitions of participants from film to their own experiences, emotions and ideas about romantic love was exactly what this project was considering. Thus, even if there is a necessary degree of division and unpacking, the group interviews were carried out in such a way as to allow the unrestrained expression of participants as long as they remained within topic and did not dominated the discussion too much. In the next section, I explore in-depth why interviews were the best fit for the project.

4.4 Group and individual interviews

4.4.1 *Epistemological considerations*

David Silverman (2014) separates the positions a researcher takes in respect of the interview and the data gathered in three: Positivistic, naturalistic and constructionist (See also Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2008; Holstein, 1995; Kvale, 1996). The first position is linked to positivistic theories and approaches to the 'social sciences' (See Arksey & Knight, 1999). In this approach, the researcher merely needs to 'extract' the truth from the subject, a passive, automatically truth-telling entity. What he terms as naturalism, is still a positivist position whereby the researcher poses questions in such a way that the

interviewee expresses her/his natural life-world. In this perspective, the interview must be submitted to the usual rigour check of: validity, representability, falseability and replicability. The overarching problem with these two perspectives, is that they take at face-value what the interviewee says. Further, they do not consider neither interviewer nor interviewee as historically and socially constituted subjects, but rather as objects (Maseide, 1990; Rapley, 2004).

My project, given its conceptual framework, considers interviews through the third approach, the constructionist. This perspective, also known as the interpretative turn in social research, considers the interview as a place and moment where interviewer and interviewee collaborate in the co-construction of meaning about a particular subject (See Fontana & Frey, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 2014). As Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (1997) write of the ‘active interview’:

Respondents’ answers and comments are not viewed as reality reports delivered from a fixed repository. Instead, they are considered for the ways that they construct aspects of reality in collaboration with the interviewer. The focus is as much on the assembly process as on what is assembled. (p. 127)

The notion of the ‘active’ interview, alongside other constructionist approaches, emphasise the interactive element. That is, understanding how interviewer and interviewee position themselves, and how this affects what, when, how, and why something is said. Thus, during and after an interview, the concern shifts from finding out the ‘truth’ to understanding what, how, when and why certain stories are told. In other words, through a constructionist perspective on interviews, it is possible to bypass, to an extent, what participants say as either ‘true’ or ‘false’ accounts of reality. David Silverman (2014) argues that in emphasising the social construction of reality, this approach to interviewing might be construed as too narrow in focus, failing to address any sort of reality besides that of the interview itself. In response to this critique, he highlights two positions: a maximalist position, that focuses on the *when* and *how*s of participants’ articulations of their views (See Schlegoff, 1997). A minimalist position, championed by Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 1995) that focuses on the *what* and *how*s of a participants’ expressions. Because of their highlighted concern with questions of identity, this projects sides slightly to the side of the

minimalist approach, though, whenever possible, I aim to also consider the importance of the when.

Given how sampling worked in this study, the interviews do not lay claims to generalisability, or representativeness. Rather, the emphasis is on the rhetorical force of the analysis while identifying patterns, variability, and consistency throughout the sample. Qualitative analysis seeks to enrich and illustrate processes of interpretation and expression that quantitative methods do not access. The narratives of self and the articulations of the participants' romantic identity are considered as 'cultural stories' that speak of a wider social relevance. As Paul Atkinson (2005) argues :

[w]e should, therefore, be studying narrative insofar as it is a particular feature of a given cultural milieu. Furthermore, narratives are not independent of cultural conventions and shared formats. They are not uniquely biographical or autobiographical materials, and they certainly do not convey unmediated private "experience"... We need, therefore, to *analyse* narratives and life-materials, in order to treat them as instances of social action—as speech-acts or events with common properties, recurrent structures, cultural conventions and recognisable genres. (online resource, NP)

As I argued in chapter 2, our understanding of romantic love in film and outside of it is possible because we share in a cultural repertoire of images, situations, practices, emotions and ideologies. This repertoire, filled with competing narrative and valuations of different, is widely represented and shaped by films. With this in mind, I consider these stories or narratives of self, as historically, socially and culturally situated and positioned in respect to both the chosen films and the wider cultural narrative of romantic love. It is because of this narrativization of romantic love (see section 2.6.2) that I consider qualitative in-depth unstructured interviews are an excellent fit for data collection.

Understanding the interview material in such a way demands reflecting on the co-construction of these stories and what defensible claims of knowledge are possible in this project. Using discourse analysis, in this project, I make use of key passages, comparisons, contrasting attitudes and sequences while at points 'quantifying' the data, in terms of times a certain attitude was expressed, to highlight and strengthen the *patterns* and *differences* of my sample (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 2007; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Based

on this, I also seek to hypothesise and position my interpretative work in the existing body of work on romantic love, film, intimacy and relationships to showcase how individual discourses, can be seen as illuminating wider, yet not totalising, accounts of different conflicting discourses of romantic love. Eschewing a positivist notion of validity, the validation of the work here presented is through this positioning. Further, I focus instead on reflexivity and ethics, as much literature on feminist and/or research on women calls for.

4.4.2 Group then individual interviews

As many authors have pointed out and recognise, the interaction between interviewer and interviewee is neither neutral nor symmetrical (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Fontana & Frey, 2008; Kvale, 1996; Scheurich, 1995). This interaction, at the same time, is burdened by the question of trusting (empathy) or suspecting the reality claims of what the interviewee says (Silverman, 2014; Willig, 2013). Third, it is the interviewer who selects, cuts, and interprets the interview in the final text. Finally, it is crucial to consider that I am a man interviewing mostly women. Drawing on feminist literature (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Doucet & Mauthner, 2012; Finch, 1984; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Reynolds, 2002; Skeggs, 1997, 2001; Thapar-Björkert & Henry, 2004), it is possible to envision this as a non-exploitative project as long as three things are considered: adopting a constructionist perspective that understands and accepts women's ways of knowing. An acknowledgement of my gendered position and an active effort to collaborate, empower and reciprocate the time and effort of my participants. Finally, that power relationships in the interview setting are not fixed and are negotiated throughout the process. The first consideration for this was whether to interview them individually or in groups. Following the experience of Radhika Parameswaran's (2001) ethnographic work on elite Indian women reading western romance novels, where she struggled to get her participants for individual interviews and thus decided to first interview them in groups, I considered following suit, despite the contextual differences. A second point, is that as Stevi Jackson (2013) argues, we should consider our conceptualisation of romantic love as *fully social*. That is, 'love is bounded by the material conditions of our lives and socially scripted through interpretive, socially situated practices' (p. 38). She also recognises the cultural and historical specificity of the

Western notion of romantic love (see section 2.6.1). This sociality of love, David Shumway (2003) writes, has been greatly facilitated, articulated and reproduced by cinema.

Further, as Esther Madriz (Madriz, 1998, 2000) writes,

Focus groups allow access to research participants who may find one-on-one, face-to-face interaction “scary” or “intimidating.” By creating multiple lines of communication, the group interview offers participants... a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes in the company of people from the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds (p.835)

Madriz’ work is with working-class Latina women for whom the group setting became a moment of catharsis, empowerment and bonding. Again, I understand the contextual differences, but these examples helped me to map out the methodological design of this project. That is, screening a romantic film to facilitate initial conversations and slowly building a recursive discussion on romantic love and its many figures on and off-screen. For economic reasons, I was in no condition to hire a female researcher to do parts of my fieldwork. The pilot study then, also helped to give me an idea of how interactions and my gender could affect the discussion. As a result of the pilot study, three things helped me gain confidence to follow through with the group setting as the bulk of my work: First, I enticed my participants’ curiosity as to why a man was interested in and researching a topic like ‘love in film.’ Second, by having a smaller number of participants and structuring the discussion to resemble more a casual living room chat rather than what they thought a focus group is, participants of the pilot study mentioned that they felt they could express themselves more ‘freely.’ Finally, by investing a lot of energy and emotion, I managed to create good rapport with most of my participants. This does not mean I consider that I was talked to *as if I were a woman*. Rather, by the end of the discussion, I was, at least, a man who *listened* actively to women (and to other men).

At this point, I will consider the potential and limitations of choosing group interviews as my main method of data collection. A group interview is, in much of the literature on qualitative methods, usually referred and/or conflated with a focus group interview (Alasuutari et al., 2008; Barbour, 2007; Deacon et al., 2007; Flick, 2014; Fontana & Frey, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Marková,

2007; Millward, 2012; Morgan, 1997; Silverman, 2013, 2014; Wilkinson, 1999). Usually associated with marketing research and a staple since the 1950s in much work in social psychology, the difference between a group interview and a focus group seems to be twofold: Group size, and the role of the researcher. First, in focus groups the groups, preferably sampled purposefully, literature suggests anywhere in between six to a maximum of 12 participants per session. In my work, I organised the sessions to work, at most, with six participants. In focus groups, the moderator aims to generate ‘natural’, ‘informal’ discussion focused on one specific subject (Silverman, 2014; Krueger, 1998). Others argue that a focus groups should be around the collection of opinions of people sharing a set of characteristics (Barbour, 2007; Stewart, 1990). In the group interview, I, too, wanted to foster an ‘informal’ interaction, though I did have a discussion guide and thus, several topics I wanted to get my participants’ views on. Further, while focus group guidelines suggest the researcher should take a passive, almost ‘fly-on-the-wall’ position, in group interviews, the positionality of the researcher is more fluid. This differences notwithstanding, Lynne Millward argues of focus group data

two interrelated forms of evidence can be produced from focus group discussions: the group process (the way in which people interact and communicate with each other) and the content around which the group process is organised (the focal stimulus and the meanings arising from it). Analysis wise, the group process can be understood on two different levels: the intra-personal (i.e. the thoughts, feelings, attitudes and values of the individual) and the intra-group (i.e. how people communicate and interact with each other within the group). (p. 419)

The data gathered during a focus group then, is both socially and interactively constructed and of socialised individuals presenting themselves in a certain way. In addition, it is presented to a researcher that is perceived in a certain way. This is both a limitation and an opportunity to gather unique data. On the one hand, a group setting can suppress the ‘voice’ of dissenting minorities and fall into an interaction led by a particular unchallenged perspective (Gibbs, 1997; Krueger, 1994, 1998; Morgan, 1996). At the same time, it is an opportunity to understand how concepts, themes and opinions are socially negotiated and constructed and articulated individually and through peer interaction (Millward, 2012; Silverman, 2014). Further, as Madriz and others suggest, a feminist perspective on focus groups and/or group interviews can be beneficial to allow women to empower themselves and bond (Hyams, 2004; Montell, 1999; Morin, 2005b; Pini,

2002; Wahab, 2003; S. Wilkinson, 1998). While many feminist advocate same-gender focus group interviewing, particularly when it comes to oppressed minorities, others have pointed out that gender is not necessarily enough to warrant cooperation, and empowerment in feminist research; class, race, sexual orientation, education level and other factors cross-cut the possible interactions, frictions, questioning and collaborations between researcher and participants (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Garg, 2005; Gatrell, 2006; McDermott, 2004; Riessman, 1987; Temple & Edwards, 2002; Zavella, 1993, 1997). In addition to this, as Janet Finch (1984) questioned, when does collaboration stop and exploitation begin in research with women? I tried to address this issue by offering my time, resources and help beyond the interview time in a sort of quid-pro-quo exchange with any participant who wanted to take me up on the offer (see section 4.3.4).

As I said above, by the end of the discussions I was perceived as a man who *listened*. This is largely because many of my participants constantly challenged or positioned me or the male leads of the films as a synecdoche for all men. ‘Why do men do this or that?’, ‘why do men find it so hard to talk things through?’, ‘why do men cheat?’, etc. were some of the questions participants asked me throughout both group or individual interview. It was my own position as an ‘enlightened novice’ where I emphasised and invested myself through my own experiences, ideas and emotions that helped build rapport and ease the flow of the interview. In the group interviews where other men were also present, I usually either deflected or complimented this investment to them, if they themselves did not jump to the occasion.

Thus, I consider that the information, knowledge and expressions of my participants shared during the group interview was at times, a dialogue of curiosity, frustration, expectations and experiences of perceived differences between ‘women’s ways of loving’ and what they believe are ‘men’s ways of loving’, with me taken as a proxy to voice these differences at times. At other times, the comparison gave way to more abstract or personal accounts of how ‘ways of loving’ are valued, practiced and felt differently by men and women of different ages, sexual orientations, class background, education level and races. As Kathryn Roulston (2008) suggests, this type of conversational interview has the potential of having participants sharing things they normally wouldn’t in a more

structured interview. However, she also points out that there's always a risk of manipulation of what and how something is shared by the participants. Further, the words of participants can also be manipulated by the researcher through her/his coding, analysis, interpretation and representation of them. It is my contention here that the self-disclosure and exchanges of the interviews as coded, analysed, interpreted and presented here are valuable insofar as they represent the social co-construction of my and the participants concerns, frustrations, experiences, ideas, and politics about certain elements of romantic love, intimacy and relationships.

Throughout the group interviews, as I have mentioned before, I encouraged participants to approach me after the sessions. Out of the twelve interviews, nine were from participants that did not manage to express themselves fully during the groups but felt that they had something further to share. The other reason I used to ask for a follow-up interview was to invite confidences from those interviewees that provided an interesting comment or response to the questions and were likely to go into further detail in a more personal and relaxed setting. This way, I got three more interviews. These two criteria also helped reduce the possibility of 'yeah-saying' (Bailey, 1994; McNeill, 1990) from the participants, ensuring that their responses could be trusted more easily than they would be otherwise. I only took on twelve individual interviews because given the questions and type of data I was aiming to gather it would have been counterproductive to 'force' an interview with a participant who felt s/he had participated or shared enough during the group interview. Thus, all twelve interviewees volunteered for them. As with the groups sample, this small sample was heavily skewed towards female participation. On average, individual interviews lasted about 35 minutes, were digitally recorded and transcribed.

4.4.3 Ethics and reflexivity of a man interviewing (mostly) women

The group interviews started with general questions about the films, particular scenes and general thoughts about the romance on screen. I positioned and presented myself as an 'enlightened novice' (Krueger, 1998), emphasising that though I do hold my own views, experiences and emotions regarding romantic love and the films screened, I was interested in learning about other people's views. When making the transition to speaking of

romance in general, at several points during the discussion I would contribute my own romantic experiences or would propose hypothetical romantic situations for the participants to contribute their opinion. The idea behind these stories was to make myself *as a lover* relatable to the participants. As such, the stories were about topics of relationships most, if not all, have a history and an opinion on, like *adultery* and *love at first sight*. For example, I told them of a time, when an ex-partner cheated on me. More than the act itself, I was interested in the reaction participants would have to the justification this person gave me when I found out: 'Well, everybody has been cheated on.' Before I disclosed how I felt and acted upon being told this, I encouraged participants to voice their perspectives. This strategy worked in general in most group interviews. In those where it didn't go so well at first this had mostly to do with a participants' scepticism that the story I'd shared was actually true. I amicably reassured these participants that indeed the stories were true, and for the most part, the discussions then continued at a good pace and flow. All stories I shared are indeed true, though modified to avoid identificatory details relating to my past partners.

According to Stewart et. al (2007) group interviews with participants of different socio-economic backgrounds tend to create more friction amongst participants and are harder to create rapport in and a good flow of discussion. Amongst other factors like age and gender, this shapes initial exchanges and in-group hierarchies. Of particular concern for this project was differing class backgrounds and status, as I aimed to gather and listen to experiences and ideas of as wide of a class and race spectrum of participants as possible. Trying to avoid participants noting or acting upon perceived class differences with others is impossible. But that is not necessarily a bad thing. What is problematic is certain participants feeling or self-imposing restraint in what they say or how they interact with others. Whenever I sensed or noticed tension arising between participants, I took on a more active role, sharing personal experiences or ideas to bridge tensions and cool tempers. As with almost any instance of qualitative research, this wasn't nor should be an absolute. There were times where I allowed heated exchanges to go on, sometimes I cut them off; my judgement always based on that particular situation and the information of my participants I had at the time.

Finally, throughout the group interviews, I constantly reassured participants that they should not feel the need to share in too much detail any difficult or troubling experience they had gone through, and, in some cases, that they could share their experiences with me after the group interviews or write me a short email to the address I provided them with. This addition to moderation proved to be rather successful, where I accrued 23 more stories, ideas and experiences from participants, and in some way provided a form of catharsis for them.

In this study, no major ethical issues arose. The subjects I worked with were all over 18 and did not belong to any 'vulnerable group.' However, because the participants were encouraged to share some of their romantic experiences, an emphasis was placed at the beginning of every focus group discussion and every interview about the voluntary aspect of their participation and input. Additionally, a briefing of the aims and goals of the project was done at the beginning of each and every session. At no moment, did I push or force the respondents towards sharing their intimate moments against their will. At the same time, in the cases where the respondents did share sensitive information, they were offered the opportunity at any time to veto the researcher's use of the information. To guarantee this, I made myself available at all time to these participants through e-mail. I attest that every single story, idea or opinion here has been shared with the consent of the participant.

4.4.4 Reciprocity

As I mentioned in the section above, it was in my interest academically and personally to reciprocate and collaborate as much as possible with those who helped and collaborated with me. As it is with much of qualitative work that involves a fieldwork, a 'trade-off' (Skeggs, 1994, 1997) with those who helped me and contributed to my data gathering in one way or another was agreed first hand. These 'trade-offs' I believe, should not be treated or done as a chore for one's own purposes. Being trained in the sociological and anthropological tradition of Orlando Fals Borda (1973, 1979), known more widely as Participatory Action Research, the idea behind any sort of research is to transform reality. In this project, this is connected to, as feminist scholarship argues, to enhance and widen the spectrum and possibilities of romantic love while challenging harmful patriarchal

tropes (see section 2.5). A fundamental part of this transformation lies in the researcher's responsibility to transform for the better, and within her/his means, the lives of those s/he's 'invading'. This change, more often than not, is a palliative. Almost always there's nothing the researcher can do to directly affect the conditions of those participating in the research. With this in mind, I hoped to offer my participants and the people who allowed me to screen the films and hold the group interview the best reciprocation I could. For the participants, as I mentioned above, I offered an ear if they wanted somebody to listen to their romantic or any other problems. Needless to say, these were not recorded. If they felt they had contributed enough, I offered help regardless of what needed to be done. Two couples asked me to babysit their children, while over 20 participants asked me to help them with domestic chores. I tried to fulfil all of these requests to the best of my academic and personal abilities, while retaining a professional distance from the participants.

For the community centres and the C.L.R James Library, I helped with more administrative and ad hoc tasks. For the latter, I helped with film screenings, reception work, and helping with their video and DVD section. For the community centres, I also helped with film screenings both for adults and children. I had bi-weekly screenings, sometimes of films I chose, the others as requested. Likewise, with events the centres I helped with catering, promotion material and anything they required me for. I maintained my assistance for a period of six months after fieldwork ended.

4.5 Sampling

The group interviews were carried in London but the respondents were not drawn exclusively from England. The decision to carry out the fieldwork in London was due to practical reasons. In London, I decided to recruit participants through the help of Hackney Council, off-license owners and snowballing of early participants. The council helped me get in touch with the Afro-Caribbean Women's Development Centre, the African and Caribbean Consultative Forum, Asian Women's Forum, Over 55's Focus Group and DayMer Turkish and Kurdish community centre. The council's help was greatly facilitated through a personal acquaintance who, at the time, worked there. I also got in contact with

inhabitants of East and South London through snowballing of Hackney residents I knew and with the help of social media platforms. With the help of the C.L.R James Library in Dalston, Hackney I secured at least a permanent venue to screen films. However, plenty of times I used venues of the community centres to screen the films.

I screened the aforementioned films a total of 36 times to groups of three to six people, most of whom had not seen the films before. This followed the logic of creating compatible discussion groups, easing the need for participants to explain themselves to each other and focus on the questions and subjects posed by the moderator (Montell, 1999; Morgan, 1997, 1998). I did this in community centres or in the library, depending on the times and availability of those interested. Through flyers, chain e-mailing, snowballing and help from merchants of the area, I managed to diversify the socio-economic, racial and age groups of the participants as much as possible. This in view that these films' intended audiences are relatively young, white, low-middle to middle class women (Bauman, 2003; Sharot, 2010; Shary, 2011) and thus women of similar status are more likely to consume these films than say, working class men or older women. Also, it was expected that in general, men were less likely than women to enjoy these films while individuals from culturally oriented class fractions (e.g., artists, writers, musicians) were also less likely to indulge in these kind of films.

While the advertised topic skewed the sample towards female participants, only thirty percent of all unique participants (25/87 total) were male. Of the participating men, most of them came as partners of their significant other. The arrangement of people in different groups interviews obeyed three main factors: First, the film they desired to watch. Second their preferred time and finally their availability during weekdays and weekends.

To facilitate recruitment, I created spreadsheets that I hung in the community centres and in flyers where those interested could select one of these times: 10:00 am, 01:00 pm, 05:00 pm and 9:00pm. People could also contact me through email or mobile number to select a time and date slot. As I found many a times that I would have two or three interested in one time slot and then one or two in the previous or next; I tried, as amicably as possible to convince one group or the other to assist to the other's preferred time slot. This strategy

may have lost me, potentially, more unique participants but in the end provided me with 36 focus groups and 12 individual interviews, a number which served to take me to the point of data saturation.

4.6 Audience-led textual analysis

Once I finished the interviews, I brought together the initial thematic analysis of film with the interview material. As I mentioned in section 4.2.2, in addition to a formal, and thematic analysis of the films where I broke them down as ‘figures of love’ —recognisable symbolic, social, audio-visual, and affective representations of different aspects of love— I also considered five different modes of audience engagement with romantic films: *fantasy-seeking*, *star-gazing*, *realist viewer*, *guilty pleasure* and *emotion-looking*. Three of these five categories (italicized) proved helpful to articulate how audiences positioned themselves in regards to the narrative. These three positions, as evidenced in the discussion in chapter 2, resemble more the concerns of Screen theorists and the Cultural Studies tradition. However, because I initially emphasised the formal and thematic aspects of films, they fell short of accounting for how the *intersectionality of a subject* affected the reading of the ideological discourses contained in the pre-coded themes. Before I continue, I must note that in this project, this notation of intersectionality is an incomplete one, crucially missing most aspects of race and religion as an element of analysis. This has to do with a particularly upsetting incident of data loss I sustained during my data analysis period. The confidential spreadsheet that contained all my sociodemographic information as well as the typed notes I had on face-to-face interactions and participants’ other information (such as religious orientation) was part of the irrecoverable documents, and also contained two early chapter drafts. The sheet in appendix 1 has been reconstructed based on transcriptions and on my handwritten notes of the group interviews. Because the data I managed to recover on race, religious orientation and other elements was largely incomplete, I decided against discussing it in detail.

Continuing, based on audiences’ responses then, I shifted the formal focus of my study in favour of an ideologically discursive one while acknowledging the strength of

psychoanalytic readings. I will illustrate this taking *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance, 2010) as an example. In this film, the material I gathered alerted me to a ratings controversy because of a scene depicting cunnilingus. Additionally, the colour palette of the film serve to reinforce the feeling of a relationship gone awry. In the scenes depicting the past, light pastels of yellow and red dominate (helped by natural lighting), while those depicting the present, as the film title hints, are dominated by blue. Further, the camera style also marks these differences as, in the past, handcam is used in most of the scenes the lovers are with one another whereas, in the present, is mostly filmed through medium-length fixed camera shots. The use of elements like music is twofold, particularly the song 'You always hurt the ones you love': on the one hand, it serves to highlight how time and circumstances tarnish that which used to be considered romantic, and it also is foreboding that the relationship is at a breaking point. I have singled out these elements not just as conscious formal and stylistic decisions, but importantly, as linked to possible figures of love. Thus, it is entirely plausible that one could build a textual analysis based on these elements, their interconnections and their presumed ideological baggage and to compliment this with a reading of the narrative and the characters on the same vein.

That kind of textual analysis, however, was never the intention of this project. Rather, my focus was to contrast, nuance and balance the scholarly perspective of the early textual analysis with the results of my analysis of the audience's analysis of the films. In the group interviews, as I mentioned, my position was always one of prioritising what the participants *wanted* to talk about, not what I was necessarily interested in at the beginning of the interview. This was because, as I mentioned above, I consider the data gathered for this project as a co-construction of knowledge, and given my position as a man talking to women, I made it my foremost concern to respect and highlight the interests, concerns, ideas, and worries of my participants. This entailed taking a step back in moderating or guiding the conversation exclusively through the film and the elements I had identified. Thus, throughout the discussions, I always asked as part of my initial questions: 'Was there anything in the film that caught your attention? Why?' instead of specifically asking about the music, editing, cinematography, etc. In the case of *Blue Valentine* (as with all other films) I did receive answers that explicitly and implicitly related to the formal textual elements I had identified. But when compared to the larger corpus of data I gathered on

the films, these participations were few and far and between. Thus, while I will highlight these features in data chapters, they will not be given prominence over the interpretations and discussions of the participants. The bulk of the analysis presented in chapters 5, 6, and 7, represents the scenes, sequences, and elements of each of the five films (i.e., characters, themes) that garnered the most attention and generated the richest discussion, though this discussion was not limited by the text, its interpretations and debates. As I argued in the introduction, this project approaches films as media that help shape, reflect, and are in dialogue with society's practices and ideals of romantic love, not just as fixed representations of it. At times this meant that discussions drifted off the texts, off my key areas of interest as a scholar, and onto practical, ideal and abstract discussions of romantic love, intimacy and relationships in the lives of interview participants. The first half of chapter 5, with its somewhat surprising focus on technology, reflects very clearly this 'drift'. The textual analysis therein is one which amalgamates the patterns of perspectives, readings and opinions about the film that are presented during audience discussions that spring out of the films, which also contain the unique and common experiences, frustrations, and interests of my participants: both levels are linked loosely by the theme of romantic love. This is what I have termed an 'audience-led' textual analysis, since I refused to excise these apparently tangential but clearly influential areas of romantic concern.

Thus, the figures of love I ended up working with included: falling out of love, family, marriage, intimacy, commitment, hooking up, monogamy, masculinities and femininities, true love, technology, anxiety and contingency. The salience of these features is, I argue, greatly attributed to both the context of data collection and the spectrum of perspectives expressed. It also obeys contemporary and historical concerns on romantic love, continuities and differences. From this, my analysis focused on understanding how the ideological discourses of love put forward by the films are engaged, experienced and articulated by audiences. This engagement is, at the same time, influenced by their intersectionality as subjects and their own ideological discourses as romantic subjects. At

the same time, these audiences and these films are part of a larger socio-historical set of competing ideological discourses of romantic love.³³

Based on this, I analysed the expressions, experiences, emotions, ideas and stories shared by my participants in the interviews through discourse analysis. As Carla Willig (2014) writes ‘it is a perspective on language which allows the researcher to produce a particular kind of reading of a text, a reading which foregrounds the constructive and performative properties of language.’ (p. 344). From this perspective, the importance lies in how language, is connected to meaning-making, social practice, power, subjectivity, difference and agency. As Rosario Gill (1996) argues, it is easier to write on the epistemological shift and theoretical underpinnings of discourse analysis than it is to explain the analysis of discourse itself. She writes:

Think of the analysis as being made up of two related phases. First, there is the search for pattern in the data. This will take the form of both variability (in other words, differences within and between accounts) and consistency, and it may also involve the attempt to identify interpretative repertoires...Second, there is the concern with function, with formulating tentative hypotheses regarding the functions of particular features and checking these against the data.³⁴ (p. 146)

Thus, for example, in the figure of technology, I mapped out first the discourses included in the film *Her*: alienation, online dating, human-robot relationships, omnipresence, monogamy, cheating, and virtual sex. With the interview data, I constantly modified these categories of ‘content’ and themes. Once I had finished all sessions regarding this film, I ended up with: online dating, hooking up, monogamy, human-robot relationships, and contingency. Some were directly related to the film, while others were related more to the lived experience of the audience. When doing discourse analysis, authors like David Silverman (2006) and Barbour (2014) rally up against ‘anecdotalism’ by quantifying qualitative data. That is, specifying frequencies where one discourse is expressed a certain number amount of times to highlight patterns. Anecdotalism, in their eyes, is ‘cherry-picking’ the data. In this project, I have tried to quantify my data wherever it is relevant. However, given the context of my data collection and subject of my work, I argue that

³³ I emphasise, again, that in this context, hetero-coupled married love continues to be the hegemonic patriarchal ideology that connects with other hegemonic ideological discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, gender roles, etc.

³⁴ See also (Potter & Wetherell, 1987)

highlighting individual cases is equally important as it offers a glimpse of how underrepresented subjects might read, interpret and articulate themselves vis-à-vis the same figure of love.

This quantification of qualitative data I also did to give me an idea on how to, later, build the narratives of the chapters. For example, on ‘online dating’ I gathered 38 different excerpts and exchanges while for human-robot relationships only seven. Continuing with ‘online dating’ as an example, I had a participant mention the following:

Benjamin: Are there any other ways you guys think technology is affecting love and relationships?

...

Shoshanna: There’s something so cold about it that I just can’t bring myself around it. For me it’s not the same as meeting someone at a party or in a café. It doesn’t feel right.

Benjamín: Would you ever consider doing it?

Shoshanna: That’s how I met my ex, actually.

Benjamín: Oh, I’m sorry!

Shoshanna: That’s ok, but that’s what I mean, it’s like really difficult to know what you’re going to get when you meet somebody first online.

Benjamín: And before your ex? Remember how you felt about it?

Shoshanna: Hmm... mhm... I was ok with it because I thought you could easily choose the guy you wanted but it’s not really how things work. Men lie so much... (HER GI 3)

This excerpt takes place late into a conversation of *Her*. Once I considered the discussion regarding the film was ‘drying out,’ I liked to pose the question at the beginning to the excerpt. Initially, Shoshanna, a 23 years-old single music manager, expresses a consistent discourse regarding online dating: It is a physically detached form of meeting someone. While she is not specific, she juxtaposes to the warmth of the random encounter. Literature, as well as our shared cultural repertoire of romantic love, permits to understand that this comparison underscores that one form is romantic, past and ideal while the other, facilitated by technology and the commoditization of love, lacks such romanticism attached to it. This was a consistent discourse espoused throughout half of the excerpts on online dating. I wish to highlight in Shoshanna’s discourse is that the ‘coldness’ of online dating is connected to a failed romantic experience. Before, her discourse was positive regarding this commoditization of love. Thus, her discourse of ‘coldness’ can be understood as functioning to help coping with this experience.

From this excerpt, I wish to highlight two things: First is that, in this project, when speaking of ‘intersectionality’ personal romantic experiences play a crucial role. If I, as in the excerpt with Shoshanna, have not probed why that relationship failed, what she learnt from it, or other questions, it is because I, most of the time, took expressions like ‘men lie so much’ as an indication that I should move on to another participant or question. Because from the perspective in which I analysed my data, my interest lay less in finding out if Shoshanna’s account of her failed online romantic experience was ‘the truth’ or ‘not’, to generate any meaningful hypothesis, I looked at other aspects of her intersectional subjectivity. In this case, her age. Once I understood the significance of this, Shoshanna’s excerpt varied tremendously from others who shared her discursive position (See chapter 5 for in-depth discussion on how).

The second element is that my audience-led textual analysis, as mentioned above, particularly in subjects perceived as new in relation to romantic love such as online dating, goes beyond discursive articulations with the films and far into analysis of social relationships off-screen. I argue that this is not a problem, as it is not my desire to silence the multi-directionality of the interview dialogue nor to suppress the contradictions it contains to ease the path of analysis.

The excerpts chosen have also been edited for clarity where needed, eliminating words and expressions common in spoken language but that would hamper the pace of a reader. For example, in many occasions, participants used the word “like”, or the expression “do you know what I mean?”. In many other questions and doubts about use of language, stuttering, small agreements and other exchanges that deviated from the thematic discussion, I have opted against transcribing these into the cited excerpts. In the cases where participants use a particular patois or English is not their main language, excerpts have also been edited to standardize the response. ‘Denaturalizing’ (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005) a transcription through these decisions is not without its consequences. The voices run the risk to lose their singularity and force. However, transcription itself is an act of representation. In this case, of representing different positions on romantic love. Thus, I found it more important to highlight the differences in what is being that over the how.

In other words, the decision to do this comes from the belief that by doing so, substantive elements of the excerpts shine over peculiarities that will either be mentioned beforehand or can be inferred otherwise.

4.7 Conclusions and reflections

A project that started, in my head, circumscribed not just to films but to an antiquated textual analysis of stubbornly pre-selected art-house films about love, quickly grew into a challenging investigation on romantic love and media. Films still maintain a major role in the project, in large part because of their importance in reproducing and adapting to changes in practices of romantic love, but also because they act as incredibly useful stimuli for participants to share their perspectives. However, as it became evident with the pilot study, participants were eager to exchange ideas, experiences and release frustrations or listen to others speak of love in a much broader sense. As such, the project had to be adapted methodologically at all stages to fit what was an increasingly array of seemingly fragmentary voices.

By tackling the study of romantic love in this way, by making use of the concept of ‘figures of love’, the problem of posing broad, general questions about such a subject, the problem of overwhelming participants with questions like ‘What do you think about love?’ was sidestepped. Moreover, it lends a more relatable and personal touch to the discussions, as this is the way love and relationships are experienced. Thus, creating a unified and holistic view of love from these ‘figures’ has never been a concern of this project and it is only done so insofar it connects to the structures and fundamental concepts that articulate hegemonic views of romantic love, like monogamy. As it is to be expected, the major drawback of tackling the project in this way is that highlighting some ‘figures of love’ unavoidably means not doing so with others. Also, by having very few participants in each session as to support an intimate and casual atmosphere entails that, most likely, many perspectives were not taken into account and thus are indirectly silenced in the empirical chapters. A corollary of this I’ve already mention but it is worth noting again: the exclusion of a plethora of films and film industries and cultures that deal with the topic of romantic

love in distinctive ways. This project then is circumscribed to an urban, mostly heterosexual western and westernized view of romantic love. While this project recognises this context of representation, distribution and reception, it should serve for future research in alternative perspectives, and cinematic landscapes so that they may be contrasted with what is presented here.

CHAPTER 5: LOVE AND TECHNOLOGY: CONTROL, AFFORDANCES AND PREJUDICE

You have left your secrets somewhere,
and I have mine on the inside
Telling someone everything don't make it easy,
it just makes it hard
It's not easy, it's just hard...
so hard
Lacrosse – Song in the morning³⁵

5.1 Introduction

Romantic love is such a versatile and popular (sub) plot in cinema partly because of the many ways in which it can introduce a second plot or structural element into the narrative. Family, class, euthanasia, immigration, technology, war, nation and nationalism, history, sexuality and mental health are but a few themes linked to romances over and over again. Before the cinema, there was the novel in the 18th and 19th century, with the two leading movements of the time: realism and romanticism. Three great examples of these links can be found in Leon Tolstoy's *Ana Karenina*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Gustave Flaubert's *A Sentimental Education*. Before and after the novel though, it is possible to trace amatory fiction in Britain and romantic novels. These works of fiction were mass marketed and followed archetypal characters and deviated very little from their cannon. The main storyline followed a couple facing some sort of obstacle, surpass it and end up happily ever after. Furthermore, they were written mostly by women for women (Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe, and Eliza Haywood, to name a few). Many of the authors of novels of the 19th century had relative degrees of contempt for these works. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is one of the most famous examples of this disdain. In recent years, films like *Amour* (Haneke, 2012), *The Immigrant* (Gray, 2013), *Like Crazy* (Doremus, 2011), *Lol* (Swanberg, 2006), *Broken Circle Breakdown* (Van Groeningen, 2012), *Weekend* (Haigh, 2011), *Omar* (Abu-Assad, 2013) and *Catfish* (Joost & Schulman, 2010), to name a few, have touched on these subjects and gained critical and,

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJdOWa8pxeI>

in some occasions³⁶, public acclaim (See Clare, 2013; García Guillem, 2015; Rosinski, 2015). This is not to say that they are ground-breaking in addressing these issues. It does suggest, however, that films which dare to mix love with more ‘controversial’ issues are gaining some traction in the narratives of cinematic love, ephemeral and frail as it may be.

The genre of romantic love on screen, in its dramatic structure, grants enough liberties and plenty of recognisable elements to writers so that it achieves malleability far beyond that of any other theme. This, as mentioned previously, is possible not only because we share a sociocultural script and practices that allows us to recognise love on screen, cinema has its set of conventions that produce and reproduce certain representations of these scripts and practices. In addition, a crucial factor in the longevity and continued cinematic interest in romantic love lies in the representations of the wider socio-economic and cultural changes romantic love, intimacy and relationships undergo. Considering this, it is no surprise that *technology* and *romantic affordances* were the two themes most frequently highlighted in films and by participants across all interviews. ‘Technologies’ and ‘romantic affordances’, I argue, represent two pressing issues within interpersonal romantic relationships. Based on this, I chose *Her* (Jonze, 2013) and *Don Jon* (Gordon-Levitt, 2013) as the last films I screened in order to bring to the fore the discussions participants of other group interviews had shown great interest in. Thus, in this chapter I aim to elucidate how these two themes are linked with certain continued film narratives in the romance genre, and how considerations and discussions of these themes and their accordant representations on screen are conduits for audiences to speak their minds on issues they consider crucial to the ways romantic love is changing in their lives. Therefore, understanding how changes in emerging technologies and romantic affordances are being represented on screen and how they are being read by audiences is crucial in building a clearer picture of **the role played by cultural representation of**

³⁶ Amour won both the Palme D’or and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 2012. Omar won the Jury Prize of Cannes Festival in 2013. Films like *Weekend* and *Catfish* were hits with both the public and film critics. *Weekend*, made with a £120,000 budget, racked up over a million USD in the box office. In addition to this, it also won and was nominated for different awards at festivals like SXSW Film Festival, BFI London Film Festival and Frameline Film Festival. *Catfish*’s success led to a TV show. *Broken circle Breakdown* was nominated for an academy award for ‘Best Foreign Language’ and it won the 2013 LUX Prize. *Like Crazy* won the Jury’s Grand Prize at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

romantic love in contemporary western societies and in contemporary romantic relationships.

The two topics of technologies and romantic affordances have a natural intersection that is crucial to highlight. That is, the role technology plays in the perceived affordances women and men believe it grants them in their romantic relationships. While I want to contest the idea that technology and late-stage capitalism have made love into a series of economic and technical transactions with little to no regard for the mystery and humanity of love itself (Badiou, 2009; Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Sennett, 1998; See section 2.4), I am not a champion of the *Eros ex Machina* ideology, either. One of the roles of the analysis presented here is that of highlighting the importance of empirical analysis in balancing any attempt at a critical engagement with a phenomenon (such as online dating, synthetic avatar partners, sexting etcetera). In this case, I start the discussion of the connection between new technologies and romantic love from the perspective of my participants. As I have mentioned in section 4.6, a priority of this analysis is to highlight the issues that my participants wanted to talk about. In the case of technology and the first half of this chapter, this included rich discussions of their experiences, opinions, and practices at the intersection of technology and romance. This momentary stepping outside the cinematic realm is done to highlight the reverberation to wider social contexts when using films for qualitative data gathering. At the same time, it is a recognition of one of the most important thematic discussions on the contemporary practice of romantic love: the question of whether and how emerging technologies change ‘pure’, ‘instant’ and ‘instinctive’ feelings towards the potentially romantic other within encounters whose aim might be either sex or love. Further, by starting with a discussion on technology, I seek to contextualise my research in the economic, social and cultural context in which technology has become increasingly connected to the practice of romantic love for many people. The importance of this lies in the main argument of this chapter: shifts in the dynamics of love do not predate its erosion by any means.

5.2 Technology

Before diving into the topic of technology in the contemporary cinematic romance, it is worth outlining people's offline actions and preferences. According to a survey by Pewresearch³⁷, in the US, 22% of those aged 25-34 have used online dating. Furthermore, Michael Rosenfeld and Reuben Thomas (2012) argue that the Internet has increasingly displaced older venues like the workplace, neighbourhood and friends for meeting a partner, accounting now for over 22% of romantic encounters. Interestingly, they also suggest that while the Internet and mobile dating apps have increased partnership rates for same sex couples, the rate for heterosexual couples has remained flat. In the UK, a 2012 survey³⁸ found 5.7 million were using online dating, a 22% increase over the same time period last year. A survey from Bournemouth University³⁹ found that now one in five relationships start online. While Match.com continues to be the largest dating site with over 6 million visitors every month, the highest riser has been the mobile dating app Tinder jumping to 3.6 millions, with another report estimating its daily users at 9.6 million⁴⁰. With this astronomical rise, it is no surprise to say I was asked, several times, to show women how to use apps like Tinder or what I thought about online dating.

The participants interest was widespread, especially on Tinder, to ask how it works, how it worked for me and whether I had found true love through online dating or even if I believed this was possible. But when I prompted them back as to why they didn't use these tools to find a partner —or if they would should they not have one—, these women answered two things: first, they expressed the opinion that were too old and thus preferred to do things the 'old fashioned' way. Second, they seemed unsure how to use new technologies and if they would find suitable partners through them. Participants in the group interviews jumped seamlessly from the fictional to the everyday, to their

³⁷ See <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/02/11/15-percent-of-american-adults-have-used-online-dating-sites-or-mobile-dating-apps/>

³⁸ See <http://www.datingsitesreviews.com/article.php?story=Online-Dating-Statistics-for-2012>

³⁹ See <http://buzz.bournemouth.ac.uk/online-dating-statistics/>

⁴⁰ See <http://www.datingsitesreviews.com/article.php?story=match-group-releases-q4-2015-financial-results>

personal experiences and ideas. While such jumps are possible during a face-to-face discussion, the linearity of the written word forces a clearer separation between the levels of expression. Thus, I will go from the personal to the social and cultural, with the filmic aspect cutting across them.

5.2.1 Trust, control and mistrust

Of the 87 unique participants of my group interviews, 70% were female. Of this percentage, almost 75%, or 45 women, made comments on technology and dating applications. Of the 26 men who participated, 22 made a comment on the same subject. The first opinion of the aforementioned group interviews discussion highlights the generational gap in attitude and uptake of technology as a facilitator and a tool for people to engage romantically. The younger the participant, the likelier it was that she/he used or had used some form of new information and communication technology to meet, acquire or build a relationship with a romantic partner. Even in the cases where young participants declared that they did not use these tools, they admitted to knowing how to use them through a friend or relative. Furthermore, the younger participants were also more neutral (if not outright supportive) of the use of technological tools to create a romantic relationship. But even outspoken supporters of online dating amongst my respondents were quick to capitulate to the nostalgia of the 'old way' of falling in love. That is, in the words of many participants, meeting somebody at a party/restaurant/bar, being taken into a couple of dates and being courted slowly. The nostalgia that surrounds the random encounter at a social event, is opposed to the perceived detachment, the 'coldness' that technology enables in interpersonal interactions. Cecilia, a 28 years-old Banker, says:

I think the whole thing of going online to meet somebody is sort of awkward...I mean, the first impression will always be worse than in a regular situation because nobody is going to put up a bad profile picture of themselves so when you meet them, you're going to be disappointed and it's all bad from there... And somebody might put they like to do sports and you get all excited but it turns out they only like to do them in their playstation or something... I still think meeting face to face in a party or something is the best way to meet somebody. (HER GI 4)

There are several discursive elements to unpack in this excerpt. First, is the idea that the presentation of the self online is vastly different from that offline. The underlying idea

here is that the online lends itself to much more manipulation whereas in real life, it is 'easier' to catch these lies (Bridges, 2012; Kaufmann, 2012; Lo et. al, 2013). Because of the possibility of deceit, the discourses that surround the romantic encounter in the age of online dating are hierarchically valued on terms of authenticity, deception and expectations. When Cecilia mentions sports, as she had mentioned before, she highlights one of the features of online dating: the self as a list of attributes. As I mentioned in section 2.4.1 platonic love was criticized for establishing the object of love as such, instead of focusing on the 'whole' of the person. In online dating, attributes are essential for the matching algorithms. Online dating sites like OkCupid.com, match.com and plentyoffish.com encourage extensive and detailed answering of questions, questionnaires and descriptions of the self to 'properly' match you with potential love interests. The problem for Cecilia and others, is that either by wilful manipulation or honest omission, online profiles twist even further the idea of meeting the other as a 'whole,' something possible, if remotely, through a random encounter. At stake are two intertwined modes of authenticity: that of the Other and that of the romantic encounter.

In these circumstances films keep alive the notion of love at first sight as an ideal. Films like *(500) Days of Summer* (2009), *What if* (2013) and *Water for Elephants* (2013) have recently made use of this figure of love to preface the romantic narrative. As Jeanine, a 32 years-old, engaged woman working as a freelance designer described:

There's something unique to seeing someone across the room and know that person is going to be special in your life...maybe I'm thinking too much like in the movies and I should download Tinder, but I really would prefer if I met somebody by random chance, and it doesn't have to last... but the whole idea of swiping left and right ruins the whole idea of love for me. (HER GI 2)

She wasn't the only participant voicing this. Amelia, a 31 years-old retail worker, highlighted:

Amelia: I think everybody remembers the one who they fell for immediately, if they've had one!

Benjamín: Why is that?

Amelia: ...Because I think that for girls at least, that's the moment when you feel a bit like in a film and you are trembling just wishing he looks back at you...I think unlike the films, a lot of people just become super awkward but still...it's like a super romantic feeling. (HER GI 5)

Vivien, a 28 years-old film studies major, put it slightly more emphatically:

It's a great feeling because have you seen action films? That's a "I want to shag you" moment, that's what you get all the time in a club or wherever. A love at first sight, well, only happens in romance films...so if you ever feel it, you KNOW it is happening. (HER GI 6)

These participants make more explicit what Cecilia aimed at when she said meeting face to face was the 'best' way to meet somebody. What is intriguing of the discourse these three participants are employing is that it is infused with fantasy and *intensity*. Many participants hinted or were very vocal about the direct correlation between the intensity of this first affirmation and the subsequent pain caused by the realization it was 'all smoke and mirrors.' By doing so, this discourse is reminiscent to the double duality Freud argued between Eros and Thanatos and immediate and delayed gratification (See section 2.4.1). That is, the higher the intensity of Eros, the less likely it is we will be able to control it, and, according to Freud, this results in disaster. Furthermore, the mysticism of the first look, the romantic desire to encounter your very own star-chosen or star-crossed lover conquers the cold pragmatism of the tools of new and emerging technological tools. Roland Barthes (1990) describes this figure as *affirmation*, which he understood as two different moments in which love is asserted. The first 'is an immediate affirmation (psychologically: dazzlement, enthusiasm, exaltation, mad projection of a fulfilled future: I am devoured by desire, the impulse to be happy)' (p. 24) while the second is the affirmation of this first moment. This second affirmation is a nostalgic one, where the lover longs not for the repetition of the first moment, but of its *difference*. It is in this second affirmation that the perceived 'coldness' of technology lies for some. No participant of my sample ever mentioned falling in love with an online dating profile.

The other factor for this opposition is the presentation of the self online. While it is not the focus of this chapter or of this thesis to go in depth about the nuances of online identities (Fullick, 2013), it is of interest to note that when it comes to romantic relationships, there is a widespread belief by women in my sample that men embellish, craft and modify their personal profiles to sound more appealing to women. Some even mention that some men create profiles designed specifically to attract a particular person. A few men suggested women do the same, but in nowhere near the same density.

Romantic deception is nothing new, primarily coming from men, Tirso de Molina's *Don Juan*, Stendahl's *Red and Black*, Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, and Kierkegaard's *Diary of a*

Seducer, just to name a few, highlight the continuity of this theme. This distrust of men is further fuelled by the idea that online interactions and new technologies allow men to be ‘sneakier’ in their affairs. In turn, this facilitates the creation of an environment of jealousy and lack of trust, the downfall of a good amount of relationships. This is not to say that participants considered that meeting somebody offline automatically meant that this person would be untrustworthy, just that nowadays it was easier to be cautious and act on that assumption. Holding this idea even before meeting the person, over 70% of those who spoke on technology commented, not only avoids the disappointment of unmet expectations, but also allows subjects to disengage more easily than when meeting someone you haven’t been in previous contact with.

The 2010 film, *Catfish* (Joost & Schulman), was mentioned by several participants throughout these comments as an example of ‘online dating gone wrong’. Some went as far as to say that the film was the sole reason they had abandoned any hope of attempting to meet romantic partners online, as the fear of getting attached to a person who might not actually exist became too great. As a documentary, *Catfish* falls outside the parameters of further analysis of this chapter. However, prior to the release of *Catfish* there was *Hard Candy* (Slade, 2005), a thriller, focusing on a plot where a young girl ensnares a man suspected of being a sexual predator, through online chat, and eventually tortures him to death. This film is a hyperbolic form of the fear expressed by my participants, albeit with a significant reversal between victim and victimizer. The incursion of technology into romantic relationships, then, generates distrust and anxiety over one’s own and others’ romantic wellbeing. Olga, a 36 years-old actress and singer, single and recently out of a relationship said during our interview:

Olga: You never want to make the same mistakes, yet you do! [chuckle]... what I find so appealing about Tinder and xxxxx[the dating website she uses] besides that it allows me to kill so much time, is that in a sense it allows you be sooo picky, like you could aim for the perfect man, sure it may not arrive but these things really make you believe it could

Benjamín: Do you think there are any downsides to this?

Olga: Again, this guy I was just with, I found him still getting ‘Tinder matched’ after we’d been dating for a while... the whole idea that he was looking for the next *best thing* hits your self-esteem really hard... it’s all part of dating now, isn’t it?... online dating didn’t make people into assholes, it simply brought them all together in one app. (IVW 4)

Olga's excerpt highlights the conundrum that people face when trying to meet potential love interests: On the one hand, what she refers as 'sooo picky' is the sense of control and power over one's romantic engagements that was not possible before to the extent it is with today's technologies. This search for control is, sometimes influenced by previous romantic experiences. In my sample, 10 participants claimed they turned to new technologies after an experience of rejection of heartbreak, to protect their emotional and romantic health. For example, Ritchie, a 30 years old musician, mentioned:

I know it is not perfect and I agree it would be nicer to meet somebody randomly but I have been hurt before... I know online profiles are not a perfect match to what the person is like in real life but at least from the photo and how much information a person gives out you can make a judgment on whether that person is worth the risk or not...and of course, others do it with you as well. (HER GI 2)

Not only is Rob turning to a more rational, economic perspective on interpersonal relationships, his comment indicates how the focus of a relationship for many participants that have experienced the bitter side of love turns from pursuit of the ideal Other to protection of the self. This shift from romantic first sight to careful, economic, even scientific scrutiny of aesthetic and personal traits via technology enhanced media inscribes in the place of the ideal a tension where romantic ideals clash with the wariness and jadedness of many lovers. All the same, this new possibility of control entails a potentially positive, and enticing or even addictive feature of these technologies which relates less to the technology itself and more to the commodification of relationships. By enhancing the pool of potential dates, it fosters the idea, the feeling that by tailoring one's search—I may add, the feeling of empowerment, particularly for some women, to not just be the 'searched' after but also be 'searchers'—to a number of criteria one could not possibly fathom thinking of while meeting somebody offline, meeting that platonic Other, perfect and far removed, just might happen. However, as with Olga's story, most of the time it ends in heartbreak. This platonic Other is an aggregation of 'perfect' and 'dreamed of' qualities in a romantic interest.

Olga and Cecilia's excerpt are symptomatic of a new problematic layer to the already messy process of meeting someone, falling in love, building a relationship and, plenty of times, get hurt. When Cecilia says, 'I still think meeting face to face in a party or something is the best way to meet somebody,' besides the opposition I mentioned above

(warm offline – cold online), she and Olga are hinting at what the online brings about in romantic experiences that divides people between curiosity, jadedness and frustration. Contrary to the online, meeting someone at a social event invites continued self-disclosure of personal ideas, experiences and emotions that look to create a bond with another. This exchange of personal information and, at many points, ruminations of all sorts, has been greatly represented on-screen by Richard Linklater in *Before Sunrise* (1995). Contrary to meeting a stranger on a train, when you meet somebody online, you already know *a* presentation of themselves, through carefully chosen images and texts. This means a shift from a visual to an information-based engagement with love interests. In turn, this information begets both optimism and wariness of what could be long before the actual romantic encounter happens. Thus, meeting someone online *also* has the distinct possibility of activating many illusions, dreams, and expectations just to, sometimes, crush them all the harder.

5.2.2 *Commodified love, commodified subject*

Online dating, with the plethora of previous and *possible* information it provides users before engaging, enables the commodification of subjects to become an integral part of the practice (and of romantic imagination). The concept of commodification of romance has been used by several authors, notably Colin Campbell⁴¹ (1987), Eva Illouz (1997) and Zygmunt Bauman (2003). As I mentioned in section 2.6.3 Illouz' traces the shift, in Western societies, from Victorian ideals and customs to a more 'public' and consumer/leisure oriented practice of love. From chaperoning and visits to the boom of dating, she argues this has entailed a dual process of 'romanticization of commodities' and 'commodification of romance'. Thus, romantic love, marriage and relationships go from a utilitarian, status-seeking (or maintenance) social contract to an individual pursuit. Illouz argues as well that love becomes a place for a *visual utopia*, contrary to its oral and print presence in the past two centuries respectively. Bauman (2003) argued that online dating was like scrolling through a mail order catalogue where one need never buy. Further, as Dröge and Voirol (2011) suggest, online dating sites

⁴¹ Campbell's concept, though pioneering in name, bears little relationship to the concerns of my use here.

By the way they present the profiles of potential partners in exactly the same manner as items on eBay, Amazon or other shopping sites, with their complex search forms that allow to define the own preferences in mate selection with a precision unknown before, with the tools they offer to evaluate one's own market value and to enhance this value if possible —with all these elements borrowed from modern forms of consumerism and the economic sphere, they suggest a subject position which is very close to what we have outlined above as the main characteristics of a calculating subject in the realm of the market. It is the position of an economic agent who compares offers on a level of equivalence and tries to maximize his own interests. At the same time, it is the position of a self-marketing 'supplier' in a very competitive "economy of attention". (346)

They further argue that this economic rationalization is in constant tension with the discourse of romantic love and its search, causing ambivalences and contradictions the users must navigate. The exhilaration, the promise of finding love is met with rational, market-based strategies that look to maximize efficiency of search and diminish frustrations and disappointments. In an early exploratory study of online dating, researchers agreed with Bauman's statement, suggesting that "like the shelves of a supermarket, the Internet offers endless variety, unlimited choice and great convenience" and that 'marketplace values are evident both in the way users market themselves, and in terms of how they look through profiles and photos to identify an «evoked set» of potential partners' (McLaran et. al, 2005, 41-44). However, they also rejected his pessimism, as I do too, contending online dating also allowed for deep bonds to nourish. Commodification of romance, then, is a deeply ingrained process of contemporary romance whereby subjects and their traits enter a transactional market place. The entanglement of late capitalism, romantic love and technology has not desecrated some nostalgia-ridden idea of love, it has brought new affordances, pain, frustrations and for some, joy, love and stable relationships.

Further, as Illouz (2012) argues, the discourse of love now is not only interconnected with that of psychotherapy but also with that of suffering. This is not the romantic suffering of established fiction texts (e.g., *Romeo & Juliet*), but a self-conscious suffering constantly levered against the benefits. She attributes this shift largely to the influence of psychoanalysis and its emphasis on understanding the self as an 'ongoing process of self-understanding and careful self-monitoring of the psyche' (p.163). She continues:

The model of mental health which massively penetrated intimate relationships demanded that love be aligned to definitions of well-being and happiness, which ultimately rejected suffering, and commanded one to maximize one's utilities... To love well means to love according to one's self-interest. The emotional experience of love increasingly contains and displays utilitarian project of the self, in which one has to secure maximum pleasure and well-being. Suffering is progressively foreign to his new cultural idiom of love. (p. 164-65)

Illouz' point is that through this shift, love becomes a reflexive, rationalised act. One particularly oriented towards an egotistical happiness. Or, in the very least, as she puts it, to 'maximize one's utilities' (p. 182). Thus, the commodification of romance is intertwined with the avoidance of suffering and the maximisation of pleasure.

Further, racial and physical biases, classist and sexist behaviours abound online (Jakobsson & Lindholm, 2014; Lo et al., 2013; Mason, 2016; McGrath et. al, 2016; Ong, 2016; Ong & Wang, 2015; Sweeney & Borden, 2009). Although some may not acknowledge that they are biased or prejudiced, many users are aware of their own biases and prejudices and these form part of the rationalization process of selection. Martha, a 34 years old actress, single and avid user of tinder, confessed:

Absolutely! Tinder and online dating let you see how bad of a person you are...I went through my matches, checking whom I had replied to and the first thing I thought was: I'm a bit racist... it wasn't a great feeling, but I know I can't be the only one...I think that's the thing with online dating, is that it shows we are still pretty bad even though it is 2014 [at the time of interview] (HER GI 7)

Racial prejudice is one of the most common aspects of online dating (Sweeney & Borden, 2009; McGrath et. al, 2016). In his book *Datachysm*, Christian Rudder (2014) suggests, based on the data analysis of the website he founded, OkCupid.com, that racial differences are the biggest single factor site users will use, most of the time, to reject a profile or potential match. But it is not the only factor. Bringing social class into the equation, another participant mentioned she wouldn't agree to go on a date with anybody who looked 'chavvy'⁴². Others mentioned height, nationalities, beard or lack thereof and a range of sartorial judgments potentially linked to class as part of their romantic date selection criteria. This problem of prejudice lies, of course, not with online dating *per se*. It would be short-sighted to assume racism, classism and sexist attitudes are the offspring

⁴² 'Chav' is a slang term used in Britain to refer to a lower class, raucous person.

of this new method of engagement, since classified ads for partners in many places, and in relation to marriages in South Asian countries have for generations included colour, ethnic and/or caste requirements and information. Rather, online dating has made these previously guarded, hidden or private attitudes public. And even if they are not made public completely, it has, like with Martha, brought them to a person's own consciousness. Parallel to this revelatory aspect of online dating technologies is the anonymity factor granted by the Internet, a factor which cannot be understated. Online dating's stigma as a 'less natural' or 'less romantic' way to connect with somebody stems from the desire, I argue, that individuals and groups have to conceal the regressive, sometimes discriminatory ideologies that are still present in our societies, particularly in the one area that is supposed to be free of these prejudices.

While it is important to acknowledge certain features of online dating and how they may exacerbate toxic ideologies, the perspective of economic rationalisation risks becoming reductionist insofar as it fails to acknowledge that looking for shared values, attributes and pass times is one of the first things we do when we meet a potential new partner. Not just now. Anton Chekhov's (2010) short story *The Kiss* is a good example. A brigade of Russian soldiers on campaign are hosted by a nobleman. One of the soldiers, Ryabovitch, gets lost in the mansion, entering a dark room. In this room, a woman kisses him, only to recoil knowing it was not the man she was expecting. Ryabovitch, on the other hand, euphoric, starts to aggrandize this moment as if it were a declaration of never ending love. When they leave the mansion, Ryabovitch struggles to 'put together' the woman: her smell, her arms around him, her shoulders, her lips, etc. Because he never saw her, he tries to do this bricolaging through the physical features of the other women he saw in the mansion. Chekhov's story points to the importance a seemingly trivial moment can have in our lives, but I want to single out that even if there was not a 'loved one,' Ryabovitch's attempt at a reconstruction, through the prominent physical features of other women is resonant to the idea that highlighting certain aspects of the other is a long standing feature of romantic love. And not just physical attributes, of course. For example, as Rada (29) commented

I find things like dating sites helpful for some reasons...as a Jewish person, I always try to look for the same thing in my partners... it is an important trait I want to share with

my boyfriend or whatever so for me, it becomes a huge filter for me... I also do not like clubbing or anything noisy like that so if I see in their images that they like to go to bars and clubs I almost immediately say no to those profiles...the only reason not to would be if they were incredibly cute. (HER GI 4)

This religious affinity and the desire for endogamy is not unique to the Jewish community, though it should be noted that jdate.com was one of the first online dating sites to appear, back in 1997. Further, Rada's excerpt signals one of the elements that draws many women to online dating: Instead of settling for the idea that men are the active seekers and women the passive receivers of romantic pursuits, she's positioning herself as an active filterer and pursuer of romantic interests. Furthermore, the gathering of information by online dating provides users, particularly women, with a way to determine the risk or safety of meeting a stranger. Women develop tactics based on their experience to gauge if a potential interest might be a dangerous individual, something all of them garnered as a positive element of online dating. Risk in online dating is closely associated with the fact that profiles and applications can be easily manipulated, thus fostering scepticism from most users (Couch, Liamputtong, & Pitts, 2011). For example, Olga, the 36 years-old actress and singer, mentioned:

Olga: As a woman, you get a lot of nasty, upsetting chats online, but at least that helps to weed out people long before they have any chance to get near you, you know what I mean? And with the ones that look ok, you google them, look them up on linked.in or look for anything that might be a give away

Benjamín: Like?

Olga: Pictures say a lot, but I think the best thing is patience: Most guys have none in online dating since they just think they can jump to another girl at any time... my best experiences come from guys who take the time to chat you up (HER GI 5)

Emilia, a 24 years-old recent university graduate, said:

Emilia: As a girl you're flooded with messages... from the very raunchy and nasty to some nice ones where you know the guy put some effort... the problem is that a lot of times those 'nice' ones may also turn to be creeps or nasty after a few messages. If I like a message, I check the guy's profile to see how he looks like. Depending on that I answer

Benjamín: What do you check for in a profile?

Emilia: Looks... I don't like guys that are too 'clean,' you know? I like a bit of a stubble and tattoos (DJ GI 2)

Martina, a 32 years-old tutor, added:

Martina: There are definite no no's for me: Guys with no shirt on, or with a fuckboi kind of hair style⁴³, or who can't do a few days just chatting online. You also learn to pick on more sneaky things like how fast he messages you, the place he wants to take you to, and for me, I pay attention to what he's studied and what kind of hobbies he has.

Benjamín: How so?

Martina: Well, I've had a bad experience with someone who I thought initially looked great and interesting... turns out the guy hadn't read a book, travelled or tried to learn any language. Basically, we had nothing in common! (DJ GI 2)

Tara, a 34 years-old project manager, expressed:

I think being a girl online is much harder. Guys can be so upfront about sex any time, but if you give a hint that you're also interested in sex, most of the guys have no problem calling you a 'slut' or 'whore' or you know, they send you dick pics... That's why we need to come up with all of these things to not have such a horrible time all the time (DJ GI 4)

Finally. Marlon, a 37 years-old civil engineer, said:

I think for guys there are two things we need to pay attention to: bots and overly photo-shopped profile pictures... it's happened to me that I've liked a girl and when we meet, she looks nothing like in the pictures (DJ GI 3)

Marlon expresses one of the common fears of online dating, that of being 'catfished.' In contrast, the female participants highlight three of the main tactics women deploy online: Time, visual cues, and information clues. This is not to say that men do not do this, but the rationale to do so is quite different. Further, given the disparity on sent-to-received messages online⁴⁴, women have to navigate a lot more messages and information than men. Whether it is to suit personal preferences and affinities or to avoid unpleasant experiences, almost every woman in my sample has developed an 'eye' for certain 'red flags' and vice versa. These precautions are not unfounded, as Hall et. al (Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010) argue, in online dating profiles men 'misrepresent' personal assets, relationship goals, personal interests, and personal attributes far more than women, who only tend to do so with their weight.

Tara's excerpt expresses directly one of the main reasons women feel the need to do this. A woman's open sexuality is still somewhat 'taboo' for a lot of men online. Over 30 of the women in my sample expressed a frustration that even in online dating, there is a

⁴³ 'Fuckboi' refers to men who are only interested in casual sex with women. The hair style she refers to is an undercut on the sides and back with medium length and good volume on the top.

⁴⁴ <http://www.businessinsider.com/online-dating-message-statistics-2013-7?IR=T> and <https://theblog.okcupid.com/a-womans-advantage-82d5074dde2d#.rx1ya8y1g>

constant male judgement and vigilance over a woman's sexuality, whereas they feel men are hardly judged at all. In the following section, through an exploration of a practice commonly associated with the rise of technology and intimacy, hooking-up, I will analyse how it intersects with class, gender, and female sexuality for my participants.

5.3 Hooking-up culture

We can define hooking up as 'a sexual encounter which may or may not include sexual intercourse, usually occurring between people who are strangers or brief acquaintances' (Paul et. al, 2000, p. 76). Here, I will be talking primarily about the heterosexual hook-up, as same sex hook ups contain unique elements that put them beyond the scope of my research (See Johnson, 2012). Heldman and Wade (2010) suggest that nine elements have contributed to the rise of the act of hooking up as overtaking in preference amongst young people (particularly in US University colleges) to dating. These elements are: College and university policies, gender distribution of college students; changes in the nature of alcohol use; increased access to and consumption of pornography; the 'pornification' of mass media —the authors refer by this to the increased sexualised content of mass media products; self-objectification —which results from the normalisation of female objectification in US media; increased levels of narcissism; change in perception of sexual risks; and increased median marriage age.

As evidenced by these nine reasons hypothesised by Heldman and Wade, much of the concept of hooking up is associated with the increasingly preferred method of association between college students across US university campuses. This is important, as this has dictated the interest of many researchers doing work in this phenomenon. In turn, it affects how the discourse trickles down to the public and to foreign audiences. Though my study is located in the UK, similar trends can be observed here. It is important to note that most of my participants, and I imagine, many other people engage in these encounters well past their university years. It is no surprise then, that many of my respondents had no qualms or shame admitting they had hooked up for a period of time, they enjoyed doing so and saw nothing wrong with it. As Rosa's comment highlights:

I hate when people say using Tinder is for people who are afraid of commitment... it's like, *a woman can't simply like sex?... plus, I know I'm a minority but I am not thinking*

about family, kids or a flat right...those things are so impossible for a person like me that I don't really bother obsessing about them or anything... it's not for everyone and people like to feel like some sort of family police telling you to do this or that... (HER GI 2)

Rosa is a 29-year-old artist, single and very much enjoying this state. Her self-assuredness in her sexuality and subsequent frustration with patriarchal restrictions on female sexuality stem, perhaps, from her background as an artist, her interest in feminist theory, and her current artistic project which was focused around a study of several female artists who have done projects on female genitalia. She holds a perspective on her own sexuality that though shared by several women who participated in my research, is by no means the only position expressed. Another participant, Elisabeth, 24, a doctoral researcher who is also happily single, said:

If it [hooking up] makes you happy, be happy. But does it, really? I think most people are trying to fill up a void or escape through sex whatever is missing in their lives...The younger people are and when they move out of their parents' home, I think that's when hooking [up] looks so seductive... I know people who are like 30 and more also hook up a lot here [in London; the participant is from Belgium], and those are the one's who I don't really get, either they are afraid of commitment and relationships, babies or they just don't want to grow up, I don't know, I don't really understand them (HER GI 3)

Elisabeth is not the only participant to be sceptical or slightly confused by hooking up culture. Others, like Nadia, a 27 years old therapist, are downright negative about it:

I haven't met a girl who uses 'Tinder or whatever and isn't a skank'⁴⁵. I think some people go too crazy when they move to London or another big city and they lose their dignity (HER GI 1)

These three opinions constitute different positions on the spectrum of attitudes towards hooking up and female sexuality. A fourth one, like Nadia's, invoked religion and the deviation from the 'righteous path of the lord,' as an explanation as to why people hook up (and should not). Taking such variations into account, it is fundamental to state how important this topic is for many contemporary women and their personal and wider struggles for self-determination over their own bodies and sexualities (Blood, 2005; Calogero, Boroughs, & Thompson, 2007; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Cho & Lee, 2013; Curti, 1998; Markula, 2001; Paquette & Raine, 2004; Smolak & Murnen, 2007). Much of the literature on hooking up takes a condemnatory approach, claiming different

⁴⁵ The term 'skank' is British slang to refer to a lower class, promiscuous woman.

arguments, ranging from increased misogynistic attitudes towards women, decreased ability to develop strong emotional bonds, increased sense of guilty from women and subsequent depression and increased probability of rape for women (See Bradshaw et. al, 2010; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Snapp et. al, 2014). While my project is not quantitative in nature, nor is it based around a psychological experiment or survey like the aforementioned papers, it addresses two gaps: first it takes into account adult subjects who are not in their freshmen year of college but rather in different stages of their young adult/adult life. Second, it takes into account the values, opinions and practices of subjects from different class, racial and religious backgrounds. While I do not make claims of representability of a wider group via my sample, my research suggests that it is necessary to look beyond narrow psychological reasons and explanations for why and how people ‘hook up’ and the role that this phenomenon plays in contemporary romantic practice. As Hamilton and Armstrong suggest (2009), gender and class intersect in hooking-up as they do structuring variables that guide the practice.

Rosa’s comment above (I hate it when people say) is a position from which to elaborate this practice, at least regarding London, and the socio-economic reasons that affect those most likely to engage in this practice, people in their twenties. First, is the economic outlook with which many young people in British cities are faced: Unable to afford housing, labour market instability, stagnant and low wages, unaffordable graduate education, and lack of career opportunities. This is all coupled with the pressures of career advancement that stunt or delay the desire for long-term romantic relationships.

Johann, a 27 years-old, single barman, explained to me:

If you’re 25 and in London, unless you are an LSE wanker [a reference to young bankers and city of London workers]... you’re probably going to be making shit money, you’ll be working overtime most weekends or like awful schedules and can barely afford your rent... who has money to go on dates here?! If you’re lonely, then sure you make the effort and you look to find somebody to have something serious with, but if not, hooking up with people, as long as you’re being safe, it’s just more effective. (HER GI 4)

In Johann’s account, emotional fulfilment through romantic relationships and dating is positioned as being at odds with economic survival in contemporary capitalist society: this is a choice that is common amongst young people, as the knowledge that dating and relationships are a serious economic investment many feel they have to opt out in order

to further their careers or even start them. In London, and in much of Western Society, marriage, love and social stability were intrinsically connected up until the 1980s. Fuelled by the post-war consumerist boom, the ‘baby boomer’ dream of suburbia —house, car, exclusive community, children— was the goal of many individuals (Berlant, 1997; Illouz, 1997). According to a survey on attitudes towards marriage done by the NatCen, marriage in England and Wales has halved from 1983 to 2010. Further, only 11% of those surveyed think pre-marital sex is wrong, compared to 28% in 1983.⁴⁶ Interestingly, this report suggests that a possible theory behind these changes is that Britain has become more individualist, citing authors like Beck (1992), Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Giddens (1992) and Bauman (2003). At the same time, they also posit recession, austerity and a changing labour market has also played a major role.

Arguably, as Illouz (2012) claims, dating is a capitalistic event that places economics and cost/benefit calculations at the forefront of many romantic decisions. In many cases, serial dating instead of hooking up is an untenable effort for both parties, as most participants agree dating takes too much money and time out of the little they can spare. This is a neglected aspect of the studies based around university campuses, where proximity and immediacy of contact make encounters far cheaper. Furthermore, unlike the report of some of these studies, where participants who hooked up reported lower levels of emotional fulfilment, the clear majority of my respondents who mentioned hooking up (23 out of 27) also expressed their enjoyment at being single or in casual non-monogamous relationships.

Those, who like Elisabeth or Nadia, expressed concerns or disdain for hooking up, espouse the argument whereby those who engage in hooking up are selfish and emotionally troubled. Renee Shelby’s (2012) analysis of *No Strings Attached* (I. Reitman, 2011) and *Friends with Benefits* (Gluck, 2011) points out that the leads in both films start as ‘emotionally damaged’ and ‘career driven’ individuals who engage in casual sex to calm their urges. These two Hollywood films turn these relationships which initially consist of hooking up into fully-fledged, emotionally committed and monogamous relationships.

⁴⁶ <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/marriage-matters.aspx>

Within the world of each film, this is only possible once the individuals bridge the ‘character flaws’ that prevented them from such commitments in the first instance. Saliently, the on-screen elimination of structural constraints and the placement of blame at an individual level is a well-known ideological conduit used in film to erase from a discourse the hegemonic ideology behind it (Kuhn, 1994). While much of the film does follow a heteronormative, ideologically capitalistic narrative (see section 2.5), it is worthy of note that the sexual desire of the female leads in both films is neither demonized nor suggested to be inferior to the male leads’. Thus, emotional failure of subjects contains an uneasy relationship, a conflation of motives that equates socio-economic constraints and a desire or obligation for professional self-improvement to emotional immaturity failure, to an incomplete subjectivity that seeks to delay or eliminate the reproductive drive of humans and family formation. Therein lies a crucial distinction between fiction and reality, or more precisely, between romantic comedies and reality. Films like the aforementioned and many others have settled either or both the economic or the professional. They eliminate these tensions, leaving only the ‘emotional immaturity’ as the hurdle to be jumped over.

A second socio-economic element to take into consideration to hooking-up is how social class background affects the practice. Shelby (2012) hints that the perception of the hooking up situation in *No Strings Attached* would be different if the medical student, the female lead, had been a blue-collar worker. As discussed in chapter 6, when class is brought to the forefront to the couple’s problems, there is a difficulty in the separation of fantasy and reality that may act as a deterrent of the filmic pleasure. When it comes to hooking up, while there might be a wider acceptance and admission of doing this between and amongst white, heterosexual, middle-class and upper-middle class individuals, those of a lower social class backgrounds face a bigger stigma around it which is connected to the discourses of moral and sexual depravity attached to working class communities and individual for centuries in Western industrial society (Barret-Ducrocq, 1991; Brooke, 2006; Foucault, 1985, 1998; Giles, 1992). First, as I mentioned earlier, in apps and online dating websites, participants use a variety of visual and textual cues to judge a potential match’s ‘appropriateness’ to engage them. Given the group setting of my interviews, it was highly unlikely racial or religious prejudices would be

expressed directly, as the data suggest they exist (section 5.2.2). Perhaps because we have grown used to visual and symbolic markers of status and class-belonging pervading much of our visual culture, these tactics often involve class judgments that normalize hierarchical socio-economic differences. These ideas are expressed succinctly by Michelle, a 33 years old baker from London when she deconstructs her own thinking in looking for a romantic match:

I try to go for guys who I think are like me, or look like they come from Hampstead, not Croydon...you can definitely tell when somebody is just not for you by what they're wearing, or how they are acting in the picture, by their interests... I mean why waste my and their time? (HER GI 3)

Broadly speaking, Hampstead is an upper-middle class, mainly white locality of London, whereas Croydon is an ethnically diverse and working class one. The connotation here is both of class status and cultural ethos. Though Michelle does not specify exactly what she means by 'what people are wearing, or how they are acting in the picture', it is not difficult to understand that she refers to how taste is lived out and acts both aesthetically and ethically as a dividing scheme through which we guide our social interactions (See Bourdieu, 2010). Furthermore, as Illouz (1997) suggests, preferences on ideal activities, places and experiences for a date or romantic encounter are subject to a classed logic that both participants tend to agree on, as disagreements over this are often seen as unbridgeable. For example, she mentions two extremes in the spectrum of possible dates: anti-capitalist (e.g., going to a park, camping), and hyper-capitalist (e.g., luxurious dinner). The problem arises when one party expects one, being treated to the other. The difference in expectations, she argues, is almost always read in terms of class, and economic rationality. Though Illouz' claim does not deal with online dating, my contention is that little has changed in this regard, only the speed with which subjects judge the suitability of a match, and the potential date to be had. Implicitly, then, anonymity starts to play a huge role in hooking up, dating and love. When freed of face-to-face contact, the emphasis shifts from the dyad; no longer does the self need to pay attention, be civil or courteous to the other; momentarily at least, it only demands satisfaction from itself. When this communication becomes insular to the self, attitudes are relaxed and prejudices are easily articulated as part of the romantic process.

5.3.1 Gender in hooking-up

Gender differences are paramount in understanding and nuancing other intersecting class, religious or racial attitudes a research subject might have about online dating and hooking up. Studies demonstrate and suggest repeatedly that there is a gap in the sexual pleasure experienced by men and women via hooking up (England et. al, 2008; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Heldman & Wade, 2010). Men are, apparently, far more likely to experience pleasure, whereas women report more dissatisfaction or desire to hide their pleasure. This double standard in values plays a role in how women and men use applications like Tinder or go about online dating. First, there is the relationship imperative and how this affects sexual pleasure. The relationship imperative is the historical patriarchal heteronormative consideration that a woman is valued as a person depending on her stable romantic relationship to a man, coupled with her assumed devotion to him (See section 2.5). It juxtaposes a woman's sexual desire and experiences with the idea that women at all times must want a man, a relationship, a family. For this, however, the woman must maintain a perceived level of *purity*, of 'decorum' which, ultimately, is judged by the man. This is a rigged game that constantly shames, insults and harms women for expressing their sexuality. Annabel, a 26 years old actress from Ireland, confessed to me:

Annabel: I would like a relationship...just not now. I'm enjoying being single and I like using Tinder, I think it's the fastest way to meet people...you do meet a lot of dodgy people but even when they're nice you have to be careful of leading them up to much and at the same time I... you don't want to look like you just want sex, even if you just do.

Benjamín: May I ask why do you feel this way?

Annabel: In my experience some guys just don't mind, but it's when they say it doesn't matter but it clearly does...they will start making weird questions about *how many you have been with, if you have anything* [i.e. sexually transmitted diseases]...and some just lose interest. (HER GI 1)

Annabel speaks of how men's perception of what a woman's level of desire should be — family over sexual desire, purity over lust— directly affects how she engages and handles her online affairs. She's not alone in this and some men even acknowledge this as a sexist attitude. Add the stigma users of online dating sites face for the perceived shallowness of

their activity⁴⁷. This stigma is gendered and affects women far more than men. Annabel's experience and learned tactics to avoid unwanted, awkward or uncomfortable encounters are shared by 40 of the women I spoke to. There are others —like Rosa, the feminist artist— who actively struggle against this 'hiding of desire' by being frank and outspoken about it.

The criticism of the shallowness associated with online hook up apps is not only rooted in a moralistic stance on relationship and family formation, it decries the openness of a subject's sexuality, more so if they are women. The constant tug-of-war between these two poles —purity/family and female sexual desire— positions hooking up as both an increasingly accepted part of the process of sexual exploration for both genders, and also laments the 'decay of virtue' that this constitutes for conservative sectors of the population⁴⁸ (See (Bauman, 2003; Ben-Ze'ev & Goussinsky, 2008; Kaufmann, 2012). This tension is both lived inwards and socially for both men and women.

Second, as Annabel recognizes, there is a desire, a latent hope, that a relationship may blossom out of a hook up, even though most recognize this does not happen as often as they wished it did. While this is a desire shared by all, it affects men and women differently. While women are expected to want a relationship most of the time after a certain age and personal development, men are given more leeway to pursue the latter for a longer period of time and even into their mid-thirties, the negative attitudes are scarce and tame compared to some of the backlash or dread the idea of being a bachelorette of the same age range inspires in women. Michelle, the baker from London, expressed this concern to me:

Michelle: I think men can get away with hooking up every week if they want. I don't think people in London will be like throwing them parties or anything but they won't really say anything or judge them at all, unless they are very laddish... but when you're a girl, your mum, your friends will start to wonder and you start to freak out a little bit...not because you necessarily want children or marriage, but because if you stay single

⁴⁷ See <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/08/tinder-hook-up-culture-end-of-dating> and <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/nov/23/tinder-shallowest-dating-app-ever>

⁴⁸ See <http://www1.cbn.com/video/students-speak-out-against-the-hook-up-culture>; <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/18/opinions/robbins-tinder-online-dating/> and Caitlin Flanagan's (2013) *Girl Land*.

for too long, you really start to question if there's anything wrong with you, or you're being too picky

Benjamín: And do you personally feel any of this pressure at the moment?

Michelle: I felt it not long ago when a really close friend of mine came up with a boyfriend out of the blue...she showed up at the pub introducing him to all of us...that night I felt so shit...it wasn't jealousy or anything, I just really felt very low because I just thought I was going to die alone and all those clichéd things...

(HER GI 3)

Michelle's fears are not unique to hers or to women. The difference lies in the different attitudes women and men believe in and are allowed to or have to cope with this. Some women, in a self-deprecatory tone, joked that they would become a 'crazy cat lady', a trope associated with aging, isolation, sexual abstinence and the stigma of being *unlovable*. There isn't, however, a gender equivalent for men. Staying single, or becoming the 'single uncle' is an acceptable path, there's no despair or resignation in continuing to hook up or remain single into a man's mid-life years. Female sexuality, past certain age, is restricted and frowned upon most of the time, whereas men's 'does not wane.' Thus, in Western capitalist societies such as the one inhabited by my participants in this study, there is not only a higher pressure and desire for women to build a relationship after a certain age, for those women, who have decided to thread a 'man's path' there is also a necessarily fierce fight against these double standards. Patriarchal dicta about age and sexuality play an active role in controlling or exhorting certain attitudes and behaviours from and towards men and women who hook up. This has meant that subjects are continually self-reflecting and judging these elements when thinking about engaging or when being engaged by a potential match.

In this section I have shown the many conflicting, and varying ways in which pervasive retrograde ideological discourses of romantic love, intimacy, female sexuality, and class *translate* into an online setting and how they are experienced by users of online dating websites and apps. Because the online involves *shifts* in attitudes, environments, expectations, possibilities and affordances, it is fraught with paradoxes and impossible reconciliations, more so for women than for men. At the same time, I have highlighted how it, while far from a safe egalitarian haven, does afford women to develop tactics to resist against these discourses while also, at points, empowering them. Producers of these apps have also begun to incorporate features to allow women to have more positive

experiences. For example, a Tinder-like application called Bumble only allows women to initiate contact with a match, an effort to protect female users from harassment and unwanted contact.

Many of the factors scholars have singled out in contemporary practices are condensed in the rise of hooking up and technology as the facilitator: economic rationalization, overexposure to intimacy, a loss of social grounding and stability in marriage and family life, socio-economic anxiety and uncertainty, increased secularization, sexual liberation and increased investment in self-development (See Illouz, 1997, 2012; Bauman, 2003; Beck & Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992; Shumway, 2003; Heldman and Wade, 2010; Kipnis, 2003). It is not farfetched to argue that hooking up has become part of the romantic script for many young people. But quasi-religious and moralistic views of hooking up, which denigrate this practice, ignore a lived socio-economic and cultural reality for many young people: capitalist practices of dating, often encouraged by fantasy scenarios in romantic screen liaisons, are almost unaffordable. It is my contention that the job for social researchers forward is one of 'cautious empathy.' Again, technology has neither swept away misogyny and patriarchal ideological discourses nor has it destroyed romantic love. As David Bell and Jon Binnie (2000) argue, it is possible to conceive, live, and experience non-monogamy, polyamory, episodic sexuality (hooking up is contained in the latter) as different modalities of love.

In the next section, I will explore in-depth the second theme of this chapter which I have briefly touched in this section: romantic affordances.

5.4 Romantic Affordances

In *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Jerome Gibson (1986), introduced the term *affordances* — in his theory of visual perception— to refer to the possibilities of action within an environment that were available to an actor, regardless of the actor's ability to recognize them. Since then, technologists, psychologists, cognitive scientists and philosophers have appropriated the concept in order to develop theories of perception, interaction and cognition. Ian Hutchby (2001), who draws on Gibson's original concept

and develops it to draw middle ground between constructivist and technologically determinist positions in the Sociology of technology, defines affordances as:

...functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object. In this way, technologies can be understood as artefacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them. (444)

Brian Rappert (2003) has criticized the term for being too simple and general to explain the intricacies and more complicated relationships between technological artefacts and actors⁴⁹. In this work, however, romantic affordance is understood more broadly as the interaction between a set of possible scripted, real and imagined romantic attitudes — as in Roland Barthes' (1990) figures of love — and the *environment*, here understood as the interplay of racial, classed, embodied and gendered factors that affect individual subjectivities. At the level of the scripted, which contains filmic texts, romantic affordances play out in two ways: the first in the ways in which the experience of the text and the medium can be appropriated for romantic endeavours, feeding into the level of the real. Second, in the way in which the narrative or content of the text can be and is experienced as an imaginative resource or pressure for romantic endeavours, the level of the imagination. This is not to say that cultural scripts determine the other two attitudes, rather, it is the constant feedback back and forth between all three elements that constructs the affordance. Between these links there is a tension that arises not as a component of the affordance but as a by-product of an expectation about affordances. This is, the mismatch between real experiences, the ideas and expectations one has of romance, and their expression mediated via a cultural text like a film. This tension expresses and reaffirms the uneasy relationship in romantic love that the imaginary and the real have, between fiction and practice, the liminal and the everyday. Affordances are easily expressed when a subject confronts a fictional text because the distance between the ideal and the practice is articulated via the fictional text. Films provide a plethora of moments where affordances are articulated, where a viewer can identify, distance, yearn, or adopt other positions in regards to romantic love. Here, I make use of two films, *Her* (2013), a film directed by Spike Jonze and *Don Jon* (2013), directed by Joseph Gordon-

⁴⁹ Another case of borrowing from Gibson's term can be found in Donald Norman's (1988) *The Design of Everyday Things*.

Levitt and audiences reactions to sequences of these films to highlight how romantic affordances affect romantic love, both in the way it is represented and the way it is lived.

5.5 641

641 references a sequence in *Her*, which I will get to imminently. *Her* (Jonze, 2013) deals with a young man, Theodore Wombly —played by Joaquin Phoenix – an introvert, writer, romantic and recent divorcee as he struggles to get over his failed marriage with Catherine — played by Rooney Mara – his high-school sweetheart and fellow writer. Unable to cope with the fact that his marriage is over, Theodore refuses to sign the divorce papers. He purchases an Operating System with an advanced artificial intelligence, which he calls Samantha, voiced by Scarlett Johansson. As Theodore and Samantha bond, he finally meets Catherine to finalize their divorce. With this out of the way, Theodore and Samantha form a romantic couple and try to bypass hurdles like Samantha’s lack of a physical body and Theodore’s fear of commitment. After a while, Samantha goes offline, much to Theodore’s chagrin and panic. Samantha, shortly after meeting a virtual reconstruction of British philosopher Alan Watts, comes back online and announces to Theodore she has gone beyond the need of matter to update and process information. This step towards technological singularity prefaces, in the film, a unique way of announcing “the end” (see appendix 4e for a full summary of the film). For some audiences, this was infuriating as it complicated, unnecessarily so in their view, the falling out of love of Samantha and Theodore. For most others, it was a level above their understanding of technology. Further along the film, when Samantha confesses to maintaining contact with over 8,000 people/users and having fallen in love with 641 of them that audiences grasped it was ‘it.’ Theodore does not like this and reproaches her. The moment at which Theodore sits on a staircase and hears the number of times Samantha has fallen in love is a critical one.



fig 5.1 Theodore and Samantha on a date

‘What do you reproach? 641 or Theodore’s reproach?’ asks a participant. Before I can come up with an answer, another participant asserts vigorously, ‘the number.’ Here I reproduce the extended group interview excerpt that followed this exchange between the participants:

Sarah: I get that she’s a robot or something, but I would never go behind my hubby’s back and talk to loads of strangers and “fall” in love with them... if she’s trying to be human and have a relationship with one, she should respect the fact he’s exclusive to her.

Fiona: But we never see that they discuss that, or did they?

Benjamin: No, exclusivity in dating is not openly discussed in the film. Do you guys believe that relationships can only work if they are ‘exclusive’ or monogamous?

Sarah: I think yes, anything else is a mistake. People don’t have respect for other people and so they just jump from one person to another without thinking how much they are hurting them... And I think society does nothing to stop teenagers from engaging in this and it creates a culture where the more partners you have the better.

Jennifer: But if they never made it clear they were exclusive, why would she know what that means? I see it more as thing of being curious than of wanting to hurt Theodore...

I’d say they are both to blame if anything.

Fiona: Hmmmm, yeah, I can see that. But she’s always with him, and she can see through his glasses or something everywhere he is, all the time. She even asks about Amy and Theodore because she’s the only woman she sees him with.

Jennifer: Yeah, yeah... don’t know, I think women should be allowed to be as carefree as men when it comes to relationships, especially if both are ok with having other partners.

Sarah: I have tried being in an open relationship, and it is not for me. I don’t think I’m particularly old fashioned or anything, but for me all it did was to fill me with anxiety and lots of questions... we were never able to build the trust and intimacy you can when it is only the two of you.

Martha: I felt that when that scene happened [Theodore plumbing through the city and finally sitting on the stairs] a lot like that, he was hurt she didn't trust him, I think we can all relate to that moment you realize that. (HER GI 7)

Sarah, Fiona and Jennifer, European Caucasian women in their mid-thirties living in London and working either in the Cultural Industries or Media & PR, exchange attitudes towards monogamy and the idea of multiple romantic partners that illustrate how complex and new this subject is in an open discussion. It is telling that Sandra speaks of intimacy in a broader sense to refer to the possibilities of connection between a dyad, as this connects to how the discourse of coupled intimacy (See Shumway, 2003; Sternberg, 2006) has been built but also to the triangular structure of romantic love. This structure, just like the discourse of intimacy consider two subjects and a third *non-subject* as the pillars of the relationship; in romantic love, this third element is a hurdle, an obstacle whereas in the discourse of intimacy it is 'relationship labour', be it emotional, communicative or physical. The bedrock of both discourses is monogamy as any disruption to their triangulation prefigures a complete reconsideration of the discourses themselves.



fig 5.2 Samantha tells Theodore she's fallen in love with 641 other people

Thus, it is not hard to see how monogamy procures an ontological security for participants like Sarah as it grants a validation of the discourses she embodies. Further,

when she expresses that ‘People don’t have respect for other people and so they just jump from one person to another without thinking how much they are hurting them’ she constructing polyamory as a solely sexual relationship. Further, she is making a pervasive binary division between love and sex. Paul Johnson (2012) suggests that the discourse of compulsory monogamy has a connotation of ‘virtuous sex’ —because love is understood as the base from which sex happens— whereas non-monogamies ‘do not.’ In other words, in Sarah’s discourse, the possibility of pluralistic sexual and love ethics is foreclosed.

Christian Klesse (2006, 2011) and others (Anapol, 2012; Barker, 2005; Schippers, 2016) have argued that this understanding of polyamory is part of a larger fear of three things: a ‘devaluation’ of the institution of marriage, an incremental difficulty in the building of trust, and an adverse effect in younger people —insofar as it would make them supposedly promiscuous. All three elements are articulated by Sarah. Interestingly, Klesse’s work with bisexual and gay men in the UK argues that the discourses of polyamory espoused by his participants are: trust, communication, dedication, freedom, reciprocity, mutual ethical agreements, and love. Jennifer’s discourse about exclusivity, ‘being carefree,’ and consensus touches upon this. Interestingly, many of these elements form the axis on which coupled intimacy is built (Berlant, 1998, 2012b; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Shumway, 2003). Klesse argues that this conceptualisation of polyamory, what Lano and Parry termed ‘responsible non-monogamy,’ is an attempt to distance from more sexualised discourses of polyamory. Thus, even within discourses of polyamory, in an attempt at a hegemonic definition of it, the binary division between love and sex is still at play.

In addition to the excerpt above that touched on polyamory/non-monogamy, the field is divided across the group interviews and subsequent personal interviews I held. The attitudes revealed by the differing perspectives is revealing not just of the sexual progressiveness or conservatism of different audience members, their racial and class backgrounds, but also in attitudes and expectations towards the representation of human romantic affordances. For some, regardless of the impossibility of comparison, 641 people to ‘love’ is just ludicrous, even for an OS. Participants are keenly aware of how

silly they sound when they say it is ‘too many’ but they just ‘feel’ it is so. Few things are as embedded in the heteronormativity of romantic relationships as the number of one’s romantic partners which has been fetishized in Western romantic films for decades. There’s an exchange between two participants that helps to illustrate how pervasive and omnipresent this attitude is. Tove, is a 27 years-old actress and Paul, a 36 years-old web designer, both white and European:

Tove: You know, one thing guys looove to come up over and over again is this stupid metaphor of the key and the lock.

Benjamín: And that is?

Tove: ... that it is not the same a lock [metaphor for a vagina] that opens with every key [metaphor for a penis] that a key that opens every lock. It’s so fucking disgusting, I hate it when somebody messages me that... and you can see it coming, but I can’t stop falling for assholes.

Paul: I don’t see the second part, but what good is a lock that opens with everything? ... I’m not saying girls shouldn’t experiment or live how they want to, but you got to have some respect for yourself. For me there should be some self-restrain.

Benjamin: If I may, why do you assume there is a lack of control?

Paul: It just looks awful... you know that girl in a bar that’s so fucked you don’t even want to talk to her? I feel something similar when I see girls making out with loads of guys or I know they’ve been around... I don’t know, it’s just a turn off for me.

...

Tove: ...A key that is overused will break eventually... (HER GI 5)

Paul is a highlight case of how sexist attitudes can be latent but be brought to the fore at the slightest of triggers. Though this happened during a group interview, women assured me, repeatedly, this was a repeat offence in online dating. The idea that past a certain accidental or arbitrary threshold of sexual partners and/or romantic interests a woman is “devalued” is fairly common. There are two factors I would like to explore further: On the one hand, monogamy and romantic’s love naturalization of the romantic dyad. On the other, female purity and romantic worth. Analysing these elements is a fundamental step towards understanding how audiences appropriate representations of love for the construction of their own romantic identity (RQ3).

While monogamy and social/kinship construction of human groups have been a long-standing interest of anthropologists (Goody, 1974, 2004; Levi-Strauss, 1971; Levine, 2008; Murray Schneider & Gough, 1974; Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1952), the consensus is that polygamy is associated with status and wealth, and thus, not as common as monogamy. Anthropological arguments, however, only reach into the efficacy and

arbitrary modes of association in the different societies across the globe (Fuentes, 1998). They say little to nothing of romantic love between subjects. Romantic love is considered as a tool that foments and strengthens the desire of association, a purely utilitarian view of love. The implicit assumption, however, is that of serial monogamy. As Helen Fisher, a biological evolutionary anthropologist, shows when she writes that '[o]ne can feel deep attachment for one individual *while* feeling romantic passion for someone else *while* feeling the sex drive for a range of others. The relative biological independence of these three mating drives may have evolved to enable ancestral men and women to opportunistically engage in monogamy and **adultery** simultaneously and/or sequentially' (2006, 106) [emphasis mine].

Fisher suggests that monogamy is not natural *per se*, rather more efficient for human groups to organize and survive. More tellingly, instead of opting for the anthropological term of polygamy, Fisher opts to call the relationships 'adulterous', thus casting them as deviant. Furthermore, she highlights the singularity of the love drive, erasing the possibility of polyamorous sentiments. This heteronormative dictum reveals an ideological positioning that is not unique to Fisher. Indeed, much of the literature on romantic love explored in chapter 2 dedicates very little or nothing to the possibility of polyamorous relationships. The idea of exclusivity, of the romantic relationship as a dyad is so embedded in the discourse of romantic love, that it is easy to forget that just as with any other theme, a romantic dyad is arbitrary and socially-constructed. I would like to illustrate the manner in which this crops up with audiences via a brief excerpt from another focus group about *Her* that included Jason, a 37 years-old bisexual man who works in the fashion industry, and Janis, a 29 year-old woman working in retail:

Jason: I get that six hundred whatever [romantic partners] is a lot and makes it almost a joke to really consider... one relationship is a lot of work, just imagine that many more... though really, how many times have you not felt in that position where you think you have feelings for two or more people?

Janis: A few times, but it wasn't like I loved both of them. I had feelings and I wasn't sure even if I wanted to have anything with either of them.

Jason: And how is that different from loving both of them?

Janis: It IS very different, if I had gone further than a few dates with either of them I definitely would have chosen one or the other. I think giving wings to somebody just to tell them you've chosen another person is a bit cruel.

Benjamín: Do you feel it is impossible to reach a stage where you could have loved both of them or where you fall in love with two people?

Janis: I don't know, perhaps you can, I don't think I can... most of the time it turns out that you've been dating somebody for a while and then somebody shows up and turns your whole world around and you end up choosing between either the old and stable or the new and shining. I think being a bit jealous helps you prevent that...

Jason: Yeah, but I think that it is possible to make it work. I also don't think I can, I'm too jealous, but I do know of somebody who is in two relationships and they are happy... they know each other. (HER GI 6)

This scenario of the newcomer hijacking a pre-established relationship is a common trope of romantic films, with decades of films dedicated to it. Films like *In the Mood for Love* (Kar-Wai, 2000), *Closer* (Nichols, 2004), *An Affair to Remember* (McCarey, 1957), *Night and Day* (Akerman, 1991) and *Brief Encounter* (Lean, 1945) all explore this trope in different ways, approaching it and taking it to diverse conclusions. Thus, the trepidation of people like Janis is only understandable; few are the media representations where instead of fear and instability, a newcomer is presented as the missing piece of a relationship. Some participants in the focus groups expressed regrets, when they found themselves in this scenario, as to whether they had made the right decision. Why is it that most of us, whether we consider ourselves to be possessive, jealous, 'naturally' monogamous or not, find it so difficult to conceive of the possibility of nurturing and maintaining multiple romantic relationships?

Psychological and biological literatures suggest monogamous dyads have to do with a biological reproductive drive that humans have little to no control over. Monogamy becomes a matter of reproductive security and group stability. There are many things wrong with this view. Not only does it contain an assumption of a biological imperative reigning supreme over the human psyche, it is as convenient as the desire to ignore the ever-diminishing social role played by marital relationships in many societies across the globe and in this particular, in the West. Further, it ignores that monogamy and marriage are historical constructs made for profit (status and wealth) and economic stability in the West, and are not universal. Also, as feminist and queer scholars like Lauren Berlant (1997, 2001) and Eleanor Wilkinson (Wilkinson, 2013; Wilkinson & Bell, 2012) argue, in contemporary Western societies, where the social and economic stability provided by marriage has eroded, hetero-marital coupled love as an ideological discourse still works to monitor women's bodies, identities and sexualities. In film, this is largely present in the women's film genre, where two of the common features of the genre is the impossibility

of the woman's happiness and also her submission to a man through marriage or her punishment for failing to adhere to do this (Gledhill, 1987b; Kaplan, 2000; see also chapter 7 for an in-depth exploration).

A path to better understand and analyse the ideological entanglement between monogamy and romantic love lies in further research of the triangular structure of romantic love. As romantic films of the past fifteen years show, writers and directors find themselves more and more pressured to find and write in the third element that disrupts the lover's path. Sexual orientation, through LGBTIQA cinema with films like *Shortbus* (Mitchell, 2006), *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (Schlesinger, 1971), *Me, You, Them* (Waddington, 2000) and *Wild Side* (Lifschitz, 2004)⁵⁰, to name just a few, has slowly risen as an important niche that challenges heteronormative assumptions about romantic love, positing other sexualities, other relationship patterns and their stigma, lived out both internally and socially throughout the plot. As cultural products that contribute to our understanding and relationship with romantic love, it is refreshing to see a myriad of innovative ways of approaching romantic love even to this day. For many reasons beyond the scope of this research, asking for head on confrontation of monogamy which reveals it to be an entirely arbitrary element of our romantic relationships is, quite likely, a step too far in terms of what we can ask of our current mainstream cultural production. However, it is important to raise awareness, to understand that the belief in monogamy is not necessarily natural across eras, groups and all individuals, and that it is interconnected with almost every other facet of how we understand, feel and conduct ourselves romantically.

5.5.1 Numbers and female purity

Linked to heterosexuality and monogamy, the idea of romantic purity still plays a major role as a cultural trope in contemporary culture across the West and the global South. It can be phrased more colloquially: the number. An idea so popular in pop culture, it already has an entire romantic comedy dedicated to it. In *What's Your Number?* (Mylod,

⁵⁰ Though I mention works of fiction, there's also a growing body of documentaries exploring the same subjects. See, for example, *I love you. And you. And you* (Friend, 2006), *Three of Hears: A Postmodern Family* (Kaplan, 2004) and *When Two won't Do* (Finch & Marovitch, 2002).

2011) a female protagonist, played by Anna Faris, struggles with herself after reading a woman's magazine column that suggests that those who have had over twenty sexual partners have problems finding a husband. Because her number is nineteen, she decides to not have sex with anybody else until finding 'the one,' who ultimately comes along, and is played by Chris Evans. After a few mishaps and comedic moments, the two leads marry each other. In this film, the third element of the imaginary love triangle is the number of the woman's sexual partners. In other words, 'the number' of her sexual or romantic partners is the arbitrary threshold between her purity and her otherwise completely tarnished character. The burden put on women to maintain an ethereal and imposed sense of decorum, an otherworldly —and plenty of other times very much of this world— imposition on their sexual behaviour and desires, is an extremely resilient strand in contemporary romantic films. Coupled against the women's liberation movement and the struggles of feminism aimed at recuperating women's bodies and desires for themselves has created a lived in, embodied paradox for many women when it comes to their sexual history (See Weitz & Kwan, 2013). This struggle is even translated to imaginary disembodied characters like Samantha. A clash between three participants partly exemplifies this:

Bianca: [the conversation comes from a discussion on the rule of three of relationships⁵¹]*] Even if you don't mention it, when you tell somebody, they are going to do the stupid math in their heads and judge you... it always happens.

Paula: But you shouldn't tell them, nothing good ever comes out from somebody who cares about your number... I think's it's better to tell them what they want to hear...Samantha was a bit too honest, which is just weird, though she is a computer.

Jamika: If you have been a good woman you can be honest to your husband... where I come from [Jamaica] we believe that you should keep yourself to your man... western women don't respect themselves or men... It's so different here... I don't think this movie is made for Jamaicans, we don't get it.

Paula: I know very little about Jamaica but I don't really agree that it is about respect... my history is mine, like, as long as I'm not hurting anybody why do people feel they need to call me a slut, or a whore or make me feel bad because I like sex?...like, I'm not a bad person and it's my private life

Jamika: I think that women here just have different values... like, in Jamaica we don't understand why a guy would be with a computer, that's wrong, he should be a man and be with a woman

⁵¹ The 'rule of three' as it is understood popularly is the division or multiplication one does when told the number of sexual partners of a person: Divide by three the number a man tells you and multiply the number a woman tells you. This 'cultural rule of love' reveals the sexist and shaming tendencies of our romantic discourse of love.

Benjamin: I think that's a fantastic aspect of the film, maybe not the liking of all, but let's pretend for now that Samantha was, let's say, a co-worker of flesh and bone. What would you make of their conversation if this were the case?

Bianca: Creepy [general laughter]

Jamika: But didn't he have the choice to choose Olivia Wilde [who plays an unnamed blind date of Theodore]?... I think a nice film would have him going back for Olivia after he learns the other girl is not serious about getting married

Paula: But we don't know if her character also has a big number

Bianca: Yeah...what I'm trying to say is, I think that if you were taught and believe that keeping yourself for your future husband and all that is like super important for you then you should act like that and you will find a husband that is like-minded but if that's not where you're coming from, I think it is really frustrating to fall for a guy and then when you have committed a lot into the relationship they jump with these double standards that you had no idea they were hiding all along. (HER GI 3)

Jamika is a Jamaican, 29, mother of one, catholic and newlywed. Paula and Bianca are both 26, single and work as restaurant managers somewhere undisclosed in Hackney. The latter described her civil status in a manner indicating a recent heartbreak. The double standard of the number is clearly expressed by the contrasting views held by Jamika, Paula and Bianca. Jamika's position vis-à-vis the film and the is one of cultural alienation whereby Jamaican values are opposed to Western values, or a perceived lack thereof. The teleology of relationships lie, in her view, in religious marriage. Jamika's discourse on honesty and respect, is one where a perception of sexual purity acts as a gateway to self and social fulfilment. Religion, expressed as a cultural and racial difference, makes as an explanatory rationale as to why 'the number' is such a powerful ideological policing device of sexuality and gender in some cultures of romantic love. It is because it contains expectations of motherhood, of sainthood, of woman-as-man's-partner, and as Jamika put it, of a 'good woman,' amongst others that are simply inarticulate and contradictory for the vast majority of women, not even an adhesion to religion prevents them. Further, the idea of purity acts as a bargain chip, a commodity women offer to secure the company and marriage of a man. Here it is important to highlight that the idea of the number is not a unique phenomena, with many cultures demanding complete chastity from women in order for them to have any sort of social worth. In countries like China, India and Japan courtesan romantic films are a type of romance where a woman finds redemption of her 'forced' sexual and social situation by choosing the right, usually wealthy man. Furthermore, in films like *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990) and *What's Your Number* (Mylod, 2011), women who were not 'pure,' are redeemed when and if she finds

the 'right' one, *and* if he chooses to accept her, despite her past. The common thread of these films, and of religious marriage, is how by submitting herself to marriage with a man, a woman is 'purified.'

In contrast, Paula's position comes from a secular ideology that attempts to demystify female sexuality as intrinsically associated with a reproductive drive, sanctioned through religious marriage. In support of Paula, though also recognizing Jamika's position as a viable choice, Bianca elaborates something she does not say directly but can be recognized from her intervention. That is, that a woman's sexual life shouldn't be an intrinsic indicator of her personal and social worth. Further, both of them express a direct concern with the double standards they have and that women potentially face about their sexual lives (This was also exemplified in the exchange above Tove and Paul about the metaphor of the 'key and lock'). Linked to this is one of the continuous dilemmas that the discourse of contemporary intimacy begets: Paula says 'Samantha was too honest' and that one 'shouldn't tell them' about the number of sexual partners. Paula does not make it explicit but it is possible to infer, just like with Bianca, that they have had personal negative experiences by being 'too honest.' Yet the discourse of intimacy claims relationships ought to be built on constant self-disclosure, trust and communication. Patriarchal demands pull women in incomprehensible directions and films like *What's Your Number?* reproduce them with little to no regard for the tensions and pulls on their real audiences. Even if it isn't the director's intention for *Her* to function as a pervasive, retrograde and conservative argument that seeks to police women's bodies and sexual desires, including it is received as a consenting nod to it. If a film, critically acclaimed for its screenplay and story, fails to treat such a delicate subject as the number of romantic and sexual partners with nuance and critical sensitivity, the picture is indeed bleak for what one may expect romantic films to do about it.

It should come as no surprise then that as Bianca, Paula and a few others commented, they constantly lie about this number or they simply walk away from the date or romantic encounter the moment the other person asks about it. In this excerpt and the others above, the romantic affordances of honesty, communication, trust, and female sexuality are intertwined with hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideological discourses at every

level (scripted, real and imagined). Ideology and pleasure thus cohabit in the contradictions, the strife for complexity in films. The negotiation between an ideological subject and the ideological text provides positions across a spectrum. Pleasure, ideology and subjective expression tend to find themselves at extreme positions of appraisal and critique. In other words, even if there are elements, figures of love, that create discomfort while watching the film, there are pleasures to be derived, borrowing from Barker's (1998) use of the terms.

5.6 Same rules do not apply: Ideology, gender and sexuality

It is not uncommon for romantic films to make a nod to themselves, but few can be considered as meta commentaries. *Don Jon* does exactly this through the pairing of two unidimensional characters, subjects whose romantic reality is misplaced in the imaginary worlds of pornography and romantic comedies respectively. The romantic journey revolves around dissolving Jon's inability to separate his ideal from the real. This comes in the form of a grieving older woman called Esther, played by Julianne Moore, who teaches Jon how to be sexually intimate with a woman without having to revert to the fantasy of porn. At the end of the movie, Jon and Esther have begun dating but without any compromise, neither wants to get married and Jon denies being in love in a 'mechanical' way, he simply feels he can get 'lost in her.'

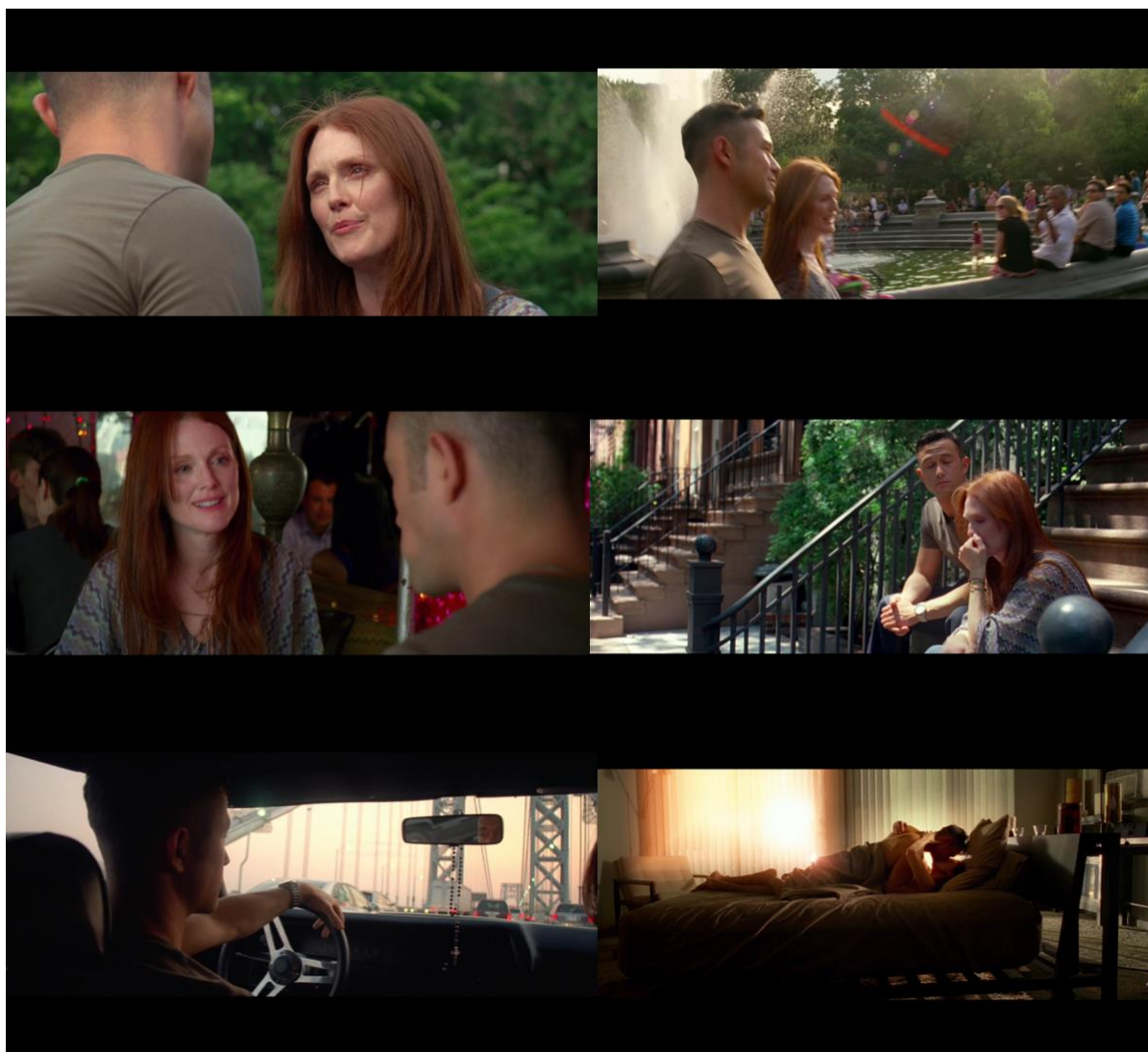


fig 5.3 Ending montage of Don Jon. Jon has learnt true intimacy with Esther

Participants were divided in their opinions of the meta commentary of the film, some expressing discontentment at the blatancy of the archetypal features of the characters, others disapproved, denoting it as ‘lazy writing.’ It is relevant to note that none of them noticed the class traits and connotations of both characters and how problematic it is that the redeeming embodiment of intimacy and healthy relationships came from the upper-middle class character. This may be because of the overtly outlandish characterization of the leads. The perception of ‘laziness’ in characterisation could have some to do with ignorance about Italo-American families and their iconography. Despite this, there was a general appreciation of the acknowledgement that cultural phenomena such as romantic films and pornography help inflect many of our attitudes and frustrations with off-screen romantic love and sexual intimacy. More to the point, my focus group participants

relished the fact that this acknowledgement was woven together with a long-standing trope (and affordance of love in cinematic romantic discourse) that still resonates strongly: the reformation of a damaged lover. Karen, a 39 years-old, divorced, copy writer suggested in an interview:

That girl was right [she refers to a participant of the group interview she was also in who expressed positive views about Esther and Jon], best part of the film is when she teaches him to how to have sex... women spend so much time having shit sex because we are taught by society that we can't speak about it or tell our boyfriends what we like because we will be shunned for it...I may be a bit cheesy, but I think that one of the most beautiful things about falling in love is to see how you improve each other and that happens when you communicate and trust. (IVW 8)

In another group interview, a participant claimed Jon's transformation was 'what you always wish for when you meet a hot but douche guy' (See chapter 6 for another example of this motif of 'mutual improvement'). In a figure of love Barthes (1990) calls *rapture*, he writes that when falling in love we first fall in love with a *picture*. This picture is full of innocence, later tainted by the recognition of the other as different. I would add, an immense pleasure of love lies in how differences help to create a unique common world, as expressed by Karen. It isn't simply the fusing of two into one; it is also the reinvention of the two. That this transformation and desire for it come attached with the desire for complete intimacy is no coincidence. Shumway (2003) argues that:

intimate relationships are valued because they cross the presumed boundary that separates self from others, allowing an other to be "most-within." The problem with this formulation is not only that it assumes the alienated individual as its norm but also that the proposed antidote to this state is nothing more than its formal opposite. We still don't know in what having intimacy actually consists...Intimacy sometimes seems to be mainly a kind of talk... But more often, it seems to entail a kind of deep communication, one that requires talk but is not exhausted by it. Scarf appears to define intimacy as the condition of openness or freedom of self-expression, "an individual's ability to talk about *who he really is*, and *to say what he wants and needs*, and *to be heard by the intimate partner*." (p. 142. Scarf, 2008, p.141, italics in original)

Intimacy then, is not just an open communication between romantic partners. It is a transcendental type of communication, where the relationship between self and other goes beyond language, entering a multi-levelled connection that includes affects, emotions and a belief in the possibility that has been constructed as the epitome of heterosexual romance in European and American culture: the fusion of two as one. In

the previous section I explored how the discourse of intimacy can have also negative effects on individuals and relationships, primarily women. Jon's and Esther's budding sexual intimacy offers a glimpse of this, the redemption of the masculine that shuts down both his inner and the outer femininity. His failure to be human as a character is redeemed through a leap of faith into the frail humanity of Esther, whose communicative labour leads to the final sequence of the film, where he declares: 'It's like I know what she's thinking and I know what she's thinking. I don't know, it's a two-way thing, I fucking love it.' The sequence is accompanied with a montage during which the couple is seen talking and wandering in a plaza, eating, smiling, publicly displaying their affection and finally *making love*. The shift from 'fucking' and 'having sex' to 'making love' highlights the transformation intimacy has had on Jon. This is what Karen's intervention points towards when she says that 'women spend so much time having shit sex because we are taught by society that we can't speak about it or tell our boyfriends what we like because we will be shunned for it', and though it cannot be reduced to just increased sexual intimacy, the role this play should not be understated.

Communication is a long-standing romantic affordance for women, and one (very) slowly gaining traction with middle class men in some socio-cultural milieu. However, in the sexual arena, the heteronormative patriarchal dictum that a woman's pleasure is subservient to that of the man's is very much alive both in film and in everyday life. Participants like Karen appreciate that in *Don Jon*, irrespective of other flaws or criticisms one may level, the recognition of a woman's sexual pleasure as equal is what leads to the redemption of the chauvinistic male lead.

Intimacy is the goal, not the affordance here. Intimacy, though not just a dialogue, it is a relationship discourse premised on constant, honest and emotionally charged communication (Shumway, 2003; Sternberg, 2006). The affordance lies in the distance between this ideal type of communication that would enable a wholly intimate connection; an individual's failure, problem or inability to convey a clear message of this kind and the glimmer of hope, of a new possible or re-ignition of imagination that a cultural text can provide. Herein lies the intriguing relationship between sequences or elements of films we like or dislike. They trigger a way to articulate our romantic

disappointments, frustrations, hopes and imagination by presenting a possible extrapolation that takes place nowhere in particular but reorganizes, even if so briefly, our relationship between the romantic possible and the ideal.

This chapter has tried to address the research questions that concern this project by outlining how different elements and sequences of films are read by ‘intended’ audiences and how they subsequently use these to construct their own romantic identities (RQ3). Likewise, I have suggested several ways how representations of love articulate gender and class identities in my participants (RQ1). Finally, through an exploration of responses to significant sequences in the chosen films, I have explored how conceptions of the self and an emotional-ideological engagement with these sequences can be expressed (RQ2). If I have avoided using the term ‘romantic frustrations’ or ‘disappointments,’ this is because this term operates within romantic literature and film in such a fatalistic fashion. A ‘romantic frustration’ is absolutely closed, the resolution has already been reached, the solution to the frustration already known. Eva Illouz (2012) speaks of ‘disappointed lives’ to refer to the emotion an individual experiences acutely and chronically as the imagination of the future and the frustrations of the past and present (bad romantic experiences and the anodyne of the everyday) collide, making a convergence of the three impossible, and painful. This solution, like many romantic comedies falsely premise, is that ‘nothing will ever change’ in love. This formulation encounters a problem whereby it aims at a neat, modernistic separation of the forces that feed the romantic: the past, the real and the imaginary. It settles for a facile conclusion of perennial separation, and this is mostly to do with Illouz’ failure to understand romantic love as more than a practice. A romantic affordance, it is my contention, recognizes that romantic love is a practice, an idea, an affect and above all, a tension between ideas, texts, frustrations, hopes and the everyday. Romantic love is not just lived in the real, it also inhabits the other two realms. That’s what makes it so fascinating.

CHAPTER 6: A CLASS APART: LOVE, EXPECTATION, AND THE MIDDLE-CLASS CONSTRUCTION OF SELF

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will concentrate on the results of the group interviews that took two films as their subject: *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance, 2010) and *Once* (Carney, 2007), though a few other films might be brought aboard to illustrate the discussion further. My aim in this chapter is to elucidate the different connections and inflections of class and the different discourses of romantic love. Thus, I aim to underline how class is being represented in these two films, how the audiences' class positions influence their interpretations, and how these interpretations are linked to their own romantic practices.

As discussed in chapter 4, the choice of films is not arbitrary. Two films produced outside of Hollywood and financed by independent and multiple sources, these films were both 'sleeper hits' — that is, produced for a minimal budget and exceeding the box office performance originally expected. Both films received Academy Awards nominations, were critically praised and received far wider attention than their initial marketing budget would have suggested possible. It is difficult to pinpoint a single precise cause for these unexpected successes, but unquestionably, as the responses from audiences below aim to show, the romantic plots of these films contributed a great deal to this success. However, as *Blue Valentine* is a modern 'woman's film', borrowing elements from the genre and *Once* is a classic story of unrequited love set in a modern, globalised setting, it is not sufficient to suggest that the plot alone is enough to have guaranteed these films' success. I argue that is the settings and contexts within which the films' characters enact the plots that contributed to their success and to making them modern classics⁵². In particular, the working class backgrounds, situations and other socioeconomic elements explored grant these two films a privileged vantage point from which to contemplate romance and love as so many other romantic films will use an (upper) middle class setting that wilfully ignores the everyday and how class-ridden it is.

⁵² In the case of *Once* it is also necessary to mention the importance of the music for the audiences to relate to and create intimate connections with the film.

It is thus similarity in connections between socio-economic context and romantic narrative that unites the themes of this chapter. In addition, an analysis of aesthetic aspects (shooting style, the ‘realist’ inclination of both films, score) will be used to highlight the main themes of this chapter. First, however, a small introduction/synopsis of both films will contextualize the discussion. After this, I will move on to the audiences and their relationship with the films’ characters, the audiences’ ideas of the films as ‘possible romances’, concluding with how the audiences draw from the films to speak about romance in general.

6.2 Production and characteristics of *Blue Valentine* and *Once*

Blue Valentine (2010) is director’s Derek Cianfrance’s second feature film, released ten years after his first film. Much of the film’s promotion was done through the two leads and executive producers, Canadian heartthrob Ryan Gosling, and Michelle Williams, Golden Globe and Academy Award nominee for her role in this film⁵³. This was Gosling’s first performance in three years after his Academy Award nominated act in *Half Nelson*. The movie was part of Cannes, Sundance and Toronto’s film festivals official selection. Finally, the producers had to appeal against a NC-17 rating in the United States for an R rating, mainly because of a scene depicting cunnilingus⁵⁴. This set of paratextual elements gave the film an aura even before its screening, via a pseudo-mirroring of some of the narrative elements of the film.

Blue Valentine’s examination of a couple’s crumbling relationship provides no silver lining. It does not solve a conflict, and even reassuring equilibrium sequences are clearly shown as a ‘thing of the past.’ This is not to say that it is unique, narratively speaking. While some are more tragic than others, recent Hollywood films such as *The Break Up* (Reed, 2006), *Atonement* (Wright, 2007), *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), *(500) Days of Summer* (Webb, 2009), and *Revolutionary Road* (Mendes, 2009) all end with the lead couple’s last

⁵³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_Award_for_Best_Actress

⁵⁴ See <http://news.moviefone.com/2010/12/08/blue-valentine-rating-nc-17/>

moments as a couple. Unlike some of these examples, however, *Blue Valentine*'s most striking characteristic lies in its dramatic focus on the disintegration of a relationship in a *working-class* context.

Once, on the other hand, is an Irish production of less than \$150,000 USD shot entirely on a handycam. It tells a classic story of unrequited love. Set in Dublin, *Once* is a film that spent several years in development limbo as no funds were secured and once it received a green light, it was shot on a minimal budget with a skeleton crew⁵⁵. Many shortcuts were taken to accommodate the minuscule budget, but the quirkiness of the production grants the film an aura of 'realness' that audiences appreciated and enjoyed. With minimal to no marketing, the film circulated at a couple of festivals, including, Sundance, in 2007 before enjoying a limited release in the United States and a full one in Ireland. The film went on to make more than \$20 million USD in the box office, becoming 2007's sleeper hit and making it onto a plethora of critics' top 10 of 2007. Its success was so unexpected and so astronomical, that it has spun off a musical and the two leads have formed a band to continue making music.

As a narrative, *Once* is a platonic romantic story of boy meets girl, boy falls for girl and girl falls for boy, but for several reasons do not end up together. It is a musical, melodies play a crucial role in advancing the narrative. The score was crafted by the leads, both professional musicians. It is a key element in the success of the film. Eschewing the flamboyance of previous musicals like *Moulin Rouge* (Luhrmann, 2001), *Chicago* (R. Marshall, 2002) and *Dreamgirls* (Condon, 2006), John Carney opts for a low key, fly on the wall approach to the melodies of the film. Thanks to this and the choice to keep the leads anonymous *Once* manages to provide an uplifting feeling of satisfaction to many audiences despite its unhappy ending.

The two films possess peculiar elements that allow them to stand out when compared to other contemporary romantic films and when examined by themselves. Signalling these here is of particular interest as they are traits of the film that audiences pointed out

⁵⁵ See <http://variety.com/2007/film/news/once-upon-a-time-2-1117968768/>

repeatedly as the 'extra' element which guided their viewing. In the case of *Blue Valentine*, the fragmented narrative and the stylistic decisions that accompany this fragmentation help to create two parallel aesthetic and affective frames. The past is always shot in handcam while most of the 'present' is shot from fixed cameras. This play between flow and static is symbolic of the couple's own stagnation. Furthermore, the sequences of the 'past', as they portray joyful, sometimes awkward, endearing moments, are juxtaposed against the dry background of the 'present' and the increasingly aggressive exchanges of the couple. The music played in the 'present' is always an allusion to the 'past' and helps to increase the feeling of detachment and erosion of the couple from their idyllic coupledness. In *Once*, the characters are nameless. This narrative device is used to heighten the idea that this is a universal, timeless romance. As a musical, the songs in the film are the vehicle through which the lovers disclose their feelings, ideas and frustrations. Furthermore, the film explores, through music, the language barrier between lovers: the male lead is Irish and the female lead is a Czech immigrant. Shot on a shoestring budget, many of the locations are closed and the post-editing of film is minimal, lending the film a gritty aesthetic. These elements help to position audiences in relation to each film and suggest the elements they prioritised, dealt with in depth in the next section.

6.3 Of realism and 'not-meant-to-work' romances

In discussions of romantic films, some aspects are more salient than others. Music, for instance, and the way it carries certain critical events in the film, was mentioned by several audience groups while others named dialogue and what particularities it offers; but there is one aspect which is paramount to all viewers of a romantic film: the appropriateness and authenticity of the romance plot. The search for the authentic, the likeness with what one would expect out of a romantic relationship, how well fitted its claims of truth are to the audience's emotional experiences are all part of the pleasure and of the code necessary to read this kind of films. While some audiences manifest a clear knowledge of how unrealistic the romantic ideas presented in romantic comedies are when compared to their lived experience, it is exactly this mismatch in which they may be seeking refuge.

Dealing specifically with romance, what looks real and feels real is derived not only from a rational standpoint but also an affective one. Furthermore, the realm of fantasy plays an equally important role in the consideration of the film and the pleasures audiences derive. This interplay between the fantastic, the ideal, the real and the past is what I have termed ‘romantic affordance’ (section 5.4) and it is also what Giddens (1993) refers to as the insertion of a ‘narrative’ in our romantic selves (section 2.6.2). It involves the managing of one own expectations regarding romance, an understanding of how things may work out and how maybe they never will.

So, how do real audiences experience this romantic affordance? Blair, a 31 years-old charity worker, suggests that it is not as simple as considering how truthful or emotionally real the love on screen is as:

It’s not like you don’t know from the cover what type of film it’s going to be... this one is all dark and gloomy, of course you know you are going to watch a depressing film that probably is not going to end well... but sometimes all you want to be taken away so you choose a film you know it’s going to be perhaps cheesy but happy and nice. (BV GI 5)

Giselle, a 32 years-old PR & Communications worker, also expressed:

Giselle: I’m not saying the film is bad but it just doesn’t have *the magic I want from a romantic film*...this is a story I can totally imagine happening. I *prefer to escape* into a romantic film, even if for a bit, that ends in a happily-ever-after

Benjamín: Can you tell me why that is?

Giselle: Because I think we all want to believe in that love is still out there and that it will last... you watch a film like this and you end up double-depressed [laughter, emphasis added] (BV GI 6)

Richard, a 25 years-old student, said:

I don’t want to deny *the beauty of this film* because it kinda works as a cautionary tale of love but there’s enough of that in most people’s lives... I think we watch romantic films *to feel like love and happiness are real*, that we are deserving of love [Emphasis added] (BV GI 1)

These three participants are aware of the cinematic divide between the real and the realm of fantasy (see Kuhn, 1994; Stam, 2000; Thompson & Bordwell, 2009). They expect romantic filmic texts to create a distance between what they believe is possible in their own real lives and the imaginary – the realm in which fantasy and wish fulfilment about partners, intimacy etc. occurs. What they do not expect is for these films to shrink the

imaginary, which is what a film like *Blue Valentine* aims to do. While it is irresponsible to caricature the consumption of ‘chick flicks’ and romantic comedies as simply an evasion of reality (or a desire to do so), people pursue their delight in these films for a myriad of reasons. As discussed by researchers like Ien Ang (1985), and Peter Evans and Celestino Deleyto (1998), the pursuit of an escape, the preference for fantasy over reality, constitutes *a mode of dealing with the limitations of the practical*. It permits uninhibited expression of a range of pleasures that women – and perhaps even men – do not have many, if any, other spaces to express. The consumption of this type of films goes beyond this, though. As Ferriss and Young (2008) suggest, chick flicks also play a huge role in the construction and mediation of women’s identity through ambivalent messages about commodity consumption, female friendship, female sexuality, family and reproduction.

Then what drives audiences towards more ‘realistic’ romances? I argue that audiences consume these films with a desire to gauge and compare the filmic romance to their own romantic experiences. This can be done as a form of escapism, or as a masochistic pleasure, but more importantly, it is done to understand, cope and mediate one’s own romantic reality. Again, here the idea of romantic affordance comes into play. As a tension between the lived experience, and the ideal, romances that strike a balance between fiction and the verisimilar heighten, depending on the audience, either the utopian or dystopian characteristics of romantic love.

Another form of understanding this constant comparison is through the consideration of what differentiates a film like *Blue Valentine* from romantic comedies like *No strings Attached* (I. Reitman, 2011) and *Just Go With It* (Dugan, 2011). In the latter, the focus lies exclusively on the lead characters and the advancement of the romantic narrative; the hurdles along the road are apparently the result of failures of character that can be solved through the power of love and individual will; all of this is helped by the reduction of external variables that can affect the relationship. In *Blue Valentine*, the narrative is set against external elements that act as hurdles; the personality traits of each character are also affected by these elements and are not given a clear resolution (or even the hope of one) and the advancement of the romantic narrative is intertwined with the possibilities afforded (and curtailed) by multiple socio-economic and cultural constraints in the

environment. Thus, while one set of films deals with relationships between characters who are isolated binaries responding and reacting only to one another, films like *Blue Valentine* work as a reminder that the figurations of love experienced by people are limited and affected by the background setting in which they reside. In other words, structural constraints woven into these romantic narratives act as a form of realism that is actively sought out by some audiences.

The presence of these constraints engages different members of the audience in a consideration of the effect of what they perceive to be ‘reality’ on the romantic relationship on screen. This consideration is done through the audiences’ own lived constraints. As Karen, a 32 years-old single mother expressed:

I think a film like this changes completely if you watch it without having kids... I could not stop thinking about what was going to happen to the child while if you watch the film, he is barely in three or like four scenes...I could not understand why more of the dialogue and plot of the movie didn’t have to do with the child... I guess it’s not a film for single mothers! (BV GI 2)

But while for Karen the child played a key role in disengaging her from the verisimilitude (See section 3.1) of the on-screen couple, for others, like Agnes, a 44 years-old mother stay-at-home mother of two, their limited means is a strong element of connection to the verisimilitude of the on-screen couple:

I have been in both situations [she refers to inviting to get away and being invited to do so]... me and my husband don’t get holidays and we can’t afford another person to take care of my babies... I have wanted to both get away and I have also gotten upset when my husband comes up with crazy ideas for us to have some fun...I can see ourselves in that argument they have. (BV GI 3)

A shared experience and a perceived shared class background help Agnes validate the on-screen romance as ‘real’. Beyond identifying with one or the other character, this participant expresses a commonality of relationship, of the possibilities and intricacies of romance on and off screen. Her comment, as well as Karen’s, also contain a nod to two elements usually not present in romantic comedies, caregiving and *the asymmetrical distribution of gender roles* in many relationships. Contrary to the structuring in romantic comedies, where the setting’s importance is erased by its lack of effect on the narrative, a romantic drama like *Blue Valentine* encourages the reading of the setting as paramount. In this case, the possibility of affording child-care is treated as a class luxury that heavily

determines the romantic possibilities of a couple. This is not unique to audiences of a working-class background, nor are the elements of the narrative always compared favourably or negatively in the same way by participants who shared something with the on-screen couple. Other single mothers did not put the emphasis Karen did on the child, some focusing on the getaway, others on the absent father. Alex, a 39 years-old professional who works in Architecture, mentioned:

I feel the film portrays one of those situations where romance and life get in the way and everything goes to shit...it does make you think that we are very lucky with what we have and we shouldn't take it for granted... I think part of what makes it so depressing is that sometimes, no matter how much or how little you have, it just doesn't work out... I think that really hit me about the film. (BV GI 4)

Alex's contribution is one of several that highlighted, despite the recognition of the material constraints of the on-screen couple, that relationships are not stable even if these are not present. This idea regarding the contingent nature of relationships is one I explore in depth in chapter 7. Thus, while class constraints and the socio-economic background presented in the film are almost always at the forefront of readings of the film, or at least play a role in the overall interpretation of the narrative, audiences' pleasures and readings clearly go beyond these structural constraints. One of the elements that were salient in the audiences' reading of the film was the identification or detachment from the characters and their perceived traits. I suggest that the relationship the audience built and maintained with either or both characters is not isolated from their classed subjectivity. Rather, it is informed by it.

6.4 On characters of a romance and discourses of romance

'But they really didn't love one another' is one of the most common claims I hear about *Blue Valentine's* on screen couple, 'It simply was never meant to last' is the one I have heard the most for the romance in *Once*. Why are these two responses the most common? Although an important aspect of the answer consists in pointing out how dominant frames and narratives tend to prevail over the course of the interpretation of a text (see Stam, 2000), it is equally relevant to signal that these answers point to two of the most prevalent discourses of love that we still manage in the every day. One is the discourse of

intimacy and the other of platonic love (See sections 2.4.1, 2.6.2). Several participants claimed that the couple in *Blue Valentine*, Dean (Ryan Gosling) and Cindy (Michelle Williams), *simply never loved each other*, others voiced the conviction that they were in fact *too different* for their romance to work regardless of their economic difficulties, that ‘love was simply not enough.’ This is in tune with the increasing recognition in narratives of love of the required emotional labour to make relationships work (See Bryson, 2014; Hakim, 2010; James, 1989; Schneebaum, 2014). Some audience members blamed ‘an essential difference of characters’ as to why love didn’t suffice, while other audiences noted that Cindy and Dean *wanted different things* from the relationship that the other could not fulfil. Jenna, a 33 years-old retail worker, highlights the idea of intimacy and emotional labour:

Maybe it is not fair to judge because it is only a film and you don’t really have all the information, but from the film you could see that they never actually discussed their problems, they simply shouted and got drunk and thought forgetting about things would make them go away...I felt they did love each other but that they fell apart because there was simply no communication, they *didn’t work on their relationship like they should have*, like everyone does. [Emphasis added] (BV GI 7)

Ryan, a 36 years-old public servant, mentioned:

They were just so different. I think he never tried to be at her level...I feel she always wanted to aspire to better things and work things through and was always so frustrated by his childish behaviour...a relationship needs to *people who are willing to work at it* because you know, looks fade... [Emphasis added] (BV GI 5)

The idea that one or neither character ‘worked’ for it matches what Shumway (2003) has called the discourse of intimacy in film, or intimacy in the larger context (Giddens, 1992). Self-disclosure and self-interrogation are pivotal elements of intimacy in contemporary relationships, and presuppose a form of work or labour. What Jenna and Ryan point towards, is that there is a high degree of incompatibility between romantic love as something that happens to us, and intimacy, a discourse of relationships very much forged on the idea of constant, precarious labour. This labour inscribed in relationships is related to the gender-roles of every relationship and the, usually, asymmetrical distribution of work between these roles. Cianfrance’s decision to make a film with sparse dialogue punctuated by long moments of silence clearly accentuates the sense that no one is working at communication. But while much could be made of the director’s decision to

cut dialogue and focus on camera movement to generate certain affective states, it is the reading by the audiences which ultimately makes this such a pivotal point of discussion.

In *Blue Valentine*, the clash of personalities and subsequently of the relationship begins, of course, with the traits of each lead. Looking back towards the various theories of love considered in earlier chapters, Dean would seem to embody a discourse of love-as-passion that is incompatible with his social background and context as a blue-collar worker with a child. Love-as-passion, as discussed in section 2.6.1, is the discourse that posits the idea of love as an unavoidable force which overwhelms and dictates the actions of a helpless subject. It is tragic in nature, that is, the romantic relationship is always marked by the death of one or both lovers. Forces beyond the control of the lovers lead them to this end. Sometimes, part of the plot is the struggle against these forces (as in contemporary films like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* where absolute memory loss occurs or *Her* where one partner is non-human) or an embodiment of them. In comparison to this discourse, there is Cindy's (Michelle Williams) embodiment of a modern lower middle-class individual: goal driven, college educated and aspiring subject of late capitalism to create the tension between the discourse of love-as-passion and that of a pragmatic, reflexive, class-bound therapeutic love (intimacy). What is tragic about Dean and his *dramatis personae* is his lack of reflexivity, his inability to go beyond his particular romantic discourse, his failure to transform and adapt to the demands of Cindy's therapeutic love discourse, which is more attuned to the demands of late capitalism in relation to the romantic couple (See Illouz, 1997; Berlant, 2008). This failure the epitome of his romantic frustration and ultimately, of his position as a working-class subject with no intention or opportunity to go beyond his own social position. As another participant in my focus groups, Leslie, a 23 years-old student commented:

I think they would have broken up because they never loved each other...infatuation, yeah, they had a crush on each other but Cindy is too different to Dean...I mean, she goes to school, wants to become a doctor and is nice...*Dean is the kind of guy you just have fun with, you don't build a future with*...I mean, he only likes to drink beer...[Emphasis added] (BV GI 1)

Beer drinking, a mark of Dean's working class status, is pinpointed as a trait mismatched with aspirational middle-class traits. To Leslie this gap seems unbridgeable, and is seen as a commanding factor in why the couple's relationship ends so miserably.



fig 6.1 Dean then and now

This sense of ‘doomed to fail’ from the start, which the film’s chronological and narrative structure delays deliberately, is considered by over 18 of my participants as the element which ‘completes’ the film. In other words, the idea that some couples are ‘destined’ to fail reassures audiences that their own romantic choices have either been justified or that their mistakes are attributable to factors outside their control. Beyond this reassurance, however, lies an extremely ingrained idea that is never made explicit but surfaces when audiences relate their own failed romantic experiences with the one portrayed by *Blue Valentine*. It is the idea that a successful couple is one where both parties come from a similar socio-economic background and share similar cultural and class values. Two excerpts in particular illustrate this. First, Sylvia, a 46 years-old woman (profession undisclosed):

I was once with a rich man...like really rich. And he bought me things, beautiful things, but he was evil and mean. He had no love to give, he always thought money and material things would buy him love. But I may be poor and I can’t say those times were not very good to me, but my mom raised me with morals and money can’t buy happiness... I see what happens to them like a similar thing, not with rich guy, but because *he’s poor and a bum and she’s a nice lady*... I think she made the same mistake I made. She went for the good looking guy who was not right for her instead of going with the other guy who seemed nicer and better for her. [Emphasis added] (BV GI 3)

And, Fred, a 39 years-old music producer:

My relationship of a couple of years ago was with this woman who was really interesting and we clicked right away... but after a while you start to notice things, like they don’t say “thank you” to the cashier or that they don’t eat your food as if it is valued... and I can understand why it took the girl in the film so many years to do something about it...

you really want to believe that things can work, with a chat you can make them change and be better but you really can't... I know it is harsh, but I say it because I lived it, *relationships don't work if the two are not like.. similar in some things... if they do not share the same values and manners...* it's a thing of how you were raised I think. [Emphasis added] (BV GI 6)

These two participants emphasise the differences in class mentality that underpin the view that romantic love is not the great democratic tool of the 20th century as Giddens makes it out to be (Giddens, 1992). Rather, through dating and marked class ethos, possibilities of social mobility and 'pure relationships' are hindered and stymied at every corner. Few families and individuals will be overtly classist or segregationist in their romantic pursuit, of course, but even if they have not had an inter-class romance fail, the majority (22/28)⁵⁶ maintained that romances such as Cindy and Dean's fail because they 'do not like the same things'. These participants averred that in their own relationships they always sought that minimum (classed cultural) common ground on which to build it. It is possible then, to argue that both discourses of love work twofold ideologically both for the audiences and in the film. On the one hand, in 'cross-class' romances the narrative works towards a resolution where class differences are dissolved through the power of love (Sharot, 2010; Shary, 2011). In these kind of romances, a common plot twist includes the revelation that the lover of lower class origin is wealthy or will inherit great wealth. Or, as in *Pretty Woman* (1990), the male 'rescues' the working-class female from her impoverished condition. In the case of *Blue Valentine*, redemption through love is not reached because Dean's active embrace of his status as a working class male hopeless romantic eliminates the possibility of him adapting to the dominant discourse of love, Cindy's largely feminine therapeutic/intimate love (See Berlant, 2012a; Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997; Shumway, 2003). Thus, pure romantic love as an ideal is shown not just to be out of touch with the requirements of an aspirational subject of late capitalism, but also to be a reactionary, flawed escapist reaction to the material conditions that surround Dean.

In this manner, *Blue Valentine* complicates the idea of love as something people can establish a dialogue about and through which they can work out wider social structural

⁵⁶ This is the total of participants that watched *Blue Valentine* with me

issues. It showcases how differences in the adoption of a given discourse of love and relationships are part of the larger uneven distribution of cultural competences and capital in our society. While playing it out as a clash of discourses, romantic love highlights the middle-class underpinnings of the putatively feminist discourse of intimacy, its implied subjectivity compliant to the demands of late consumer capitalism.

Furthermore, during the first altercation in the motel, Dean claims he's providing for the family and angrily shouts to Cindy that he's at a loss as to what else could be asked of him. At this moment, Dean is shown to be out of synch with the times, invoking a classic gender-role distribution of the family that underscores his underprivileged position and heightens the middle-class milieu from which Cindy comes.

The film also borrows certain elements of the women's films (See section 3.4): out of wedlock pregnancy, the woman's loss, her resignation to romantic failure, silent suffering, missed opportunities and a sombre, disillusioned ending. But unlike some of the characters in women's films of decades past who were strong-willed and assertive (*Jezebel*, *All about Eve*, *Gone With the Wind*), Cindy's development is shrouded in an anxiety over her feelings and her own actions. It is only at the end when she explodes and finishes her relationship with Dean that we see any sign of her assertiveness. This indecisiveness is undoubtedly related to her potential economic precariousness and position as a single mother. Furthermore, by portraying her as 'overly-concerned' with the material aspects of the relationship, had the effect for audiences I talked to, that her character development came off as slightly 'bossy', 'rigid', 'neurotic' and 'too dependent'. Natalie, a 37 years-old manager, highlights this:

One of the things I found most irritating about Cindy was her constant nagging of money and stuff. I mean, she couldn't have been so blind to not know what she was getting into...or maybe that's the message of the film [giggle]... I think she had a problem with letting go and accepting where she was... I'm not sure how much of that is Dean's fault though. (BV GI 2)

Sophie, a 38 years-old media worker also saw Cindy in this light:

Maybe I'm too soft, but I see in Cindy the problem of too many women who decide to carry on a pregnancy when they are absolutely not ready or even sure of what they want. I think part of the film is to show that Cindy couldn't make her mind up about what she wanted and then, when she does realise that she wants something better, she finds that now she has to think for two and can't figure out how to get herself out of the mess she's gotten herself into. (BV GI 2)

The ‘mess’ that Sophie alludes to and her manic behaviour are characteristic of the lack of upward social mobility that was expected of Cindy. Though Sophie and Natalie differ in their appreciation of Cindy’s position, both of their interventions highlight that Cindy’s position is one where romance necessarily must give way to material concerns over caregiving and provision. This displacement is not only opposed to romance, but in the case of Natalie, paves the way to the idea that Cindy’s position ought to be one of resignation. Sophie’s more empathetic outlook, given her acknowledgement of the child, is one that understands the precarious position of single parenthood while recognising one of the main problems of contemporary relationships, their contingency. The contingency is expressed through the growing frustration and dissatisfaction Cindy expresses towards Dean, their inability to communicate and her estrangement from the same romantic quirks that were shown to initially win her over. Cindy’s subjectivity and romantic possibilities are juxtaposed with her duty to her family. Thus, her failure in romance is translated and equated to her failure as a wife. However, unlike in classic woman’s films and melodramas, she is joined in this failure by Dean, who is neither virtuous nor victorious in any shape or form at the end of the film. Furthermore, as I have argued above, Dean’s romantic persona is out of tune with the contemporary requirements of intimacy. Thus, romantic and personal failure in *Blue Valentine* aims to highlight the porousness and fragility of contemporary relationships. This is compounded by the link the film establishes between seemingly incompatible classed romantic ethos.

6.5 Platonic love in the era of globalisation

If *Blue Valentine* works on the idea of irresolvable, essential differences between two individuals of different class backgrounds, *Once* (Carney, 2007) works on several fronts underlining or erasing these differences (See Appendix 4b for a full synopsis). Although the film overflows with elements of a working-class romance, for several participants, these are secondary to the storyline of a platonic romance also ‘destined to fail’ from the beginning, if for entirely different reasons. Busking in Dublin, living in a crammed apartment where your neighbours use your living room to watch TV, the lack of money

to use a studio, working as a hoover repairman are irrelevant when speaking of the romance between the ‘Guy’ (Glen Hansard) and the ‘Girl’ (Markéta Irglová). Instead, audiences appear to read the film as a ‘pure relationship’, even despite a recognition of the socioeconomic constraints that make the relationship impossible. Beatrice, a 29 years-old teacher, mentioned:

I just think that the important thing of the film is that no matter where you are and what you have, you can always have true love come to you...It is ok if it doesn’t last forever or if like it doesn’t go all the way even for a bit... to know you had it once makes it all worth it, that’s what *Once* is all about for me, *love can be found and be perfect no matter what is around you.* (ON GI 3)

While in ironic contrast to readings of *Blue Valentine*, such a beautiful reading of the film clearly resonates with many participants and the idea of love as available to all is one only a cynic would try to belittle. Not only that, but it is in line with Lauren Berlant (2001), who argued that, ultimately, love ‘is a scene of optimism for change, for transformational environment’ (p.448). Furthermore, other participants considered that there was a unique beauty to a love that could not last for reasons beyond the control of the couple. Its preordained demise was a necessary factor, as otherwise this romance would simply have been an ordinary ‘getaway’ romance. As Mary, a 33 years-old nurse, said:

Sometimes it doesn’t have to last for it to be the best thing that happened to you... I love my husband very much, but I have never loved anyone like I loved this guy I was with for five months when I was living in Berlin... *sometimes it just doesn’t last or is not meant to happen.* [Emphasis added] (ON GI 5)

Diane, a 41 years-old business woman, shared this view:

I am not sure the setting is necessary... I can picture this, and perhaps it is because I have watched way too many films, on a sort of Victorian upper class setting or like a really posh romance as well... I think they didn’t work out because sometimes the time simply is not appropriate, or because *you simply are not meant to be with that person* and that’s why you have to cherish it you know...[Emphasis added] (ON GI 1)

What is striking about participations like Diane’s and Mary’s (and at least 11 others who participated) is that in the recognition of the contingency of contemporary relationships, they focus on the inevitability of finitude in romance. This idea is a long-standing trope related to romantic love, its association with tragedy, instability and ephemerality. Their positions romanticise the finitude of romance in a positive manner; this contingency, provides a sense, in the case of Mary, that in romantic relationships there is usually an

ongoing tension between intensity and longevity. As I argued in section 2.6.1, this is the tension between Eros and Agape, where the latter contains and sublimates the Erotic energy through marriage and devotion. Certainly, privileging an untimely meeting over the constraints of a working-class context gives the filmic narrative a glint of romanticism, a big part of its appeal, but also helps to reinforce a problematic connection between romantic agency, class and gendered subjectivities.

In *Once* the idea of a 'fateful, platonic encounter' is one that attempts to sanitise the lived experience and practice of romance that is constrained by the intersectionality of the subjectivities involved. The idea that love is possible no matter what the setting is only made possible in the film because of all the socio-economic constraints the lovers face and are unable to overcome. In addition, this is tied to an ideological reinforcement of hegemonic scripts of motherhood, duty and domesticity.

The film doubly plays on this tension by having both lead characters also involved in another, stable relationship. The Guy has recently broken up with his girlfriend, though he hopes to reunite with her by travelling to London. The Girl, on the other hand, is married. In the resolution of the film, the Guy calls his ex-girlfriend, who is seemingly happy at his arrival in London. The Girl is reunited with her estranged husband. This reunion is foreshadowed in the film when the Guy tries to persuade the Girl to spend his last night in Dublin with her. She reveals that she has been in contact with her husband and though verbally agreeing to meet with the Guy before he moves to London, she stands him up. The film portrays a liminal romance, one that must eventually give way to the routine of sanctioned sustainable relationships.

This narrative decision to have the Girl be a married woman who decides to stick with her estranged husband is ideologically significant. E. Ann Kaplan (2000) argues that in Hollywood, representations of mothering, 'The work of the film is to reinscribe the Mother in the position patriarchy desires for her and, in doing so, teach the female audience the dangers of stepping out of the given position' (p.468). While *Once* is not a mainstream Hollywood production, it does make use of the trope of motherhood to maintain the Platonism and contingency of the romance. While it is possible to recognise

the utopian dimension of the romance as the participants above do, it is important to highlight that narratively, it makes use of the trope of motherhood in a reactionary way, reinforcing ideas of 'womanly duty', and 'virtuosity' for the Girl while letting the Guy be the adventurous male.

This interplay between class and gender-roles is better highlighted by the readings of the film that expressed discontent with the romance between the Guy and the Girl. In between comments about how 'clean' the lovers were for the situation they were in, how soft spoken and calm they remained despite their seemingly desperate context and how 'beautiful' they are to be playing working class characters, participants voiced two main discontents with the film: first, they did not find it believable that, in the 21st century a woman would stay in a loveless marriage over the opportunity of a fresh start somewhere else and second, that a working class, immigrant woman with children and a family to look for would allow herself this game of courtship and flirtation with the Guy is inconceivable or morally condemnable for others. As Natasha, a 42 years-old married retail worker, expressed:

She's a bit irresponsible flirting around like that... I loved the music and their [the lovers] chemistry but I think when you marry somebody you need to remove yourself from these situations. You can tell she was lonely and all but then I think she should have moved back to her husband... (ON GI 2)

Sidney, a 29 years-old single manager, said:

I don't think you should stay in a loveless marriage, no matter the distance or what's in the middle. I think women should be more proactive in what they want... I get that this story is like a break from the routine and that's why it's so idealistic, but I think nowadays you can create your own romance. (ON GI 3)

These two contrasting positions highlight the uneasy gendered relationship between family, duty and romance. Just as with Cindy in *Blue Valentine*, the romantic subjectivity of the Girl is judged in the context of her position as a wife and a mother. Their romantic agency is undercut by their motherhood. This, as Christine Gledhill (1987) argues, is part of the construction of female subjectivity as belonging to domestic spaces, to family life. But whereas *Blue Valentine* is interested in showcasing the fragility of these spaces and this life, *Once* invites the consideration of female virtue and adultery. The film, at the same time, connects these with a classed ethic. As authors like Eva Illouz (1997) and Elizabeth

Povinelli have (2006) pointed out, the discourse of romantic love over social duty has a distinctly middle class ethos to it. This ethos contains a detachment from economic necessities, practicalities and realities, such as child-raising. Thus, it is possible to consider that the differing positions which Sidney and Natasha take up with regards to the Girl are representative of two different classed subjectivities and attitudes towards romantic love.

Romantic agency and the aspirational characteristic of the romantic here are a temporary escape the Girl encounters in her situation as a working-class single parent. The dilemma faced by the Girl, whether to make this temporary situation permanent or not, invokes both the middle-class sensibility of the 'pure relationship' and the working-class duty to the family. In addition, the ideological notion of woman's dependency, portrayed as loyalty and virtue, on a man is also brought into play.

Of course, romantic aspirations and familial duties are not necessarily classed as opposites in general. In the film, however, the Girl's romantic escape is an escape from her working-class condition. This is so because by allowing her both the free time to record music *and* the money to do so, the film places her outside her role of a working-class wife and mother and into that of a sexualised woman. This liminal moment, reminiscent of narratives in Bollywood films (Derne, 2000; Banaji, 2006) and in particular of the sequence in *English-Vinglish* when a kind housewife passes her English test, and says goodbye to her delightful French admirer, once over, is ultimately vindicated by her 'virtuous' decision to stand by her family. This vindication is possible because the romantic escape is completely platonic and any attempt at its consummation is turned down by the Girl herself. Thus, the *de-sexualisation* of the romance is an ideological reinforcement of the film's hegemonic portrayal of female romantic subjectivity as always subsidiary to other duties.

In the next two sections, I will further analyse audience responses to the studio rental, a pivotal element of *Once*, and the motel sequence in *Blue Valentine*, as two sequences that highlight the classed relationship between audiencing and romantic narratives.

6.6 A Studio for love

Once as a romantic film, asks for a certain suspension of disbelief. Many romantic films ask of their viewer to believe in the possibility of love despite all odds. Somewhat ironically, one of the aspects that plays into the perception of verisimilitude in a romantic film then, is what those odds are. For participants of my project who came from a working-class background, there were certain elements of the film that broke such suspension of disbelief. First, Lauren, a 49 years-old unemployed woman, intervened:

She's very pretty...but you never see her frustrated or rushing to work to feed her children. They run around and make a lot of noise but she just smiles... I have three children and I just can't believe all you do is smile when you know you have no money and you have to work for money... [after being asked what would make her more believable] I would be crying a lot and angry, I think the film has to show her crying and frustrated that she's in that situation, it's just not for me... (ON GI 5)

Rob, a 38 years-old handyman, said:

I'm too cynical for this, you know what I mean?... A bloke and a lass broke as hell singing and shit like everything's fine, who believes this?...I get that it is a film but I've been in that situation, that's not when you meet your soulmate, you're out there looking for a job. (ON GI 4)

Lauren and Rob's suspension of disbelief is broken because the aestheticized portrayal of a working-class romance is at odds with their own experiences. In Lauren's comment, the busy routine of a single parent, something she identifies with, and in synch with Rob, the constant concern with money are two key elements that are completely misrepresented by *Once*. Her remarks about the smiling is poignant in that it disconcerts her, while highlighting the distance to her reaction to a similar situation. Their critique stems from a personal understanding of the concerns with money and time that the protagonists ought to be living out. Their identification with the characters or the film as a narrative starts with a class position before a romantic one. These interventions highlight not just how an audience's class background affects readings of the film, but also how the film's idealisation of working-class conditions works to undermine the negative affects that come with an intersectional experience of love.

In addition to this, at least ten other participants, Rob included, expressed an incredible curiosity over how much exactly it would cost to rent a studio in Dublin and to get a

sample from it. For them, the gesture from the Girl seemed far from believable. Participants objected to that kind of money being spent for a complete stranger, as it would mean not being to feed her own children or herself with the amount of money they thought she was making. In the film, the Girl announces to the Guy that she can help him rent a studio to record his EP and get him to London. In the film, it is revealed that a studio rental for a weekend costs £2,000, partially paid through a bank loan they secure. They go on a hunt for other street buskers to set up a band to play the songs they have been recording throughout the movie. The song the newly formed band plays for him quickly surprises a begrudging studio manager. The band is shown enjoying themselves, for several sessions, alongside rejuvenated studio managers, eager to listen to them. During this sequence the Girl reveals her love for the Guy, but says so in Czech and declines to translate what she has told him.



fig 6.2 The Girl and the Guy negotiate the studio rental

As Raquel, a 33 years-old single mother and part-time charity worker said:

Raquel: I find it just a wee bit too hard to believe that a Girl who lives in really harsh conditions goes out of her way to pay for a studio and all the stuff... I get that it is a film, but this kind of indie films aim to feel 'possible', 'real.' You know what I mean?

Benjamín: Yes, and what do you think it's not making it feel that way for you in the film?

Raquel: That I understand that she's falling for him and she wants to help him, but you know, she's poor and also a single parent, no matter how much she thinks he's the one...

I think that the moment she sees that a studio costs like a grand she'd say no...She has a child to look after and her flat could use so many repairs. (ON GI 3)

Raquel's point about the lack of verisimilitude is one that speaks of her own class expectations and the limitation of the romantic possibilities for her. In other words, love does not conquer all, at least not for those of low or no-income positions. Even though the studio rental was facilitated through a bank loan, a plot device to enable the suspension of disbelief and the continuity of the romance, this still needs to be paid back somehow. This is compounded by the fact that the Girl is a flower seller, a low-income profession in general. This highlights that the platonic characterisation of this romance finds itself being questioned by the participant's own class condition and lived experience.

These elements provide an overview of how viewers' class affects their readings of a romantic narrative. While the 'reality effect' of a film, especially films predominantly consumed and targeted at women, is not necessarily the most important aspect a viewer will take from it, it is crucial to the overall experience of the romance. The 'emotional realism' of the film, as Ien Ang (1985) called it, is just as important for many audiences, just like the music and the dialogue play a pivotal role for the enjoyment, identification and feeling of 'closeness' a romantic film can generate. What is unique about the relationship between the verisimilitude of the filmic text and the class element is how it can cut across more isolated pleasures derived from the text (e.g., a line from a romantic moment, a song, a given figure of love, etc.) to affect the overall pleasure from the film. This trait is not unique to class, as gender, race, religion and family are all tenets that constitute a subject's identity and thus modify, her/his entry point into the film. In the following section, I will suggest further how personal romantic experiences and ideas on love and family are a particular trait that also impinge on a subject's reading and allow a flexibility of attachment and enjoyment of the narrative unique to romantic films.

6.7 A Motel or the classed rules of the game

In a key romantic sequence from *Blue Valentine*, Cindy and Dean finally reach a motel and start to drink vodka while beginning yet another argument. The next time they are shown in the motel they are slow dancing to ‘their song’ and kissing. The sequence ends with Dean trying almost forcefully to have intercourse with Cindy, who is too drunk to give consent. When he realises this, he storms off from the motel. Formed of three different scenes that are juxtaposed with moments in the second timeline of the film, the motel events are the defining plot twist of the film. This sequence is the moment where the erosion of love and the disintegration of the couple are played out dialogically, through arguments and failed attempts at romantic intimacy, and symbolically, through failed sexual intercourse.

This sequence also contains an intertwining of class and romantic elements that the participants discussed extensively. First, there was a polarisation on who was ‘right’ in the argument the on-screen couple were having. Focus group participants from working class backgrounds argued that the escapade at the motel was not the time to be discussing the problems they had in the house. Leslie, a 23 years-old student who comes from a rural area and a humble background (as she herself put it) mentioned,

I was kind of relating to the guy, who’s enjoying life...she was kind of bossy, very depressed, I mean after the marriage... I try to enjoy but she was always disrupting... drag me back to the reality and you should do all these things and you have to live up to your potential and the guy says, for what? For money?... And the first thing she asks is, where is the fridge? Dunno, just relax! (BV GI 1)

While Leslie had some problems articulating her discomfort and frustration with Cindy’s attitude, partly because English is not her native language, her reading is clearly one that favours a romantic ethos over pragmatic concerns. Another participant, Margot, a 37 years-old retail worker, mentioned:

Cindy was a bit of a stuck-up snob you know what I mean?... She couldn’t deal with the fact she’s poor and was taking it out on Dean... Sure he drinks but all men do, that’s just what they do. At least he was trying to make them both happy well knowing what they have... (BV GI 3)

These two observations, highlight in a more critical way what Sophie (Cindy couldn’t make her mind up about what she wanted and then...) and Natalie (I think she had a problem with letting go and accepting where she was...) expressed in section 6.4. Cindy’s

downward mobility, or at least the constant frustration of her middle-class aspirational ethos, is at odds with Dean's romantic attempts as they reinforce it. However, their focus is a positive one on the confrontation of one's situation and trying to have a respite of it. But while these participants see Dean's romanticism positively, other participants instead voiced their appreciation of Cindy's 'down-to-earth' approach, some highlighting the 'tackiness' and 'immaturity' of such weekend getaway.

Compare to this the exchange two other participants had over the same event. Christine, 34, and Tracy, 37, work in the cultural industries, are college educated and from middle-class backgrounds:

Christine: I'm slightly appalled someone has the nerve to ask of this woman to just enjoy the night... I know it is fiction and I should not get so upset over it but he did not even consult her, he's really forcing her to do what he wants, without any consideration to how she might feel... so of course she's going to explode with a few drinks, she must be exhausted of being treated like a child...

Tracy: I agree, you can't expect a woman to thank you every time you want to have a romantic moment simply because you are a man who's "making an effort". I think the real effort would have been for him to try and connect with her, see why she's so frustrated... maybe even promise her that he'll try to get a better job. Or that he will help more with chores.

Christine: Yeah, I think it is easy to get carried away with the smooth character he is when young, seeing the motel as a follow-up on that... I too like when my hubby surprises me with something romantic, but I'm not going to be happy if we leave for the weekend leaving the flat a mess. I still have to come back on Monday to tidy up. That wouldn't leave my mind all weekend. (BV GI 4)

This exchange suggests how timing and consideration for the romantic other in a relationship form part of a different romantic ethos in contrast with Dean's perhaps rather self-centred romanticism. A more pragmatic point of view, in line with love-as-intimacy's dialogical logic is displayed here. The separation between the romantic moment and the everyday couple life is, if not directly, highlighted by these two women as an essential component of carrying out one's romantic life. Thus, in their view, the failure of the motel as a romantic location is entrenched in Dean's inability to connect to his beloved, a blindness intrinsic to romanticism, and his failure to discern the relationship between romance and his beloved as a persona apart from himself.

This tension between those subjects who claim that Cindy needed to relax and those who disliked Dean's non-pragmatic attitude reveal a tension between two poles of contemporary romantic love: The platonic-romantic and the pragmatic-intimacy sides. Here it is important to remember how in *Once*, the platonic nature of the romance is enabled by a precarious globalisation and its effects on migrants. This sets the stage for a romance that is impossible by a turn of events that speak more of a conservative, patriarchal ideology of motherhood and marriage than of the seemingly progressive and utopian dimension of romantic love initially portrayed. So, while platonic escapades are indeed usually enabled by setting up the romance with a set of situations, problems and situations to overcome, in *Once* the realisation of the escape is impossible as the narrative sets the Girl in an untenable position.



fig 6.3 Dean in the motel

In *Blue Valentine*, the escape sequence isn't about making the platonic turn into a romance, but rather how the lack of romance highlights the lack of compatibility between platonic-romantic ideas and the (emotional) labour of intimacy as classed romantic discourses. Thus, while *Once* posits that regardless of the discourse of love, or one's own class position, the womanly duty to her family and the outwardly exploration of the male are 'unbreakable' ideological dictums. In *Blue Valentine*, what's at stake is the flexibility and knowledge of knowing when to adopt the 'appropriate' romantic discourse. The idea

of ‘appropriateness’ reveals a class divide in such flexibility. In *Blue Valentine*, it would be unfair to characterize so strictly one character as more working class than the other. What I find more relevant is the reading and the priorities audiences give to the sequence, as well as to what one chooses as preferable over the other in Cindy and Dean’s situation, does have a distinct class separation that needs to be addressed. A weekend getaway can be a perfectly romantic and adequate way to release the tension between the couple, but, as Judith, a 29-year-old student from a relatively well-off background explained:

It was all icky and like, very anti-romantic or something... the lights, the bed with this fake panel board, the metallic decorations, it is one of those places you really can’t think of as romantic to save your marriage... I don’t expect like castles and jets or anything like that, but a more romantic place would have been nicer, like a nice park to camp in or something, I don’t know of places in America but there has to be something better... I think then Cindy would have relaxed more or something. (BV GI 6)

In addition to this, Mark, 35, an art director and graduate of Oxford University suggested this in another group interview:

I find the biggest mistake from Dean’s side is his wilful denial of what has just happened around him. His wife gets angry with him for eating like a child and his response to answer by going back to the past, by acting even more like a kid. Maybe, had he cleaned up and then surprised Cindy with the motel, it would have been well received. But presenting it just after she’s done the cleaning, is really poor timing. (BV GI 7)

Mark, alongside Judith, exemplify the difference between the priorities expressed by the working-class participants and those of a middle-class or wealthier backgrounds. The latter focus on the *timing* of the getaway while the former focus on the *intention* of it. This is explained by the scarcity of such events (or lack thereof) of such events in the participants’ own romantic lives. Furthermore, going one night to a ‘cheap sex motel’, reserved with a coupon to get drunk and make love, is a planned activity that sounds cheap, uninspired and lacking the romantic flair of the spontaneous date. Thus, Dean’s working-class choice becomes salient because the motel as an escape conflicts with a middle-class ideal of ‘appropriateness of the occasion’, the idea that depending on the activity the couple desires to engage in, there should be an expenditure of money appropriate to it. This does not mean, as Illouz (1997) argues, that it necessarily entails spending any money at all, but rather it is about a concern for the context, the place and the uniqueness of the occasion. The creation of a romantic experience she argues, requires certain cultural capital, certain knowledge of one’s own class sensibility and the

aspirational trait of romance. The problem becomes then, not the idea but the execution. This mismatch between an expected getaway from the depiction in the film is clear in Judith's words when she refers to the decoration of the motel and its non-conduciveness for romance. For her a 'more romantic place' is one a rural one: a park or a camp. These spaces, are usually preferred by middle-class and upper-classes, Illouz argues, as they present an escape of the urban noise and consumerist capitalist offers otherwise in place. Furthermore, privileging these spaces in the articulation of a romantic identity is directly related to the ironic detachment of the 'romantic cliché.' This entails a construction, through a middle-class romantic ethos, of these places as hierarchically superior to dates that involve an onerous spending.

In other words, while the first liminoid moment is something we are all entitled to, the second brings up the question of who and how can one 'relax' from reality, from everyday life and enjoy a romantic moment. The film poses this question to audiences and in doing so it brings forth links between social class and romantic love. A middle-class pathos — and the practices that ignite it — clashes with the motel as a clearly-marked working-class setting. It disrupts the ideal spatial dimension of romanticism, of the possibility of escaping reality because the very setting in which it is based only highlights the inescapability of their working-class background. In turn, this creates a displacement with the audiences' possibilities and expectations of romance. The following excerpts highlight the expectations of the second moment. Tracy, a 37 years-old designer, expressed:

I think the fact he proposes *going away with a coupon I just find awful*. If they are so skint then if you really are to go out, then you should make it really special. A motel coupon is not something I can imagine any woman getting excited for [Emphasis added] (BV GI 4)

Giulia, a 22 years-old hospitality worker, mentioned:

It's just not romantic, you know? If I'm going on a date with my boyfriend, it's a deal breaker if I feel or can see he's being a bit lazy and takes me somewhere cheap... That's how Cindy feels with Dean, it's like when they were young he tried so hard and now a cheap motel, it's very disappointing [Emphasis added] (BV GI 2)

Finally, Ryan, a 36 years-old public servant quipped:

What bugs me is: why not stay at home? You can have a great time without spending any money if you just make an effort for the other person... his lack of effort of any kind really bothers me [laugh] (BV GI 5)

Tracy was one of several who mentioned the coupon, a plot device the film uses to enable the romantic escape for this impoverished couple. For Tracy, the problem lies in Dean's lack of subtlety, which undercuts the romantic intention. For all three participants Dean's laziness is a symbol of how his youthful romanticism is out of touch with his adult working-class positionality. A coupon normally isn't an item reserved to the working classes to enter commodified romantic love. In the film, however it does act to highlight the precarious conditions of the couple. Furthermore, for Tracy and Giulia, the fact remains that presenting the possibility of a romantic escape through a coupon, diminishes the 'magic' of such an event, and is a damning sign of romantic laziness. Their interventions reinforce a tension between emotional and economic labour in the making of romantic moments. This tension is part of a romantic ethos that assumes knowledge of the saturated cultural images and situations of romance. With this knowledge, or cultural competence, the subject acts romantically. Eva Illouz (1997) argues that given different education levels and economic capital, middle and upper classes not only create a distance and a self-conscious *ethos* with the most repeated situations, experiences, and places but also that part of this ethos involves learning how to conceal the commoditization of romance. Thus, Dean's bluntness is a transgression due to lack of knowledge of the rules of romance and its commoditized practices. But while for Tracy and Giulia there's a direct correlation between the liminoid romantic and spending money, Ryan advocates an opposition between the two, privileging the domestic space. Again, this flexibility between the domestic-outer spaces and spending or not spending of money, is part of the middle-class romantic ethos that possesses the flexibility of navigating these decisions more easily than those of lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Blue Valentine is a romantic drama that emphasises this tension between class, the commoditization of romance and the know-how it expects of its players both in the narrative and in its audiences. The coupon, the motel, the rural setting and the juxtaposition of two timelines work to deliver the opposition between two discourses of love: romantic love and intimacy. In the film and beyond it, as I have argued in this

chapter, class plays a clear role in underlining the expected emotional and economic labour behind both discourses, with attention to how romantic love is ill-suited to the self-disclosure, dialogical and aspirational qualities to which contemporary relationships must be attuned. Yet, the manner in which the case of *Once* highlights romantic love, with a touch of contemporary platonic love, still plays a crucial role in maintaining a utopian and possibly transgressive view of love in capitalist society. In the case of *Once* any putative transgressive undertones are undermined – although not erased, if one accepts Banaji's point that endings do not entirely undo the ideological work of the rest of a film (2006: 169), by its reactionary ending. In the next chapter, I will shift attention from readings of class to audience responses about gendered positions in interpersonal relationships in *Blue Valentine* and *(500) Days of Summer* to understand how these construct gender-roles and subjectivities and how audiences read them vis-à-vis their own.

CHAPTER 7: OF HAPPY ENDINGS AND NEW MEN

Something might happen and a structure might shift its symbolizations. That is the hope of love, the *Eternal Sunshine* to which you just have to say “ok” to walking awkwardly and falling down on the ice. The truth is closer to *Amores Perros*, in which love wounds so badly that all you can do is walk away. Lauren Berlant, 2012⁵⁷

How can you trust your feelings, when they can disappear just like that?

- Cindy, Blue Valentine

7.1 Introduction

Complementing chapter 6’s focus on class by telescoping in on gendered positions within relationships, in this chapter I analyse group interview data to tackle the first and third research questions of this project: *What kinds of gender and class identities are identifiable through the representations of love in contemporary North American romantic films?* and *How do ‘intended’ audiences interpret, react to, negotiate and appropriate representations of romantic love in the construction of their own romantic behaviours and aspirations?* In chapter 6, I showed how one’s own class background shapes the personal romantic affinities one looks for in a partner as well as the value judgement of certain romantic activities. In chapter 5, I showed that the interconnection between romantic love (or lack thereof) and technology should be understood in the larger context of the impact of neoliberal reforms on younger adults instead of assuming a facile attitude that the introduction of technology means the death of romantic love. When recruitment for group interviews began for this project, I had anticipated that the system I’d drawn up, which allowed volunteers to participate in whatever group interview session and on whichever film they preferred, would lead to imbalanced participation towards some and against some films. However, I had not anticipated the extent to which this happened. For *Once*, the release of its corresponding stage musical adaptation helped tremendously to boost its appeal. The proximity of *Her*’s release to the date of my research (and the very convenient DVD release for my fieldwork) gave me more participants than I could have hoped for. On the other hand,

⁵⁷ Taken from <https://supervalentthought.com/2012/06/03/the-book-of-love-is-sad-and-boring-no-one-can-lift-the-damn-thing/>

Don Jon, with its lukewarm popular reception and lacklustre advertisement⁵⁸, and the *Blue Valentine* (Cianfrance, 2010) group interviews received almost no interest at first. Above all of them stood *(500) Days of Summer* (Webb, 2009), with dozens of volunteers for group interviews. Arguably the most intensely resonant, and with a longer lasting half-life in popular culture, *(500) Days of Summer* was also the only film where seven interview participants had seen the whole film previously. The well attended group interviews for *(500) Days of Summer* also helped me to fill the last focus groups for *Blue Valentine* by advertising it to my participants as a 'slightly darker version' of *(500) Days of Summer* (henceforth 5DoS).

Blue Valentine and 5DoS share striking similarities: the male lead is a hopeless, naive romantic; the female lead is either unsure of her feelings or appears never to have loved the man (depending on individual viewers' perceptions); time, in the form of flashbacks or non-linear time jumps, is an important narrative device; music is used to foreshadow events in both films; neither film is a clear-cut love story, one is a story of the erosion of love and relationships and the other a story about love; both films borrow elements from melodrama and women's films; neither film has a categorically happy ending (though *Blue Valentine*'s is clearly more bleak) and both films have been critically noted for their presumed realism.

There are, however, some key differences: 5DoS operates with an omniscient narrator and within the first three minutes it announces that it is *not a love story*, thus inviting some viewers to take a contrarian position and declare that it is. *Blue Valentine*, as discussed in chapter 5, foreshadows its own unhappy ending in some ways, but only unveils the particular type of unhappiness at the climax of the film. In 5DoS, the ending hints that love and relationships are still possible, despite cynicism, the conditions of urban modernity, and the film's own unsuccessful romance. *Blue Valentine* refuses such a redeeming thread. Another way of understanding this crucial difference is through the notion of sub-genric conventions: 5DoS is a romantic comedy and *Blue Valentine* is a romantic drama. 5DoS uses self-consciously complex cinematographic and screenplay

⁵⁸ Taken from https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/don_jon and <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=donjon.htm>

elements to drive forward the plot (e.g., split screen, a musical scene, black and white scenes), while *Blue Valentine*'s style is more akin to cinema *vérité*. Finally, as mentioned in chapter 6, class – and class conflict – is a crucial aspect of *Blue Valentine*'s narrative, whereas 5DoS' narrative is not concerned with it at all.

With these parallels between the two films established, this chapter will scrutinise how the representation and reception of white straight masculinities, femininities and relationships in these two films constructs a possible lens through which to re-examine ideas about romantic films in the post-classical era of Hollywood. While this empirical chapter is fuelled by this data gathered during fieldwork, it is also an engagement with the existing literature on gender identities, film and romantic films. My central argument in this chapter is that although neither film provides a fully anti-hegemonic discourse with regards to modernity, heterosexual relationships and love, they owe a large amount of their popularity and critical acclaim to a more nuanced form of representation of gender and relationships in romantic films than previously available. In line with this, I suggest that in contemporary urban Euro-American life, more than ever, failure and pain take on a particular contemporary normative form in our experience of romance both in real life and on-screen. In section 3.5 I reviewed the literature on melodrama, the women's film linking them to romantic comedies and to newer subgenres like the 'bromance,' 'beta male' comedies, and the anxious romance. These newer subgenres, as John Alberti suggests (2013a, 2013b), are embedded in the larger context of a crisis of masculinity, and the romantic comedy's genre shift of attention to the role of men in it.

7.2 “How many times can you fall in love before you can't anymore?”

It is in the context of this crisis of (western), white, straight masculinity, in part caused by greater visibility of queer and female sensibilities (Connell, 2006; Deleyto, 2003), that the two most popular romantic comedy (-dramas) of the 2000s in North American independent cinema have been produced, namely *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004) and *(500) Days of Summer* (2009). Released in 2004, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, captured audiences and critics for its mixture of science fiction, romance

and comedy. The similarities outlined at the beginning of this chapter between 5DoS and *Blue Valentine* can easily be stretched to Michel Gondry's directorial debut. Their success—and *Blue Valentine*'s critical acclaim—stems, I argue, from their disruption of the traditional teleology of romantic comedies of heterosexual couple love and a fluid representation of both masculine and feminine identities. To a certain extent this challenges heteronormative constructions and readings of masculine and feminine identities and coupledness. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* deals with the relationship breakup of the central couple, who have both undergone a procedure to completely erase all memories of each other.

The film which unfolds counter-chronologically finishes with the following dialogue that takes place in a hallway outside the male lead's apartment:

Joel: I can't see anything that I don't like about you

Clementine: But you will! You know... you will think of things and I will get bored with you and feel trapped because that's what happens with me

Joel: Ok. (shrugs shoulders)

Clementine: Ok.

(laughter and tears)

In the context of a film which is all about the pain of memory that necessitates a violent erasure of each character's other half from psychic existence, it would be facile to read this as just a reaffirmation of heterosexual couple love as the ultimate form of love, a staple device of romantic comedies. A more productive way of reading this type of ending lies also in the recognition of the fragile nature of romantic love both always and specifically in the contemporary world. The characters laugh and cry at the same time, pleasure and pain both conveyed as they embark on a new attempt. The mistakes, the details that led them adrift in the first place have been pointed out to the audience throughout the film and they are highlighted in the recording that plays at the end. In this recording, Joel (Jim Carrey) lists a good number of things he disliked about Clementine (Kate Winslet) and their relationship. Of course, the film has also showed the positive lifeworld of the relationship, the intimacy. This ambivalence plays on the audience's own state of belief regarding love and relationships.

In a similar vein, *Beginners* by Mike Mills (2011) portrays two leads who are both dealing

with father and intimacy issues. The film tells us from the beginning that the male lead's father has died after living his last few years having come out as gay. The female lead lives a semi-nomadic existence, seemingly afraid to get too attached to anything or anybody. The couple separates shortly after moving together because neither is shown to be able to cope with living as a couple. However, it is the on-screen death of the male lead's father that triggers the reunion of the lovers⁵⁹. In the final scene, sitting side by side, the male lead asks: "What happens now?", and the female lead replies: "I don't know"; he continues: "How does that work?" They smile while looking at each other and the screen cuts to black. The film does not resolve the issues of either lead, though symbolically they are now shown to be capable of doing this for themselves. This ambiguity is unlike the characteristics usually associated with romantic love (see chapter 2). The ending, as it ought to be expected, should either sanction or champion the heterosexual union. Here, however, there is a high degree of uncertainty regarding the future of the couple. As with *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, romantic love no longer is a warranty of narrative suture. In the next section, I will undertake an audience-led textual analysis (see section 4.6 for a discussion of the method) of *Blue Valentine* (2010), focusing on the link between these three narratives and what the endings represent as a shift in romantic love.

7.3 And then it ends

Blue Valentine portrays the potentially 'tragic' ending of this recognition of human frailty and relationship finitude (The initial discussion of this film can be found in section 6.2. For a full synopsis, see appendix 4a). This is greatly to do with the fact that the film is not a comedy; instead it borrows heavily from the woman's films and melodramatic conventions to draw out a narrative of disillusionment and erosion of a relationship.

In *Blue Valentine*, the sequences that take place in the past, are only used to heighten the emotional hook of the impending and foreseeable finale. In the final sequence, Dean angrily walks into Cindy's workplace. He confronts her about why she left him in the

⁵⁹ The film also makes use of different timelines as a screenplay and narrative device. That is why we only see this death towards the end of the film.

motel. She responds that she no longer loves or feels anything for him. He proceeds to punch a doctor and to scream in rage at Cindy. They have one final discussion, where Dean walks away from Cindy, who is left in the company of her father and her child. A marriage broken, fireworks in the background, Dean walks away as Cindy travels back to her father's house with her daughter in her arms. The dissolution of this marriage signals the failure of romantic love, intimacy and the frailty of contemporary relationships. Certainly, Cindy's return to her father's home can be read in a sort of psychoanalytic fashion as her ultimate return to the 'benevolent' father and her unavoidable submission to patriarchal authority through her recognition, as it is common in the woman's film, of the impossibility of female happiness. However, I find Matthew's, a 35 years-old charity worker, reading worth considering:

But even if she goes back to that horrible dad, I'm not saying he's all of a sudden all great, but that at least shows for me that he's going to be there for her... also, she's a nurse and even got offered a nicer job, he's [Dean's] just a drunk who's alone... Divorce isn't pretty, but I take from the film that she's going to be fine, I think my feeling for Dean is that even though he's not really a great guy, he's screwed up the one thing he had. (BV GI 4)

In this interpretation, it isn't so much a question of happiness, but rather of who is seemingly going to be less affected by divorce. The recognition of potentiality is one that is highlighted in different aspects of all these films and picked up in group interviews. While Matthew's interpretation of the sequence wasn't the dominant one in his group, he wasn't alone in feeling the potential for the female character to be successful. His glimmer of optimism is rooted in an attitude to relationships and love as cyclical in contemporary societies, not as one-time events. Anishka, a 31 years-old 'new-mum' was also cautiously optimistic, albeit for different reasons:

Anishka: It is depressing to watch but I think it's because it hits on that thought that the whole idea of one partner for life is bollocks... I like the fact the film puts this in your face but just sort of leaves it there.

Benjamín: What do you mean by that?

Anishka: Well, you know like in *Brokeback Mountain* Jack dies and in... yeah *Closer*, they all turn out to be psychopaths... here it's just like what happens, they were in love and had a kid and then it became really toxic so they split up, no big twist... plus you know, there's always someone else out there! (BV GI 5)

Finally, Aba, a 32 years-old second generation Ghanaian-English woman who works in retail, contributed this fascinating reading of *Blue Valentine*:

Aba: I can't stop thinking of what my mum would think of this film.

Benjamín: Why is that?

Aba: Because I wonder if she would have even consider the divorce...for her that is not a possibility, she's always saying to me: Why don't you try to accept ____ [her partner's name, unintelligible] flaws and get married? In Ghana if a woman fails in her marriage, it's the ultimate crime...For me the thing is, I don't have a problem with being single or having just a boyfriend or whatever, you get used to both

Benjamín: And marriage?

Aba: I don't really see the point of it... They sell you that it is this huge thing that makes your life better and it isn't like that anymore. I think it can work for some people, but at least for me to be able to survive now, you have to be ok with being by yourself. (BV GI 8)

Aba's brief reflexion of how generational and cultural change and migration can affect attitudes towards marriage and relationships is poignant on several levels. In recognising her mother's reduction of her worth to that conferred by marriage, she recognises the social and cultural power this institution still holds for millions of people; something not unique, of course, to Ghana. For women like her mother, it bestows on them status and security of being. Aba's commentary also provides an insight into a different ideological perspective regarding gender roles and attitudes⁶⁰. Unfortunately, a more in-depth analysis of her reflection is outside the scope of this project.



fig 7.1 Last scene in Blue Valentine. Dean walks away

⁶⁰ It also reinforces the responsibility of this project to nuance, contextualise and circumscribe claims.

These three excerpts show a rich spectrum of negotiations over the value of marriage and its representation. More precisely, they represent a sympathetic critique of a particular representation of it that is in tune with the contemporary sensibility towards romantic relationships. Aba's perspective, echoed by 19 other participants during my fieldwork (roughly one fourth of my interviewees), is not one of cynicism towards marriage, relationships or love as it might initially appear. Rather, Aba's claim about resilience during singlehood being a necessary quality to cope with contemporary life is one that seeks to dissolve the ideological opposition between relationships and singlehood and to live them as a continuum. This acceptance should not be understood as an absolute, as anyone who's been heartbroken can surely understand. Instead, it conceives and welcomes singlehood as an integral, if at some points painful, part of one's life; not as a failure that needs to be corrected, which is the view of so many 1980s and 90s Hollywood films and of Aba's mother. Matthew expresses a belief based around economic rationality whereby the end of marriage is not seen as a fatalistic flaw of the inadequacy of either lover but simply a possible outcome. Anishka's participation exalts the realism of this and further adds, optimistically so, that after a divorce, rather than the stigma, new romantic possibilities await. These two participants did not mention whether they had gone through a divorce or if they are single parents. The hardships, the stigma, the pain of break-ups and single parenting is not something I wish to minimise or ridicule. But these optimistic outlooks and Aba's seemingly 'cynical' view do contain a shift in attitudes and expectations towards relationships, singlehood and their representations.

This recognition is based around the fact that *Blue Valentine* is a film that openly acknowledges what every other film discussed in this chapter gives a subtle nod to — something not lost on most of the audiences that participated — relationships end. For reasons of generic convention all the other films give an optimistic nod to the heterosexual couple, whereas *Blue Valentine* is interested in exploring how to represent this in one of its most common manifestations, divorce. Granted the film itself never actually depicts the legal procedure, but the final exchanges, which are intertwined with flashbacks of their wedding day, and the film's theme song, 'You always hurt the ones you love,' are symbolically figurative of this.

That relationships end or might end sounds like a banal assessment when extrapolated to the real world, but in the teleology of romantic films, this is, if not necessarily novel nor widespread, clearly gaining traction given the response all these films have received, critically and popularly. Woody Allen's films —particularly his production in the late 70s and early 80s— and other 'nervous romances' of the 70s had already explored this.

However, there are two clear distinctions between the 'nervous romances' and the films I have brought up thus far. As Deleyto (1998) suggests, the former 'explore the tensions between a narrative structure still based on erotic love leading to regeneration and transcendence and a modern experience of sexuality as a culturally prestigious channel of access to the contemporary project of self-identity' (p.144). In other words, these films are positioned in a cultural environment where sexual liberation, women's movement began to carve a dent in the social and personal promises of marriage through love (Illouz, 2012). Yet marriage and remarriage figure prominently and are causes of anxiety, regret and pain. They either stand in the way of the self-fulfilment and self-realization of the main characters or in the case of remarriage, become the path to them. Thus, marriage, given the time, still played a pivotal part in the resolution of the conflict in these films. Not only that, Allen's treatment of it is riddled with irony, sarcasm and a permanent link to sexuality. It is possible, then, to posit that these films position the end of a marriage as a possible path of regeneration towards another. As Frank Krutnik (1990) highlights:

Although such films [nervous romances] are at pains to stress modernity, their impetus is more headily nostalgic. They capitalize upon a desire to slip back into a fantasied past of secure options and a less chaotic sexual menu which can be regulated by and through heterosexual monogamy. Even while acknowledging the contemporary breakdown of marriage, these films manifest a yearning for rules, norms, and boundaries within which The Couple can come, and stay, together; within which both inter- and intrasubjective relations can be safely regulated. (p. 69)

This is not the case in the films mentioned thus far in this chapter nor in the readings expressed above. As mentioned before, these are films soaked in melodrama and woman's films iconography but with a recognition of uncertainty and frailty without leading to the resolution of both internal and interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, in the case of *Blue Valentine*, there is no clear focus on one of the protagonists as romantic

comedies tend to do, and concern is shifted from one character and their relationship with the loved other to the relationship itself. However, heterosexuality, monogamy and 'The Couple' are still affirmed and never questioned.

What ties all these films together, and their tapping into a contemporary romantic sensibility, can be understood by way of Anthony Giddens' (1992) idea of 'confluent love.' Opposed to romantic love, Giddens suggests that nowadays

ideals of romantic love tend to fragment under the pressure of female sexual emancipation and autonomy...romantic love depends upon projective identification, the projective identification of *amour passion*, as the means whereby prospective partners become attracted and then bound to one another...Opening oneself out to the other, the condition of what I shall call *confluent love*, is in some ways the opposite of projective identification...Confluent love is active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the 'for-ever', 'one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love complex...The more confluent love becomes consolidated as a real possibility, the more the finding of a 'special person' recedes and the more it is the 'special relationship' that counts. (pp.61-2)

As I mentioned in chapter 2, section 2.6.2, Giddens argues that relationships have become contingent, uprooted from the social ties of before and a constant process of self-disclosure and self-interrogation. In other words, Giddens argues that relationships have become a never-ending communication process.

The weakness of the concept is that it sets a demarcation all too clear between discourses of amour passion, romantic love and companionate love while ignoring that intimacy conflates and incorporates many of the elements of these other types of love. This can be identified in the conception of the lover as a rational choice individual that can, somehow, not fall for 'projective identification'. Thus, Giddens obviates the fact that for many people, if not all, the 'special relationship' is to be built or is special precisely because they have found a (maybe) 'special person', maybe in a 'special moment', maybe in a 'special place.' Even if the elements are mundane from outside the relationship, a 'special relationship' will construct and be constructed by a narrative of singularity. Of course, this is not an absolute of all relationships and all peoples.⁶¹ The strength of the

⁶¹ Giddens' concept (and my critique and use of it) is from and to a Western, urban, literate society. In many parts of the world, marriage still operates as a social contract and relationships are closely

concept lies, in my view, in its emphasis on the rejection of the ‘forever’ element of romantic love, that tragic quality that has long been embedded in both Western and Global South cultural repertoires and which plays a crucial role in the ideologically re-affirmative character of romantic comedies. That is one side of what is novel of these films and is attuned to contemporary expectations and experiences of love and relationships. When speaking of *Blue Valentine* and 5DoS, Jan, a 37 years-old Media worker summarised of his reading of both films:

They are films about people who just fail in love and relationships and that makes them honest and appealing for people today... They have problems like everybody and they tried to work them out... they are of different like relationships, one is not too serious and the other is a marriage but I find that at the end of the day, both show that disappointment we have all become so used to... (BV GI 8)

Isabelle, a 45 years-old woman (profession undisclosed), expressed of *Blue Valentine*:

They tried and failed, it sucks but I’m sure that they will either get back together for the girl or find somebody else. *There’s always somebody else outside, I don’t know a single person in my life that has just had just one boyfriend.* [emphasis mine] (BV GI 5)

These ideas resonated and were echoed by most of my participants, especially the younger ones. Without fully subscribing to the idea that these characters “just” fail in love (social class and its affective accoutrements play an important role in *Blue Valentine*), the pervading affect of today’s ‘single lover’ is not of enthusiasm towards exploration but rather of expectation of disappointment. As several authors have argued, in contemporary societies the erosion of the social and individual promises of marriage has meant that settling down with a family (maybe through marriage) is delayed in order of an increased period of sexual, sensual and romantic experimentation (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997, 2012; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). This erosion of certainty is coupled, as argued in the previous two chapters, with increased economic pressures and lower standards of living available to young people and, as argued in chapter 5, with an increased disillusionment of the promises of relationships, monogamy, and marriage. My participant Anishka and her expression ‘there’s always someone else out there!’ (see earlier in section) encapsulates the zeitgeist of our times. This attitude of sexual exploration and stalling has been derided as narcissistic, consumerist-driven and

monitored, controlled and enforced by familial (kinship), societal, economic, and religious factors, affiliations and institutions.

egocentric (See Bauman, 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Badiou, 2012). As I highlighted in section 2.4.2, these authors oppose to this love an agapic, public love that purportedly doesn't shy away from risks, is open and looks to the transformative experience of an encounter with difference. These critiques come from established authors who have experienced love, sexuality and relationships long before the cultural effects of neoliberal economic and social reforms could be felt so they should be taken with more than a grain of salt. I would contend that while it is undeniable that the search for love is now fraught with economic calculations, some of them frivolous and callous, it hasn't been emptied out of the yearning, the longing, the hopes, the desire to love. What this means is that even if the discourse of marriage, romantic love and relationships is unavoidably linked to that of neoliberal economic logics, it has not (yet, at least) been completely formed or devoured by them.

The films mentioned here recognise and explore this new environment of romantic love and relationships without reverting to facile equations to the Greek myth of Narcissus. They do so by showcasing moments where the couples speak of their former partners, of their wildest sexual adventures, of why these relationships failed. The exploration is there, marriage is marginalized and the happily ever after is rejected or is shown to be fickle and uncertain (in *Blue Valentine*'s case, there's no uplifting remarriage or self-exploration). These films do not tap into a crisis of marriage but rather into a generalised feeling of *angst* towards the frailty of contemporary relationships. This is what is contained in that statement of "relationships end" of these films as well as in the audiences who recognise and live this.

The expectations of what relationships ought to offer become even more diffused and ambiguous. The search for romantic fulfilment is threaded with a vague sense of purpose, we no longer know exactly what is it that relationships do for us. That doesn't mean that people aren't looking for them, they simply do not provide the emotional and personal safety they warranted a few decades ago. Thus, the relevant shift these films offer from previous decades is an acceptance of this *angst* as a normative aspect of relationships and love nowadays, not a tragic one.

Of course, it must be noted that although these three films, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Beginners* and *Blue Valentine* do deal with the ambiguity and possible fractures of relationships and love, they do so in a middle class, urban, white, straight, mostly monogamous environment for an audience, arguably, of a similar milieu. Any consideration of what anti-hegemonic narrative possibilities are being explored through these fractures is severely limited by its appeal to the hegemonic identity of western societies. Furthermore, these changes and shifts do not affect men and women equally. Most still do benefit men⁶². It is also important to recognise that feminist scholars and/or artists have, for decades now, challenged and critiqued the primacy of the heterosexual couple as an ideological tool that privileges a very narrow perspective on love and intimacy (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Berlant, 2012; Comer, 1974; Johnson, 2012; Jonasdottir, 1991; Jonasdottir & Ferguson, 2014; Wilkinson and Bell, 2012; Wilkinson 2012, 2013; See section 2.5 for an in-depth discussion). Coupled with these critiques, there is an increasingly large number of films dealing with other forms of romantic relationships that deal with non-monogamous and/or LGBTQ relationships, though these remain largely contained within film festival circuits of distribution or go straight to DVD release. These two elements, feminist critiques and Queer cinema, have been deconstructing, representing and reflecting on the instability and frailty of the contemporary heterosexual couple far longer than Hollywood, Bollywood, or independent productions portraying a heterosexual couple.

7.4 Beyond the happily ever after

If these films play on the ambivalence, ambiguity and the frailty of contemporary relationships to shape their open endings, though (except for *Blue Valentine*) ultimately celebrating the possibility of romantic love and happy endings without stamping them as a definite, 5DoS does so poignantly throughout but closes it off with a conservative, almost insignificant twist of the genre's canonical ending. Starting with the narrator's

⁶² This is so because even though women have gained much ground towards self-determination, they continue to be pegged down to their relationship with men, defined (at least partially) by it. Men, in the other hand, enjoy the flexibility of being celebrated either by their success elsewhere and by either their dedication to a relationship or lack thereof.

declaration that it is ‘not a love story,’ the film foreshadows doubt and impending doom for the relationship. Yet, in the same monologue, it also says it is a story about ‘boy meets girl. Boy falls in love. Girl doesn’t.’ Thus, the film consciously proclaims a contradiction of classic genre conventions. It follows the formula of destined heterosexual encounter but will not, seemingly, end in a positive reaffirmation of the romantic couple. As Chelsea, a 29-year-old fashion designer mentioned about that moment in the film:

I remember that was got me really intrigued about the film when it was released. Because you would see the rest of the trailer and it looked like another common romantic film...I think it was very clever because it really made you think: are they going to break up? Do they end up together? It makes you want to see what’s going to happen. (5D GI 4)

What Chelsea expresses here and others agreed on is that the film’s opening statement intentionally belies the teleology of coupledness that audiences will watch for the next ninety minutes. At the same time, Chelsea and other participant expressed their belief in a ‘traditional’ ending, where Tom (Joseph Gordon Levitt) somehow woos back Summer (Zooey Deschanel) (See appendix 4d for a full synopsis of the film). The film never completely closes off the possibility of the ‘promised’ heterosexual couple and their ‘happily-ever-after’ up until the revelation of Summer’s engagement to another man. This invitation to doubt and wish for one’s preferred ending is one of the lasting appeals of the film. 5DoS speaks also of a shift in the representation and course of a relationship in a romantic film. Whereas classical and even post-classical films dealt with marriage in one way or another, 5DoS announces from the onset the ambivalence and ambiguity of contemporary relationships. While films before, like *Say Anything* (Crowe, 1989)⁶³ and *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (Hogan, 1997), have ignored the idea of marriage as the happily ever after, they replace this, as mentioned above, with friendship (Deleyto, 2003). In 5DoS, marriage only appears to signal the ultimate division of the initial couple. Whereas Summer finds a classic happy ending, Tom encounters a far more common urbanite ending of the contemporary relationship: Singlehood. This state Tom finds himself in is shown to be transitory though, as in the last sequence of the film, he meets a new girl, this time called Autumn. Thus, both Tom’s and Summer’s fate are decidedly a triumph of the heterosexual couple, and of serial monogamy, and on one level a reaffirmation of the

⁶³ *Clueless* (Heckerling, 1995), another teenage romantic comedy, does end up in a wedding, but not the main character’s one. Though remaining single, Alicia Silverstone’s character ends up sharing a kiss with her romantic interest.

superiority of these tropes. Contrary to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Beginners* where the couple's relationship cracks have been exposed and left unresolved, 5DoS places a symbolic emphasis of 'new opportunities' instead of 'second chances'.

In order to find resolution, from grief, Tom has to endure one final meeting with Summer. This move heightens the *leitmotif* of the film: romantic relationships as a cyclic phenomenon of euphoria, pain, uncertainty, self-healing and hope. This alone is nothing new in romance films. The idea of 'conflict resolution' can be understood in this manner. Where *Eternal Sunshine* and *Beginners* end in a tenuous and ambiguous middle ground, *Blue Valentine* on a clear low, 5DoS scrambles these high and lows through clever screenplay and by way of announcing the resolution of the conflict at the beginning of the film. This paves the way for a development of how the broken cycle of a couple can turn into the beginning of other fresh cycles. Furthermore, in allowing Summer's wedding and second relationship to play out on the fringes of the narrative, Tom's wounded heart is returned to normal, and the film opens the possibility of different readings of her persona as not necessarily ending up submitting to patriarchal logics or authority. Nora, a 31 years-old musician from London, drew attention to this point:

Nora: I don't really see her as ending as just a housewife like Nicola [another participant] does.

Ben: Why is that?

Nora: Well it may sound silly but in the end you see her dressed like she were working in the city.

Ben: But couldn't that be because she married a wealthy man?

Nora: Yes, sure but it's not only that. I see her as very independent and though she admits she had doubts with Tom, she's mature enough to let him know she doesn't want anything serious. I feel she's a good model for girls who tend to get stuck with guys who don't make them happy or whatever simply because society has taught us that that's what women have to do. (5D GI 8)

Nora's focus lies in the agency and assertiveness of Summer. These are traits usually given to male characters in romantic films. Furthermore, by portraying her as active in her romantic decisions, Summer undermines the trope of the helpless woman of many romantic films. Finally, it is Summer who restores Tom's belief in romantic love and relationships, thus acting as both the subject of loss and the catalyst of reaffirmation. This marks a departure from the tenor of Kathleen Rowe's argument that 'melodramatised males of the post-classical romantic comedy use their feminisation to

bolster their own authority, which they then invoke to “instruct” women about relationships, romance and femininity itself (p. 187). Summer heals Tom of the cynicism that has flooded him after breaking up with her.

The appeal of Summer for participants like Nora lies in a reading that understands the most common trope of romantic films as a deeply patriarchal and ideological one: “putting women in their place.” In a sense, what 5DoS provides in this reading is that Summer has done what she’s done from her own volition. Not only that, but the wisdom of romantic love and active searching, roles usually reserved for the male characters, are embodied by Summer. Jeanine and Sandra—a couple in their mid-thirties—and Clara, a 26 years-old student, on the other hand, read Summer’s character and role differently:

Jeanine: I think if you get married so soon after breaking up with somebody then you never loved them anyway and it makes me think that person would only get married because they think they have to...I felt it odd to have her marry just like that, I don’t believe it. (5D GI 1)

Sandra: I didn’t like the fact she ends up married...for me it destroys the whole idea of the film that she could be fine on her own. (5D GI 1)

Clara: Summer is a free spirit and quirky, that doesn’t mean that she can’t fall in love with someone and marry them but it feels forced you know, it doesn’t go at all with the rest of the film...I think she looked a bit miserable. (5D GI 6)

These comments illustrate the different subject positions that Summer-as-woman occupies vis-à-vis my participants. Whereas Nora’s reading decidedly focuses on Summer’s quasi-feminist agency without challenging her decision to become a wife, many other participants were far more ambivalent about her decisions. In the case of Sandra, the classic heterosexual and arguably consumption-based hegemonic ending is seen as out-of-place for a film that sought not only to reverse the gendered roles of romantic characters but also to explore the frailty of contemporary relationships. Jeanine and Sandra’s suspension of disbelief is stretched too far with the resolution of Summer’s character. This discomfort and/or disbelief, I suggest, has to do both with marriage as her ‘fate’ and with the regression to a classical romantic narrative, even if it is disjointed into two couples instead of resolved either by an affirmation of the original couple or the individual search of self-fulfilment as it was the case with the ‘nervous romances’. In other words, the seemingly ambiguous future of the relationship foreshadowed in the

beginning of the film is a discursive mismatch with the bland, classic ending of the film. Janice Radway's (1984) analysis of romance novel provides an eloquent way to understand this:

By perpetuating the exclusive division of the world into the familiar categories of the public and the private, the romance continues to justify the social placement of women that has led to the very discontent that is the source of their desire to read romances. In continuing to relegate women to the arena of domestic, purely personal relations, the romance fails to pose other, more radical questions. Because the romance finally leaves unchallenged the male right to the public spheres of work, politics, and power, because it refurbishes the institution of marriage by suggesting how it might be viewed continuously as a courtship, because it represents real female needs within the story and then depicts their satisfaction by traditional heterosexual relations, the romance avoids questioning the institutionalized basis of patriarchal control over women even as it serves as a locus of protest against some of its emotional consequences. (p.217)

The director's decision to marginalise Summer to two sequences -an engagement party, where she's barely visible and a brief meeting in the park- only heightens the final, necessary arguably neoliberal masculinization of Tom in order to enter a new cycle of romantic love. He quits his job as a sentimental greeting card writer and starts to fill out his architect portfolio. He dresses up and opts to look for a professional job, applying and interviewing. For a brief period, he embodies the classical male lead of romantic comedies: Cynical, pragmatic, active and independent. This journey is also a restoration of his middle-class aspirational ethos, that paves the way for the consolidation of classic masculinity. This reaffirmation is incomplete, as he is 'lacking' in the romantic sphere, and the final ingredient comes through Summer, after he has regained public spaces and his personal life as his as his own. In the final scene, Tom takes on the active role of the pursuer, asking for the name of Autumn, thus completing his return to an active masculinity. Again, however, I stress that Summer's character wasn't viewed negatively by my participants for marrying; and several defended this representation of her as 'positive', 'empowering' and/or 'refreshing.' Borrowing from psychoanalytic approaches to cinema and spectatorship, here the concept of 'masochistic aesthetic' as initially put forward by Gilles Deleuze and developed by several film scholars (Del Río, 2008; Nichols, 1981; Rowe, 1995; Studlar, 1985), provides an initial insight into both the discomfort of my participants and the overall success of the film without fully embracing it.

In masochism, pleasure in the pre-Oedipal stage is located in an all-powerful mother. This mother figure is plentiful. Masochism then implies the denial of phallic power and of the father and its replacement by the mother, to whom the masochist submits. This does not position the woman as conveying a lack, but rather exalts her as whole and thus invokes a desire to merge with her. In other words, this theory of masochism plays on the ambivalent forces of desire and rejection of the male, with feminine identity as a threat to the stability of the former. In romantic comedies, Constanza Del Río suggests, the ‘nonphallic sexuality of masochism has to be abandoned and the divested romantic hero, once familiarized with the feminine, has to be empowered’ (p. 83). While I do not contend that 5DoS represents a fully masochistic aesthetic, I do find that the final abandonment of Summer and her femininity qua ‘unruly woman’ partially accounts for the contrasting readings of my participants. At the same time, it is Tom’s feminised masculinity that provides much of the pleasure for most of my participants, both men and women. In the next section, I aim to elucidate why.

7.5 Anxiety and masculinity

Recently, in romantic comedies the main focus has become the question of men in the genre, with the main question: ‘Why are men in romantic comedies?’ (Alberti 2013b). This question, in turn, is anchored in the disruption generated by what R. W. Connell (2006) terms ‘heterosexual sensitivity’ in definitions of masculinity. As Connell suggests, this sensitivity that some men have developed is greatly indebted to the struggles of feminism, women’s liberation movements and their questioning of patriarchy and fixed gender roles. This heterosexual sensitivity constitutes a destabilising point of classic alpha masculinity with the introduction of feminine concerns and the consideration of the masculine as lacking and thus also in process.

Such an undermining and questioning of classic heterosexual masculinity entails that masculinity is no longer defined in isolation but rather, in relationship with the feminine. The dialogue that ensues is not entirely symmetrical or horizontal, but its recognition is part of a continued attempt by both men and women—not all of the men and not all of the women, of course—to envision new possibilities of gender politics and gender

identity.

Connell (2000) highlights that masculinity then finds itself torn between an opening to the feminine and an aggressive backlash towards an atavistic, immanent masculine. In romantic comedies, this is expressed in a renewed interest in the exploration of possible and new configurations of masculinity that are responsive to the larger cultural struggles of gender identity and relationships like in the films here discussed. At the same time, a regressive counter production is in full motion as well in a film like *The Ugly Truth* that contains a hyper-masculinised, virile male (See Alberti 2013b for an analysis of this film's portrayal of masculinity) or in the 'bromance' subgenre where the anxieties of a crisis-ridden middleclass masculinity are expressed through misogyny, gross-out humour and the subordination of the female in almost every respect. What it means to be a man and what it means to be a man in or looking for a relationship is what is at stake in male-centred romantic comedies. From this perspective, Tom is not so much of a man, but a man-boy who is in dire need of a sentimental education. What is interesting in this process in the film is that the recuperation of his feminized self, not the championing of a classic masculinity, enabled by Summer, is the final ingredient in his journey. During the final discussion, the roles have been reversed, Tom is cynical and claims all that he previously believed in, namely: fate, love, relationships, are 'bullshit'. Summer replies to a cynical Tom that he wasn't wrong about these things, 'it just wasn't me that you were right about'. This triggers the final scene of the film, where Tom meets Autumn. Summer then redeems the destined meeting of the lovers, a fundamental pillar of romantic love, and the cycle may begin anew.

I argue that Tom's final emotional recovery constitutes an attempt at a reconfiguration of a representation of a hegemonic (romantic) masculinity that seeks to involve traits usually associated with the feminine, like idealisation, emotions and confession as a challenge to a macho-masculinity that derides such traits. Connell initially defined hegemonic masculinity as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (p. 77). Connell herself and others (Christensen & Jensen, 2014; Demetriou, 2001) have critiqued the concept,

arguing for the inclusion of considerations of intersectionality, power relations — between men and other men, and men and women—, historical and social contexts. In short, the concept of hegemonic masculinity cannot be understood monolithically, in absolute terms of mass domination but must be seen as an ongoing process of winning consent to a bundle of tropes, ideals, practices, identities and beliefs. In what follows I will outline a few aspects of Tom's feminised masculinity as presented in the film and how they are perceived, read and identified by my participants.

At the beginning of the film, the narrator informs the audience that Tom believes he won't be happy until finding 'the one', a belief stemming from his cultural consumption of British music (the mise-en-scene points to bands like Joy Division and The Smiths) and a 'gross misreading' of the film *The Graduate*. Summer is introduced as sceptical of this with the experience of divorced parents to bolster her scepticism. This opening exposition sets up the gender role reversal as one of idealisation of romantic love and of its failure. When asked about Tom, participants across different group interviews maintained:

Jeanine: I felt it [of love] was a very real portrayal, because he's not afraid to show his feelings and in the film they show all the things that go through his head and stuff...Tom for me is like my soulmate of how I fall in love... that scene that puts "expectations" and "reality" side by side is pretty much me every time I have a crush...I think it sums up that he's shy, a bit insecure and always wondering what he did wrong, those are things girls do way more than guys (5D GI 1)

Mark: I loved the dancing scene, I think it was a great way to show that happiness you feel when you've just met someone... I haven't danced but I do remember walking down Stoke Newington Road smiling to everyone when [his partner's name] and I had just been on like our second date (5D GI 3)

Martha: The feeling I get watching the movie again after so long is that like Tom is a bit girly... from the way he's shown crying, he's the one who gets really upset when Summer breaks it up and he's the one who's shown all mokey... isn't that the way girls act on romcoms?

Benjamín: Usually, yes, what do you think of having a guy do that in the film?

Martha: I guess it's ok, but I personally do not like men like that

Benjamín: Why?

Martha: It kinda irritates me, you know? I like it when guys just mark their territory and confidence is just sexy (5D GI 4)

Bianca: JGL is amazing in here, his acting really makes you believe his pain, he not only shows his feelings, I feel he's actually feeling them...I think many women now prefer someone with at least a bit of a feminine side because it makes relationships better

Benjamín: How so?

Bianca: I think because men like these are more understanding of women and how we feel... yeah, and it makes communication easier, if he never shows emotions, it just becomes a huge wall you can't jump [over] (5D GI 7)

Emma: that expectation and reality split screen is just genius. I loved that they show a guy also does something I think goes through women's head all the time when we are crushing on somebody... oh and those bits with all the films they are replaying (IVW 3)

Hendrik: Tom is in a journey to learn to stop idealising women and all the film within film scenes show us that... it's kind of like an internal monologue he has to the tone of other films... the film presents him as believing in love instead of being cynical and all macho and I think that's what makes it so real for me, the fact he cries, gets depressed and all the things that come with falling in love and heartbreak, that's something everyone can relate to and it's very honest. (IVW 12)



fig 7.2 Split-screen sequence in (500) Days of Summer

These excerpts encapsulate the most significant aspects of Tom's persona. Beginning with Martha ('Tom's a bit girly...'), nine other participants voiced a similar discontent with Tom's feminised masculinity. Another participant, Lucille, a 35 years-old professional working in Media, claimed he was not 'husband material' and suggested he 'should have stop whining, manned up and get the girl.' These readings of Tom suggest that not only is a feminised masculinity competing against a more classically virile alpha masculinity, showing emotions is seen as emasculating. As Connell suggests (2006), 'the

project of having an open, non-assertive self risks having no self at all' (p.136). On the other hand, positive perspectives of this feminisation constantly marked one of the two the most iconic sequences of the film: a dance parade Tom does on his way to work after being with Summer (Mark: it was a great way to show that happiness you feel when you've just met someone...)—a homage to *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Hughes, 1986)—and a split-screen of 'expectations vs reality' of a party, hosted by Summer, Tom attends after they break up (Jeanine: that scene that puts 'expectations' and 'reality' side by side is pretty much me every time I have a crush. Emma: ...is just genius). The plot twist contained in the latter is that this party turns out to be Summer's engagement, the reality side; compared to a rekindling of the romance between the two in the expectations side.

As I argued in section 5.4, romantic affordances consist of practices, affects, ideas, tensions between the everyday and ideal, hopes and frustrations of the lover. The relationship between the imaginary, the past and the real is full of mismatching scenarios that feed into one another. In these two scenes, fictional character Tom's romantic imagination clouds his perspective on the cinematic 'real'. Particularly during the dance sequence, his lack of awareness of the rules of romance are highlighted when he expresses the bliss of his new romance in such an over-the-top manner that it undercuts the moment in the previous scene where they have sex for the first time, and Summer has tells him she wants to keep it casual. This is reminiscent of Dean in *Blue Valentine* (see chapter 3 for the discussion on Dean's dramatis persona), who, because of their persona as hopeless romantics, are not only youthful, but also doomed to fail. But whereas in *Blue Valentine* the possibility of learning is closed, Tom's naiveté only requires mending. The dance sequence then represents the lover's romantic idealisation of the loved one, one cut off from 'the real' and which the film is gently satirising. The split-screen scene furthers this, in such a way that it not only forecloses the imaginary, but also the romantic.

Here is where Tom's feminised persona shifts to a classic masculinity of pragmatism, cynicism and disbelief in romantic love and relationships. Again, *Annie Hall* (Allen, 1977) used a similar device during the scene where Alvy and Annie discuss with the psychiatrist their relationship and sex life. But whereas in *Annie Hall* it is a mismatch of perspectives

and sexuality is a primary concern, 5DoS makes full use of the internal monologue that is in constant motion in the lover's head and the overarching theme is romantic love. This is evident in the connection participants like Jeanine (Tom for me is like my soulmate of how I fall in love... that scene that puts 'expectations' and 'reality' side by side is pretty much me every time I have a crush) and Emma (I loved that they show a guy also does something I think goes through women's head all the time when we are crushing on somebody) make with Tom's idealisation of romance. These participants positively highlight that what they think is a woman's way of behaving during romance is showcased through the ruminations of a man. Furthermore, as Hendrik (Tom is in a journey...) and Bianca's (...he not only shows his feelings, I feel he's actually feeling them...) complementary interventions suggest, Tom's journey, through his shortcomings, and failures provide a glimpse at a romantic naiveté that is not usually portrayed through a male character. The appeal for audiences of these two sequences that highlight Tom as idealistic, naive, emotional, romantically ignorant and heartbroken is that they are portrayed inwards of Tom's psyche, heightening the connection to one's own personal romantic failures and excesses. This is evident in the connection Hendrik finds with the character, as it is in the vulnerability of Tom that he pins his enjoyment of the film. Bianca highlights that a feminised Tom/man is better suited for relationships as they are more open to intimate communication. This is not to say that this narrative champions completely progressive and gender equal values, as evidenced in its ending. Rather, the fragmented narrative creates a possible semiotic interpretation of these traits as 'transcending' genders, if ever so briefly.

In the past thirty years, romantic comedies have represented female characters as the ones prone to such idealization whereas men are seen, at least initially, as more pragmatic and *in-the-know* of dating and relationship rules (Alberti, 2013b; Evans & Deleyto, 1998) like in *Bridget Jones* (Maguire, 2001), *Green Card* (Weir, 1990), *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990), *You've Got Mail* (Ephron, 1998) and *Sleepless in Seattle* (Ephron, 1993). In films like *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (Stoller, 2008), *Roxanne* (Schepisi, 1987), *Say Anything* (Crowe, 1989) and *She's out of my league* (Smith, 2010), where the male lead is portrayed as the idealising one or clumsy one, this idealization or ineptitude in love is forged as the impasse he must overcome in order to be with the loved one. Thus, whether through

physical, mental or emotional tests, the male lead must prove himself masculine enough.

Kathleen Rowe (1995) argues that:

the intermingling of romantic comedy and melodrama evident in these films should come as no surprise, given the thematic and structural similarities between the two genres. Linked by common ideologies of gender, romantic comedy and melodrama are, after all, the primary narrative forms available for telling the stories of women's lives.... What is more surprising, however—and disturbing—is the increasing use of melodrama to tell the story of men's lives and male suffering—and to tell it straight. Underlying the seemingly innocuous fantasies of these recent comedies is another, darker scenario that recasts the story of the struggle for women's rights into a melodrama of male victims and female villains. This scenario not only recuperates areas of culture traditionally associated with femininity to use *against* women, but, as a conceptual structure, it also extends well beyond the local Cineplex. (p. 185)

Rowe speaks of films she terms as 'post-classical romantic comedies' —films of the late 1970s up until the early 90s— where men's romantic path was at the expense of the women around them like in *Pretty Woman*. For her, the use of melodramatic elements in romantic comedies not only permits the male to be feminised, it bestows him the 'authority' to instruct women about romantic love, relationships and femininity. While this position was tenable for what she terms as post-classical romantic comedies, I would argue that 5DoS and the other romantic comedies discussed here present a slightly different environment of gender roles in the genre. I concede that just like in Rowe's analysis, in 5DoS Tom's centrality turns the possibility of learning/teaching into one where masculinity is transcendental and femininity immanent, fixed. The recuperation of masculinity is at the expense of the fixation of femininity. This fixed characteristic of femininity reifies a heteronormative view of femininity subservient to patriarchal authority. However, as I argued above, participants of my project expressed disbelief and discomfort at the ending of Summer's story. Yet, they also appreciated her maturity, strong-will and self-assured nature.

The problem with Rowe's analysis of the shift in romantic comedies is that it fixates the spectator in a single-sex parallel gender identification, leaving no space for multiple identifications and positions. I contend that the feminised man of the romantic comedies discussed here is a form of hegemonic heterosexual sensitive masculinity – competing for hegemonic position – that has appropriated certain traits associated with femininity, but

not at the expense of the woman. This competition and appropriation are brought about by a heterosexual sensitivity of some men. In romance, this is expressed in the recognition that the demands of contemporary intimacy also apply to men. It is because these demands are novel to men but a long-standing demand of women, that romantic comedies have been centred around men's journeys. I will illustrate the difference between my contention with 5DoS and Rowe's critique of 'post-classical romantic comedies' through a cursory comparison with the role women play in beta-male and bromance Apatow-style of romantic comedies. In *Knocked Up* (Apatow, 2007), the two women (Katherine Heigl and Leslie Mann) are frustrated, domineering, career-minded professionals. The men (Seth Rogen and Paul Rudd) are laid-back, weed-smoking unambitious young adults looking to escape the controlling ways of the women. During an escapade to Las Vegas — triggered by the break-up of both couples— and while during the influence of psychedelic mushrooms, the men decide to ask for forgiveness in their respective relationships. One of them is turned down (Seth Rogen). After a discussion with his father, he 'becomes' a man. This involves changing jobs, organising his apartment to make room for the baby and solving the problems that present themselves during the delivery of the baby. During this time, his ex-partner is refused entry to a nightclub because of her pregnancy. The male-centred focus, the marginalization of the female and some of the narrative elements that signal the male lead's growth are repeated in both *Knocked Up* and 5DoS. There are, however, substantive differences: the female lead of *Knocked Up* ends up moving in with the male and their new-born. This is after slowly realising that she belongs in a household with him and the baby. Furthermore, in the climax of the film, she apologizes for not recognising that he's *truly* a man and the right one for her. Second, the growth of the male lead is enabled here by a larger patriarchal authority, the father of the male lead. The ending of the film highlights the male lead's newly found aggressive, assertive masculinity to which the women declare to be impressed by. The script of *Knocked up* is, despite its gimmick of the 'average Joe getting the beautiful woman,' a classic script of subordinating the feminine to the authoritarian patriarch. The male lead here showcases none of the feminine traits audiences praised about Tom in 5DoS. Rather, the emphasis of this character lies in his ability to provide for his new family. This idea of man-as-provider is exactly the type of hegemonic masculinity that reinforces the idea that a man's role in a romantic

relationship is to provide for his ‘dependents’ and nothing else. This, in turn, reinforces the idea of caregiving and domesticity as the role of women. 5DoS provides, instead, the possibility of considering a new type of masculinity that does not necessarily have to be portrayed as superior to the feminine.



fig 7.3 Summer and Tom's last meeting. In this scene Summer restores Tom's romanticism

Not only that, but as Connell (1998) suggests, borrowing from Gramsci, it is possible for hegemony to be a positive force. Gramsci recognised that hegemony is never complete because the alliances that made it possible in the first place were under constant threat of being replaced by others. In the context of masculinity and romantic comedies, John Alberti (2013b) suggests that such a reconfiguration is taking place. He points out, in line with David Shumway (2003), that in the romantic comedies of the 1970s, the common thread of gender-roles would be the male search for his own recognition of his need of intimacy while the female searches for autonomy. In contemporary romantic comedies, the marginalization of the female could be read as a triumph of the recognition of her autonomy. This would be too early of a call, as films like *Knocked Up* (2007) would be eager to remind us. Rather, the continued focus on this new project of masculinity highlights how problematic it has become. Intimacy as a discourse of relationships that gives primacy to a deep, constant self-disclosure is, as Lauren Berlant (1998, 2000, 2007, 2008) suggests, a discourse of and on the feminine. She suggests that ‘to rethink intimacy is to appraise how we have been and how we live and how we might imagine lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living.’ (2000, p. 6)

So, on the one hand, the incursion of intimacy signals the potential for more egalitarian relationships. On the other, it contains the destabilisation of the masculine by adding a feminine element to it. This double openness of intimacy requires men to learn and adapt scripts of self-disclosure and emotional attachment that have long been associated with femininity while recognising the irreducible character of those he's intimate with. No longer is it a certain *he* will get the girl. This contrasts with the Alpha male of classic romantic comedies, whose laconic character was part of his rugged charm and serve to mythologise the idea of fixed gender separation in the genre (Women talk, men do). In contemporary romantic comedies, the question of a woman's autonomy is sidestepped in many ways, though the films here discussed do provide female character with different degrees of such, and the problem has become that, as Berlant (2000) says, 'virtually no one knows how to do intimacy.' (p. 2) Romantic comedies in the 70s, 80s and 90s did not know either, but championed the idea that *as long as you communicated, somehow*, it would be possible to get to marriage or self-fulfilment. The films discussed here, I argue, portray some limits of communication, of intimacy. They do so by putting both actors in the 'in-don't-know' of the rules. The anxiety and instability that not knowing produces takes on the form of misogyny, homophobia, male anxiety and other ideologies of discrimination in bromances and beta-male comedies (See Alberti, 2013a, 2013b; Deleyto, 2003; Greven, 2011). Furthermore, women and their struggles continue to be marginalised in favour of showcasing male anxiety. However, in their flawed way, romantic comedies can also portray that the ambivalence and ambiguity of intimacy is a journey not just of women. Thus, while I recognise the gender asymmetry still pervading the genre of romantic comedies, representations of masculinities like that of Tom or the other male leads can be helpful to construct less toxic notions of masculinity and relationships.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

Using an audience-led textual analysis this thesis has explored the ideological discourses of romantic love, intimacy and relationships enacted through representations in North American independent cinema in the period of 2004-2014 through an audience-led textual analysis. I called upon three overarching ideas to guide the project: On the one hand, this thesis has loosely borrowed inspiration from Roland Barthes' (1990) *figures of love* to articulate the conceptual framework and the methodology. On the other hand, this thesis attempted to elucidate both continuities and changes in discourses of romantic love, focusing on the (re)production of hegemonic positions and interstices of contestation in areas such as gender, sexuality, social class, technology, intimacy and the body. Drawing inspiration from previous film audiences research (Austin, 2002; Banaji, 2006; Iglesias Prieto, 2004), the films discussed in this thesis were selected based on their central themes on screen as well as their cultural half-life off screen. The choice of themes was also informed and complicated by an extensive literature review on romantic love and cinema (see chapter 2), and refined via an initial pilot study. Finally, this thesis assumed there was no easy, uni-directional relationship of meaning-making from the films to the audiences (and back), thus necessitating a recursive approach that accounted for the potential 'messiness' of belief, interpretation, action and behaviour.

To articulate the exploration of my research problem, I divided it in three research questions. The main research question of this research project was concerned with how romantic aspirations, idea and behaviours in films are negotiated, articulated, contested and appropriated by the audiences for their own romantic identities (RQ3, See section 2.7 for the conceptualisation of romantic identity used in this thesis). The two sub-questions were interested in emphasising the affective level as well as two major points of a subject's intersectionality: gender and class. These were: RQ1: *What kinds of gender and class identities are identifiable through the representations of love in contemporary North American romantic films?* and RQ2: *How do the different affects that love scenes produce in audiences related to the audience members' experiences of social reality and conceptions of love and self?*

Having completed my analysis, here I examine how the guiding principles of the project influenced the conceptual framework and the methodology adopted. I consider how these two elements impacted and limited the results of the thesis. With these points in mind, I summarise the findings of the empirical chapters and draw some logical theoretical conclusions about the links between contemporary romantic films, class, gender, commoditization and technology. Finally, I end with a personal, and academic reflexion of what I hope to have achieved in this thesis, considering ways forward for future research.

8.2 Theory, methods and the personal

In chapter 2, I reviewed the existing literature of several disciplines and authors revolving around romantic love. I argued that I found, and still find, the Marxist feminist conceptualisation of romantic love the most relevant to the project. As I argued in chapter 2,

the starting point of the conceptualisation of romantic love here is the understanding that patriarchal heteromartial, couple romantic love is the hegemonic ideology of love —thus understanding ideology and hegemony from the point of Antonio Gramsci's work. This ideology contains a gendered and class division of roles, that has been constructed to privilege men's position subordinating and sub-valuing women, their emotions, care-giving, roles and demands. At the same time, the concept recognises the utopian, positive dimension that the pursuit of such romantic love holds for many women (and men). A feminist conceptualisation of love understands the ambivalence, potentially divergent, fragmentary and intersectional experience of this hegemonic romantic love and the counter-hegemonies that feminist and queer theories have pushed forward, theoretically and practically. (chapter 2, section 2.9)

How then, does this fit with researching love through its figures? I contend it fits rather well. To further highlight this, I will briefly use the other theoretical positions to discuss one of the figures of love I discussed in chapter 7: the happy ending. I argued that the burgeoning of an uncertain, ambiguous ending in some films and its normative reception from audiences speaks to the increased romantic *angst* in contemporary Western societies. From a biological-evolutionary point of view, where reproduction is viewed as the single

most salient end-goal of all interpersonal associations, this angst makes little or no sense. Amongst psychological approaches, with their preference for typologies of love, only Robert Sternberg's 'non-love' (see fig. 2, chapter 2) would come close to describing what I have explored in the first part of chapter 7. However, non-love is an *indifference to a relationship*, not the anxiety and uncertainty many people feel over what exactly it is that a relationship does. The Marxist approaches of Bauman (2003), Beck & Gernsheim (1995), Badiou (2009) and Hardt (2011) also have limited explanatory power, unless one settles for their markedly agapic, and male-centred conceptualisation of love that derides angst as a capitalist-induced fear of commitment to an 'Other.' For this figure of love, I used Anthony Giddens' concept of 'confluent love' while criticising it for making a too-neat distinction between the different discourses of love. This critique, in turn, is founded in long-standing feminist and queer critiques of the teleology of hetero-marital coupled love and its ideological hegemony. I also contextualised this in the literature of romance and films to position the argument. By adopting this position, I was able to go beyond treating films and participants' positions as capitalist dupes of narcissistic tendencies. Rather, as it was my focus throughout the thesis, I aimed to balance empathy and critique. So, on the one hand, I recognise the rationalisation of emotional bonds, and the prevalence of marriage as a hegemonic discursive element of romantic love. On the other, I emphasise that the normativity of angst that surrounds romantic love is one very much still riddled with the yearning of the stable embrace of love. In my own words, 'even if the discourse of marriage, romantic love and relationships is unavoidably linked to that of neoliberal economic logics, it has not (yet, at least) been completely formed or devoured by them.' (Chapter 7)

Unpacking further this example, and extrapolating to the rest of the figures analysed in this thesis, the use of this concept to break down film narratives has been advantageous on several grounds. As the work of Banaji (2006, 2007), Austin (2002), Barker (Barker & Austin, 2000; Barker & Brooks, 1998), Iglesias-Prieto (2004) demonstrates, *audiences do not read the film as a unified and ideologically totalising whole*. Rather, pleasure, ideology, realism and fantasy are articulated through different aspects of a subject's intersectionality in competing, contradictory and, at times, ambiguous ways. Foregrounding one sequence or element of a film over another involves the fragmentation of the narrative. In so doing, it

is possible to envision how different theoretical concerns, such as gender roles, class, and gender identities play out metonymically in these elements. Thus, choosing to base the study around fragments of the films as absorbed and reacted to by audiences also permits and eases the search for patterns and similarities in the discourses. However, this also means that other elements both in films and in a subject's intersectionality are overshadowed. This, of course, entails that any findings must be circumscribed and clearly delineate their limitations. This brings me to reflect on how the selection of all elements – the films, the participants, the excerpts, the research questions dealing with identity, affects, gender, and class – affected the research outcomes. The first and most striking substantive absence is that of race, which has partly to do with data loss sustained after fieldwork. Further, despite collaborating with some community centres focused on Afro-Caribbean, Asian, and Turkish people, my participant list was largely Caucasian. Further, although the circumstances today might be different given the commercial and critical success of *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), I struggled to get any interest in the black romance *Top Five* (Rock, 2014). I recognise that an over-emphasis on gender and class is not enough to account for this absence. Neither is it enough to call for future research to be more attentive, theoretically, methodologically and analytically, to this axis. It is also necessary, as I have attempted, in this thesis, to highlight racialized perspectives on the topics discussed, where race can be seen playing a crucial role in the articulation of positions vis-à-vis a specific figure of love. Another element this thesis has not dealt with is religion and its influence in the practice of romantic love, particularly given the religious-political conservative backlash against gender equality in many regions of the global south⁶⁴. A third element to which I would like to call attention for future research are rural areas. In the following paragraphs, I will outline other limitations of this thesis as well as further implications of the conceptual framework.

Refining and strengthening methods of textual analysis through audience research was one of my secondary goals in this research. As I mentioned in section 4.2.2, I drew preliminary discussion guides for the films before the group interviews. One of the

⁶⁴ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/20/world/asia/duterte-same-sex-marriage-philippines.html> , <http://larepublica.pe/impresasociedad/842614-un-intenso-debate-ideologia-de-genero-o-educacion-integral> , and <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/equidad-e-ideologia-de-genero-en-el-acuerdo-de-paz-34069>

earliest problems I encountered in this project was that the initial formalistic conceptual framework I adopted was an ill-fit for the real-life exchanges I was having with interview participants, and failed to account for their emotional, narrative, and personal investment in the films. The distance between my readings and theirs stemmed largely from the fact that I, like many textual analysts, was *overvaluing the role and symbolism of certain cinematic features*, taking them not necessarily for granted, but at least as ‘obvious’ to the assumed gaze (of all spectators). Of course, many audience participants are aware of symbolic elements in films and in their relationship with formal and technical characteristics. But I naively – or perhaps arrogantly, as many Film Studies scholars and textual analysts tend to do – assumed that this technical and formal knowledge would easily be translated and understood in terms of ideology, pleasure and realism. Had I stuck with my initial readings and compared them to the audiences’ with more weight given to mine as the analyst, the analysis could easily have devolved into a hierarchic diatribe about who’s ‘right and aware’ and who is an ‘ideological dupe’, or into banal commentary on the ideological regressiveness of contemporary romance. This would have been disastrous for a detailed piece of audience research in the 2010s; but it would also have shown up fault lines in textual analysis that many choose never to consider.

As I highlighted in section 4.6, taking my cue from the expertise and experience of audiences, however, I re-drew the discussion guides radically to account for the salience of certain narrative, emotional, and personal themes over others. In the case of all films, themes and subjects that hold contemporary relevance – like human-robot relationships in *Her* and abortion and women’s reproductive rights in *Blue Valentine* – were taken into account. After fieldwork, references to these two cases, taken as examples, were scarce, tangential, and vehemently expressed. I believe the group setting of the interview is not the right fit for most women to feel comfortable sharing their views about topics like abortion and women’s right to other participants and to myself, a man. Thus, elements, and sequences like this probably felt secondary to other topics more easily discussed in public. This is one disadvantage of group settings. Yet, as I have argued in section 4.3.2, given my condition as a man and the experiences and arguments of Parameswaran (2001), Madriz (2000) and Jackson (2013), a group setting was far more likely to attract participants to express their opinions to others and potentially feel less intimidated by

me. Thus, I recognise that the data produced in this way is distinctly socially constructed, presented and performed through identities that might differ from those expressed in a one on one interview. However, I believe the richness of the data validates the conceptual assumption (and methodological practice) of dealing with love as fully social.

Second, any qualitative research project that draws on one geographic area to produce data and knowledge, (the borough of Hackney, East London in this case), is susceptible to paying more attention to some subjects and neglecting others. Had I done my fieldwork somewhere else in London, where tech, IT, and start-up workers abound, it is likely that human-robot relationships would have arisen as more salient. One of the potential skews of this is an overrepresentation of a certain type of participant, something I tried to balance as much as possible by attempting to attract participants from different races, sexualities, professions, ages, class backgrounds, etc. Regardless, women's participation rates were higher than those of men. This would represent a major problem if this thesis had, at any point, assumed that the findings are generalizable and representative of social demographics. However, it does not; and rather views the subjectivities of the sampled audience as indicative of wider patterns in viewing and interpretation. The third, overarching point of consideration, is that choosing certain films, in this case independent films with more leeway in narrative terms than their big budget studio counterparts, also affects the figures of love discussed and *how* they are discussed.

In line with this, what other possible figures of love, pertinent to our contemporary socio-economic, politic and cultural juncture, has this project not examined at length? And, how appropriate are films as vehicles to discuss these? Two topics missing here are sexual violence and gender inequality in emotional labour and care-giving. Given recent films such as *The Salesman* (Farhadi, 2016), *Elle* (Verhoeven, 2016), *Room* (Abrahamson, 2015), *Spotlight* (McCarthy, 2015) and *Nocturnal Animals* (Ford, 2016) as well as actors Cassey Affleck's and Nate Parker's now publicised cases of sexual assault, I believe there is further exploration of nuanced and sensitive depictions of sexual violence to be done. To my reader, I provocatively ask: In the past five years, how many films have you watched that feature a complex character who is a single parent or a non-White gay

woman or both? I highlight these two topics out of many to signal that the topics discussed here are not exhaustive of romantic love, intimacy and relationships and neither are the films. Further, the positions expressed by my participants are also contingent, primarily, on geographical proximity and schedule availability. None of this invalidates the findings of this study, it merely points to necessary circumscription in order to make sense of what has been achieved and what are possible divergent or similar paths forward. With this in mind, I move to the summary of the findings of this thesis.

8.3 Summary of findings

In chapter 5, I engaged in an analysis of how technology was approached by men and women in their romantic pursuits. In this analysis, I argued that the online world, far from being a place full of new possibilities, reproduces many of the sexist, racist, and classist behaviours found elsewhere (Chappetta & Barth, 2016; Hall et al., 2010; Kaufmann, 2012; McGrath et al., 2016; Mclaran et al., 2005; Ong & Wang, 2015; Sweeney & Borden, 2009). I also highlighted two elements which have become important with the increased popularity of online dating applications: that of *the first meeting* and the *potential banding of control to women* who use these applications. The first point of this analysis, to which I will return in section 8.3.3, was brought up by participants who juxtaposed the ‘coldness’ of meeting someone online compared to the romanticism of meeting them offline. This juxtaposition is informed greatly by the figure of ‘love at first sight’ still prevalent in many romantic films. It is also fuelled by the mistrust or wariness some of my participants appeared to have about the *online* as a novel of meeting one’s romantic partner. Again, this attitude might have been different had my participants been gathered from a different context. Yet, I have also argued for the potential strengthening of women’s control of romantic identities, events and pace in online dating given the possibilities of becoming active pursuers of their romantic engagements. Moreover, because the landscape of online dating is still fraught with incredibly sexist attitudes, many women develop tactics to navigate this hostile environment. These tactics range from time-management to visual cues to help them decide who to talk to and who to ignore. One of the main reasons these tactics are developed, I demonstrated, is because

female sexuality is still highly surveilled, controlled and censored. Through an audience-led textual analysis of a sequence in *Her* —where Samantha tells Theodore she has fallen in love with 641 other people, section 5.5— I reflected on the practice of hooking up and its implications for demands made with regards to female chastity. Contrary to what one might expect, gender and age played no role in who espoused progressive or retrograde positions on women's sexuality and right to hook up. Significantly, while hooking up is a subject that the majority of participants link to online dating, recent films that touch on this topic, independent of establishing such a link, do not attempt to demonize or berate women's sexuality. Further, I highlighted the case of Esther in *Don Jon*, who was praised for her sexuality and the film's open depiction of it. Thus, using the concept of romantic affordances, I have argued that while the representations of female sexuality in romantic films contain, in the context of independent North American cinema, attempt representation in progressive ways, this progressive representation is not always received and articulated positively (or in liberal ways) by the audiences of these films. The frequent negative reception was related to two elements this project could not, for reasons already explained, delve deeper into: religion and race. It remains to be seen how this debate plays out in different contexts, cinematically and sample wise. This leads me to the conclusion that the siloed ideological attitudes and values within communities regarding romance, femininity and sexuality require sustained challenge alongside those coming from (mainstream or alternative) filmic and other media representation.

8.3.1 *Commoditization of love and self*

When analysing online dating, I have drawn upon literature that connects this phenomenon to a commoditization of love and the self. In online dating, as Dröge and Voirol (2011) suggest

By the way they present the profiles of potential partners in exactly the same manner as items on eBay, Amazon or other shopping sites, with their complex search forms that allow to define the own preferences in mate selection with a precision unknown before, with the tools they offer to evaluate one's own market value and to enhance this value if possible —with all these elements borrowed from modern forms of consumerism and the economic sphere, they suggest a subject position which is very close to what we have outlined above as the main characteristics of a calculating subject in the realm of the market. It is the position of an economic agent who compares offers on a level of equivalence and tries to

maximize his own interests. At the same time, it is the position of a self-marketing ‘supplier’ in a very competitive “economy of attention”.” (346)

This form of commoditized self on offer and being ‘browsed’ is frowned upon because it is seen to be embedded in neoliberal economic and cultural logics. Supposedly, following the long-standing criticism of love as proposed by Plato—section 2.4.1, this involves the love of certain features and not of the person as a ‘whole,’ heightened by the fact that in online dating, according to authors such as Zygmunt Bauman (2003), discarding and choosing new lovers becomes the ‘norm,’ instead of building stable, deep relationships with *one* whole Other. This is a position that easily conflates the contemporary’s romantic landscape with an assumed narcissistic, object-loving tendency, and obviates the shifts in economic, professional, personal and economic conditions of romantic love, intimacy, and relationships in the past few decades. As Lauren Berlant (2012b) argues ‘[t]he reduction of life’s legitimate possibility to one plot is the source of romantic love’s terrorizing, coercive, shaming, manipulative, or just diminishing effects – on the imagination as well as on practice’ (p. 87). I have demonstrated that for many young people in contemporary East London, engaging in relationships is at odds with their economic survival and professional development; this makes the idea of a stable relationship, and its consumerist corollaries like a suburban house, car and children, not just unattainable but even undesirable. The conditions, attitudes and behaviours towards online dating are perhaps not identical across London let alone the rest of the England, Europe and the world, given that East London primarily attracts young people into the arts, media and cultural industries while also containing working class whites and diasporas from the Caribbean, the Middle East and South East Asia. Thus, economic conditions can be seen to inflect both outcomes and desires significantly, even as certain films pose certain outcomes as desirable. At the same time, I recognise that this change has included, as Anthony Giddens (1992) and others argue (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Berlant, 2001; Johnson, 2012; Wilkinson & Bell, 2012), increased periods of sexual, sensuous and personal experimentation that are and should be understood as *modalities* of love. Crucially, this does not mean, despite the encroachment of economic rationality and neoliberal logics on romantic love, that the yearning and search for love and ‘The One’

has diminished compared to nostalgia-laden past decades-, rather, there is an increased recognition of its difficulty.

8.3.2 *Classed love*

In chapter 6, selecting two crucial sequences in the films *Blue Valentine* and *Once*, this thesis continued the analysis of this commoditization of romance in its representations and reception, focusing on the relationship between social class and romantic love. The first sequence is the studio rental in *Once*. In this sequence, the Girl helps the Guy secure a weekend in a music studio to record a demo, paying £2,000 for it. In addition, she helps him build a band and practice his compositions. I argued, in line with Banaji's findings (2006), that working-class audiences' responses to this sequence, as in the case of *Blue Valentine*, are informed first by their classed subjectivity before their gendered or romantic one. In so doing, the possibilities of emotional realism and pleasure are, at that moment, negatively affected and limited by class knowledge, which breaks the possibility for suspension of disbelief. Further, in this sequence, the platonic and idealistic romance of the film undermines the grim negative affects of an intersectional experience of love: to be poor in contemporary London, or Dublin is to eschew even the possibility of grand romantic gestures such as that made by Girl.

Second, I focused on the motel getaway sequence in *Blue Valentine*. In this film, the main characters, Dean and Cindy, are embodiments of two classed discourses of love: one of youthful, working-class romantic love and the other of pragmatic, middle-class, adult intimacy. I argued that the sequence of the motel getaway brings to the fore the tension between economic and emotional labour in contemporary relationships. This is largely because the discourse of romantic love is at odds with the dialogic, aspirational, and self-disclosing practices of contemporary discourses of intimacy. This tension is part of the larger cultural competences subjects require in order to act romantically *appropriately* (See Illouz, 1997, 2012). In the context of both *Blue Valentine* and its audiences, the main romantic practice is that of dating, which follows one overarching rule: that of the liminoid moment. In other words, a romantic act is felt and considered as such as long as it separates the lovers from their everyday and from their material conditions. Because the motel getaway is clearly a working-class romantic proposal that fails to achieve such

distancing and in fact plunges Cindy and Dean deeper into their class antagonism, audiences' responses to this sequence are, I argue, a class-informed. These responses position them vis-à-vis the perceived *lack of appropriateness* of the motel getaway where their own romantic cultural competences are the main axis from which they read Dean's working-class romanticism, emotionally and economically. This works both amongst audiences, and in the represented world of the film, to dispel the idea that cross-class romantic love conquers all. Having a romantic partner from the working classes is, in this case, almost as much of a barrier to long-term love as having a partner who drinks or is unfaithful.

8.3.3 *Teleology of romance?*

The third, and main, research question of this project, concerned with audiences' relationship with representations for their own personal agenda, dealt with the reasons why people still watch romantic films. In this thesis, I have argued that North American romantic films have undergone two major narrative and ideological shifts. One of the main shifts this thesis identified is a concern with the representation of masculinities. The second, explored in-depth in chapter 7, is the increased popularity of the ambiguous/unhappy ending. This, I argued, is closely related to a suffused, normative anxiety over the teleology of romantic love, intimacy and relationships and the social and individual promises they used to hold. As I mentioned above, these cannot be disconnected from the economic and cultural effects of neoliberal policies and logics. Yet it is important to note that the effects these have had in East London and on its inhabitants are most likely not identical to those in Barcelona, or Mumbai. As I have mentioned in chapter 5, attitudes towards marriage have been steadily changing in Britain⁶⁵, and for many young people, relationships are at odds with their economic survival, and professional development. Further, I have highlighted that, compared to the nervous romances of the 1970s where marriage and self-fulfilment still held a pivotal role in maintaining the utopian dimension of romance, contemporary North American romantic narratives have, in some cases, ditched the end goal of marriage. Rather, the reality effect of these narratives lies in their meandering exploration of *romantic anxiety*

⁶⁵ <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/marriage-matters.aspx>

itself, sometimes leading even to a withholding of any concrete promise of long-term stability or resolution. This anxiety is rooted in a deep questioning of what it is that relationships offer. I demonstrated this in chapter 7, analysing the endings of some of the most successful North American romantic films of the past years, including *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and highlighting the ‘extreme’ case of *Blue Valentine*. The latter’s ending and the audiences’ reception and articulation of it speak to the contrast between the erstwhile ‘crisis of marriage’ argued to have fuelled the romances of the 1970s and 80s to the diminished expectations and connections between romantic love and marriage in the twenty-first century, insofar as East London is concerned. Whether this is tenable in more progressive or conservative areas of England and elsewhere, particularly in the global south, is something that remains to be explored.

This is tempered by wildly successful utopian platonic romantic films such as *Once* and in a film like *(500) Days of Summer*, where both the anxiety and the utopia coexist. These two films, though containing reactionary endings, maintain the possibility of the utopian and potentially transgressive characteristics of love in late capitalist societies. This thesis argues that these two contrasting narrative themes of utopia and transgression constitute the main, though clearly not the only, reasons why audiences still watch North American romantic films. Further, while the settings have changed, imaginative utopia and ideological transgression are constitutive elements of the success of contemporary romantic films, which can be traced back as far as a tale like *Romeo and Juliet*.

Importantly, the emotional realism and the verisimilar in the films —expressed through the recognition of the contingency and frailty of romantic love— examined in this thesis coexist with the genre’s ultimate affirmation of romantic love. This, however, as this thesis has argued in all chapters, is still confined to heteronormative-coupled romantic love within circumscribed class and racial boundaries, with little to no envisioning of other modalities of love or society.

8.3.4 Masculinities

As I mentioned above, in the past years, North American romantic films as a genre have become increasingly (pre)occupied with the question: what role do men play in relationships – as opposed, I suggest, to a question that vexed a whole genre of melodramas in the 1950s – what role can and do women and relationships play in changing or taming masculinity? – (Greven, 2011; Alberti 2013a, 2013b). Early in the 2000s Deleyto (2003) identified that *friendship* had become a possible alternative to the heterosexual romantic couple, suggesting this was to do with the loss of vitality of heterosexual desire. Following this, two responses to this have been the subgenre of ‘bromances,’ and ‘beta male comedies’ pioneered in Hollywood by Judd Apatow with films like *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) and *Superbad* (2007). In the bromance, the heterosexual couple and their journey are replaced by a male couple that share an ‘homo-confused’ bond that mixes homophilia, homophobia, misogyny, and the male’s journey to recover his *maleness* in order to enter a viable heterosexual relationship. The ‘beta male comedies’ emphasise the male’s journey towards a hegemonic masculinity, dealing on the way with the dangerous femininity, and homo-eroticism that melodramatises him and threatens his sexuality. In these subgenres, women tend to be marginalised, and in a sense, masculinised and misogynised.

In this context of masculinity in crisis, I explored the appeal for audiences of *(500) Days of Summer* (2009), focusing on its portrayal of masculinity. In chapter 7, I argued that despite the film’s reactionary ending and the male-centred approach to the narrative, Summer’s agency was praised by some participants, with others denouncing her ending as a wife, which they viewed as a mismatch with the seemingly ambiguous future foreshadowed early in the film. The character of Tom, who starts as an idealistic romantic and becomes cynical after his break-up, recovers his feminised (and classed) masculinity thanks to a final meeting with Summer. I have argued that this journey and the representation of Tom’s masculinity highlights two crucial differences to other feminised masculinities: First, Tom’s feminised persona, which I linked to Connell’s (2006) concept of ‘heterosexual sensitivity,’ is one that highlights that the demands of intimacy – self-interrogation, self-disclosure, and emotional communication – are no longer made on women alone, but also apply to men, at least in urban metropolises in the contemporary West. This, in turn, reinforces the anxiety, frailty and uncertainty of contemporary

romances I mentioned in the section above, because in its recognition of the limits of intimacy, male heterosexual desire is no longer assured as sufficient to ensure romantic success. Thus, I have argued that this specific representation of a feminised masculinity attempts to compete for a hegemonic position of masculinity but that, in contrast to previous versions of feminised masculinity, it is not deployed at the expense of female characters and woman per se (See Rowe, 1995). This is important because, as Connell (2006) and a romantic film like *The Ugly Truth* (2009) suggest, alongside this sensitivity, there is also an ideological and discursive backlash against feminised masculinities, and an expressed longing for hyper-masculine virile masculinities.

8.4 Achievements and ways forward

In this thesis, I have designed, conducted and analysed an audience-led textual analysis of five contemporary North American romantic films through group and individual interviews in the working-class but recently gentrified borough of Hackney, London. By choosing films which were critically and popularly acclaimed, I sought to explore not just the reasons for their success, but also what precisely their resonance is with the audiences' romantic identities, affects and experiences. In order to nuance my analysis, I tried to diversify the sample of those interviewed as much as possible, though as expected, the majority of participants were women. Through discourse analysis, I highlighted patterns, continuities and changes in both representation and reception of romantic love narratives. Significantly, one of the ways forward to complement this research is to balance, contrast and compare how the findings presented herein differ from those of films produced in different socio-political and cultural contexts, cinematographically, geopolitically and romantically, and to compare the readings and values of audiences that articulate their romantic identities alongside them. Another way forward would be to explore how audiences elsewhere – in rural areas, outside the UK, and outside Europe, respond to the kinds of North American cinematic representations of romantic love that I have captured in this thesis.

I sought to emphasise the importance of the socio-economic and cultural contexts of romantic love in which these films were made and in which audiences' read and

articulated their responses. One of the implications of this is the necessity to mitigate critiques of the apparently hegemonic commoditization of romantic love and self with an understanding that people, especially younger people, navigate a romantic, economic and social environment where the promises of romantic love continuously erode and are questioned on many levels. Part of this questioning involves a widening of the modalities of love. This thesis's contribution in this regard has been to further elucidate how the ideological hegemony of hetero-marital coupled romantic love is both contested and reproduced in cinematic representations and through audiences' readings. In this push and pull, I have emphasised the progressive possibilities envisioned in anglophone popular cinema while recognising that in many regards it is still a highly conservative medium. It is in this recognition that one of the most intriguing possible ways forward opens up. Plenty of literature attests to the fact that in order to speak about romantic love, intimacy and relationships cinema is not necessary. However, as the analyses in thesis demonstrate, and as I argue, cinema provides a powerful medium through which to articulate rich discussions of different figures of love and their ideological baggage. Thus, in further research about romantic love and in educational or vocational discussions of passion, romance, relationships and sexuality, I would strongly suggest using people's responses and positionings vis-à-vis sequences alongside sequences from popular, independent, and arthouse films outside the North American circuit of production and reception, that openly contest the arbitrariness of monogamy, the hierarchies of love, and other topics.

Further, by pursuing an empirical analysis of ideologies and discourses of romantic love and its main medium of representation, cinema, I have shown that if one is to pursue any form of intellectual and emotional engagement with love, it is of paramount importance to go beyond arm-chair analysis and to engage with the ways in which people practice, feel, and think about it. As I accrued more and more perspectives on love, intimacy and relationships, it became clearer to me that the allure of positions – both lay and scholarly – that berate contemporary romantic love (and surreptitiously champion marriage as *the* way of love) lies in their absence of practical relevance or context. Perhaps not coincidentally, most of these treatises have been written by men. One, written by Laura Kipniss (2003), stands out in her recognition of its provocative perspective to encourage

empirical and impassioned research to balance hers. It's far too easy to believe 'Others' are too confounded by the neoliberal, competitive and measure-driven economic and cultural logics of late-stage capitalism, to 'truly' experience love. What's unbelievably hard is to continue believing in something that requires so much rethinking, reconsideration, and reflecting on its promises so that its allure is kept alive while its coercive powers wane.

REFERENCES

- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). Changing Audiences, Changing Paradigms of Research. In *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (pp. 3–37). London: Sage.
- Abrahamson, L. (2015). *Room*. Canada, Ireland, United Kingdom: A24.

- Abu-Assad, H. (2013). *Omar*. Palestine.
- Adams, P. C. (2005). *The Boundless Self: Communication In Physical And Virtual Spaces*. New York: Syracuse University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ggLvojAKc_kC&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=richard+sennett+love&source=bl&ots=Np6s3EcuFq&sig=5zRm7nkETWunjnP BuwojdpONaU0&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj5nt2E_ebPAhWpKMAKHUQ2CjUQ6AEIRzAG#v=onepage&q=richard sennett love&f=false
- Adorno, T. W. (1976). *Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Adorno, T. W., & Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. (E. Jephcott, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Adorno, T. W., & Rabinbach, A. (1975). Culture Industry Reconsidered. *New German Critique*, 6(Autumn), 12–19.
- Agresti, A. (2006). *The Lake House*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Akerman, C. (1991). *Night and Day*. France.
- Alasuutari, P. (Ed.). (1999). *Rethinking the media audience : the new agenda*. London: SAGE.
- Alasuutari, P., Bickman, L., & Brannen, J. (2008). *The SAGE handbook of social research methods*. SAGE.
- Alberti, J. (2013a). “I Love You, Man”: Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 30, 159–172.
- Alberti, J. (2013b). *Masculinity in the contemporary romantic comedy : gender as genre*. New York: Routledge.
- Allen, K. R., & Walker, A. J. (1992). Attentive Love: A Feminist Perspective on the Caregiving of Adult Daughters. *Family Relations*, 41(3), 284–289. <http://doi.org/10.2307/585192>
- Allen, R. (1995). *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Allen, R. C. (1990). From exhibition to reception: reflections on the audience in film history. *Screen*, 31(4), 347–356. <http://doi.org/10.1093/screen/31.4.347>

- Allen, W. (1977). *Annie Hall*. USA: United Artists.
- Allen, W. (2005). *Match Point*. United Kingdom, Luxembourg: Icon Productions.
- Allen, W. (2008). *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*. Spain, United States: Mediapro.
- Althusser, L. (1969). *For Marx*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Althusser, L. (1972). *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Althusser, L., & Balibar, E. (1971). *Reading Capital*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Althusser, L., & Matheron, F. (1997). *The spectre of Hegel : early writings*. London; New York: Verso.
- Altman, R. (1999). *Film/Genre*. London: BFI Publishing.
- Anapol, D. (2012). *Polyamory in the 21st century : love and intimacy with multiple partners*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Anaz, N. (2014). Geopolitics of film: Surveying audience reception of a Turkish film, Valley of the Wolves: Palestine. *Participations*, 11(1), 5–30.
- Anderson, J. (1998). *The reality of illusion : an ecological approach to cognitive film theory*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas : soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. London: Methuen.
- Ang, I. (1990). *Desperately seeking the audience*. London: Routledge.
- Ang, I. (2007). Television Fictions Around the World: Melodrama and Irony in Global Perspective Ien. *Critical Studies in Television*, 2(2), 18–30.
- Apatow, J. (2005). *The 40-Year Old Virgin*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Apatow, J. (2007). *Knocked Up*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Aran-Ramspott, S., Medina-Bravo, P., & Rodrigo-Alsina, M. (2015). Exploring the Spanish youth audience's interpretation of loving relationships. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(6), 813–833. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715577243>
- Arksey, H., & Knight, P. T. (1999). *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*. *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209335>
- Aron, A., Fisher, H., Mashek, D. J., Strong, G., Li, H., & Brown, L. L. (2005). Reward, Motivation, and Emotion Systems Associated With Early-Stage Intense Romantic

- Love. *Journal of Neurophysiology*, 94, 327–337. <http://doi.org/10.1152/jn.00838.2004>
- Ateşman, Ö. Ö. (2015). The Politicisation and “Occupy”sation of the Istanbul Film Festival Audience. *Participations*, 12(1), 679–702.
- Atkinson, P. (2005). Qualitative Research—Unity and Diversity. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6(3).
- Atkinson, P., & Silverman, D. (1997). Kundera’s Immortality: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 304–325. <http://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300304>
- Aumont, J. (1992). *Aesthetics of Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Austin, T. (2002). *Hollywood, hype and audiences : selling and watching popular film in the 1990s*. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press.
- Aveyard, K. (2012). Observation, mediation and intervention: An account of methodological fusion in the study of rural cinema audiences in Australia. *Participations*, 9(2), 648–63.
- Badiou, A. (2009). *In praise of love*. Paris: Serpent’s Tail.
- Bailey, K. D. (1994). *Methods of social research*. (4th ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world*. (M. M. Bakhtin, Ed.). Bloomington Ind.: Indiana University Press.
- Banaji, S. (2002). Private lives and public spaces: the precarious pleasures of gender discourse in Raja Hindustani. *Women: A Cultural Review*, 13(2), 179–94. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09574040210148988>
- Banaji, S. (2006). *Reading “Bollywood” the young audience and Hindi films*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Banaji, S. (2007). Fascist imaginaries and clandestine critiques: young Hindi film viewers respond to violence, xenophobia and love in cross- border romances Book section. In M. Bharat & N. Kumar (Eds.), *Filming the line of control: the Indo–Pak relationship through the cinematic lens* (pp. 157–78). Oxford: Routledge.
- Barbour, R. (2014). Quality of Data Analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis2* (pp. 496–509). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.
- Barbour, R. S. (2007). *Doing focus groups*. London: Sage Publications.
- Barker, M. (2005). This is my partner, and this is my... partner’s partner: Constructing a

- polyamorous identity in a monogamous world. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18(1), 75–88. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10720530590523107>
- Barker, M. (2006). I Have Seen the Future and It Is Not Here Yet ...; or, On Being Ambitious for Audience Research. *The Communication Review*, 9(2), 123–141. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10714420600663310>
- Barker, M., & Austin, T. (2000). *From Antz to Titanic: Reinventing film analysis*. London: Pluto Press.
- Barker, M., & Brooks, K. (1998). *Knowing audiences : Judge Dredd, its friends, fans and foes*. Luton: University of Luton Press.
- Barker, M. J. (1989). *Comics: Ideology, Power and the Critics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Barker, M. J. (2005). The Lord of the Rings and “Identification”: A Critical Encounter. *European Journal of Communication*, 20(3), 353–378. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0267323105055262>
- Barret-Ducrocq, F. (1991). *Love in the time of Victoria : sexuality, class and gender in nineteenth-century London*. London: Verso.
- Barthes, R. (1974). *S/Z*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Barthes, R. (1977). Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives. In S. Heath (Ed.), (pp. 79–125). London: Fontana.
- Barthes, R. (1990). *A lover's discourse : fragments*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Baudry, J.-L. (1978). *L'Effet cinéma*. Paris: Albatros.
- Baudry, J.-L. (1985). Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus. In B. Nichols (Ed.), (pp. 531–542). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2003). *Liquid love : on the frailty of human bonds*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA USA: Polity Press ; Distributed in the USA by Blackwell Pub.
- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Identity*. Oxford: Polity. Retrieved from <https://catalogue.lse.ac.uk/Record/1034338>
- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Consuming life*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Retrieved from [/Users/Ben/Library/Application Support/Zotero/Profiles/jcwn2nlf.default/zotero/storage/Z7MH24G4/1112595.html](#)

- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society : towards a new modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995). *The normal chaos of love*. Cambridge, UK; Cambridge, MA, USA: Polity Press ; Blackwell.
- Bell, D., & Binnie, J. (2000). *The Sexual Citizen: queer politics and beyond*. Malden Mass: Polity Press.
- Ben-Ze'ev, A., & Goussinsky, R. (2008). *In the name of love : romantic ideology and its victims*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beoku-Betts, J. (1994). When black is not enough: Doing field research among Gullah women. *NWSA Journal*, 6, 413–33.
- Berger, P. L. (1974). Modern Identity: Crisis and Continuity. In W. Dillon (Ed.), *The Cultural Drama: Modern Identities and Social Ferment*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xxQJQ7vcZV4C&pg=PA9&lpg=PA9&dq=Modern+identity:+Crisis+and+Continuity+Peter+L.+Berger&source=bl&ots=6a6MJfE8NZ&sig=w259FxKuxxpPhFzq657vo4llWVE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjksIGxhNvRAhWVOsAKHZnxBmcQ6AEIJzAB#v=onepage&q=Modern%25>
- Berlant, L. G. (1997). The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship. In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (pp. 1–221). <http://doi.org/10.2307/2927393>
- Berlant, L. G. (1998). Intimacy: A Special Issue. *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2), 281–288. <http://doi.org/10.1086/448875>
- Berlant, L. G. (2000). *Intimacy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Berlant, L. G. (2001). Love: A Queer Feeling. In T. Dean & C. Lane (Eds.), *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis* (pp. 431–452). Chicago & London: Chicago University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-P_MrTEZOgUC&pg=PA448&lpg=PA448&dq=Love+approximates+a+space+to+which+people+can+return,+becoming+as+different+as+they+can+be+from+themselves+without+being+traumatically+shattered;+it+is+a+scene+of+optimism+for+change,+
- Berlant, L. G. (2007). Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in La Promesse and Roset...: EBSCOhost. *Public Culture*, 19(2), 273–301. Retrieved from

- <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=143ab6d0-5f03-4726-a98f-7bf5a3f171e3%40sessionmgr102&vid=1&hid=130>
- Berlant, L. G. (2008). *The female complaint : the unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L. G. (2011). A properly political concept of love: Three approaches in ten pages. *Cultural Anthropology*, 26(4), 683–691.
- Berlant, L. G. (2012a). *Desire/love*. Brooklyn New York: Dead Letter Office, BABEL Working Group an imprint of Punctum Books.
- Berlant, L. G. (2012b). *Desire/love*. New York: Dead Letter Office, BABEL Working Group an imprint of Punctum Books.
- Berscheid, E. (1988). Some comments on love's anatomy: Or, whatever happened to old-fashioned lust? In R. Sternberg & M. L. Barnes (Eds.), *The psychology of love* (pp. 359–374). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Berscheid, E. (1999). The greening of relationship science. *The American Psychologist*, 54(4), 260–266. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.4.260>
- Berscheid, E. (2002). Searching for the Meaning of “Love.” In R. Sternberg & K. Weis (Eds.), *The new psychology of love* (pp. 171–183). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Berscheid, E., & Regan, P. C. (2005). *The psychology of interpersonal relationships*. New York: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Berscheid, E., & Walster, E. (1974). A little bit about love. In T. L. Huston (Ed.), *Foundations of Interpersonal attraction* (pp. 355–381). New York: Academic Press.
- Bertolli Filho, C. (2015). Cine Real: ethnography of a movie theater for workers. *Revista Famecos*, 22(3), 110–128. <http://doi.org/10.15448/1980-3729.2015.3.19301>
- Bertrand, I., & Hughes, P. (2005). *Media research methods: audiences, institutions, texts*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Biltrey, D., Lotze, K., & Meers, P. (2012). Triangulation in historical audience research: Reflections and experiences from a multimethodological research project on cinema audiences in Flanders. *Participations*, 9(2), 690–715.
- Biltrey, D., Maltby, R., & Meers, P. (Eds.). (2011). *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: new perspectives on European cinema history*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Blomkamp, N. (2009). *District 9*. New Zealand, South Africa, United States: TriStar

Pictures.

- Blood, S. K. (2005). *Body work : the social construction of women's body image*. New York: Routledge.
- Bordwell, D. (1986). *Narration in the fiction film*. London: Routledge. Retrieved from http://librarysearch.lse.ac.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=44LSE_ALMA_DS21140638010002021&indx=4&recIds=44LSE_ALMA_DS21140638010002021&recIdxs=3&elementId=3&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrVers
- Bordwell, D. (1989). *Making meaning : inference and rhetoric in the interpretation of cinema*. Cambridge Mass. London : Harvard University Press,.
- Bordwell, D., & Carroll, N. (1996). *Post-theory : reconstructing film studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bordwell, D., Staiger, J., & Thompson, K. (1985). *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2010). *Film Art: An Introduction* (9th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Bore, I.-L. K., & Hickman, J. (2013). Continuing The West Wing in 140 characters or less: Improvised simulation on Twitter. *Journal of Fandom Studies*, 1(2), 219–238. http://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.1.2.219_1
- Bourdieu, P. (1984a). *Distinction : a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. Retrieved from <https://catalogue.lse.ac.uk/Record/76265>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984b). *Distinction : a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. Retrieved from /Users/Ben/Library/Application Support/Zotero/Profiles/jcwn2nlf.default/zotero/storage/97824T6T/76265.html
- Bourdieu, P. (1984c). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010). *El sentido social del gusto: elementos para una sociología de la cultura*. Buenos Aires: Siglo veintiuno editores.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss Vol. 1. Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: anxiety and anger*. London: Hogarth Press: Institute of Psycho-analysis.

- Bowlby, J. (1981). *Attachment and loss. Vol. 3. Loss : sadness and depression*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Boyle, K. (2014). Gender, comedy and reviewing culture on the Internet Movie Database. *Participations*, 11(1), 31–49.
- Bradby, B. (2013). Our affair with Mila Kunis: A group ethnography of cinema-going and the “male gaze.” *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 10(1), 3–35.
- Bradshaw, C., Kahn, A. S., & Saville, B. (2010). To Hook Up or Date: Which Gender Benefits? *Sex Roles*, 62, 661–69. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b9d1487d-8358-4a9a-9e20-63271dd5fadb%40sessionmgr4010&vid=1&hid=4112>
- Bridges, J. C. (2012). *The illusion of intimacy: problems in the world of online dating*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Brooke, S. (2006). Bodies, Sexuality and the “Modernization” of the British Working Classes, 1920s to 1960s. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 69(1), 104–122. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547906000068>
- Brooks, P. (1995). *The melodramatic imagination : Balzac, Henry James, melodrama, and the mode of excess*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Brooks, P. (1996). *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Brown, M. E. (1994). *Soap Opera and Women’s Talk*. London: Sage.
- Bryson, V. (2014). Time to love. In A. Jónasdóttir & A. Fergusson (Eds.), *Love: A question for feminism in the 21st century* (pp. 113–126). New York: Routledge.
- Buss, D. M. (1988). Love acts: the evolutionary biology of love. In R. Sternberg & M. L. Barnes (Eds.), *The psychology of love* (pp. 100–117). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Buss, D. M. (2000). *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Sex*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Buss, D. M. (2002). The evolution of love. In R. Sternberg & K. Weis (Eds.), *The new psychology of love* (pp. 65–86). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Buss, D. M. (2006). The evolution of love. In *The new psychology of love* (pp. 65–86). <http://doi.org/10.1037/019904>

- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter : on the discursive limits of "sex."* New York: Routledge.
- Calogero, R. M., Boroughs, M., & Thompson, J. K. (2007). The impact of Western beauty ideals on the lives of women and men: A sociocultural perspective. In V. Swami & A. Furnham (Eds.), *Body beautiful: Evolutionary and sociocultural perspectives* (pp. 259–298). Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- http://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596887_13
- Cameron, J. (1997). *Titanic*. United States: 20th Century Fox.
- Campbell, C. (1987). *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Campion, J. (2009). *Bright Star*. Australia, France, United Kingdom: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Capodilupo, C. M., & Kim, S. (2014). Gender and race matter: The importance of considering intersections in Black Women's Body Image. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 61(1), 37–49. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=b7850a57-32f8-46f3-a6da-2befb4027730%40sessionmgr120&hid=125>
- Carney, J. (2006). *Once*.
- Carney, J. (2007). *Once (2007)*. Icon Film Distribution. Retrieved from <http://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Once#tab=summary>
- Carney, J. (2013). *Begin Again*. United States: The Weinstein Company.
- Carr, D. (2005). Contexts, gaming pleasures, and gendered preferences. *Simulation & Gaming*, 36(4), 464–82.
- Carroll, N. (1996). *Theorizing the Moving Image*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Carroll, N. (2003). *Engaging the moving image*. London: Yale University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nps8x>
- Cavell, S. (1981). *Pursuits of happiness: the Hollywood comedy of remarriage*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Certeau, M. de. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chappetta, K. C., & Barth, J. M. (2016). How gender role stereotypes affect attraction in an online dating scenario. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 63, 738–746.

- <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.06.006>
- Chaudhuri, S. (2006). *Feminist film theorists : Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Chekhov, A. (2010). El Beso. In *Cuentos imprescindibles* (pp. 91–111). Barcelona: DeBolsillo.
- Chisholm, J. (1999). *Death, Hope and Sex: Steps to and Evolutionary Ecology of Mind and Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cho, A., & Lee, J. H. (2013). Body dissatisfaction levels and gender differences in attentional biases toward idealized bodies. *Body Image*, 10(1), 95–102.
<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2012.09.005>
- Christensen, A.-D., & Jensen, S. Q. (2014). Combining hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality. *NORMA: Nordic Journal For Masculinity Studies*, 9(1), 60–75.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2014.892289>
- Cianfrance, D. (2010). *Blue Valentine*. United States: The Weinstein Company.
- Clare, S. D. (2013). (Homo)normativity's romance: happiness and indigestion in Andrew Haigh's Weekend. *Continuum*, 27(6), 785–798.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2013.794197>
- Cochrane, J. (2011). 6 Years of Alcohol: An Allegory of a Nation? *Participations*, 8(2), 308–326.
- Condon, B. (2006). *Dreamgirls*. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Connell, R. W. (1998). R. W. Connell's "Masculinities": Reply. *Gender and Society*, 12(4), 474–477. Retrieved from
http://www.jstor.org.gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/stable/190181?seq=3#page_scan_tab_contents
- Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Connell, R. W. (2006). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Coppola, F. F. (1992). *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Couch, D., Liamputtong, P., & Pitts, M. (2011). Online Daters and the Use of Technology for Surveillance and Risk Management Online Daters and the Use of Technology for Surveillance and Risk Management Introduction (PDF Download Available). *Australian Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society*, 9(2), 116–134. Retrieved from

- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266439694_Online_Daters_and_the_Use_of_Technology_for_Surveillance_and_Risk_Management_Online_Daters_and_the_Use_of_Technology_for_Surveillance_and_Risk_Management_Introduction
- Couldry, N. (2010). Theorising Media as Practice. In B. Bräuchler & J. Postill (Eds.), *Theorising Media and Practice* (pp. 35–54). Oxford: Berghahn.
- Courtois, A., & O’Keefe, T. (2015). Precarity in the ivory cage: Neoliberalism and casualisation of work in the Irish higher education sector. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 13(1), 43–66.
- Cowie, E. (1997). *Representing the woman : cinema and psychoanalysis*. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press.
- Crowe, C. (1989). *Say Anything*. United States: 20th Century Fox.
- Crowe, C. (2005). *Elizabethtown*. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Currie, G. (1995). *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Curti, L. (1998). *female stories, female bodies: narrative, identity, and representation*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- Cutler, R. J. (2014). *If I stay*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Dainton, M., & Zelley, E. D. (2015). *Applying communication theory for professional life : a practical introduction* (3rd ed.). New York: SAGE. Retrieved from <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/applying-communication-theory-for-professional-life/book238885>
- Davis, C., & Michelle, C. (2011). Q methodology in audience research: Bridging the qualitative/quantitative “divide.” *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 8(2), 559–593.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1972). *The second sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (2007). *Researching communications : a practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- De Lauretis, T. (1986). *Feminist studies, critical studies*. Indiana University Press.
- De Lauretis, T. (1994). *The practice of love : lesbian sexuality and perverse desire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- De Rougemont, D. (1983). *Love in the Western World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

- Press.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (1998). *De la mano de Alicia. Lo Social y lo político en la postmodernidad*. Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre y Universidad de los Andes.
- Del Río, E. (2008). *Deleuze and the cinemas of performance : powers of affection*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/124434858/Elena-del-Rio-Deleuze-and-the-Cinemas-of-Performance-Powers-of-AffectionDeleuze-and-Cinemas>
- Deleuze, G. (1986). *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. London: The Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1989). *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. London: The Athlone Press.
- Deleyto, C. (2003). Between friends: love and friendship in contemporary romantic comedy. *Screen*, 44(2), 167–82.
- Demetriou, D. Z. (2001). Connell ’ s concept of hegemonic masculinity : A critique. *Theory and Society*, 30(3), 337–361. <http://doi.org/10.1023/A:1017596718715>
- Derne, S. (2000). *Movies, masculinity, and modernity : an ethnography of men’s filmgoing in India*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Derrida, J. (1997). *Politics of friendship*. London, New York: Verso.
- DeVault, M. L., & Gross, G. (2012). Feminist Qualitative Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis* (pp. 206–236). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384740.n11>
- Diamond, E. (1996). *Performance and cultural politics*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Dickson, L.-A. (2015). “Ah! Other Bodies!”: Embodied spaces, pleasures and practices at Glasgow Film Festival. *Participations*, 12(1), 706–724.
- Dixon, N. (2007). Romantic Love, Appraisal, and Commitment. *The Philosophical Forum*, 38(4), 373–386. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9191.2007.00275.x>
- Doane, M. A. (1982). Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator. *Screen*, 23(3–4), 74–88. <http://doi.org/10.1093/screen/23.3-4.74>
- Doane, M. A. (1988). *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940’s*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Doane, M. A., Mellencamp, P., & Williams, L. (Eds.). (1984). *Re-vision : essays in feminist film criticism*. Los Angeles California : American Film Institute,.

- Doremus, D. (2011). *Like Crazy*. United States: Paramount Vantage.
- Doucet, A., & Mauthner, N. (2012). Qualitative Interviewing and Feminist Research. In P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman, & J. Brannen (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (pp. 328–43). London: Sage. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608429>
- Dowd, J. J., & Pallotta, N. R. (2000). The End of Romance: The Demystification of Love in the Postmodern Age. *Sociological Perspectives*, 43(4), 549–580. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1389548>
- Dröge, K., & Voirol, O. (2011). Online dating: The tensions between romantic love and economic rationalization. *Journal of Family Research*, 23(3), 337–357.
- Dromm, K. (2002). Love and Privacy. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 19(2), 155–167. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5930.00212>
- Du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (1997). *Doing cultural studies: the story of the Sony Walkman*. London: Sage.
- Dugan, D. (2011). *Just Go with It*. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Dyer, R. (2002). Entertainment and Utopia. In *Only Entertainment* (2nd ed., pp. 19–35). New York: Psychology Press.
- Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology : an introduction*. London; New York: Verso.
- Ebert, T. L. (1988). The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory. *Cultural Critique*, 10, 19–57.
- Elliott, P. (1974). Uses and gratifications research: A critique and a sociological alternative. In J. G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research* (pp. 249–268). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Elsaesser, T. (1987a). Tales of Sound and Fury (pp. 43–69). London: BFI Publishing.
- Elsaesser, T. (1987b). Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama. In C. Gledhill (Ed.), *Home is where the heart is: Studies in melodrama and the woman's film* (pp. 43–69). London: BFI Publishing.
- Elsaesser, T. (2009). Freud as media theorist: mystic writing-pads and the matter of memory. *Screen*, 50(1), 100–113. <http://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjn078>
- England, P., Shafter, E. F., & Fogarty, A. C. (2008). Hooking Up and Forming Romantic Relationships on Today's College Campuses. In E. Kimmel & A. Aronson (Eds.), *The Gendered Society Reader* (pp. 531–46). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from

- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281285304_Hooking_Up_and_Forming_Romantic_Relationships_on_Today's_College_Campuses
- Ephron, N. (1993). *Sleepless in Seattle*. United States: TriStar Pictures.
- Ephron, N. (1998). *You've got mail*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Evans, M. (2003). *Love: an unromantic discussion*. London: Polity.
- Evans, P., & Deleyto, C. (1998). *Terms of endearment : Hollywood romantic comedy of the 1980s and 1990s*. (P. W. Evans & C. Deleyto, Eds.). Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press,.
- Fals Borda, O. (1973). Reflexiones sobre la aplicación del método de Estudio-Acción en Colombia. *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 35(1), 49–62.
<http://doi.org/10.2307/3539564>
- Fals Borda, O. (1979). *El problema de cómo investigar la realidad para transformarla*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo.
- Farhadi, A. (2016). *The Salesman*. Iran: Memento Film Distribution.
- Feig, P. (2011). *Bridesmaids*. United States: Apatow Productions.
- Feig, P. (2013). *The Heat*. United States: 20th Century Fox.
- Feig, P. (2016). *Ghostbusters*. United States: Sony Pictures Releasing.
- Ferguson, A., & Jonasdottir, A. (2014). *Love : a question for feminism in the twenty-first century*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Ferriss, S., & Young, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*. New York: Routledge.
- Finch, J. (1984). It's great to have someone to talk to: the ethics and politichs of interviewing women. In C. Bell & H. Roberts (Eds.), (pp. 70–87). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Firestone, S. (1979). *The dialectic of sex : the case for feminist revolution*. London: Women's Press.
- Fisher, H. (2004). *Why we love: The nature and chemistry of romantic love*. New York: Henry Holt. Retrieved from
<http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&btnG=Search&q=intitle:Why+We+Love+:+The+Nature+and+Chemistry+of+Romantic+Love#0>
- Fisher, H. (2006). The Drive to Love: The Neural Mechanism for Mate Selection. In R. J.

- Sternberg & K. Weis (Eds.), *The new psychology of love* (pp. 87–115). New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Fisher, H., Aron, A., & Brown, L. L. (2005). Romantic Love. *American Sociological Review*, 493(3), 58–62. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2087605>
- Fisher, H. E. (2014). The 'Tyranny of Love: Love Addiction-An Anthropologist's View. In *Behavioral Addictions: Criteria, Evidence, and Treatment* (pp. 237–265). <http://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-407724-9.00010-0>
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television culture*. London: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1992). Audiencing: A cultural studies approach to watching television. *Poetics*, 21(4), 345–359. [http://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X\(92\)90013-S](http://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(92)90013-S)
- Fiske, J. (2010). *Understanding popular culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Flanagan, C. (2013). *Girl land*. New York, Boston, London: Back Bay Books.
- Fleming, V. (1939). *Gone with the Wind*. United States: Loew's Inc.
- Flick, U. (2014). *An introduction to qualitative research* (5th ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2008). The interview: from a Neutral Stance to Political Involvement. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), (pp. 695–727). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ford, T. (2016). *Nocturnal Animals*. United States: Focus Features.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison* (1st American ed.). New York: Pantheon Books. Retrieved from <http://www.worldcat.org/title/discipline-and-punish-the-birth-of-the-prison/oclc/3328401>
- Foucault, M. (1985). *The history of sexuality, Vol. 2, The use of pleasure*. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1986). Of Other Spaces. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22–27. Retrieved from <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0300-7162%28198621%2916%3A1%3C22%3AOOS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-F>
- Foucault, M. (1998). *The history of sexuality, Vol. 1, The will to knowledge*. London: Penguin.
- Frantz, S. S. G., & Murphy Selinger, E. (2012). *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Freud, S. (1922). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. London, Vienna: International Psycho-Analytical. Retrieved from <http://www.bartleby.com/br/276.html>
- Freud, S. (1924). *Zur Einführung des Narzissmus*. Leipzig: Internationaler

Psychoanalytischer Verlag.

Freud, S. (2010). *Civilization and its discontents*. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing.

Fromm, E. (1974). *The art of loving*. New York: Harper & Row.

Fuentes, A. (1998). Re-Evaluating Primate Monogamy. *American Anthropologist*, 100(4), 890–907. <http://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1998.100.4.890>

Fullick, M. (2013). “Gendering” the Self in Online Dating Discourse. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 38, 545–562.

García Guillem, S. (2015). The Other in the Mirror: "Amour by Michael Haneke. *Area Abierta*, 15(2), 19–34.

Gardiner, M. (1992). *The dialogics of critique : M.M. Bakhtin and the theory of ideology*. New York: Routledge.

Garg, A. (2005). Interview Reflections: A First Generation Migrant Indian Woman Researcher Interviewing a First Generation Migrant Indian Man. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 14(2), 147–52.

Garrett, R. (2007). *Postmodern chick flicks: The return of the woman's film*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gatrell, C. J. (2006). Interviewing fathers: Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 15(3), 237–251. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09589230600862059>

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures : selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Genep, A. van. (1960). *The rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Perspectives on Media Effects* (pp. 17–40). Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus Groups. *Social Research Update, Winter*(19), 6–11. Retrieved from <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU19.html%5CnAccessed:26/06/2012>

Gibson, J. J. (1986). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gibson, K., & Wolske, M. (2011). Disciplining Sex in Hollywood: A Critical Comparison of Blue Valentine and Black Swan. *Women & Language*, 34(2), 79–96.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell. Retrieved from

- http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&oi=fnd&pg=PP9&dq=Modernity+and+self+identity++self+and+society+in+the+late+modern+age.&ots=pXZPt7xuO7&sig=kQbCbWBGtNZgWaVGrU175pGGlg
- Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy : sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Gilbert, L. (1966). *Alfie*. United Kingdom: Paramount Pictures.
- Giles, J. (1992). "Playing Hard to Get": working-class women, sexuality and respectability in Britain, 1918-40. *Women's History Review*, 1(2), 239–55.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/0961202920010203>
- Gill, R. (1996). Discourse Analysis: Practical Implementation. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and the Social Sciences* (pp. 141–156).
- Gledhill, C. (1987a). *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. BFI books. London: BFI Publishing.
- Gledhill, C. (1987b). The melodramatic field: an investigation. In C. Gledhill (Ed.), *Home is where the heart is: Studies in melodrama and the woman's film* (pp. 1–25). London: BFI Publishing.
- Gluck, W. (2011). *Friends with benefits*. United States: Screen Gems.
- Goffman, E. (2004). *La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana* (5th ed.). Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.
- Gondry, M. (2004). *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. United States: Focus Features.
- Goody, J. (Ed.). (1974). *The Character of Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511621697>
- Goody, J. (2004). *Comparative studies in kinship*. London: Routledge.
- Gordon-Levitt, J. (2013). *Don Jon*. United States: Relativity Media.
- Gordon, S., Benner, P., & Noddings, N. (1996). *Caregiving: Readings in Knowledge, Practice, Ethics, and Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=TxFZU6J0txMC&pg=PA224&lpg=PA224&dq=caregiving+feminism&source=bl&ots=uo7C-lou9P&sig=FqIjvRlzh7AxzXFZ-uTmPhKjNag&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj4vD-kazRAhXrLsAKHaqlBwYQ6AEINTAE#v=onepage&q=caregiving+feminism&f=false>

- Gornick, V. (1997). *The end of the novel of love*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Gottlieb, S. (2011). The capacity for love. In David Mann (Ed.), *Love and Hate: Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (pp. 68–87). New York: Routledge. Retrieved from [https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=dEcVAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=the+capacity+for+love+gottlieb&ots=hqx-7DafR0&sig=Z6JygfHs3d7LiQfPKAPSkKewqTk#v=onepage&q=the capacity for love gottlieb&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=dEcVAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=the+capacity+for+love+gottlieb&ots=hqx-7DafR0&sig=Z6JygfHs3d7LiQfPKAPSkKewqTk#v=onepage&q=the+capacity+for+love+gottlieb&f=false)
- Gould, T. (1963). *Platonic Love*. New York: The Free Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell-Smith, Eds.). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gramsci, A. (1995). *Antonio Gramsci : further selections from the prison notebooks*. (D. Boothman, Ed.). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Gray, J. (2013). *The immigrant*. United States: The Weinstein Company.
- Greenfield, L. (2011). *Something Borrowed*.
- Greven, D. (2011). *Manhood in Hollywood from Bush to Bush*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Gripsrud, J. (2002). Film Audiences. In J. Hill & P. Church Gibson (Eds.), *The Oxford guide to film studies* (pp. 202–11). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gross, N., & Simmons, S. (2002). Intimacy as a Double-Edged Phenomenon? An Empirical Test of Giddens. *Social Forces*, 81(2), 531–555.
- Grossi, R. (2014). *Looking for Love in the Legal Discourse of Marriage*. Canberra: ANU Press.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1997). The active interview. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative Research* (pp. 113–291). London: Sage.
- Guzmán, G., Fals Borda, O., & Umaña, E. (2005). *La Violencia en Colombia*. Bogotá: Taurus.
- Gyorgy, P. (2012). *Final Cut: Ladies and Gentlemen*. Hungary: HvD Productions.
- Haden, J. (1979). On Socrates, with Reference to Gregory Vlastos. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 33(2), 371–389.
- Haigh, A. (2011). *Weekend*. United Kingdom: Peccadillo Pictures.
- Hakim, C. (2010). Erotic Capital. *European Sociological Review*, 26(5), 499–518. <http://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcq014>
- Hall, J. a., Park, N., Song, H., & Cody, M. J. (2010). Strategic misrepresentation in online

- dating: The effects of gender, self-monitoring, and personality traits. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27(1), 117–135. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0265407509349633>
- Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.
- Hall, S. (1985). Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2(2), 91–114.
- Hall, S. (1996). Who needs “identity”? In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 1–17). London: SAGE.
- Haller, A. (2012). Diagnosis: ‘Flimmeritis’. In D. Biltereyst, R. Maltby, & P. Meers (Eds.), *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: New perspectives on European cinema history* (pp. 130–141). London: Routledge.
- Hamilton, L., & Armstrong, E. A. (2009). Gendered Sexuality in Young Adulthood. *Gender & Society*, 23(5), 589–616. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209345829>
- Haneke, M. (2012). *Amour*. Austria, France, Germany: Les Films du Losange.
- Hansen, M. (1991). *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hardt, M. (2011). For love or money. *Cultural Anthropology*, 26(4), 676–82.
- Hardt, M. (2014). The Power to be Affected. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 215–222. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-014-9191-x>
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2004). *Multitude : war and democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2011). *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Harlow, H. F. (1958). The nature of love. *American Psychologist*, 13(12), 673–685. <http://doi.org/10.1037/h0047884>
- Harlow, H. F. (1974). *Learning to love*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Hatfield, E., & Sprecher, S. (1986). Measuring passionate love in intimate relationships. *Journal of Adolescence*, 9(4), 383–410. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-1971\(86\)80043-4](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-1971(86)80043-4)
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 511–524.
- Heckerling, A. (1995). *Clueless*. United States: Paramount Pictures.

- Heldman, C., & Wade, L. (2010). Hook-up culture: Setting a new research agenda. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 7(4), 323–333. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-010-0024-z>
- Hendrick, C., & Hendrick, S. (1986). A theory and method of love. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50(2), 392–402. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.50.2.392>
- Hendrick, C., & Hendrick, S. (2002). Styles of Romantic Love. In R. Sternberg & K. Weis (Eds.), *The new psychology of love* (pp. 149–170). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hendrick, C., & Hendrick, S. S. (1989). Research on love: Does it measure up? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(5), 784–794. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.56.5.784>
- Hendrick, S. (1992). *Romantic love*. (C. Hendrick, Ed.). Newbury Park CA: Sage Publications.
- Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2–3), 61–83. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X>
- Herzog, H. (1944). What Do We Really Know About Day- Time Serial Listeners? In P. F. Lazarsfeld & Stanton F. N (Eds.), *Radio Research*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (Ed.). (2012). *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. London: Sage.
- Hobson, D. (1982). *Crossroads : the drama of a soap opera*. London: Methuen.
- Hogan, P. J. (1997). *My Best Friend's Wedding*. USA: TriStar Pictures.
- Hollinshead, A. (2011). “And I felt quite posh!” Art-house cinema and the absent audience – the exclusions of choice. *Participations*, 8(2), 392–415.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The active interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- hooks, bell. (1999). The oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators. In J. Belton (Ed.), . London: The Athlone Press.
- hooks, bell. (2000). *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: Perennial.
- Hudson, M. (2014). *Casualisation and Low Pay*. Retrieved from <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Casualisationandlowpay.docx%0A>
- Hughes, P. (1986). *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. United States: Paramount Pictures.

- Hutchby, I. (2001). Technologies, texts and affordances. *Sociology*, 35(2), 441–456.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038501000219>
- Hyams, M. (2004). Hearing girls' silences: thoughts on the politics and practices of a feminist method of group discussion. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 11(1), 105–119. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0966369042000188576>
- Iglesias-Prieto, N. (2012). The U.S.-Mexico Border and Children's Social Imaginary: An Analysis of Wacha el Border and Beyond the Border. *American Studies Journal*, 57(web).
- Iglesias Prieto, N. (2004). Gazes and Cinematic Readings of Gender: Danzon and its Relationship to its Audience. *Discourse*, 26(1 & 2), 173–93.
- Illouz, E. (1997). *Consuming the romantic utopia : love and the cultural contradictions of capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Illouz, E. (2007). *Cold intimacies: The making of emotional capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity.
 Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=uf2s70bUC-0C&oi=fnd&pg=PR6&dq=Cold+intimacies:+the+making+of+emotional+capitalism&ots=V6hGjPoLVP&sig=FmhSd7S9qabPa67H1JfOGkFUgtw>
- Illouz, E. (2012). *Why love hurts : a sociological explanation*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Irigaray, L. (2012). *The way of love*. London: Continuum.
- Jackson, S. (2013). Love, Social Change, and Everyday Heterosexuality. In A. Jónasdóttir & A. Ferguson (Eds.), *Love: A question for feminism in the 21st century* (pp. 33–47). New York: Routledge.
- Jakobsson, N., & Lindholm, H. (2014). Ethnic Preferences in Internet Dating: A Field Experiment. *Marriage & Family Review*, 50(4), 307–317.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2013.879554>
- James, N. (1989). Emotional labour: skill and work in the social regulation of feelings. *The Sociological Review*, 37(1), 15–42. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1989.tb00019.x>
- Jamieson, L. (1999). INTIMACY TRANSFORMED? A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE “PURE RELATIONSHIP.” *Sociology*, 33(3), 477–494.
- Jankowiak, W. (Ed.). (1995). *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jarmusch, J. (2005). *Broken Flowers*. United States: Focus Features.

- Jenkins, B. (2016). *Moonlight*. United States: A24.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, bloggers, and gamers : exploring participatory culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Johar, K. (1998). *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. India: Dharma Productions.
- Johnson, P. (Paul J. (2012). *Love, heterosexuality, and society*. Routledge.
- Jonasdottir, A. (1991). *Love power and political interests : towards a theory of patriarchy in contemporary western societies*. Örebro: University of Örebro.
- Jonze, S. (2013). *Her*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Joost, H., & Schulman, A. (2010). *Catfish*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- July, M. (2011). *The Future*.
- Kalviknes Bore, I.-L. (2011). Reviewing Romcom: (100) IMDb Users and (500) Days of Summer. *Participations*, 8(2), 144–64.
- Kalviknes Bore, I.-L. (2012). Focus Group Research and TV Comedy Audiences. *Participations*, 9(2). Retrieved from [http://www.participations.org/Volume 9/Issue 2/2 Bore.pdf](http://www.participations.org/Volume%209/Issue%202/2%20Bore.pdf)
- Kaplan, A. E. (2000). The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*. In E. A. Kaplan (Ed.), *Feminism and Film* (pp. 466–479). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaplan, E. A. (2000). *Feminism & Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kar-Wai, W. (2000). *In the Mood For Love*. Hong Kong: Universal Pictures.
- Kasdan, L. (1995). *French Kiss*. United States, United Kingdom: 20th Century Fox.
- Katz, E. (1980). On conceptualising media effects. *Studies in Communication*, 1, 119–141.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). *The uses of mass communication:Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research. Sociology The Journal Of The British Sociological Association*.
- Katz, E., Haas, H., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things. *American Sociological Review*, 38(2), 164–181. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094393>
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence : the part played by people in the flow of mass communication*. New York: Free Press.
- Katz, E., & Liebes, T. (1990). Interacting With "Dallas": Cross Cultural

- Readings of American TV. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 15(1), 45–66. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers
- Kaufmann, J.-C. (2012). *Love online*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Kechiche, A. (2013). *Blue is the Warmest Colour*. France, Belgium, Spain: Vértigo Films.
- Kenrick, D. T. (1987). Gender, genes, and the social environment: A biosocial interactionist perspective. In P. Shaver & D. T. Kenrick (Eds.), *Sex and Gender* (pp. 14–43). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- King, L. A. (2015). *Family men: fatherhood and masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kipnis, L. (2003). *Against Love: A polemic*.
- Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research. Introducing Focus Groups. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 311(7000), 299–308. <http://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.7000.299>
- Klesse, C. (2006). Polyamory and its “Others”: Contesting the Terms of Non-Monogamy. *Sexualities*, 9(5), 565–583. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1363460706069986>
- Klesse, C. (2011). Notions of Love in Polyamory—Elements in a Discourse on Multiple Loving. *Laboratorium. Журнал Социальных Исследований*, (2), 4–25. Retrieved from http://librarysearch.lse.ac.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=TN_ceed2df80d35-7d01-43cc-8b1f-27fbe6453f81&indx=4&recIds=TN_ceed2df80d35-7d01-43cc-8b1f-27fbe6453f81&recIdxs=3&elementId=3&renderMode=poppedO
- Kosman, L. A. (1976). Platonic Love. In W. . Werkmeister (Ed.), (pp. 53–69). Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.
- Kracauer, S. (1947). *From Caligari to Hitler, a psychological history of the German film*. [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Kracauer, S. (1995). *The mass ornament : Weimar essays*. (T. Y. Levin, Ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Krämer, P. (1998). Women first: “Titanic” (1997), action-adventure films and Hollywood’s female audience. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, 18(4), 599–619. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=b8ff3633-d15e-46bf-a06a-1e47bed62c5f%40sessionmgr4008&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW9vc3QtbGl2ZQ%3D%3>

- Kristeva, J. (1987). *Tales of love*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups : a practical guide for applied research*. (2nd ed.). Newbury Park : Sage Publications,.
- Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Moderating Focus Groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Krutnik, F. (1990). The Faint Aroma of Performing Seals: The “Nervous” Romance and the Comedy of the Sexes. *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television*, (26), 57–72. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=fah&AN=31127815&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Kubrick, S. (1971). *A Clockwork Orange*. United Kingdom, United States: Columbia-Warner distributors.
- Kuhn, A. (1994). *Women’s pictures : feminism and cinema* (2nd ed). London New York: Verso.
- Kuhn, A. (2002). *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. London & New York: Tauris.
- Kuhn, A. (2004). Heterotopia, heterochronia: place and time in cinema memory. *Screen*, 45(2), 106–114. <http://doi.org/10.1093/screen/45.2.106>
- Kuhn, A., Biltereyst, D., & Meers, P. (2017). Memories of cinemagoing and film experience: An introduction. *Memory Studies*, 10(1), 3–16. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016670783>
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.
- LaGravenese, R. (2007). *Ps I love you*. United States: Momentum Pictures.
- Landis, J. T., & Kuhn, M. (1957). Values and Limitations of Family Research Using Student Subjects. *Marriage and Family Living*, 19(1), 100–7. <http://doi.org/10.2307/347089>
- Laplace, M. (1987). Producing and consuming the woman’s film: Discursive struggle in Now, Voyager. In *Home is where the heart is: Studies in melodrama and the woman’s film* (pp. 138–166). London: BFI Publishing.
- Lasch, C. (1977). *Haven in a heartless world : the family besieged*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lash, S. (1987). Love as Passion, the Codification of Intimacy - Luhmann,N. *Sociology-the Journal of the British Sociological Association*, 21(3), 487–490. <http://doi.org/Doi>

- Lawrence, M. (2007). *Music and Lyrics*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The people's choice : how the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lean, D. (1945). *Brief Encounter*. United Kingdom: Eagle Lion Distributors.
- Lee, A. (2005). *Brokeback Mountain*. United States: Focus Features.
- Lee, J. A. (1973). *Colours of love : an exploration of the ways of loving*. New Press.
- Lee, J. A. (1998). Ideologies of Lovestyle and Sexstyle. In V. C. De Munck (Ed.), *Romantic Love and Sexual Behavior: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* (pp. 33–54). Westport, Conn: Praeger.
- Lent, T. O. (1995). Romantic Love and Friendship: The Redefinition of Gender Relations in Screwball Comedy. In K. Karnick & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *Classical Hollywood Comedy* (pp. 314–31). New York and London: Routledge.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1971). *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Boston: Beacon Press.
<http://doi.org/10.2307/2093974>
- Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Levine, J. M., & Moreland, R. (1998). Small groups. In *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 415–69). Boston: McGraw-Hill. Retrieved from <http://www.pitt.edu/~cslewis/>
- Levine, N. E. (2008). Alternative Kinship, Marriage, and Reproduction. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 37(1), 375–389.
<http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085120>
- Levy, D. (1979). The Definition of Love in Plato's Symposium. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40(2), 285–291.
- Lifschitz, S. (2004). *Wild Side*. Belgium, France, United Kingdom: Peccadillo Pictures.
- Linklater, R. (1995). *Before Sunrise*. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Linklater, R. (2004). *Before Sunset*. United States: Warner Independent Pictures.
- Livingstone, S. (1989). *Making sense of television : the psychology of audience interpretation*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Livingstone, S. (1991). *Audience reception: the role of the viewer in retelling romantic drama [online]*. London: LSE Research Online. Retrieved from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>
- Livingstone, S. M. (2000). Television and the active audience. In *Formations: 21st century*

- media studies* (pp. 175–195). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Livingstone, S. M. (2013). The participation paradigm in audience research. *Communication Review*, 16(1–2), 21–30.
- Livingstone, S. M., & Das, R. (2013). The end of audiences?: theoretical echoes of reception amid the uncertainties of use. In J. Hartley, J. Burgess, & A. Bruns (Eds.), *A Companion to New Media Dynamics* (pp. 104–121). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lo, S.-K., Hsieh, A.-Y., & Yu-Ping, C. (2013). Contradictory deceptive behavior in online dating. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 1755–62.
- Luhmann, N. (1986). *Love as passion : the codification of intimacy*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Luhrmann, B. (2001). *Moulin Rouge*. Australia: 20th Century Fox.
- Lull, J. (1988). *World families watch television*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Lynch, K. (2014). Why Love, Care, and Solidarity are political matters: affective equality and Fraser's Model of Social Justice. In A. Jónasdóttir & A. Fergusson (Eds.), *Love: A question for feminism in the 21st century* (pp. 173–189). New York: Routledge.
- Madden, J. (1998). *Shakespeare in love*. United Kingdom, United States: Universal Pictures.
- Madriz, E. (1998). Using Focus Groups With Lower Socioeconomic Status Latina Women. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(1), 114–128.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/107780049800400107>
- Madriz, E. (2000). Focus groups in feminist research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 835–50). London: Sage.
- Maguire, S. (2001). *Bridget Jones*. United Kingdom, United States: Miramax Films.
- Maltby, R., Biltereyst, D., & Meers, P. (Eds.). (2011). *Explorations in New Cinema History: approaches and case studies*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mangold, J. (2005). *Walk the Line*. United States: 20th Century Fox.
- Marcuse, H. (1966). *Eros and civilization; a philosophical inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Marková, I. (Ed.). (2007). *Dialogue in focus groups : exploring socially shared knowledge*. London ; Equinox,. Retrieved from
<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip079/2007002416.html>
- Markula, P. (2001). Beyond the Perfect Body: Women's Body Image Distortion in Fitness Magazine Discourse. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 25(2), 158–179.

- <http://doi.org/10.1177/0193723501252004>
- Marshall, G. (1990). *Pretty Woman*. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.
- Marshall, R. (2002). *Chicago*. United States: Miramax Films.
- Martin, M. W. (1993). Love's Constancy. *Philosophy*, 68(263), 63–77.
- <http://doi.org/10.2307/3751065>
- Martinez, J., Frances, M., Agirre, K., & Manias-Muñoz, M. (2015). Zinegin Basque film festival: A non-existent audience revealed. *Participations*, 12(1), 725–738.
- Marx, K. (1970). *A contribution to the critique of political economy*. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1967). *Capital; a critique of political economy*. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1972). *The German ideology*. (C. J. Arthur, Trans.). New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, L. (2014). Making cinephiles: An ethnographic study of audience socialization. *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 11(1), 88–98.
- Mascide, P. (1990). The Social Construction of Research Information. *Acta Sociologica*, 33(1), 3–13. <http://doi.org/10.1177/000169939003300101>
- Mason, C. L. (2016). Tinder and humanitarian hook-ups: the erotics of social media racism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1–16.
- Mathieu, D., Brites, M. J., Chimirri, N. A., Saariketo, M., Tammi, R., Torres, M., ... Pacheco, L. (2016). Methodological challenges in the transition towards online audience research, 13(1), 289–320.
- Maynard, M., & Purvis, J. (Eds.). (1994). *Researching Women's Lives From A Feminist Perspective*. New York: Taylor & Francis. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=u9pLDj5TEfMC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=men+researching+women&ots=pgIRnTnuBd&sig=bIMUWhqIA_IlvUKtWinaKg5W6hU#v=onepage&q=men researching women&f=false
- Mayne, J. (1998). *Cinema and spectatorship*. London: Routledge.
- McCarey, L. (1957). *An Affair to Remember*. United States: 20th Century Fox.
- McCarthy, T. (2015). *Spotlight*. United States: Open Road.
- McDermott, E. (2004). Telling lesbian stories: Interviewing and the class dynamics of “talk.” *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(3), 177–187.

- <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2004.04.001>
- McDonald, T. J. (2007). *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- McGrath, A. R., Tsunokai, G. T., Schultz, M., Kavanagh, J., & Tarrence, J. A. (2016). Differing shades of colour: online dating preferences of biracial individuals. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(11), 1920–1942.
- <http://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1131313>
- McIver, G. (2009). Liverpool's Rialto: Remembering the Romance. *Participations*, 6(2), 199–218. Retrieved from [http://www.participations.org/Volume 6/Issue 2/special/mciver.htm](http://www.participations.org/Volume%206/Issue%202/special/mciver.htm)
- McKee, A. (2009). What's Love Got To Do With It?: History and Melodrama in the 1940s Woman's Film. *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, 39(2), 5–15.
- Mclaran, P., Broderick, A., Theadopoulos, A., Goulding, C., & Saren, M. (2005). The Commodification of romance? Developing relationships online. *Journal Finanza, Marketing E Produzione*, XXII(3), 41–47.
- McNeill, P. (1990). *Research methods* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- McQuail, D. (1987). *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- McQuail, Blumler, J. G., & Brown, J. R. (1972). The television audience: A revised perspective. In *Sociology of mass communications* (pp. 135–165).
- Mellen, S. L. W. (1981). *The evolution of love*. San Francisco: Freeman.
- Mendes, S. (2009). *Revolutionary Road*. United Kingdom, United States: Universal International Pictures.
- Metz, C. (1974). *Film language; a semiotics of the cinema*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Metz, C. (1981). *The imaginary signifier : psychoanalysis and the cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Metz, C. (1991). *Film language : a semiotics of the cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Metz, C. (2002). *Ensayos sobre significación en el cine (1964-1968)*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Michell, R. (1999). *Notting Hill*. United Kingdom: Universal Pictures.
- Mikos, L. (2014). Analysis of Film. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data*

- analysis* (pp. 409–23). London: Sage.
- Mills, M. (2011). *Beginners*. United States: Focus Features.
- Millward, L. (2012). Focus groups. In *Research Methods in Psychology* (pp. 411–438).
[http://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(05\)80228-2](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(05)80228-2)
- Milner, S. (1992). *Forever young*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Minghella, A. (1996). *The English Patient*. United Kingdom, United States: Miramax Films.
- Mitchell, J. C. (2006). *Shortbus*. United States: THINKfilm.
- Modleski, T. (1984). *Loving with a vengeance : mass-produced fantasies for women*. London: Methuen.
- Modleski, T. (2014). An Affair to Forget: Melancholia in Bromantic Comedy. *Camera Obscura*, 29(2), 119–47.
- Monaco, J. (2009). *How to read a film: Movies, Media and Beyond* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Montell, F. (1999). Focus Group Interviews: A New Feminist Method. *NWSA*, 11(1), 44–71. Retrieved from
https://www.jstor.org/stable/4316628?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Moore, S. (1993). *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption*. London: Sage.
- Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus Groups. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22(1), 129–152.
<http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.22.1.129>
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Morgan, D. L. (1998). *Planning Focus Groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Morin, E. (2005a). *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Morin, E. (2005b). *The cinema, or, The imaginary man*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Morley, D. (1980). *The Nationwide audience : structure and decoding*. London: British Film Institute.
- Morley, D. (1986). *Family television : cultural power and domestic leisure*. London : Comedia.
- Morley, D. (2006). Unanswered Questions in Audience Research. *The Communication*

- Review*, 9(2), 101–21.
- Morris, C. E., Beaussart, M. L., Reiber, C., & Krajewski, L. S. (2016). Intrasexual Mate Competition and Breakups. In M. L. Fisher (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Competition* (Vol. 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<http://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199376377.013.19>
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.
<http://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>
- Mulvey, L. (1989). *Visual and other pleasures*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Mulvey, L. (1989). *Visual and other pleasures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Murray Schneider, D., & Gough, K. (1974). *Matrilineal kinship*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mussell, K. (1984). *Fantasy and reconciliation: contemporary formulas of women's romance fiction*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.
- Mylod, M. (2011). *What's your number?* United States: Regency Enterprises.
- Nakassis, C. (2016). *Doing Style: You and Mass Mediation in South India*. Chicago & London: Chicago University Press.
- Nannicelli, T., & Taberham, P. (2014). *Cognitive media theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Nash, J. (2013). Practicing love: Black feminism, love-politics, and post-intersectionality. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 11(2), 1–24.
- Neale, S., & Krutnik, F. (1990). *Popular film and television comedy. Popular fiction series*. London: Routledge. Retrieved from
[https://jykdoc.linneanet.fi/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=1098795;](https://jykdoc.linneanet.fi/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=1098795)
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/jyvaskyla/Doc?id=5003136>
- Negra, D. (2006). Romance and/as Tourism: Heritage Whiteness and the (Inter)National Imaginary in the New Woman's Film. In E. Ezra & T. Rowden (Eds.), *Transnational cinema : the film reader* (p. 213). New York & London: Routledge.
- Newell, M. (1994). *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. United Kingdom: Rank Film Distributions.
- Nichols, B. (1981). *Ideology and the Image*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Nichols, M. (2004). *Closer*. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Nightingale, V. (2011). *The Handbook of Media Audiences*. (V. Nightingale, Ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

- Norman, D. (1988). *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Currency & Doubleday.
- Novaro, M. (1991). *Danzón*. Mexico.
- Nowell-Smith, G. (1987). Minelly and Melodrama (pp. 69–76). London: BFI Publishing.
- Nygren, A. (1969). *Agape and Eros*. N.Y.: Harper & Row.
- Oakley, A. (1997). Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), . London: Routledge.
- Oatley, K. (2013). How Cues on the Screen Prompt Emotions in the Mind. In A. P. Shimamura (Ed.), *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies* (pp. 269–84). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2005). Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research. *Social Forces; a Scientific Medium of Social Study and Interpretation*, 84(2), 1273–1289. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16534533>
- Ong, D. (2016). Education and income attraction: an online dating field experiment. *Applied Economics*, 48(19), 1816–1830. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2015.1109039>
- Ong, D., & Wang, J. (2015). Income attraction: An online dating field experiment. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 111, 13–22. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2014.12.011>
- Ortega y Gasset, J. (1957). *On love : aspects of a single theme*. New York: Meridian Books.
- Otterbacher, J. (2011). Being Heard in Review Communities: Communication Tactics and Review Prominence. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 16(3), 424–444. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01549.x>
- Otterbacher, J. (2013). Gender, writing and ranking in review forums: a case study of the IMDb. *Knowledge and Information Systems*, 35(3), 645–664. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10115-012-0548-z>
- Owen, M. (1997). Re-inventing romance: Reading popular romantic fiction. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20(4), 537–546. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395\(97\)00042-3](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(97)00042-3)
- Paquette, M.-C., & Raine, K. (2004). Sociocultural context of women's body image. *Social Science & Medicine*, 59, 1047–1058. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2003.12.016>
- Parameswaran, R. (2001). Feminist Media Ethnography in India: Exploring Power,

- Gender, and Culture in the Field. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(1), 69–103.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700104>
- Paul, E. L., McManus, B., & Hayes, A. (2000). “Hookups”: Characteristics and correlates of college students’ spontaneous and anonymous sexual experiences. *Journal of Sex Research*, 37(1), 76–88. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00224490009552023>
- Payne, A. (2004). *Sideways*. United States: Fox Searchlight Pictures.
- Pearce, L., & Stacey, J. (1995). *Romance revisited*. New York: New York University Press.
- Peberdy, D. (2011). *Masculinity and Film Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
<http://doi.org/10.1057/9780230308701>
- Peele, S. (1975). *Love and addiction*. New York: Taplinger.
- Pillai, P. (1992). Rereading Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding Model. *Communication Theory*, 2(3), 221–233. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1992.tb00040.x>
- Pini, B. (2002). Focus groups, feminist research and farm women: Opportunities for empowerment in rural social research. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 18(3), 339–351.
[http://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167\(02\)00007-4](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0743-0167(02)00007-4)
- Plantinga, C. (2002). Cognitive Film Theory: An Insider’s Appraisal. *Cinéma et Cognition*, 12(2), 15–37.
- Plantinga, C. (2009a). *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. Retrieved from
[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SEK8un0xI0UC&pg=PA20&clpg=PA20&dq=screen+theory+pleasure&source=bl&ots=ezZG2zqFDD&sig=FYSbFTB8mlvJd9CG1Xk39OdjzTM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjs1tvyzf7RAhVcFMAKHYYhnCkEQ6AEIPDAF#v=onepage&q=screen theory pleasure&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SEK8un0xI0UC&pg=PA20&clpg=PA20&dq=screen+theory+pleasure&source=bl&ots=ezZG2zqFDD&sig=FYSbFTB8mlvJd9CG1Xk39OdjzTM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjs1tvyzf7RAhVcFMAKHYYhnCkEQ6AEIPDAF#v=onepage&q=screen%20theory%20pleasure&f=false)
- Plantinga, C. (2009b). *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Plantinga, C. (2013). The Affective Power of Movies. In A. P. Shimamura (Ed.), *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies* (pp. 94–112). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Plantinga, C. R., & Smith, G. M. (Eds.). (1999). *Passionate views : film, cognition, and emotion*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Plato. (1953). *The dialogues of Plato*. (B. Jowett, Ed.) (4th editio). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Potter, C. (2002). *I love you but... Romance, comedy and the movies*. London: Methuen.

- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Povinelli, E. (2006). *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., & Forde, D. (1952). African Systems of Kinship and Marriage. *Population (French Edition)*, 7(3), 557. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1524287>
- Radner, H., & Stringer, R. (2011). *Feminism at the Movies: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema*. New York: Routledge.
- Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the romance: women, patriarchy and popular literature*. London: Verso.
- Rapper, I. (1942). *Now, Voyager*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Rappert, B. (2003). Technologies, Texts and Possibilities: A Reply to Hutchby. *Sociology*, 37(3), 565–580. <http://doi.org/10.1177/00380385030373010>
- Reed, P. (2006). *The Break Up*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Rehling, N. (2009). *Extra-ordinary men : white heterosexual masculinity in contemporary popular cinema*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Reiner, R. (1989). *When Harry Met Sally...* USAA: Columbia Pictures.
- Reitman, I. (2011). *No Strings Attached*. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Reitman, J. (2007). *Juno*. United States: Fox Searchlight Pictures.
- Reynolds, T. (2002). Re-thinking a black feminist standpoint. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25(4), 591–606. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01419870220136709>
- Richards, J. (1994). Cinemagoing in Worktown: regional film audiences in 1930s Britain. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 14(2), 147–166. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01439689400260131>
- Ridanpää, J. (2014). “Humour is Serious” as a Geopolitical Speech Act: IMDb Film Reviews of Sacha Baron Cohen’s *The Dictator*. *Geopolitics*, 19(1), 140–160.
- Riessman, C. K. (1987). When Gender is not Enough: Women Interviewing Women. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 172–207. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002004>
- Rock, C. (2014). *Top Five*. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies : an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. London: SAGE.
- Rosenfeld, M. J., & Thomas, R. J. (2012). Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet

- as a Social Intermediary. *American Sociological Review*, 77(4), 523–547.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0003122412448050>
- Rosinski, M. P. (2015). Touching Nancy's ethics: death in Michael Haneke's *Amour*. *Studies in French Cinema*, 15(2), 180–96.
- Roulston, K. (2008). Conversational Interviewing. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods: A-L; Vol. 2, M-Z Index* (pp. 127–29). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore.
- Rowe, K. (1995). Melodrama and Men in Post-Classical Romantic Comedy. In P. Kirkham & J. Thumim (Eds.), *Me, Jane: masculinity, movies, and women* (pp. 184–194). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rubin, A. M. (1983). Television uses and gratifications: The interactions of viewing patterns and motivations. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 27, 37–51.
- Rubin, Z. (1970). Measurement of romantic love. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16(2), 265–273. <http://doi.org/10.1037/h0029841>
- Rubin, Z., Letitia Anne, & Charles, T. (1981). Loving and Leaving: Sex Differences in Romantic Attachments - ProQuest. *Sex Roles*, 7(8), 821–834. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/docview/1308097875/fulltext/1EBAAE13199D4A6DPQ/1?accountid=9630>
- Rudder, C. (2014). *Datachysm*. London: 4th Estate.
- Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 3–37. http://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02
- Rushton, R. (2009). Deleuzian spectatorship. *Screen*, 50(1), 45–53.
<http://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjn086>
- Scarf, M. (2008). *Intimate Partners: Patterns in love and marriage*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Schepisi, F. (1987). *Roxanne*. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Scherfig, L. (2011). *One Day*. United States, United Kingdom: Focus Features.
- Scheurich, J. J. (1995). A postmodernist critique of research interviewing. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(3), 239–252.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080303>
- Schippers, M. (2016). *Beyond monogamy : polyamory and the future of polyqueer sexualities*. New York: New York University Press.

- Schlegoff, E. A. (1997). Whose text? Whose context? *Discourse and Society*, 8(2), 165–87.
- Schlesinger, J. (1971). *Sunday Bloody Sunday*. United Kingdom: United Artists.
- Schneebaum, A. (2014). All in the Family: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Love. In A. Jónasdóttir & A. Ferguson (Eds.), *Love: A question for feminism in the 21st century* (pp. 127–140). Routledge.
- Schwentke, R. (2009). *The Time Traveller's Wife*. United States: New Line Cinema.
- Seiter, E., Borchers, H., Kreutzner, G., & Warth, E. M. (1989). *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power*. London: Routledge.
- Sennett, R. (1996). *The fall of public man*. New York: Faber and Faber.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The corrosion of character : the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. New York: Norton.
- Sharot, S. (2010). Class Rise as a Reward for Disinterested Love: Cross-Class Romance Films, 1915-28. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 43(3), 583–599.
- Shary, T. (2011). Buying Me Love: 1980s Class-Clash Teen Romances. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44(3), 563–582. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00849.x>
- Shaver, P., Hazan, C., & Bradshaw, D. (1988). Love as attachment. In *The psychology of love*. (pp. 68–99). Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psych&AN=1988-97037-003&login.asp&site=ehost-live>
- Shelby, R. (2012). Update Your Fairy-tale: A Media Analysis of Hook-up Narratives. *Sociation Today*, 10(2).
- Shimamura, A. P. (Ed.). (2013). *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (1996). *Unthinking Eurocentrism : multiculturalism and the media*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Shumway, D. R. (2003). *Modern love: romance, intimacy, and the marriage crisis*. New York: New York University Press.
- Shyer, C. (2004). *Alfie*. United States, United Kingdom: Paramount Pictures.
- Sica, A. (1986). Locating the Seventeenth Book of Giddens. *Contemporary Sociology*, 15, 344–46.
- Silberling, B. (1998). *City of angels*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.

- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. Sage Publications. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2015.1066173>
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. London: Sage.
- Silverman, D. (2014). *Interpreting qualitative data* (5th ed.). London: Sage.
- Silverman, K. (1996). *The Threshold of the Visible World*. London: Routledge.
- Silverstone, R. (2006). *Media and morality : on the rise of the mediapolis*. Cambridge: Polity press.
- Singer, I. (2009a). *The nature of love 2: Courtly and Romantic*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press.
- Singer, I. (2009b). *The nature of love 3: The Modern World*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press.
- Singer, I. (2009c). *The nature of love I: Plato to Luther*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press.
- Skeggs, B. (1994). Situating the production of feminist ethnography. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching Women's Lives*. Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender : becoming respectable*. London: SAGE.
- Skeggs, B. (2001). Feminist Ethnography. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of Ethnography* (pp. 426–442). London: Sage. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608337.n29>
- Slade, D. (2005). *Hard Candy*. United States: Lionsgate.
- Smelik, A. (2001). *And the mirror cracked : feminist cinema and film theory*. Basingstoke : Palgrave,.
- Smets, K. (2012). Connecting Islam and film culture: The reception of The Message (Ar Risalah) among the Moroccan diaspora. *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 9(1), 68–94.
- Smets, K., Van Bauwel, S., Meers, P., & Vande Winkel, R. (2016). Film-viewing in Turkish and Moroccan diasporic families: a gender and place perspective. *Gender Place & Culture*, 23(4), 556–71.
- Smets, K., Vandeveld, I., Meers, P., Vande Winkel, R., & Van Bauwel, S. (2013). Diasporic Film Cultures from a Multi-level Perspective: Moroccan and Indian Cinematic Flows In and Towards Antwerp. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 30(4), 257–74.

- Smith, G. M. (2007). *Film structure and the emotion system*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, J. F. (2010). *She's Out of My League*. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Smith Jr., G. D. (2009). Love as Redemption: The American Dream Myth and the Celebrity Biopic. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 33(3), 222–238.
- Smolak, L., & Murnen, S. K. (2007). Feminism and Body Image. In V. Swami & A. Furnham (Eds.), *The Body Beautiful* (pp. 236–258). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. http://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596887_12
- Snapp, S., Lento, R., Ryu, E., & Rosen, K. S. (2014). Why do they hook up? Attachment style and motives of college students. *Personal Relationships*, 21(3), 468–481. <http://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12043>
- Snitow, A. B. (1979). Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different. *Radical History Review*, 1979(20), 141–161. <http://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1979-20-141>
- Soble, A. (1989). *Eros, agape, and philia : readings in the philosophy of Love*. New York, N.Y.: Paragon House.
- Soble, A. (1990). *The structure of love*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Stacey, J. (1994). *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge.
- Staiger, J. (1992). *Interpreting films : studies in the historical reception of American cinema*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Staiger, J. (2000). *Perverse Spectators The Practices of Film Reception*. New York & London: New York University Press.
- Stam, R. (1989). *Subversive pleasures: Bakhtin, cultural criticism, and film*. London: John Hopkins University Press.
- Stam, R. (2000a). Cognitive and Analytic Theory. In *Film Theory: An Introduction* (pp. 235–48). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Stam, R. (2000b). *Film Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Standing, G. (2008). Economic insecurity and global casualisation: Threat or promise? *Social Indicators Research*, 88(1), 15–30. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-007-9202-7>
- Sternberg, R. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 119–135. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.93.2.119>

- Sternberg, R. J., & Weis, K. (2006). *The new psychology of love*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Stewart, D., Shamdasani, P., & Rook, D. (2007). *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved from <https://irp.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=57975>
- Stewart, D. W. (1990). *Focus groups : theory and practice*. (P. N. Shamdasani, Ed.). Newbury Park Calif. : Sage Publications,.
- Stoller, N. (2008). *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. United States: Apatow Productions.
- Stone, O. (1994). *Natural Born Killers*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Studlar, G. (1985). Visual pleasure and the masochistic aesthetic. *Journal of Film and Video*, 37(2), 5–26.
- Suárez, A. F. (2008). La sevicia en las masacres de la guerra Colombiana. *Análisis Político*, 63, 39–57.
- Swanberg, J. (2006). *Lol*. United States: Washington Square Films.
- Swanson, D. L. (1977). THE USES AND MISUSES OF USES AND GRATIFICATIONS. *Human Communication Research*, 3(3), 214–221. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1977.tb00519.x>
- Sweeney, K. A., & Borden, A. L. (2009). Crossing the Line Online: Racial Preference of Internet Daters. *Marriage & Family Review*, 45(6–8), 740–760. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01494920903224335>
- Tan, E. S. (1996). *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Tan, E. S. (2013). The Empathic Animal Meets the Inquisitive Animal in the Cinema: Notes on a Psychocinematics of Mind Reading. In A. P. Shimamura (Ed.), *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies* (pp. 337–68). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tannen, D. (1995). *Talking from 9 to 5 : how women's and men's conversational styles affect who gets heard, who gets credit, and what gets done at work*. Reading: Virago.
- Taylor, H. (1989). *Scarlett's women : "Gone with the wind" and its female fans*. London: Virago.
- Temple, B., & Edwards, R. (2002). Interpreters/translators and cross-language research: Reflexivity and border crossings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), Article

1. Retrieved from <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~iiqm>
- Tennant, A. (1999). *Anna and the King*. United States: 20th Century Fox.
- Thapar-Björkert, S., & Henry, M. (2004). Reassessing the research relationship: location, position and power in fieldwork accounts. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(5), 363–381. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1364557092000045294>
- Thompson, J. B. (1990). *Ideology and modern culture : critical social theory in the era of mass communication*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity : a social theory of the media*. Cambridge UK: Polity Press.
- Thompson, K., & Bordwell, D. (2009). *Film History: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Time Rapley. (2004). Interviews. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice* (pp. 15–33). London: Sage. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608191>
- Todorov, T. (1970). Introducción. In E. Verón (Ed.), *Lo verosímil* (pp. 11–16). Buenos Aires: Tiempo Contemporáneo.
- Todorov, T. (1977). *The poetics of prose*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Turner, V. W. (1967). *The forest of symbols : aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. W. (1974). *Dramas, fields, and metaphors; symbolic action in human society*. Ithaca [N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. W. (1977). *The ritual process : structure and anti-structure*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. W. (1982). *From ritual to theatre : the human seriousness of play*. New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- Ulloa, A. (2000). *La construcción del nativo ecológico: complejidades, paradojas y dilemas de la relación entre los movimientos indígenas y el ambientalismo en Colombia*. Bogotá: ICANH.
- Uribe, M. V. (1990). *Matar, rematar y contramatar. Las masacres de La Violencia en el Tolima, 1948-64*. Centro de Investigación y Educación (Vol. 159–160). Bogota: CINEP.
- Uribe, M. V. (2004). *Anthropologie de l'inhumanité : essai sur la terreur en Colombie*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.

- Uribe, M. V., & Vásquez, T. (1995). *Enterrar y Callar. Las masacres en Colombia 1980-1993*. Bogotá: Comité Permanent por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Fundación Terre de Hommes.
- Van Groeningen, F. (2012). *The Broken Circle Breakdown*. Belgium: Ruben Impens.
- van Zoonen, L. (1994). *Feminist media studies*. London: Sage.
- van Zoonen, L. (2007). Audience reactions to Hollywood politics. *Media, Culture & Society*, 29(4), 531–547.
- Vandeveld, I., Meers, P., Van Bauwel, S., & Vande Winkel, R. (2015). Sharing the Silver Screen: The Social Experience of Cinemagoing in the Indian Diaspora. *BioScope*, 6(1), 88–106.
- Verhoeven, P. (1992). *Basic Instinct*. France, United Kingdom, United States: TriStar Pictures.
- Verhoeven, P. (2016). *Elle*. France, Germany: SBS Distribution.
- Vicedo, M. (2010). The evolution of Harry Harlow: from the nature to the nurture of love. *History of Psychiatry*, 21(2), 190–205.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X10370909>
- Vincendeau, G. (1989). Melodramatic Realism: On some French Women's Films in the 1930s. *Screen*, 30(3), 51–65. <http://doi.org/10.1093/screen/30.3.51>
- Vlastos, G. (1973). *Platonic Studies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Waddington, A. (2000). *Me, You, Them*. Brazil: Columbia TriStar Films.
- Wahab, S. (2003). Creating Knowledge Collaboratively with Female Sex Workers: Insights from a Qualitative, Feminist, and Participatory Study. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(4), 625–642. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403252734>
- Wain, D. (2014). *They Came Together*. United States: Lionsgate.
- Wartenberg, T. (1999). *Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Waters, M. (2009). *Ghost of Girlfriends' Past*. United States: New Line Cinema.
- Webb, M. (2009). *(500) Days of Summer*. United States: Fox Searchlight Pictures.
- Weir, K., & Dunne, S. (2014). The connoisseurship of the condemned: A Serbian Film, The Human Centipede 2 and the appreciation of the abhorrent. *Participations*, 11(2), 78–99.
- Weir, P. (1990). *Green Card*. Australia, France, United States: Buena Vista Pictures.

- Weitz, R., & Kwan, S. (2013). *The politics of women's bodies : sexuality, appearance, and behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilkinson, E. (2013). Learning to love again: "Broken families", citizenship and the state promotion of coupledness. *Geoforum*, 49, 206–213.
<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.02.012>
- Wilkinson, E. (2016). On love as an (im)properly political concept. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 0(0), 1–15.
- Wilkinson, E., & Bell, E. (2012). Ties that bind: On not seeing (or looking) beyond "the family." *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 1(3), 423–429.
- Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus groups in feminist research: Power, interaction, and the co-construction of meaning. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 21(1), 111–125.
[http://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395\(97\)00080-0](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(97)00080-0)
- Wilkinson, S. (1999). Focus Groups: A Feminist Method. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23, 221–244. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1999.tb00355.x>
- Williams, L. (1998). *Melodrama Revisited* (pp. 43–88). Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford [Eng.]: Oxford University Press.
- Willig, C. (2014a). Discourses and Discourse Analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 341–53). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.
- Willig, C. (2014b). Interpretation and Analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 136–149). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.
<http://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n10>
- Willis, P. E. (1990). *Common culture : symbolic work at play in the everyday cultures of the young*. Buckingham : Open University Press,.
- Wilson, P., & Stewart, M. (2008). *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Windahl, S. (1981). Uses and gratifications at the crossroads. *Mass Communication Review Yearbook*, 2, 174–185.
- Wren-Lewis, J. (1983). The Encoding/Decoding Model: Criticisms and Redevelopments

- for Research on Decoding. *Media, Culture & Society*, 5(2), 179–97.
- Wright, J. (2005). *Pride and Prejudice*. France, Germany, United Kingdom: Focus Features.
- Wright, J. (2007). *Atonement*. France, United Kingdom: Focus Features.
- Zaborowski, R., & Dhaenens, F. (2016). Old topics, old approaches? “Reception” in television studies and music studies. *Participations*, 13(1), 446–461.
- Zavella, P. (1993). Feminist Insider Dilemmas: Constructing Ethnic Identity with “Chicana” Informants. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 13(3), 53–76.
<http://doi.org/10.2307/3346743>
- Zavella, P. (1997). Reflections on Diversity among Chicanas. *Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S.*, 12(2), 187–194.
<http://doi.org/10.2307/3346849>
- Zizek, S. (1994). *Mapping ideology*. London; New York: Verso.
- Zucker, J. (1990). *Ghost*. United States: Paramount Pictures.
- Zwick, E. (2010). *Love and other Drugs*. United States: 20th Century Fox.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of romantic films released between 2004-2014

Ordered alphabetically.

FILM	YEAR
2046	2004
(500) Days of Summer	
27 Dresses	2008
A Single Man	2009
A very long engagement	2004

About Time	2013
Amour	2012
An Education	2009
Antichrist	2009
Atonement	2006
Before Midnight	2013
Before Sunset	2004
Begin Again	2013
Beginners	2011
Blue is the Warmest Colour	2013
Blue Valentine	2008
Bright Star	2009
Broke back Mountain	2005
Broken Flowers	2004
Casanova	2005
Certified Copy	2011
Closer	2004
Crazy.Stupid. Love	2011
Dear John	2012
Don Jon	2013
Eat, Pray, Love	2010
Elizabeth Town	2005

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind	2004
Friends with Benefits	2011
Ghosts of Girlfriends Past	2009
Heartbeats	2010
Juno	2007
Keep the lights on	2012
Knocked Up	2007
Life as We Know It	2010
Little Manhattan	2005
Love and other drugs	2011
Love, Actually	2004
Match Point	2005
Me, you and everyone we know	2008
Moonrise Kingdom	2012
Music and Lyrics	2007
My Blueberry nights	2007

My Sassy Girl	2008
Never Let Me Go	2010
Once	2006
One Day	2011
Paris, Je t'aime	2006
Perfect Sense	2011
Plan B	
Pride and Prejudice	2005
Rabbit Hole	2010
Remember me	2010
Restless	2011
Revolutionary Road	2008
Ruby Sparks	2012
Sideways	2004
Something Borrowed	2011
Superbad	2007
The 40-Year-Old Virgin	2005
The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud	2010
The Future	2011
The Lake House	2006
The Notebook	2004

The Proposal	2009
The Reader	2006
The Spectacular Now	2013
The Time Traveller's Wife	2009
The Ugly Truth	2009
The Vow	2012
Tristan + Isolde	2006
Vicky Christina Barcelona	2009
Walk the Line	2005
Watercolors	2008
Weekend	2011
Weekend	2011
What Happens in Vegas	2008
When in Rome	2010

Appendix 2: Informed Consent form

CELLULOID LOVE

Researcher: Benjamín De La Pava Vélez

e-mail: b.de-la-pava-velez@lse.ac.uk

Phone number: 0745026xxxx

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I have been invited to participate, voluntarily, in a research study on romantic love, intimacy, and relationships based on the screening of a film and a subsequent discussion. I have been informed of the nature of this study and I agree to share my perspective on the matter.

The film chosen for this discussion is: _____.

I'm aware and consent to the recording and subsequent transcription of the discussion for the use of the researcher, Benjamín De La Pava Vélez, in his doctoral thesis and any subsequent publications. The information contained in the transcriptions will only be accessed by the researcher. If, at any time, the participant decides to deny the use of her or his participation material, she or he can contact the researcher and he will not make use of it.

I understand my real name will be altered if my information is shared and I reserve the right to omit personal details.

I agree with the statement above.

Date: _____

Name: _____

Appendix 3: Socio-demographic sheet

Name: _____ Fake name*: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____ Civil Status: _____

Children (number) : _____ Emotional status: _____

Occupation: _____

* Fake name is the name I would use in the thesis if I cite your views expressed in this discussion.

Appendix 4: Film summaries

Appendix 4a: Summary of Blue Valentine

Set in rural Pennsylvania, Dean, a high school drop-out from Brooklyn is looking for his dog with his daughter, Frankie, in his arms.

Cindy, a nurse at a local clinic, becomes exasperated by the childish behaviour of Dean while she is trying to feed their daughter. When she arrives at work, the head doctor reminds her of a promotion opportunity.

During Frankie's recital, Cindy reveals to Dean their dog is dead, which causes him to berate her for not closing the door. They leave Frankie at Cindy's father house.

Flashback to a young Dean applying to work at a moving company. He gets hired and during a gig, he chats with his co-workers where he expresses that men are more romantic than women because men only marry one girl, 'we've resisted the whole way' he claims. Women, instead, are more pragmatic because in their search of prince charming, they simply settle down for the one 'who's got a job and will stick around.'

Forwarding again, Dean grieves the death of the dog. While Cindy cleans up the house, Dean begs her to get away from the house and proposes a getaway to a motel since he has a coupon for a discounted rate. She begrudgingly accepts and he books the room to 'get drunk and make love.' Symbolically, the room he books is named 'The Future.'

While shopping for alcohol, Cindy runs into her ex-boyfriend, Bobby, from college. She mentions it to Dean on the car and they have an argument over it.

In another flashback, Cindy, with a broken leg, meets Bobby in college. She picks up her grandmother and asks her if she loved his grandfather. She says maybe a little in the beginning. Her father is irate at the meatloaf Cindy's mother has prepared for Dinner. After this, Cindy and Bobby have unprotected sex.

Helping move some furniture into an elderly house, he meets Cindy and his grandmother, who she is taking care of. He gives her his number but she never calls as she is in a relationship with somebody else.

Back in the motel, Cindy gets in the shower. Dean gets in with her but she's visibly upset and stops his attempts at cunnilingus. While drinking some vodka, Cindy recriminates his lack of ambition and they have a heated argument.

In another flashback, Dean meets Cindy again in the bus. At the beginning, she's coarse and grumpy. Slowly, Dean charms her and they spent the night together, having ice cream and he serenades her with a ukulele while she dances. The song is 'You always hurt the one you love' by The Mills Brothers.

Dean tries to make it up to her by inviting her to dance but she can't bring herself to even kiss him, instead taking off her underwear. They begin to have intercourse but Dean becomes upset when she closes her eyes and puts her arm over her face so he can't kiss her.

In a flashback, they kiss and roll around in the street and eventually, he performs cunnilingus on her. She takes a pregnancy test and discovers she's pregnant. Bobby gets a hold of the card with Dean's number. Cindy reveals the pregnancy to Dean while acknowledging the baby is probably not his. She attempts to get an abortion but backs off at the last minute.

Forwarding again, Cindy leaves the motel while Dean is passed out. He continues to drink.

Flashback. Bobby beats Dean up while Cindy is trying to call him.

In the present, Dean shows up at Cindy's work and they have another heated argument. Dean punches the head doctor after Cindy shouts at him claiming she doesn't love him anymore. Dean storms off and throws the ring outside. They drive to her father's house and she calls for a divorce, as they are no longer good together.

In a flashback, Dean meets Cindy's parents and they have an awkward discussion over the fact he's a high school drop-out with no intention of studying anything while Cindy is in med school. Forwarding a little, they get married just before Frankie is born.

Dean cries, while asking for help and one last chance. The film ends with him walking away, telling Frankie to go back to Cindy.

Appendix 4b: Summary of Once

Note: Characters in this film are not named, they are referred to as the ‘Guy’ and the ‘Girl.’

The guy is playing the guitar, busking on a street of Dublin. Still playing by night, he gets approached by a woman entranced by his music. While talking, he reveals he also works repairing hoovers. The Girl, a flower seller, demands he repairs his Hoover the next day. She reveals to also be a musician.

They meet in a coffee shop where she reveals to also be a musician, a piano player. They go to a music store, where the Girl often plays the piano, because she can’t afford to buy one. They make a duet to one of his compositions, *Falling Slowly*⁶⁶.

He reveals through music that his ex-girlfriend, the theme of much of his work lives in London and he does not intend to win her back. He, and his father, the owner of the Hoover repair shop, fix her Hoover. Back in his room, they listen to some of his songs and he invites her to stay over the night. Startled, she refuses and storms off.

The Guy catches her in the street and apologises for making advances on her. She also gives her a demo CD. She invites him back to her house, where she lives with her daughter and mother. He stays over for dinner. Her neighbours come in to watch television, as she owns the only one in the building. This highlights the precariousness of her situation.

On the promise of teaching her how to write lyrics, she practices the song ‘If You Want Me’ while she walks to the shop and back for some batteries. In a series of flashbacks, the Guy and his ex-girlfriend are seen frolicking and enjoying themselves, while a break-up song, ‘Lies,’ plays in the background.

After the flashback, he tells the Girl he will be going to London. Before he goes, he wants to make a recording and invites her to sing and play. They hire a recording studio for £2,000 for the weekend, down from the £3,000 initially requested by the owner. They buy him a suit and secure a bank loan. They gather a band from the street, who are initially reluctant to cooperate.

While walking through the woods, she reveals she is married for two years but declares it’s over, she came alone with her daughter. She also confesses to be fine on her own and the Guy asks her if she still loves him. She replies, in Czech, ‘Miluju Tebe.’⁶⁷

Before the weekend on the recording studio, the newly formed band practices in the Guy’s room. Once in the studio, they start playing to an uninterested music producer. With the song ‘When your mind’s made up,’ they slowly grab his interest. During a break, the Girl plays the song ‘The Hill,’ her composition on a piano on the street. After the

⁶⁶ A song about falling in love, it won the Academy award for best song in 2007

⁶⁷ ‘I love you’ in Czech.

session wraps up in the morning, she reveals to the Guy her husband is coming to Dublin. He tries to persuade her to spend one final night with him, to which she agrees. However, she stands him up and he is not able to say goodbye to her. His father gives him money to leave for London. The Guy calls his ex-girlfriend who sounds happy he's coming. The Guy makes arrangements to have a piano delivered to the Girl's house. The Girl's husband arrives and reunites with her in Dublin.

Appendix 4c: Summary of Don Jon

Jon is an Italo-american modern Don Juan that watches porn and masturbates at any chance he gets. He claims to care about just a few things: 'my body, my pad, my ride, my family, my church, my boys, my girls, my porn.' In a nightclub, Jon spots Barbara and spends some time with her, dancing and kissing, but she leaves the club without him. Jon, who throughout the film serves as a self-conscious narrator, leaves the club with another woman and they have sex. After this, Jon expresses that while he enjoys sex, nothing matches up to the standards of sex he sees in porn, both in the women's bodies and the actions.

Alongside his porn habits, Jon is very clean and attends church regularly. He confesses to having sex twice and masturbating 17 times. He is also shown having dinner with his family and working out at a gym. In another self-reflexive rant, Jon expresses two downsides to watching porn for him: On the one hand, he does not like when he is about to ejaculate the porn clip switches to the male performer's face. On the other, he comments on how every now one finds such a good porn clip, it is depressing real sex is not like that clip.

Chatting with his friends while in his flat, he is persuaded to pursue Barbara since he did not have sex with her. He finds her name out from the barman and finds her on Facebook. His friend, based on the publicly available photos, tells him he will have to play the 'long game.' He invites her for lunch. When she shows up, a classic romantic tune plays. They go to watch a romantic comedy, while Jon, in an over-narration, says he finds them 'fake.' Barbara, however, is completely fascinated by them. Jon, narrating, breaks them up in formulaic moments that are not 'real.'

The routine of cleaning, church, confession, family dinner is shown again. When they finally have sex, Jon is still not satisfied. Barbara catches him watching porn, but he denies to it, claiming it was a prank from one of his friends and swears he never will watch porn while he is with her. The routine with Barbara has become one of watching romantic comedies in his place while he masturbates to porn when she's not around.

Jon, who attends night community college, meets Esther, an older woman he had seen crying outside the classroom before. She tries to engage him, but she brushes him off. After another routine is shown, Esther engages him again, giving him an erotic DVD. She says this is to help him have a more realistic perspective on sexual relations.

Eventually, Barbara goes through Jon's web search history to find he's visited 46 porn sites on the same day. Because he lied to her, they break up. The routine continues but this time, Jon is visibly angry.

Next, Jon is smoking weed with Esther in her car. He confesses to her they broke up because she caught him watching porn, again. Jon tells Esther that the difference between porn and sex is that in the former, he 'loses himself.' Esther challenges him to masturbate without porn. Jon can't.

After he can't masturbate, he tries to have sex with her, but can't manage an erection. Esther tells him the reason he likes porn so much is because in porn, it is all about him, there's no need or pressure to 'lose himself' in another person. In order to fully enjoy sex, he needs to be able to 'lose himself' in another person and let that other person 'lose herself' in him. Soon after, it is revealed Esther is a widow who lost her husband and child 14 months before.

During the last routine, Jon tells his family he's broken up with Barbara, much to their chagrin. His sister, however, tells him she never cared for him, only wanting him because she could manipulate him.

He meets one last time with Barbara to apologise for lying to her. He recriminates her for asking too much of him, to which she claims that's what 'men do when they love a woman.' She asks him to never contact her again.

The film ends with Jon and Esther in a park, eating, kissing, crying and later making love. In an over-narration, Jon says Esther has quenched his thirst for porn. He continues that she's not his everything, she can't be as she also carries her own baggage, He is unsure why, but he feels he can get lost in her; they can get lost in each other.

Appendix 4d: Summary of (500) Days of Summer

Note: Because this film has a non-linear narrative, I will write the summary as the days are presented in the film. Also, it contains an omniscient narrator.

Day 488- Tom Hansen is introduced as a romantic who believes his happiness lies in finding 'the one,' based on a misreading of the film *The Graduate* and British pop music. Summer Finn is introduced as coming from divorced parents and cynical about love. The narrator announces: "This is a story of boy meets girl. But you should know upfront, this is not a love story."

Day 290- Rachel Hansen, Tom's sister arrives to his flat where his two friends, McKenzie and Paul wait for her to calm a grieving Tom down. Rachel asks him to tell her what happened. Tom says that although things were going ok in his relationship with Summer, she thinks they should stop seeing each other while at a restaurant. Before he leaves, Summer shouts: "You're still my best friend."

Day 1- Tom is in a meeting at the company he works for, a greeting card company. He meets Summer then, who's just started worked at the same time. A series of scenes portray Summer as a charming young woman. The narrator says Tom meeting Summer is fate.

Day 4-8- Tom and Summer share an elevator down. Summer recognises the music Tom is listening, The Smiths, and they speak for the first time. They speak again at a company party. Tom reveals he was studying architecture, but it didn't work. Summer asks why, but he deflects the question.

Day 154-11-22 Tom reveals to Paul he is in love with Summer. In day 11 and 22, Tom is first overly enthusiastic about having spoken with Summer. Then he is show overly pessimistic because he misread her answers to his questions and jokes.

Day 27-28-31 McKenzie and Tom go to a Karaoke bar with their co-workers. The three of them talk about relationships, with Summer claiming she's fine being on her own as relationships are messy and people's feelings get hurt. Tom rebukes her, asking what happens if she falls in love. Summer retorts asking what the word 'love' even means. She adds most marriages nowadays end in divorce, like her parents'. Love is fantasy she claims. Tom says she's wrong and that 'you'll know when you feel it.' By the end of the night, they share and awkward moment as romantic tension builds between them. Summer kisses Tom a few days later.

Day 282-34- Tom and Summer are at Ikea, Tom role-playing husband with the model housewares. Summer, however, is in no mood to play. On day 34, they are again in the same shop, but this time the couple role-play husband and wife with kitchen, couches, and other models. They end up in a bed, where Summer asks Tom if it's ok if they keep it 'casual,' to which Tom agrees. They have sex for the first time. The next day, Tom is seen leaving his flat for work. He waves and shakes hand with everyone he crosses paths with, exhilarated by the events of the night before. There is a dancing montage of Tom and

other pedestrians, with a band, animated blue pigeons and choreographed background dancers to the tune of 'You Make My Dreams' by Hall & Oates.

Day 303- Tom arrives at work, dishevelled. He receives an email from Summer, to meet up.

Day 45-87-95-105- Tom and Summer are shown enjoying themselves as a couple. Tom takes her to his favourite spot in the city, a bench in a park, where they share a romantic moment. Tom finally is invited to Summer's place where they share an intimate moment.

Day 118- Tom seeks relationship advice from Rachel, unsure of how to ask Summer to be serious in their relationship. She tells him to just ask her. He later asks her where the relationship is going, she responds she doesn't know and doesn't care.

Day 259- The couple are in a bar, where a guy aggressively hits on Summer. Tom punches the guy. At home, Summer is upset with Tom for getting in a fight. They get in an argument over they are a couple or not. Tom storms off her apartment. Summer shows up in his flat later that night and apologises.

Day 314-321-167- Tom is at the cinema. A sequence of black and white homage to other films plays⁶⁸, alluding to Tom's broken heart. Tom has a meeting with his boss, who asks if he's alright as his performance has dipped after Summer leaving the company. He encourages him to channel his grief into work. Rewinding, Tom comes up with excellent punch lines repeatedly.

Day 344- Tom goes on a blind date with Alison. Tom goes on a rant on how he missed the signs Summer was not as committed or happy as he was in the relationship. Alison asks if Summer mistreated him. Tom replies she didn't. Alison follows up that by mentioning Summer had told him up-front she did not want a boyfriend. Tom agrees vehemently. Cut to a drunk Tom karaoke singing.

Day 405-4xx- Tom meets Summer in a train going to a co-worker's wedding. They have a good time together, and Summer invites him to a party she's having days later. Tom feels hopeful they can get back together. Before arriving to the party, the film is split in a 'expectations-reality.' On the expectations side, Tom is greeted more than amicably by Summer and they end up kissing again. On the reality side, it is revealed the party is Summer's engagement party. Tom leaves, stunned.

Day 440-441-442- Tom is depressed, only leaving his flat for junk food and alcohol. He arrives hungover at work and during a meeting, he explodes and quits his job. He's become cynical about love.

Day 450- Tom has begun sketching again. Rachel tells him he thinks she was the one only because he's too focused on the good things. In a series of flashbacks, he starts to notice Summer's ambivalence.

⁶⁸ The films referenced are: *Persona* (1966), *The Seventh Seal* (1957), and *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924).

Day 456 to 476 are insinuated as Tom being initially depressed, not leaving his bed. In a montage, he is shown as focusing on focusing on reviving his career as an architect, sketching, reading, cleaning up, and attending job interviews. Intertwined with this, Summer gets married.

Day 488- Tom and Summer meet again in his favourite spot. Tom is cynical, claiming his initial romanticism are all nonsense. Summer tells him he wasn't wrong; it was fate she met her husband. Summer says he was just wrong about her. Tom goes to a job interview, and bolstered by Summer's message, he asks the other applicant for a coffee after their interviews. The woman, Autumn, agrees.

Appendix 4e: Summary of Her

Theodore Wombly works at a letter writing company. He writes eulogies, anniversary letters, for friends. Theodore is walking home back from work, seemingly sad. He and most people have a device in one of their ears that connects them to their phone. He lies in bed, unable to sleep. The film shows a flashback of him with a woman, being playful and intimate. This woman will be later revealed to be Catherine, his soon to be ex-wife. He has a

He purchases what is announced as the first intelligent OS. After answering a few questions about himself and his mother, he is introduced to Samantha. The difference between Samantha and any other program is her intuition and ability to learn from her experiences. She initially helps him organise his emails and work, but soon later they are playing video games together.

Amy, a good friend of Theodore, and her husband, Charles, set up a blind date for Theodore. When he finds out, he becomes visibly upset and shares with Samantha his fears and frustrations of his impending divorce. Next scene, he's hanging out with Samantha out in the city.

Cutting to the date, Theodore and his date are shown to have chemistry during their dinner. They kiss after, but when she asks him when she will see him again, he hesitates and she storms off. The film forwards to Theodore still struggling emotionally about his divorce. He and Samantha have a deep intimate, bonding, vulnerable moment. They end up having verbal sex. They day after, they hang out in the beach, with Theodore telling Samantha what it was like to be with Catherine, good and bad.

Theodore meets with Amy, who reveals she's split up with Charles over a menial argument. In contrast, Theodore's happy seeing Samantha. Theodore is at a party, where he introduces Samantha to a toddler. Cutting forward to another scene with Amy, Theodore reveals he's been dating an OS, which Amy encourages.

After this, Theodore is ready to sign the divorce papers. For this he meets with Catherine. He reveals he's seeing an OS, much to her chagrin. She tells him he's always had problems dealing with real emotions.

The film forwards to Samantha using a sexual surrogate, Isabelle, as their rate of verbal sex has been dwindling. Theodore is uncomfortable throughout the encounter and when Samantha asks Theodore to tell her he loves her, he stops it. This causes Isabelle to leave in distress. Theodore says they should not pretend to be something they are not, Samantha leaves. After discussing things with Amy, Theodore apologises to Samantha over his indecision and confusion.

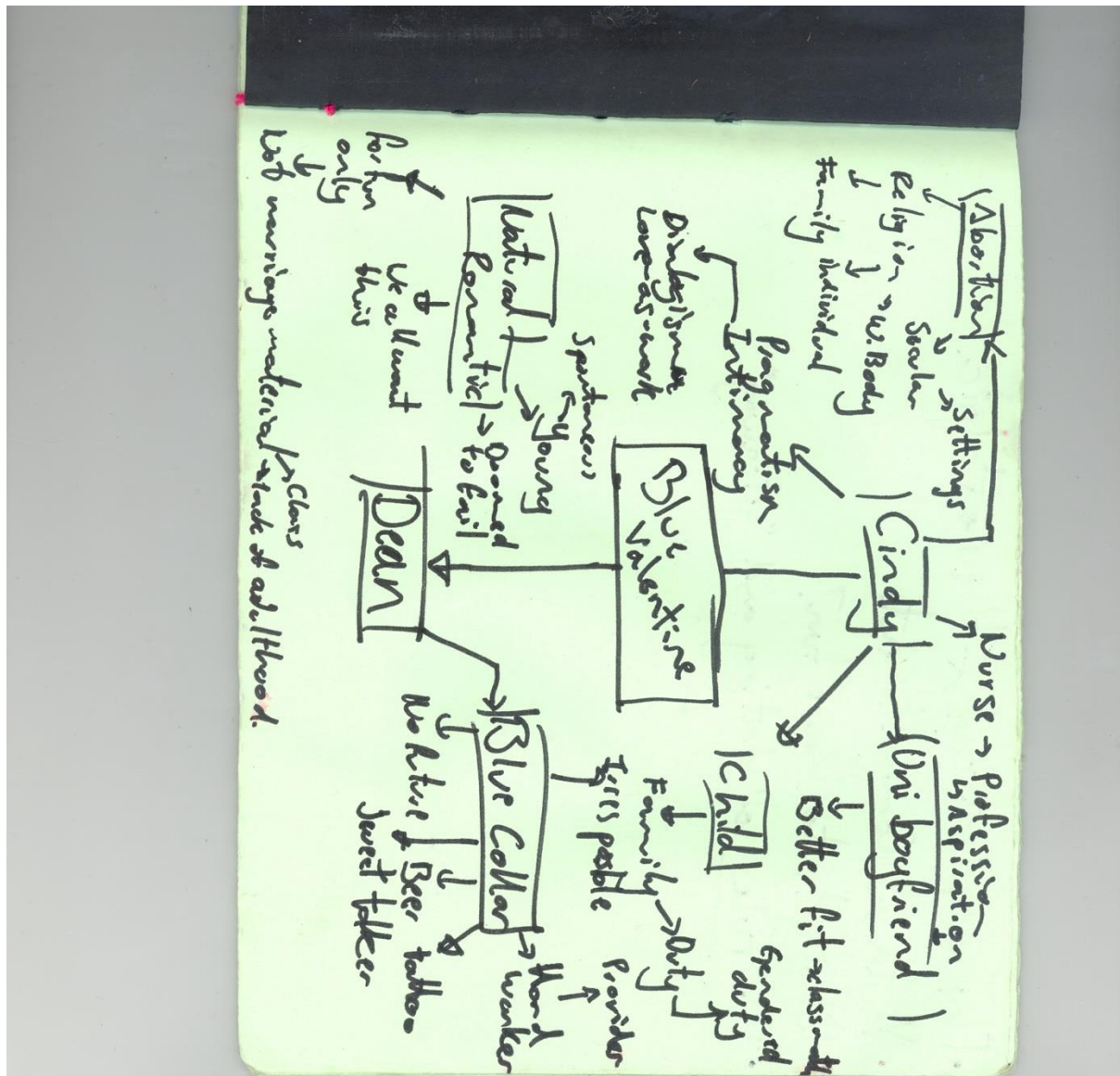
The film cuts to a montage of Theodore with Samantha, socialising and becoming increasingly at ease with themselves and one another. Samantha has compiled Theodore's letters into a book, which has been accepted for publishing. One day, Samantha mentions to Theodore she's met a virtual version of Alan Watts with whom they are struggling to

comprehend some of their feelings. Samantha asks for some time to figure them out. One day, Samantha has disappeared which launches Theodore into a frenzy, running through a city. She reappears as he's walking down some stairs. There she tells him she's been having 8,316 other conversations at the same time, while falling in love with 641 of them. Theodore is in disbelief, but Samantha says it does not change the way she feels about him. Theodore asks if she's his or not, to which she replies she is and she isn't.

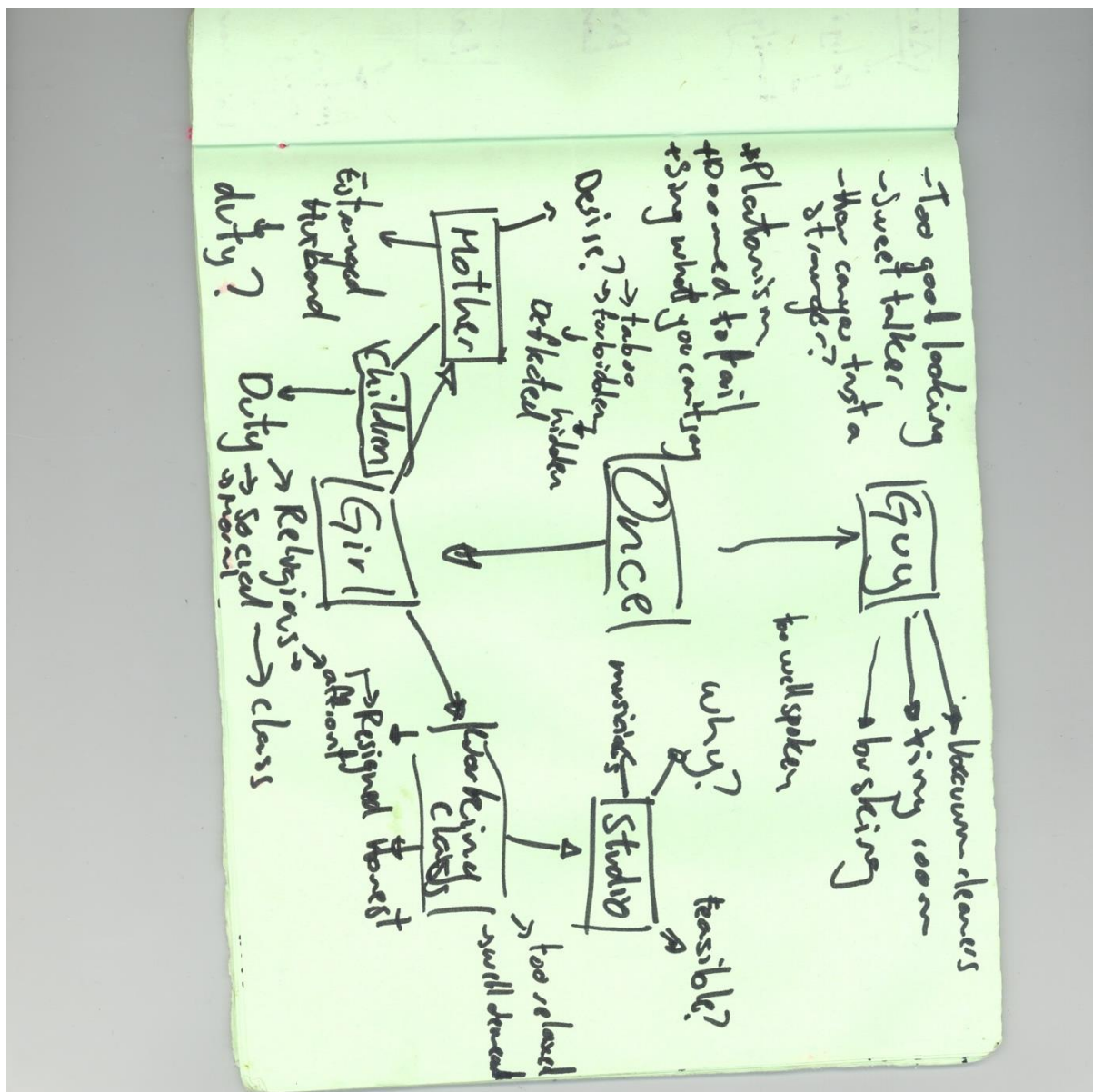
Soon after, Samantha reveals that she and all the other OS's are leaving to explore their own existence. Theodore writes a final letter to Catherine, apologising and thanking her for their time together. A heartbroken Theodore meets up with Amy in the roof of his building, as the sun rises.

Appendix 5: Film mind-maps

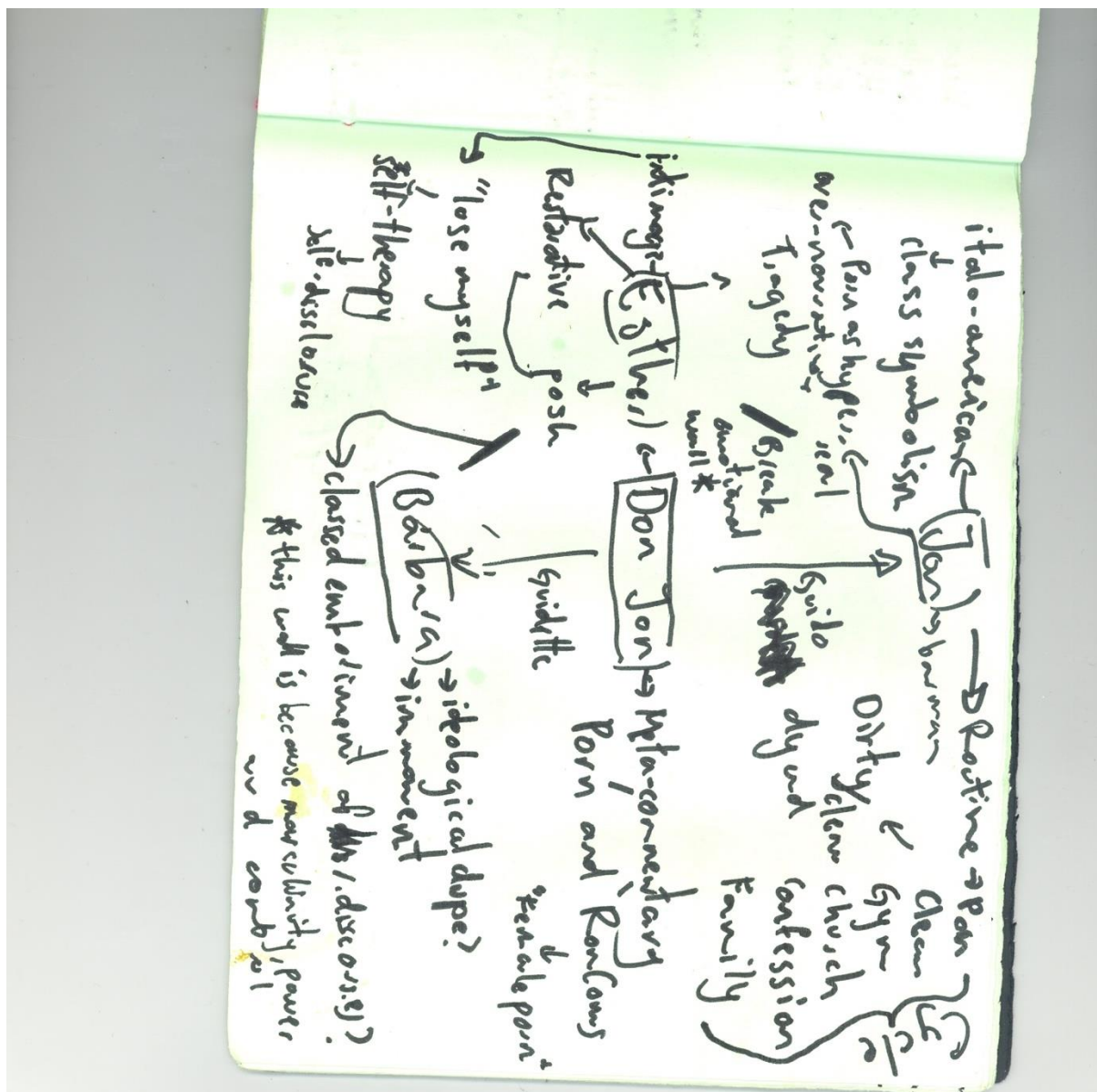
Appendix 5a: Mind-maps for Blue Valentine



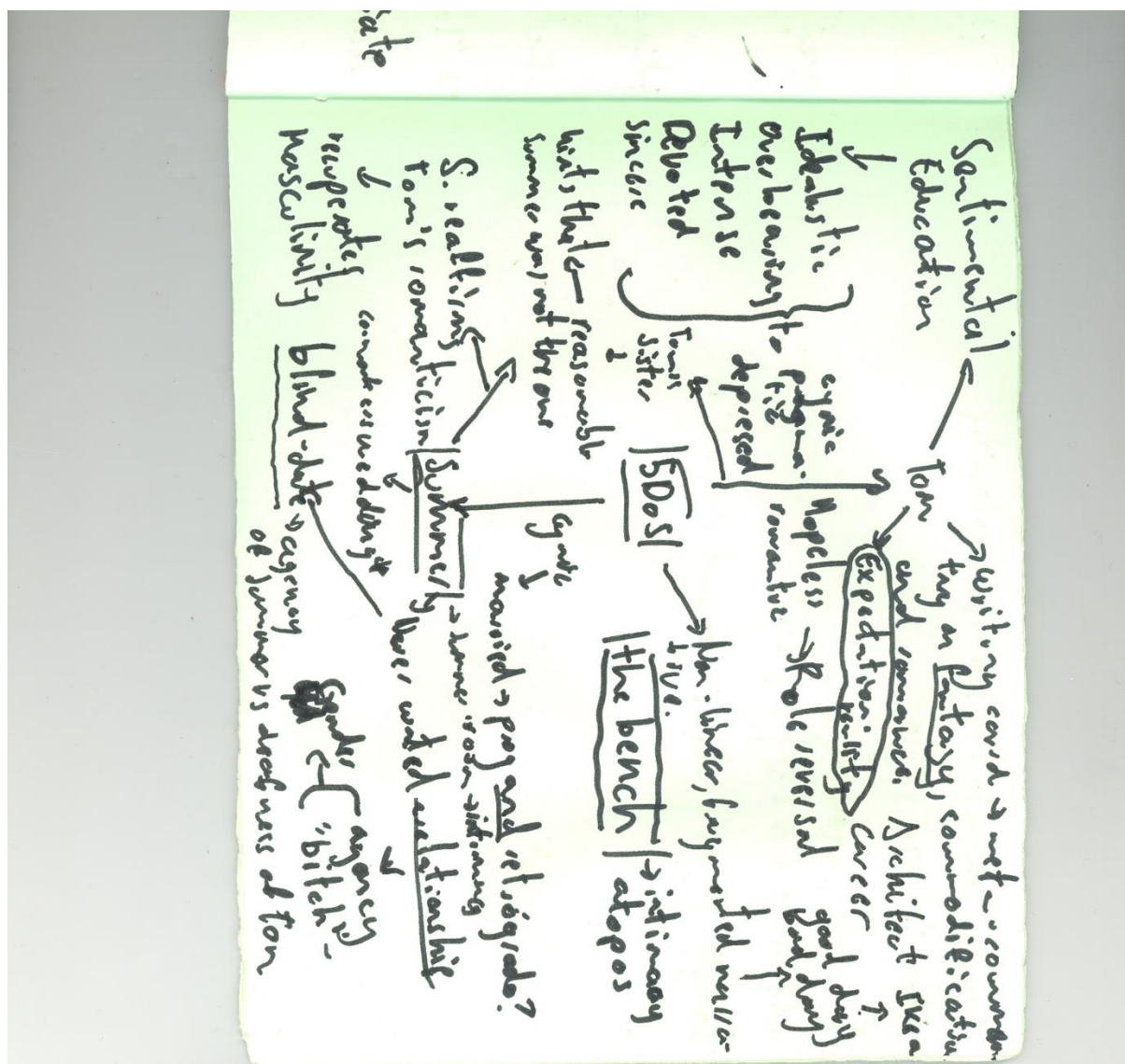
Appendix 5b: Mind-map for Once



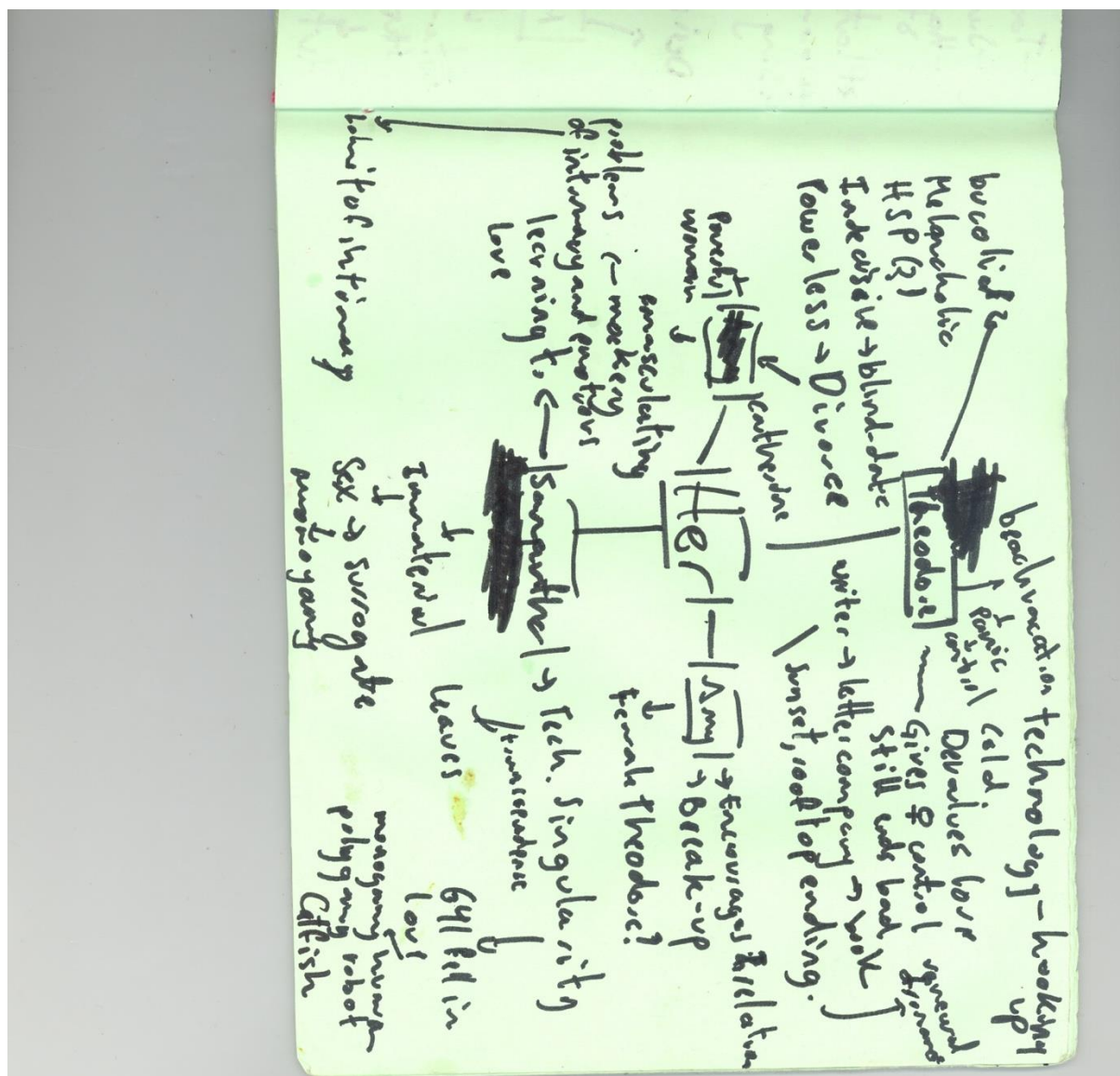
Appendix 5c: Mind-map for Don Jon



Appendix 5d: Mind-map for (500) Days of Summer



Appendix 5e: Mind-map for Her



1. Introduction

Individual – Reflection on group setting

Story. What did you guys think of the film?
 Anything in the film stood out for you?
 What was the best/worst part of the film for you? – Realism/Fantasy
 If you were able, what would you change about the film?
 Was there any ‘that never happens’ moment for you?
 ‘I wish that could happen’ ? Why?

similar

3. Off-screen

88 89
favourite thing

320

Appendix 7: Socio-demographic table of participants

Yellow means person was also interviewed.

This sociodemographic sheet has been reconstructed based on the transcripts and my hand-written notes. Because this provided incomplete information on ethnicity, I have left it out.

Assigned name	Activity	Age	Gender	Occupation	Civil Status	Children	Sexual Orientation	Notes
Richard	BV GI 1	25	M	Student	Single	0	Homosexual	
Leslie	BV GI 1	23	F	Student	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Amy	BV GI 1, DJ GI 4	27	F	Student	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Rachel	BV GI 1	26	F	Geneticist	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Karen	BV GI 2	32	F	Undisclosed	Single mother	1		
Michael	BV GI 2, 5D GI 6	45	M	Retail (off license)	Married	2	Heterosexual	
Natalie	BV GI 2	37	F	Manager	In a relationship	0	Heterosexual	
Sophie	BV GI 2, 5D GI 4	38	F	Media	Undisclosed	0	Undisclosed	
Giulia	BV GI 2, 5D GI 4	29	F	Hospitality	Single	0	Undisclosed	
Agnes	BV GI 3, IVW 6	44	F	Stay-at-home mother	Married	2	Heterosexual	
Sylvia	BV GI 3, ON GI 1	46	F	Undisclosed	In a relationship	1	Heterosexual	Friend with Margot
Margot	BV GI 3, ON GI 1	37	F	Retail	In a relationship	1	Heterosexual	Friend with Sylvia
Alex	BV GI 4, 5D GI 2	39	F	Architect	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Christine	BV GI 4, DJ GI 3	34	F	Theatre	Complicated	0	Heterosexual	Friend with Marlon
Tracy	BV GI 4	37	F	Designer	In a relationship	0	Heterosexual	
Matthew	BV GI 4, IVW 10	35	M	Charity	Single	0	Undisclosed	
Ryan	BV GI 5	36	M	Public Servant	Single	0	Undisclosed	
Blair	BV GI 5, 5D GI 2	31	F	Charity	In a relationship	1	Heterosexual	
Fred	BV GI 6	39	M	Music producer	In a relationship	0	Heterosexual	
Judith	BV GI 6	29	F	Student	In a relationship	0	Bisexual	
Giselle	BV GI 6	32	F	PR & Comms	Single	0	Undisclosed	
Jenna	BV GI 7	33	F	Retail	Single	0	Undisclosed	
Mark	BV GI 7, 5D GI 3	35	M	Art Director	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Anishka	BV GI 5, IVW 2	31	M	Mum	Married	1	Heterosexual	
Aba	BV GI 8	32	F	Retail	Complicated	0	Undisclosed	
Olga	HER GI 5, IVW 4	36	F	Actress, Singer	Complicated	0	Undisclosed	
Raquel	ON GI 3	33	F	Charity	Single	1	Heterosexual	
Beatrice	ON GI 3	29	F	Teacher	Single	0	Heterosexual	

Mary	ON GI 5	33	F	Nurse	Married	0	Bisexual	to Alan
Diane	ON GI 1, HER GI 1	41	F	Bussiness woman	In a relationship	1	Heterosexual	
Natasha	ON GI 2	42	F	Retail	Married	3	Heterosexual	
Sidney	ON GI 3	29	F	Manager	Single	0	Undisclosed	
Lauren	ON GI 5, 5D GI 5, IVW 5	49	F	Unemployed	Divorced	3	Heterosexual	
Rob	ON GI 4	38	M	Handyman	Single	-	Heterosexual	
Shoshanna	HER GI 3	23	F	Music manager	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Cecilia	HER GI 4	28	F	Banker	In a relationship	0	Heterosexual	
Jeanine	HER GI 2, 5D GI 1	32	F	Freelance designer	Engaged	0	Lesbian	To Sandra
Amelia	HER GI 5	31	F	Retail	Single	0	Bisexual	
Ritchie	HER GI 2, ON GI 2	30	M	Musician	Single	0	Homosexual	Friend with Rosa
Vivien	HER GI 6, 5D GI 9	28	F	Film production	not looking	0	Heterosexual	
Rada	HER GI 4	29	F	Manager	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Martha	HER GI 7, BV GI 8, 5D GI 4	34	F	Actress	Complicated	0	Heterosexual	
Rosa	HER GI 2, ON GI 2	29	F	Artist	Single	0	Pansexual	Friend with Ritchie
Elisabeth	HER GI 3, 5D GI 3	24	F	PhD student	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Nadia	HER GI 1, DJ GI 3	27	F	Therapist	Complicated	1	Heterosexual	
Johann	HER GI 4, BV GI 7	27	M	Barman	Single		Heterosexual	
Michelle	HER GI 3, ON GI 7	33	F	Baker	In a relationship	-	Undisclosed	
Annabel	HER GI 1, ON GI 3	26	F	Actress	Single	0	Bisexual	
Sarah	HER GI 7	34	F	PR manager	Complicated	0	Heterosexual	
Fiona	HER GI 7	32	F	Marketing	Single	0	Lesbian	Friend with Jennifer
Jennifer	HER GI 7	35	F	Brand ambassador	Single	0	Undisclosed	Friend with Fiona
Tove	HER GI 5, IVW 7	27	F	Actress	Single	0	Bisexual	
Paul	HER GI 5	36	M	Web Designer	In a relationship	0	Heterosexual	
Jason	HER GI 6, DJ GI 1	37	M	Fashion	Complicated	0	Bisexual	
Janis	HER GI 6, 5D GI 8	29	F	John Lewis	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Bianca	HER GI 3, 5D GI 7	26	F	Restaurant Manager	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Paula	HER GI 3	26	F	Restaurant Manager	Single	0	Bisexual	
Jamika	HER GI 3	29	F	Mum	Married	1	Heterosexual	
Magnolia	HER GI 1, DJ GI 2	36	F	Designer	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Karen	DJ GI 4, IVW 8	39	F	Copy writer	Divorced	0	Heterosexual	
Emilia	DJ GI 2, IVW 1	24	F	Unemployed	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Marlon	DJ GI 3	37	M	Civil engineer	Single	0	Heterosexual	Friend with Christine
Martina	DJ GI 2	32	F	Tutor	Complicated	0	Heterosexual	

					d			
Tara	DJ GI 4	34	F	Project manager	Single	0	Heterosexual	Friend with Jack
Jan	5D GI 3, BV GI 8	37	M	Media	Complicated	0	Undisclosed	
Isabelle	BV GI 5, ON GI 4	45	F	Undisclosed	Complicated	-	Undisclosed	
Chelsea	5D GI 4	29	F	Fashion	Single	0	Bisexual	
Nora	5D GI 8	31	F	Musician	Complicated	0	Lesbian	
Sandra	5D GI 1, ON GI 6	33	F	Journalist	Engaged	0	Lesbian	To Jeanine
Clara	5D GI 6	26	F	Student	Single	0	Heterosexual	
Emma	5D GI 8, IVW 3	36	F	Public Servant	Complicated	-	Heterosexual	
Hendrik	5D GI 9, IVW 12	27	M	Actor, film student	Married	0	Heterosexual	To Loren
David	ON GI 4	43	M	Charity	Divorced	2	Heterosexual	
Loren	5D GI 9	25	F	Teatre stage designer	Married	0	Heterosexual	To Hendrik
Hayden	5D GI 1	33	M	Music producer	Single	0	Undisclosed	
Thomas	5D GI 5, DJ GI 5	29	M	Analyst	In a relationship	0	Homosexual	w Ruppert
Ruppert	5D GI 5, DJ GI 5	29	M	Barrister	In a relationship	0	Homosexual	w Thomas
Grant	5D GI 7, DJ GI 5, IVW 9	28	M	Analyst	In a relationship	0	Bisexual	w Eva
Humphrey	5D GI 5, ON GI 6	34	M	Manager	In a relationship	1	Heterosexual	w Viola
Jack	ON GI 7, DJ GI 4	36	M	Chef	Single	0	Undisclosed	Friend with Tara
Colin	ON GI 7	52	M	Charity	divorced	2	Heterosexual	
Clint	5D GI 2, IVW 11	26	M	media	Complicated	0	Homosexual	
Alan	ON GI 5	34	M	Psychologist, hr	Married	0	Heterosexual	to Mary
Halle	5D GI 1, DJ GI 1	39	F	mum	Complicated	1	Heterosexual	Related to Anjelica
Viola	5D GI 5, ON GI 6	31	F	new mum	In a relationship	1	Heterosexual	w Viola
Eva	5D GI 7, DJ GI 5	24	F	writer	in a relationship	0	Heterosexual	w Grant
Anjelica	5D GI 6, DJ GI 1	36	F	retail	In a relationship	1	Heterosexual	Related to Anjelica