AN INSIGHT INTO THE WORKS OF NOAH BAUMBACH
by Isabel Oliver
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This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfilment of the BA (Hons) Film degree at Dublin Business School.

I confirm that all work included in this thesis is my own unless indicated otherwise.

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Introduction

“You have to know the past to understand the present” - Carl Sagan

This dissertation focuses on the work of Noah Baumbach over the last 20 years, concentrating on his use of aesthetic and sociological techniques. In order to fully appreciate his work, it is necessary to look back at those directors who have inspired his films. Firstly, I will look at the filmmakers’ use of New York City as a backdrop and a central character. In particular, I will focus on directors Martin Scorsese (Mean Streets (1973) and Taxi Driver (1976), John Cassavetes (Shadows (1959), Faces (1968) and Woody Allen (Manhattan (1979), Annie Hall (1977), analysing their use of technology, dialogue and location. I will then examine their influence on director Noah Baumbach (Frances Ha (2012), Mistress America (2015), as he incorporates ‘real life’ elements into the majority of his narratives. In doing so, I will highlight the director’s union of past and present film techniques, while exploring several contemporary practices found today.
Chapter 1

New York: The Celluloid Skyline

In *The Celluloid Skyline (2001)*, James Sanders eloquently writes: “the movie city, the mythic city, is ultimately far more than a mirror.” While referring to the medium of film, New York has multiple profiles. Each identity circulating around a dramatised stereotype or representation found within the city. From Woody Allen’s “self-reflexive” “neurotic love letter” to his hometown, as he infinitely examines himself and those around him; to the dark, violent, street films of New York City, found among the narratives of John Cassavetes and Martin Scorsese. However, despite the multiple cinematic stereotypes The Empire State may possess, “movie makers today, looking at the real city, so often see more than is there.” Film directors such as Noah Baumbach, have paved the way for up and coming filmmakers to reflect on ‘real life’ experiences to inspire their narratives, rather than the vast archives of stereotypes and conventional images of New York. James Sanders declares:

New York is a place unto itself, an extraordinary cultural construct spanning hundreds of individual films. Perhaps it is precisely because real New York possesses this ‘other’ city as some kind of adjunct or underside or dream version of itself, that it holds a true claim to urban greatness, once shared by only a few places in history. Once they were called ‘storied’ or ‘fabled’ cities. Today we tell our fables with a celluloid.

Since the early 1920s to contemporary cinema today, New York City has been regarded as a blank canvas for screenwriters, actors and emerging directors to display their narratives and make their mark in the film industry. It can be argued that Paul Strand and Charles Sheerler’s documentary
Manhatta (1921), is one of the earliest odes to “a modernist vision of old New York.” Although there is little to no dialogue throughout the documentary Manhatta (1921), the images demonstrating a day in the life of a New Yorker, combined with the words of Walt Whitman’s poem Mannahatta (1900), allow its audience to feel the rush and excitement found within the city that never sleeps.

Manhatta (1921) inspired many directors to utilise the location of New York, using the city as a backdrop to display their narratives. “With names such as Adolph Zuker (Paramount Pictures), William Fox (FOX), Cecil B. DeMile (Dynamite (1929), New York City was emerging as the centre of culture and sophistication throughout the 1920s.” Inspired by directors of the past, contemporary filmmakers adopted new methods of production allowing them to develop narratives of their own. From the romanticised, yet slightly New York neurotic narratives, seasoned with biting wit and choreographed sarcasm; constructed by Woody Allen (Annie Hall (1977) and Manhattan (1979); to violent accounts, featuring guns, gangsters and a plethora of attitude. Such attributes can be found within the films of Martin Scorsese (Mean Streets (1973), Taxi Driver (1976) and Goodfellas (1990), as well as fellow New Yorker John Cassavetes (Shadows (1959) and Faces (1968).
John Cassavetes

Growing up in New York City during the mid-1930s, Cassavetes “initially became interested in acting.” However, it wasn’t until his directorial debut with controversial narrative *Shadows (1959)*, that he “rose to prominence as a director.” During an interview with *MS Magazine* in 1987, filmmaker John Cassavetes stated:

> Film is an art, a beautiful art. Its a madness that overcomes us. The artist is really a magical figure. The idea of making a movie is to pack a lifetime of ideas and emotions into a two-hour form—two hours where some images flash across the screen. And the hope is that the audience will forget everything and the celluloid will change lives. That’s a preposterously presumptuous assumption, yet that’s the hope of every filmmaker.

Already fulfilling the role as an established actor “one never quite knew what Cassavetes would say or do next, in a role or in life.” It was only after a brief appearance on national radio show *Night People* and a “rhetorical flourish, that Cassavetes career as a producer, writer and director was unexpectedly launched.” After collecting $2,000 for his efforts on *Night People*, “Cassavetes felt absolutely honour bound to make a movie with it.” The production process of *Shadows (1959)* commenced in 1957. “Cassavetes later admitted to making every mistake they could.” It was the combination of inexperienced actors, lacking both a script and the knowledge to create such film, which led to several issues on set. Despite the trials and tribulations experienced by the cast and crew Cassavetes made his box office debut with the confrontational romance narrative *Shadows (1959)*. Set in Manhattan during the 1950s, the story of *Shadows (1959)* follows the relationship of Leila and Tony, an interracial couple, as they face the circumstances of “living in the shadows of crazy Manhattan.” (See Figure 1)
Following his financial success at the box office with *Shadows (1959)*, John Cassavetes briefly left New York for Los Angeles, in order to work under renowned director and producer Stanley Kramer. Regrettably his time in Hollywood did not last, due to disagreements with the crew. This led to Cassavetes being blacklisted from Hollywood for a number of years. Despite this setback, he took advantage of his former role as a subordinate producer and became determined to create his own feature. However, he was unsuccessful in this endeavour. Following his experience in L.A, Cassavetes re-wrote several former narratives where his focus had shifted to “the shallowness and hypocrisy of L.A deal making.”

Deemed to be “one of the most important artists of the 20th century, Cassavetes originality within his work was precisely what doomed it to critical misunderstanding and neglect.” He was renowned for narratives such as *Shadows (1959)* and *Faces (1968)*. Cassavetes’ films provided its audience with new cinematic encounters. With his ability to create depictions of ‘real life', using
dialogue “that comes so close to real speech it often sounds peculiar, similar to ad-libbing,” the director disallowed the audience any hint of conflicted sub-context within the narrative, instilling a sense of realism throughout his stories. John Cassavetes use of realistic dialogue and is echoed through Baumbach’s work. We see this technique repeated through a number of his films from *Kicking and Screaming (1995)* to *Mistress America (2015)*. However, in contrast to Cassavetes “jazz style” approach to filmmaking, while Baumbach’s dialogue may come across as realistic, each line is meticulously constructed leaving little to no room for error.

Based on previous experiences, Cassavetes emotive threshold swiftly transitioned from the pleasant and heartfelt narratives found in films such as *Shadows (1959)*, to the unceasing aggressive and abusive accounts such as *Faces (1968)* (See figure 2). Throughout his career John Cassavetes influenced numerous up and coming directors works with his “nouvelle vague filmmaking American style” and unpredictable methods while shooting. As Scorsese comments, “Around the same time, as I became aware of what a director could do…right at the period of say fifty-nine to sixty, the film that made the strongest impact on me, also taught me a great deal was *Shadows (1959)*

Figure 2: Film still from John Cassavetes *Faces (1968)*  
(Source: Cassavetes, 1968. Faces. Courtesy of Walter Reade Productions)
Martin Scorsese


Heavily influenced by the works of John Cassavetes, Orson Wells and François Truffaut, Martin Scorsese “has become, for many, the greatest filmmaker still working at the height of his powers— the king of American cinema.”[25] When reflecting on the work of this substantial New York director, Scorsese’s narratives are not only an expression of a personal perspective, but a semi-autobiographical account of his own experiences. Arguing “his films aren't quite autobiographies,”[26] Scorsese continues to declare that “there are certain feelings in the characters which I would identify with… if I were disinterested in the characters or couldn’t relate to them, I couldn't make a film about them.”[27] This exhibition of real life occurrences concealed behind the facade of fictional characters is reflected throughout a number Baumbach’s works.

Martin Scorsese has drawn on multiple influences for guidance and inspiration while writing and directing his narratives. “John Cassavetes was the filmmaker who’s example, encouragement and friendship most profoundly influenced Scorsese’s early works.”[28] While establishing his career as an emerging filmmaker during the late 1970s Scorsese was supported by John Cassavetes “who subsequently gave him an assistant sound editors credit,”[29] following his work on Minnie and Moskovitz (1972). Martin Scorsese became highly inspired by the works Bertolucci, specifically Before the Revolution (1964). During this time his “sense of urgency”[30] was eminent as he strived to produce his first feature film during his undergraduate semester in NYU. After creating a several films, including Boxcar Bertha (1972), “a film belonging to a new genre, started by Warren Beaty’s Bonnie and Clyde (1967)”[31], Scorsese made his directorial debut with hard hitting, gangster drama, Mean Streets (1973). (See figure 3)
The narrative of *Mean Streets (1973)* is an account following the experiences of those living on the lower east side of Manhattan. *Mean Streets (1973)* “speaks powerfully of the ethnic hatred that ruled the streets, Scorsese witnessed as he grew up.” Following his box office launch, Scorsese continued to produce films calling attention to events experienced by him in the past. Such narratives include, *Taxi Driver (1976)* and *Goodfellas (1990)*. With each film “Scorsese insists that his films are meant to be documentaries of a sort, as well as dramas; artifacts that speak of what a certain person said, what they thought, the way they dressed and moved.” Scorsese’s use of semi-autobiographical aspects can be found among several narratives constructed by Baumbach. Such films include *Kicking and Screaming (1995)* and *The Squid and The Whale (2005)*.

Throughout his career “Scorsese has successfully managed, perhaps like no other American film maker, to make artistic personal films within the Hollywood system.” With narratives delivered by way of a nervous, New York “staccato” tone, Scorsese’s work has allowed him to be defined
by many, as the most influential contemporary director of his time. Admitting to self-proclaimed authorship, possessing narratives poles apart from a “neurotic love letter” to his hometown, Scorsese films constantly focus on the violent bittersweet reality of living in New York (See figure 4), contrasting the romantic narratives found throughout Woody Allen’s archives.

Figure 4: Promotional still from Martin Scorsese’s Mean Streets (1973) “You don’t make up for your sins in Church. You do it in the streets. You do it at home.”
(Source: Scorsese,1973. Mean Streets  Courtesy of Warner Brothers Productions)
Woody Allen

“Chapter 1: He adored New York City. He idolized it all out of proportion…no, make that he— he romanticised it all out of proportion. Yes. To him, no matter what the season was, this was still a town that existed in black and white and pulsated to the great tunes of George Gershwin.”

Whilst contemplating the notion of New York cinema and its characters, it is difficult to disregard native New Yorker, Woody Allen. Raised in Brooklyn, Allen’s childhood was composed of “trips to Manhattan; a place where he subsequently became enchanted by the movies, captivated by the works of comedian Bob Hope and finally enthralled with the notion of magic and jazz.” After a brief stint as a stage magician in 1951, Allen soon identified his comical strengths, leaving magic behind. Succeeding his submission of comical copyright to several advertising firms, Allen’s niche in comedy was established. Woody Allen’s characterisation of comedy is highlighted by a number of unlikeable personas with several redeemable qualities. This element can be found throughout a number of Baumbach’s films, specifically Kicking and Screaming (1995).

Following a short college career, dubbed by Allen as “a brief abortive year in college,” Allen left NYU to pursue his career as a joke contributor for The Gary Moore Show (1950—1958). As his career progressed into “the early 1960s”, Allen’s comedic streak eventually rewarded him with “considerable recognition and several television appearances” on shows such as What’s My Line? (1950-1967). Such recognition eventually earned him his own TV show titled: The Woody Allen Show (1965). “In 1965, shortly after producing three successful comedy records, Allen made his debut, as an actor and a screenwriter in What’s New PussyCat? (1965).” Following his screenwriting launch, Allen’s next project Take the Money and Run (1969), “was the first project
that he not only wrote and starred in, but directed as well.” Despite the fact that a number of his films have been “critically acclaimed, it wasn't until the 1977 release of Annie Hall (1977) (see figure 5), that Woody Allen became identified as a remarkable figure within cinematic society.

In the wake of his box office success with Annie Hall (1977), Allen proceeded to create a collective of successful New York narratives from Manhattan (1979) (See figure 6), to contemporary features such as Café Society (2016). Throughout his narratives, Woody Allen pens a “neurotic love letter” to his hometown. From the charming and comical Annie Hall (1977), to the captivating black-and-white love story Manhattan (1979); Woody Allen demonstrates a softer, more romanticised perception of New York. This element is mirrored by Baumbach’s later work Frances Ha (2012).
The celluloid skyline possesses a multitude of characters, giving way to an enormous archive of narratives. Following in the wake of his cinematic counterparts, Noah Baumbach uses the glistening backdrop of New York City as a frame to recount the triumphs and failures encountered by his characters in the city that never sleeps. However, in order to fully understand this director, it is important to look back on his earlier works, observing his transition from a part-time columnist to the renowned filmmaker he is today.

Figure 6: Film still from Woody Allen’s *Manhattan* (1979)
Chapter 2

Early Works of Noah Baumbach: Getting Started

“I’ve always viewed life as material for a movie.” 46 Noah Baumbach,

Noah Baumbach grew up in Brooklyn during the late 1970s. He lived with his parents, Jonathan Baumbach and Georgia Brown, who were two established film critics. It was in this environment Baumbach began to develop a passion for “high culture; found in film, books and art” 47 early on in his life. After spending the majority of his formative years in Brooklyn, Noah Baumbach enrolled in Vassar college and subsequently obtained a job as a messenger for The New Yorker. During his time there, Baumbach composed a series of narratives and short films based on real life experiences. His parent’s divorce would later influence the director to create the narrative The Squid and The Whale (2005). During this time, he also provided a number of witty columns such as: La Nouvelle Joie De Peindre (1991); Keith Richards Desert-Island (1999) and Van Gogh in AOL (2000); for the magazine.

Baumbach graduated from Vassar college in 1991, with a degree in English and an idea that would lead him to his box office debut. This idea resulted in the film Kicking and Screaming (1995). It was inspired by Whit Stillman’s bourgeois New York based narrative, Metropolitan (1990), as well as Baumbach’s college experience. Kicking and Screaming (1995), is a filmic examination of how students cope with the notion of post-college boredom and the concept of making real life choices defining them as adults. It is regarded by many “as an anti Generation X film” 48.
Following its completion, Noah Baumbach looked to his fellow classmate and “aspiring producer, Jason Blum”\textsuperscript{49} for help. Blum’s thorough enjoyment of the script inspired him to pass the screenplay on to his close friend and renowned “actor/comedian Steve Martin.”\textsuperscript{50} It was Martin’s contacts which enabled Baumbach to create his first feature. In 1995, *Kicking and Screaming (1995)* opened in the New York Film Festival. As the film was widely received by positive reviews, *Kicking and Screaming (1995)* launched Noah Baumbach’s career as a film director (see figure 7). This is the first example of Noah Baumbach using real life experience to influence his narratives, a prevalent pattern found in his future works.

![Figure 7: Noah Baumbach on set of *Kicking and Screaming (1995)* with Josh Hamilton and Eric Stoltz](Source: Baumbach, 1995. Kicking and Screaming. Courtesy of Trimark Pictures)

*Slant Magazine* correspondent, Nick Scharger declares in his 2006 article “Noah Baumbach has used his work to tackle the highly personal doubts, fears and disappointments”\textsuperscript{51} he previously struggled with. After studying Baumbach’s early works, this concept is evident throughout his film *Kicking and Screaming (1995).* For instance, while looking at the narrative there are several aspects related to the complications encountered while growing up. Such components include the
reluctance to grow up, while revealing the social issue of the “perils of being precociously over-educated or rather sophisticated beyond one’s ability to cope with sophistication.” The director also includes the imminent fear of having little to no prospects, following four years of education, as a subtle undertone featured within the narrative. This is illustrated by the director’s use of real life issues experienced by those within the film, echoing the work of his cinematic predecessor Martin Scorsese.

In her 1995 article, featured within The New York Times, Janet Maslin appropriately refers to Baumbach’s characters in Kicking and Screaming (1995) as: “baby birds with brand new college diplomas who seem to be having trouble leaving the nest;” a notion arguably universal to most college graduates. This element is reflected as the characters continue to reside on campus accommodation, despite their graduate status. While reflecting on a number of contemporary issues, Baumbach includes a cast of personas “who’s hero could be Peter Pan.” Throughout the film Kicking and Screaming (1995), each character is a prime representative of a certain collegiate stereotype, still found within society today. (See figure 8)
A primary example of a stereotypical college graduate can be found in Josh Hamilton’s character, Grover. Grover is a lovably vulnerable character whose usually absent minded father, “becomes too close and girlfriend moves too far away.” Cast as the underdog throughout the narrative, it can be argued that he is an honest embodiment of every college graduate’s nightmare. As Baumbach uses the element of flashback in order to demonstrate Grover’s recurring recollections of his lost love Jane, the audience later notice the character facing the universal conflict of having too much time on his hands and not enough work to do.

The final two characters: Otis, played by Carlos Jacott and Skippy, played by Jason Wiles; go hand in hand concluding the clan of collegiate lost boys. While looking at the story of Kicking and Screaming (1995), it can be argued that the majority of its narrative connotation deals with the “trepidation of unfamiliar territory. In this case adulthood.” Throughout Kicking and Screaming (1995), Baumbach puts both Otis and Skippy through several inconsequential, yet melancholic incidents. For instance as Otis, stimulated by his own initiative, ventures out to the pretentious video store in search of a job, he is subsequently disappointed after he is later asked by the interviewer: “What are your influences?” Whereas in Skippy’s case, his return to college does not go to plan, due to the fact he is unable to complete any of the curriculum. This is the first instance where we see the director highlighting the reluctance of his characters to grow up throughout his film. A pattern later to be found in future narratives.

Through his film Kicking and Screaming (1995) Baumbach highlights the notion of artificiality in character Max Belmont, played by Chris Eigeman. This is the first example where we see the director using contemporary context as a platform for each of his characters. The qualities of Max Belmont found throughout the narrative of Kicking and Screaming (1995) can only be described as
the professed alpha-dog of the collegiate pack. It can be argued that the character of Max, seasons the narrative with several instances of pretentious, yet innocent intelligence. For example in one sequence as he talks to a girl approaching her seventeenth birthday, Max remarks: “So now you can read Seventeen Magazine and get all the references.” Janet Maslin argues that while Eigeman’s character has the potential to be more “funny than emotionally engaging,” it can be contended that the director manages to evoke both in a number of his characters. In doing so, Baumbach mirrors the work of Woody Allen by incorporating humour and unlikeable characters, producing an engaging narrative.

Demonstrated by a series of “avoidance games”, each character evokes a ubiquitous series of mannerisms established in the narrative structure. Nick Schager from Slant Magazine, highlights each character “side steps confrontation whenever possible,” for fear of causing a fuss in public. A primary example of this can be found as the main protagonists hide in order to evade a salesman selling cookies (see figure 9). Another example of this can be found as Max reminds his girlfriend not to confront a redneck who’s “bumper sticker indicates he’d rather be bow hunting.” While studying the characters of Baumbach’s directorial debut, it is difficult to ignore the evident similarities in behaviour between his characters, despite a plethora of differences in traits and mannerisms.

Figure 9: Film still from Baumbach’s Kicking and Screaming
When discussing the central meaning behind his film in a 2005 “interview with the A.V Club at The Onion,”63 Noah Baumbach stated “the point of Kicking and Screaming (1995), I always felt, was that college equalises people from different economic backgrounds, and once you graduate, you’re put back where you were.”64 Throughout the narrative, “Baumbach’s protagonists are too smart not to realise the avoidance game they’re playing, their self-analytical awareness making them more charmingly pathetic.”65 The fundamental concept and purpose of Baumbach’s coming of age comedy Kicking and Screaming (1995), focuses on highlighting the avoidance of future responsibilities, while coping with the transition into adulthood.

In the time that Baumbach’s directorial debut wrapped, the director was twenty-six, and dubbed as one of Newsweek’s “Ten New Faces of 1996.”66 Following his box office debut Kicking and Screaming (1995), Baumbach quickly returned to the silver screen with “the underrated Mr. Jealousy (1997), another funny, though less immediately relatable, story about the uncomfortable emotions that emerge with adulthood.”67 Noah Baumbach considered his second feature, a follow up to the witty coming-of age narrative, as a direct tribute to the works of Billy Wilder, François Truffaut and Ernest Lubitsch. Mr. Jealousy (1997), recounts the story of two “self defeating romantics”68 emulating their issues in dark, yet trendy coffeehouses. In doing so, Noah Baumbach portrays the narrative of possessive Lester Grimm, played by Eric Stolz, and his obsession with girlfriend Ramona Ray, played by Annabella Sciorra.

The story of Mr. Jealousy (1997), follows the journey of miserable teacher Lester Grimm, as he tries to come to terms with his distant girlfriend’s behaviour and the fact he may never be a literary success. In order to change, Lester Grimm eventually succumbs to modelling his behaviour after
“appropriate rival: Dashiell Frank; the literary celebrity known as the voice of his generation,” who also happens to be Ramona’s renowned ex-boyfriend. During this period, Grimm embarks on a number of pursuits in order to better himself in the literary field, while getting to know more about Ramona’s ex. Such adventures include “Lester joining Dashiell’s group therapy sessions under a false identity, in order to find out more about his opponent.

The narrative continues to proceed into absurd territories with side-kicks, pseudonyms and mistaken identities. However, despite its unruly structure and “farcical plot,” Nathan Rabin argues in his review for the *A.V Club* “*Mr. Jealousy (1997)*, is for the most part smart.” Similar to Kevin Smith’s *Chasing Amy (1997)*, the narrative of *Mr. Jealousy (1997)* explores the notion of “sexual and professional jealousy,” focusing on the subtle confrontations between Ramona, Lester and Dashiell. Following in the footsteps of Baumbach’s early work *Kicking and Screaming (1995)*, the structure of *Mr. Jealousy (1997)* focuses on characters “too old for college, yet unready for real life,” a theme later found in Baumbach’s later works such as, *Greenberg (2010)* and *Francis Ha (2012).*

Despite Baumbach’s efforts to repeat history and relive his cinematic success with *Mr. Jealousy (1997)*, he inevitably became submerged into what can only be described as the “shadow years” of his career. Due to the lack of connection between his audience and narratives, Baumbach eventually removed himself from the silver screen, allowing him to recharge his creative battery. During an interview for *Bomb Magazine* in 2005, Baumbach later admitted to Jonathan Lethem,
I started making movies pretty young; I had a lot of preconceived ideas about who I was as a filmmaker and the kind of career I wanted to have that was still connected, I think, to the teenager I was rather than the person I was becoming.\textsuperscript{76}

Following his box office disappointment with \textit{Mr. Jealousy (1997)}, Baumbach admittedly went through a period of cinematic hibernation and self discovery. In an interview with Scott Foundas, a chief film critic for \textit{Variety}, Baumbach goes on to explain this period further by stating:”I think I went through a period of, kind of, discovering in a more substantial way, what kind of films I wanted to make. As well as both who I was as a person and as a filmmaker.”\textsuperscript{77} However, despite several years of self enlightenment, “aside from the occasional humorous essay in \textit{The New Yorker}, and a co-writing credit on Wes Anderson’s \textit{Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou (2004)}, Baumbach fell off the radar.”\textsuperscript{78}
Chapter 3

Middle Career: 2005-Greenberg

In an interview with *Independent* correspondent James Mottram, Noah Baumbach explained that he learned a lot from Wes Anderson and was inspired by his ability to “work within the Hollywood studio system and still create wilfully, quirky films infused with an independent sensibility”\(^\text{79}\). He added: “Principally Wes is so committed to doing it the way he sees it in his head. Getting close to making the film as he conceives it - and being uncompromising that way.”\(^\text{80}\)

Following his collaboration with Wes Anderson on films such as *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), Noah Baumbach emerged from the shadows “debuting his fourth film: *The Squid and The Whale* (2005) at The Sundance Film Festival”\(^\text{81}\) in 2005. Received with praise and curiosity, *The Squid and the Whale* (2005), is an “Oscar-nominated narrative set in the 1980s,”\(^\text{82}\) following the dysfunctional demise of the Berkman family unit. With New York City as his platform, Baumbach refers back to several semi-autobiographical elements of his own upbringing, such as his parent’s divorce. Influenced by his own childhood experience, the director examines the coping mechanisms and characteristics embraced by the Berkman family in order to deal with their familial collapse.

*The Squid and the Whale* (2005) was produced by Wes Anderson. The film possesses what can be described as a “homely humanity”\(^\text{83}\) and its narrative contains “breath, impulse and life”\(^\text{84}\) which features throughout the most ordinary of situations and locations. The author Carolyn Jess-Cooke declares in her published works *Second Takes: Critical Approaches to The Sequel*, Baumbach’s film
is a poignant description of a family’s breakdown, following “the immediate aftermath of a parental separation in an intellectual Brooklyn family, in 1986.” During an *Indiewire* interview in 2009, Baumbach reflects on the impact his parent’s divorce had on the film’s narrative. He explains how he incorporated elements from his previous life, such as: his father’s old clothes and parent’s old books, to his own childhood hometown New York City in order to “connect with the material on both a visceral level and a creative level.” (See figure 10) This is another example of the director using elements from his past as a narrative mechanism.

The *Squid and The Whale* (2005) commences with an undertone of conflict and competition, as the Berkman family play a less than friendly game of tennis (see figure 11). Through his narrative, Baumbach uses the element of tennis as a symbolic motif in *The Squid and The Whale* (2005) in order to demonstrate anger and frustration felt among the family. The tennis game also highlights

![Figure 10: Baumbach on *The Squid and The Whale* (2005) set with Laura Linney (Joan Berkman)](Source: Baumbach, (2005) *The Squid and The Whale*. Courtesy of Samuel Goldwyn Films)
the disillusion of the Berkman family unit, with each side becoming more vicious. The structure of the entire film is established in one single line expressed by the youngest Berkman, Frank. The statement “Me and mom against you and dad” highlights the structure of the film’s entire plot: a familial unit breakdown. This scene allows the audience to understand the central theme of family conflict.

Throughout the film *The Squid and The Whale* (2005), Baumbach presents the audience with a highly stylised account of his own childhood masquerading as the characters found within the film. With a star studded cast including: Jeff Daniels, Laura Linney, Jesse Eisenberg, Owen Kline and William Baldwin; each actor enables the audience to understand, experience and empathise with the struggles faced by Baumbach, as he dealt with his parent’s separation. In his article “Why I love… *The Squid and the Whale’s Bernard Berkman*,” columnist Martin Pengelly describes Jeff Daniel’s character, the patriarchal figure head, as a “monstrously egotistical,” unsuccessful writer, who embodies the epitome of arrogance throughout the entire film. During an interview in a behind-the-
scenes feature for *The Squid and the Whale* (2005), Jeff Daniels describes his character Bernard as someone who is: “constantly in denial about who he is and how successful he really is/or isn’t in this case.” This character was loosely based on the memory of Baumbach’s father at the time.

Throughout the film Bernard Berkman, continues to declare his deteriorating perception of precedence over the intellectual community. He does this by splitting the general public into two sub-categories: academics, who share his affiliation for high culture, “and philistines, those who don’t.” A.O Scott from *The New Yorker* argues: the character of Bernard Berkman exists as a “fountain of pompous judgements,” there solely to disband and deject works of Dickens and “refer to Frank Kafka ‘as one of his predecessors;’” a tendency to be picked up later on by eldest son Walt. Despite his appalling and contemptible behaviour toward both his colleagues, family and friends; the character of Bernard emotes a certain melancholic tone, sharing several similarities with Max Belmont from *Kicking and Screaming* (1995). While his “preposterous self confidence” is enough to make any audience member recoil, this characteristic is a blatant smoke-screen for a wounded character trying to keep their head above water, similar to the rest of his family. This element is a feature found throughout the majority of Noah Baumbach’s films.

The character of Joan Berkman, documents the account of a discontented housewife. Inspired by attributes of Baumbach’s own mother, Joan goes through several emotional and personal changes, as she proceeds to write her unfinished novel. As the film continues Joan undergoes the process of “finding her own artistic voice and realising she has something more to contribute,” as Bernard slowly moves out of the picture. Cast as the film’s central matriarch, Joan Berkman plays the “good hearted, yet philandering” maternal figure to her two sons. Originating as a central voice of reason to her soon to be ex-husband’s rants. Joan’s character inevitably develops from doting
mother to an unrecognisable woman. Following her affair with the family tennis coach, Joan puts her previous life on hold, a fact neither of her son’s can condone.

*The Squid and The Whale (2005)* evoke emotions through use of relatable subjects universal to its audience. The narrative of the film examines a number of coping mechanisms adopted by the Berkmans in order to survive the family unit’s collapse. This element is seen in Joan and Bernard’s sons, Walt and Frank, as they struggle to deal with upsets caused by their parent’s divorce. From the very beginning of Baumbach’s narrative, each son takes a different parent’s side.

As the film proceeds, the parent’s personality traits emerge in both Walt and Frank’s behaviour. An example of this is when Walt confronts his mother about her affair. He conducts himself in a similar way to his father, as he shouts through a tone of condescendence and disgust: “men in and out of here, like a brothel.” Whereas Walt’s brother Frank takes a different approach defending his mother against Walt’s accusations, even though he knows them to be true. Despite Frank’s alliance to his mother, his character is adopting characteristics of his father. Such examples include: swearing and aggressive behaviour during his tennis lesson and drinking beer in the middle of the day, despite the fact he is only ten.

Noah Baumbach obtained inspiration both stylistically and narratively from “things that had… a raw feel.” In particular, by the French New Wave and some early works from both John Cassavetes and Martin Scorsese. Throughout the process of producing *The Squid and The Whale (2005)*, Baumbach remembers his own “experience of being caught in the maelstrom, the walls closing in,” in order to illustrate the claustrophobic atmosphere experienced. In doing so, he generated a “fast-moving series of pointed vignettes (Scott).” Although Baumbach’s narrative
was shot in less than twenty three days, he made a conscious effort “capturing the earthy, saturated
colours of old reversal-stock home movies, to ‘lived in’ production design, fashioning locations as
battered and as worn, as the characters that inhabit them.”

(See figure 12)

![Figure 12: Film still from The Squid and the Whale (2005) capturing earthy, lived in tones](Image)

When discussing the film with Baumbach, Variety editor Scott Foundas refers back to the director’s
use of aesthetic storytelling throughout his narrative, deeming it as a wonderful combination of
“clipped editing and use of a hand held.” In order to provide reasoning for this choice,
Baumbach responds by stating: “I wanted the movie to feel more immediate, I would crash scenes
together in order for this movie to have some sort of momentum.” In doing so, Baumbach mirrors
the works of John Cassavetes, as he takes a “shambolic approach to the aesthetic and the
narrative.”

Following his success with The Squid and the Whale (2005), Noah Baumbach returned to cinema
screens two years later with “his fifth directorial feature, Margot At The Wedding (2007).” The
film’s narrative follows the journey of overbearing novelist Margot, as she travels to the country with her son in order to visit her free spirit sister Pauline who plans to marry a man with whom “Margot immediately disapproves.” Featuring a conservative writer, a free-spirit and “self-destructive family politics,” Margot at the Wedding (2007) provides a platform of chaos; allowing the narrative to come alive with awkward embarrassments, ignorant postulations and dark family matters brought to light.

Margot at the Wedding (2007) theme of family conflict is similar to Baumbach’s earlier work The Squid and The Whale (2005). With echoes of Woody Allen, Noah Baumbach combines a number of unsympathetic characters who have some sense of redeemable qualities. Peter C. Kunze, author of The Films of Wes Anderson: Critical Essays on an Indiewood Icon, argues “Baumbach’s films are filled with characters that are notably competitive; be it with siblings, cousins or spouses.” (See figure 13)

Figure 13: Film still from Baumbach’s Margot at The Wedding (2007) with Margot (Nicole Kidman) and Pauline (Jennifer Jason-Leigh) (Source: Baumbach, 2007. Margot at The Wedding. Courtesy of Scott Rudin Productions)
Throughout Baumbach’s films, competitiveness between characters is a central theme providing an arc within the narrative. In *The Squid and the Whale (2005)*, the competitiveness is evident in estranged couple Bernard and Joan’s relationship, as they clash over both personal and professional opinions. At the same time both of their sons are conflicted as they take sides and struggle to cope with their parent’s divorce. Furthermore, in *Margot at The Wedding (2007)*, the conflict “centres around a troubled relationship between two adult sisters, competing over personal matters, rather than a successful career,”¹⁰⁸ as found in *The Squid and the Whale (2005)*.

When analysing the films of Noah Baumbach, it is difficult to ignore the central theme of ‘real life.’ Throughout each of his films Baumbach creates characters who possess certain characteristics which we respond to as: ‘where do I know that person from?’ “Many of us have known someone like Roger Greenberg, played by Ben Stiller, a prickly failure, who happens to become hero of Noah Baumbach’s film *Greenberg (2010)*”¹⁰⁹.

The story of *Greenberg (2010)*, follows the journey of “a bilious forty year old man, who is thrown a lifeline by a free-spirited younger woman,”¹¹⁰ played by Greta Gerwig. While cringing at his arrival on screen and preparing ourselves for future rant about to commence, Baumbach’s film *Greenberg (2010)*, allows the audience to understand the character of Robert Greenberg to be more than just the “lovable eccentric,”¹¹¹ but as a real human being.

Throughout the film, the conjoined elements of accepting adulthood and mortality are prominent features weaved into the narrative structure. This concept is highlighted as Roger Greenberg comes to the conclusion: “*All the men out here dress like children and all the kids dress like*
superheroes,” following his attendance at a “Hollywood Hills children’s birthday party (See figure 14).” Greenberg shares a number of similarities with patriarchal tyrant Bernard Berkman from The Squid and The Whale (2005) and Margot, from Margot At The Wedding (2007). Each character goes through an individual identity crisis. For instance, Greenberg feels twenty-five still acts twenty-five, why can’t he be twenty-five?”

When asked in a 2005 interview by New York Times Magazine correspondent Deborah Solomon, about his inspiration for his narratives, Baumbach declares: “I’ve always viewed life as material for a movie.” Throughout his directorial career, it can be argued that Noah Baumbach has used his own stages of life experience to inspire and inform his films. However, with films such as Frances Ha (2012) and Mistress America (2015), Noah Baumbach returns back to his youth, demonstrating to the audience what its like to be a lost twenty-something individual, trying to make it in New York City. (See figure 15). From adolescence to adulthood, Noah Baumbach seems to have travelled full circle.
Figure 15: Film still from *Frances Ha*. Frances (Greta Gerwig) and Sophie (Mickey Sumner)  
(Source: Baumbach, 2012. *Frances Ha*. Courtesy of RT Productions)
Chapter 4

Francis Ha (2012) and Mistress America (2015)

Since Baumbach’s directorial debut in 1995 with the quirky coming of age narrative Kicking and Screaming (1995), he has incorporated the notion of age, maturity and the acknowledgement of becoming an adult into a number of his films. In a 2015 interview with The Guardian, Noah Baumbach explains his fixation on growing up and its use as a central counterpoint within his narratives. As he explains, “I felt that in my 20s. I don’t know how you feel, but I always felt like time was running out, which is crazy, I can tell you right now.”

Throughout his career, Noah Baumbach has documented several relatable narratives. By using New York City as his backdrop, he creates his films with familiar characters. Noah Baumbach’s Frances Ha (2012) and Mistress America (2015) are two examples of such narratives. Each film is a comprehensive documentation of the universal trials and tribulations faced by many, demonstrated by two contrasting archetypes and narratives. By producing such films, Noah Baumbach highlights the struggles faced by the contemporary generation. In doing so, he portrays a digital native population, preoccupied with cataloguing their every move on social media, as they deal with the diagnosis of “cultural infatuation.”

“Frances Ha (2012), like Lena Dunham’s Tiny Furniture (2010) before it, belongs to a genre of films that centre around the latter of part of a relatively new lifestyle, known as emerging adulthood.” On the surface, the narrative of Frances Ha (2012) may seem as if it strays from the idiosyncratic and semi-biographical characteristics of Noah Baumbach’s films, due to the fact that
its sole protagonist is embodied by a young woman in her mid twenties who dreams of becoming a dancer. However, it can be argued that Noah Baumbach’s film *Frances Ha (2012)* speaks for an entire generation trying to find their place in life. Throughout his collaboration with Greta Gerwig (*Greenberg (2010)*, on the coming-of-age classic *Frances Ha (2012)*, Noah Baumbach documents the maturation of a generation through the eyes of happy-go-lucky, seemly ordinary Frances Halladay. In doing so “Gerwig finds the right vessel for her voice capturing the spirit of a generation in a film where appeal should resonate well beyond the demographic it depicts.”

When asked in a 2013 interview with *The Guardian*, to describe her experience playing Frances in the film Gerwig replies by stating, “although I have a lot of empathy for Frances, my experiences in my twenties were a lot different. I mean I just felt I had more luck, in a lot of ways. But I think that there’s definitely a core within France’s character that I can relate to and a few details that I know are moments from my life.”

Richard Brody, a *New Yorker* correspondent, declares Frances as an individual “who sets herself adrift in the stream of time and gets caught in a waterfall.” While using a conventional archetype, embodied by Frances’ character, Baumbach highlights a series of altercations focused around romance, friends, and career choices.

The narrative of *Frances Ha (2012)*, follows the journey of Frances, a twenty-seven year old aspiring dancer, as she overcomes the trials and tribulations of maturation, living in New York society and playing the role of a “child pretending to be an adult.” As the film progresses, Noah Baumbach explores the lifestyle of twenty-something year old urbanites. Throughout his film he interweaves a coming of age narrative, while writing an affectionate “love letter of sorts, highlighting the joyous celebration for both the art of film-making and the performer on screen.”
Inspired by the romantic work of Woody Allen (*Manhattan* (1979), Baumbach continues to depict Frances’s journey through the colour palette of black and white. *(See figure 16)*

Noah Baumbach’s narrative *Frances Ha* (2012) is composed of relatable subjects, demonstrated by a number of occurrences found within the film. These subjects include: young adults reverting back to childlike tendencies, regretting impulsive and rash decisions, dealing with the concept of becoming an adult and finally lacking in any job or financial prospects. Throughout *Frances Ha* (2015), there are a series of occasions where we as an audience notice Frances revert back to a childlike state.

One instance that highlights Baumbach’s characters regressing into a childlike state, can be found during the touching sequence where Frances returns from the cold and lonely clutches of New York City, to the warm embracing arms of her parents and hometown California. This image evokes a
particularly universal message familiar to every student, adolescent and adult within the audience: you can always return home. Another example can be found during the closing sequence of the film when Frances demonstrates her carefree disregard for society’s rules and regulations. During this period she breaks into a running dance hybrid through the streets of New York with ‘Modern Love’ as an inner monologue diegetic soundtrack. (See figure 17) Another element focuses on regretting decisions made in the past. An example of this can be found as Frances, without considering financial implications, ventures outside the Manhattanite boundaries and travels to Paris on a whim with a credit card she received in the mail.

Figure 17: Film still from Frances Ha (2012)
Frances dancing through the street.
(Source: Baumbach, 2012. Frances Ha. Courtesy of RT Productions)

The final theme presented throughout the narrative focuses on the lack of prospects for Frances, both financial and occupational. For instance, during the dinner date scene when Frances tries to pay for dinner with her tax return, she slowly has to admit defeat acknowledging “she’s so embarrassed and not a real person yet,” due to her lack of finances. (see figure 18) For the duration of Frances Ha (2012), Noah Baumbach continues to illustrate the central concept of the struggle to embrace adulthood.
Influenced by works of the French New Wave, such as Francois Truffaut (Jules and Jim (1962), as well as works from Woody Allen (Manhattan (1979), Baumbach states that while shooting the film, this arrangement “allowed him to see the city in a new way, with fresh eyes.” He later admits: “I’ve always loved black and white films about contemporary subjects.” Choreographed in a “gloriously messy” manner, mirroring the “skittish rhythms of the coltish, klutzy heroine; who can’t account for her bruises,” Frances Ha (2012), demonstrates the “feeling of falling and catching yourself,” through life’s experiences. Throughout his work the director continues to charm and enlighten audiences by featuring characters who possess lives and issues that the audience can relate to. The film Frances Ha (2012) has paved the way for narratives such as Mistress America (2015), “another comedy about cultural infatuation.”

In Mistress America (2015), Noah Baumbach takes us on a contemporary journey of New York City, as his protagonists try and find their place in life. Following in the footsteps of his previous work, Baumbach highlights a number of universal insecurities and fears found within his seemly
confident characters. Throughout Baumbach’s films from *Kicking and Screaming* (1995) to *Mistress America* (2015), there is a central pattern focusing on his “characters putting on a false front of what they want to be seen as, rather than who they really are.” This concept can be found throughout *Frances Ha* (2012) and *Mistress America* (2015).

Sharing several similarities with *Kicking and Screaming* (1995) and *Frances Ha* (2012), Noah Baumbach’s *Mistress America* (2015) highlights a number of relatable and engaging themes familiar to any audience. These themes include: “the anxiety involved with hanging out with younger people; the older person’s fear of getting old; the younger person’s resentment of the lack of status and career achievement involved in being young.”

Regarded by *The Herald* as “A Holly Golightly for a new generation:” *Mistress America* (2015) accompanies awkward eighteen year old Tracy Fishko, as she ventures to New York in order to attend college. The narrative progresses through a number of uncomfortable, coming of age ice-breakers such as: meeting new roommates, joining societies, making friends and learning how to stand on one’s own two feet. Following her freshman year introduction, Tracy eventually connects with her thirty year old soon to be stepsister. From the very beginning, “Tracy is bowled over Brooke’s supposed sophistication,” as well as the lifestyle she leads. Following Brooke’s guidance, “Tracy subsequently becomes the “Manhattanite she’s always wanted to be.”

Designed around the larger than life persona of Brooke, Noah Baumbach’s *Mistress America* (2015), is a narrative exploring obstacles encountered on the journey to adulthood. Providing a guide for those navigating their way through a culturally infused society, Baumbach highlights our society’s dependence on technology and documentation. This can be found as Brooke quickly
retorts: “Must we document ourselves all the time?”136, following her friend’s selfie attempt. (See figure 19)

Figure 19: Film still from *Mistress America* (2015)

In many ways Frances shares several similarities with Greta Gerwig’s character Brooke, as each character deals with the anxieties of adulthood. For instance within *Frances Ha* (2012), Frances strives to become a world renowned modern dancer, despite her lanky and uncoordinated manner. In *Mistress America* (2015), Brooke presents herself, in an over-the-top theatrical manner (see figure 20) “as a clever, dynamic, independent, woman who juggles work as an aerobics instructor, interior decorator and a maths tutor.”137 While each character exudes an air of naive ambition, in reality they both face the struggles of having little hope of achieving their dreams.
Structured around Tracy’s interest in Brooke’s uninhibited lifestyle and wild ways, Noah Baumbach shoots the film from a fly on the wall perspective; allowing the audience to follow Tracy on her expedition around the island of Manhattan. As he illustrates Brooke’s buoyant behaviour and lofty expectations, Baumbach strays from the classic melancholic black and white colour palette, demonstrated in *Frances Ha (2012)*. Instead he incorporates the blinding lights of Times Square and bright colours of Manhattan, in order to emulate Brooke’s identity in the mise-en-scène. While depicting Brooke’s vibrant personality throughout the visual structure of the film, Noah Baumbach uses several aesthetic tactics, in order to demonstrate the disorganisation of Brooke’s ambitions. Such elements include jump cuts and multiple run on takes.

Both *Frances Ha (2012)* and *Mistress America (2015)* depict “the conflict between how we want the world to be and how the world really is,” a theme that is undeniably relatable to this
generation’s audience. Even though Baumbach’s characters may not possess many amenable qualities, the audience can still relate to the realness of each character.

Over the years Baumbach’s films have developed from moving, autobiographical accounts of his childhood and college experiences, to social commentaries on how the millennial generation have chosen to live their lives. Taking inspiration from the works of the French New Wave, François Truffaut, Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese and John Cassavetes; he has become an influential presence in the world of film to a generation of up and coming filmmakers.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

“New York. A dream city of the imagination, born of that most pervasive of dream media, the movies”\(^\text{139}\)

Since it’s inception, cinema has been deemed as a primary medium for both visual and narrative storytelling. With a city as its stage and its inhabitants merely players, New York has become a cinematic icon. While gaining as much stature as any celebrity to walk the red carpet, this “celluloid skyline”\(^\text{140}\) provides its filmmakers with an incomparable and adaptive canvas on which they may project their narratives. Sanders argued that “New York and the movies seem made for each other. New York is a dynamic restless ideal for constantly moving images that make up a film.”\(^\text{141}\)

Having grown up in New York, cinema has always been of enormous interest and a somewhat sentimental topic to me (See figure 21). I have always been extremely fascinated by the city and its cinematic reputation over the years. Through research and exploration, this dissertation has allowed me to gain an in-depth knowledge relating to New York films and its directors. In choosing this project, I explored the careers of three legendary filmmakers John Cassavetes (Shadows (1959); Martin Scorsese (Mean Streets (1973) and Woody Allen (Manhattan (1979), comparing their use of dialogue, colour palette and narrative structure to their contemporary counterpart Noah Baumbach.
While writing this dissertation, I used a number of research skills developed over my years in college. Before even considering research on the designated directors, I first had to truly understand the city I was writing about. As I investigated a number of sources on the cinematic city, I witnessed the fascinating transition New York made during it’s many years on the silver screen. Following my education on New York’s cinematic historical context, I soon moved on to exploring the works of its legendary directors.

Throughout my research process, while studying the many works of John Cassavetes (*Shadows* (1959), Martin Scorsese (*Mean Streets* (1973) and Woody Allen (*Manhattan* (1979), I soon realised while each director featured Manhattan as their central character, they also included an element of semi-autobiographical detail throughout their narratives. Thus giving the audience a sense of who they might have been before the fame of New York City and the silver screen. Following my research on the three renowned figures, I quickly progressed towards gaining an insight into the work of contemporary director, Noah Baumbach.
Researching Noah Baumbach has allowed me to view New York from several different perspectives. For many, New York City is viewed through a lens made up of two personas, gangsters and romantics. From the lower east side gangster flicks produced by Martin Scorsese, to the romantic yet stereotypically neurotic films of Woody Allen; New York has become composed of several clichéd images. For instance for many cinema enthusiasts, New York is just a place where characters declare: “you talkin to me?”

When looking at the works of Noah Baumbach, audiences are enlightened by the various identities New York City has to offer. In his recent 2015 article James Mottram argues: “Baumbach doesn't exactly look like the voice of the hipster generation.” However, when regarding the director’s work “one might lazily reach for the term.” Throughout the majority of his films, the director takes his audience into the minds of confused collegiate graduates pretending to be adults, as they try and understand their place in the world.

In order to fully understand the director's work, I looked back on several films, reviews, and a number of past columns from the director. It was here, I began to understand the reasoning behind the themes and tone featured throughout his films. Following his collaborative works including Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou (2004) and The Fantastic Mr. Fox (2009) with Wes Anderson, Noah Baumbach quickly became motivated to create his own silver screen masterpiece.

Following his arrival on the cinematic scene in 1995 with his directorial debut Kicking and Screaming (1995), Noah Baumbach won the hearts of many with his charming, yet quirky narratives, dealing with the daunting concept of growing up and the responsibilities that follow. By permeating his films with a series of ubiquitous themes and issues such as: family conflict and the
acceptance of adulthood, Noah Baumbach follows the path of his previous counterpart Martin Scorsese, as he incorporates a number of semi-autobiographical concepts throughout the majority of his films.

Driven by a semi-autobiographical sense, Noah Baumbach’s films are a detailed account of memories from his past. From *The Squid and The Whale* (2005), to *Frances Ha* (2012) and *Mistress America* (2015), Noah Baumbach documents the trials and tribulations faced by his characters as they try to understand their place in New York’s urban jungle. When looking back on the relationship formed between his characters and the city during an interview with *Variety* in 2013, Noah Baumbach states: “For me, there’s an energy in New York, being on the street and being in the real world. I try as much as possible to put my characters into the real city.”

Following prior directorial examples, Baumbach not only uses New York City as a glittering backdrop to his characters circumstances, but as a separate entity to be included within the narrative dialogue.

Inspired by the works of cinematic legends such as: John Cassavetes (*Shadows* (1959), Martin Scorsese (*Mean Streets* (1973) and Woody Allen (*Manhattan* (1979)); Noah Baumbach uses the backdrop of New York City, as a playground for the twenty something millennials and those trying to keep up with them. When asked in a 2013 interview with Variety correspondent Scott Foundas, about his sentimental use of New York as a canvas, Baumbach responds by stating:

I know the city so well and I’ve spent most of my life here. So I am drawn to it and I think I get a lot of ideas from the city. If I’m shooting on a street I have memories of, theres
always something extra about just showing up to work everyday, even if there’s no literal connection to the scene.\textsuperscript{147}

After studying Noah Baumbach’s films “it is difficult to determine where the story ends and his life begins.”\textsuperscript{148} As each film documents a specific time in his life, Baumbach focuses on several milestones universal to a global audience. From the evident growing pains found within the characters throughout \textit{Kicking and Screaming} (1995), to the incontestable family conflict found within both \textit{The Squid and The Whale} (2005) and \textit{Margot at the Wedding} (2007). While reflecting on his experiences, Noah Baumbach creates films such as, \textit{Frances Ha} (2012) and \textit{Mistress America} (2015), “that are just a shuffle-step from his own reality, sprinkled with nods and references to the people he knew and the places he has lived.”\textsuperscript{149}

While discussing the stylistic tendencies and thematic attributes found throughout his works during a 2015 interview with \textit{Independent} correspondent James Mottram, the director states: “I’ve been lucky enough to make everything I’ve written. I got to be the personal filmmaker, which is the filmmaker I’ve always aspired to be.”\textsuperscript{150} When reflecting on the dialogue and style of Noah Baumbach’s films it is apparent that many are tailored towards an acquired cinematic taste. However, each film refers to a series of issues and themes which appeal to all audiences.

Noah Baumbach has been known for creating a number of eccentric, yet relatable narratives dealing with the trials and tribulations faced by many, as they try and cope with the changing circumstances around them. In her 2015 article, \textit{Guardian} correspondent Rachel Aroseti argued “recent years have seen Baumbach at his most prolific.”\textsuperscript{151} With a series of quirky drama/comedies stored in the director’s vast archives, it can be argued that Noah Baumbach has become the one of the many
directors giving a voice to the lost twenty-something year olds. His personal, yet poignant narratives, provide the audience with a fly-on-the-wall perspective of what it's like to go through the coming of age process. However, in recent months the director has strayed from his stereotypical 'dramadies', producing documentaries dealing with the lives of well known directors, tailored for a cinephile demographic.

Following his “bracing, yet peppery tonic”\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Mistress America} (2015), Noah Baumbach chose to collaborate with fellow filmmaker Jake Paltrow in order to create a personal documentary, recounting the life and works of Hollywood legend Brian De Palma. Known for his films such as \textit{Carrie} (1976), \textit{Scarface} (1983) and \textit{The Untouchables} (1987), Brian De Palma has influenced an enormous amount of actors, producers and filmmakers, with his subjective, meticulous style framed around a number of dark themes.

During an interview with \textit{Indiewire} in 2015, Baumbach reflects on the influence DePalma’s films had on his own career by stating,

\begin{quote}
I remember hearing about Brian’s movies before I saw them, because my parents loved his movies and would talk about them a lot. There was something, even about the way you talked about them that was just shocking and interesting. It felt like some dark version of the adult world.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

Baumbach’s collaborative documentary recounts DePalma’s “five decade career,”\textsuperscript{154} documenting the triumphs and downfalls of the legendary Hollywood director. “Keeping us squarely in DePalma’s subjectivity,”\textsuperscript{155} Baumbach and Paltrow created the film using several minimalistic
tendencies. With a compact crew, the directors focused on creating a personal “curriculum vitae style documentary, walking us through the director’s career, discussing the 29 feature films, a few shorts, a beloved music video plus some projects that never got off the ground.”156 When asked by Indiewire correspondent Emily Buder about the methods used when constructing the narrative DePalma (2015) Baumbach responds by stating, “It wasn’t about trying to get answers out of him that we already had in our head; we were trying to tell it the way he wanted to tell it. The story of the film industry is baked into DePalma’s experience.”157

Following its release in 2015, by A24 at the Venice Film Festival, Baumbach’s De Palma (2015), was later awarded “with the festival’s Jaeger-Le Coultre Glory to the Filmmaker 2015 Award.”158 This award has been received by an abundance of “dedicated filmmakers who have made an outstanding contribution to cinema over the years.”159 When asked by Guardian correspondent: “why Noah Baumbach?”160 DePalma responds by stating:

I tend to be attracted to filmmakers who aren’t like me at all. Because we approach cinema from different directions, we were fascinated by our different views on how to tell a story. They did their interview with me five years ago, it was like the old cinema school days—you had three people and that was your crew.161

Following his success with the subjective and personal documentary DePalma (2015), Noah Baumbach is currently working on a new project titled Yen Din Ka Kissa (2017) or “the story of the day from Hindi.”162 Referenced as The Meyerowitz Stories, by various sources such as USA Today, the upcoming narrative’s title is still undecided. With a cast composed of Emma Thompson, Adam
Sandler, Dustin Hoffman and Ben Stiller, Noah Baumbach incorporates several elements from his previous work including family conflict as a central theme.

Baumbach’s up and coming narrative recounts “the story of an estranged New York family coming in preparation of an artist and family patriarch Harold’s career retrospective.” In regard to discussing characters and themes, little has been said apart from various interviews with Emma Thompson describing her character as “a dreadful passive-aggressive alcoholic.” Another example of an unsympathetic yet human character. Noah Baumbach’s newest narrative is set to release in 2017.

While reflecting on the career of Noah Baumbach, it is evident that he has made great strides in the film industry with his multi persona narratives and adaptable palette, giving a voice to the generation of lost twenty-something year olds. With New York City as a platform, the director enlightens his audience to the trials and tribulations found amongst the daily lives of those featured in the ‘Generation Y’ statistic and those trying to keep up with them.

Influenced by the works of the French New Wave, John Cassavetes (Shadows (1959), Martin Scorsese (Mean Streets (1973) and Woody Allen (Manhattan (1979)); Noah Baumbach has paved the way for the upcoming generation of filmmakers to reflect on their own experiences for inspiration, using New York as a sole platform by which they may go out and project their stories. When asked in a 2015 interview ‘What advice would you give to your 24 year old self?’ Baumbach replies:

By any means necessary, do it. Find a way to make a movie, because if you wait around asking for permission, you may not get the opportunity.
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