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Review scientific article

UDK 141.32:929 Vudi A.
DOI 10.7251/SOCEN1917041B
Accepted: 17.10.2019.

The postmodern existentialism of Woody Allen

Abstract

With the intention of portraying the film director (actor, screenwriter) Woody Allen as a (non-typical) existentialist and postmodernist in the genre of film comedy, the author of this paper first explicates the basic terms – philosophical existentialism and artistic postmodernism. The central part of this paper is dedicated to the analysis of typical scenes from the most important Allen's films (Annie Hall, Love and Death, Irrational Man, etc.) where, on the one hand, his position on the meaninglessness of life, death, the absurd, despair is emphasized and in which, on the other, he uses certain postmodern forms to aesthetically shape his thoughts. The research approach is close to the cultural studies discourse in it being multidisciplinary, that is, drawing together sociology, philosophy, psychology, semiology and aesthetics in an intrinsic, and not a mechanic manner. The author's aim is to empirically determine whether and to which extent Woody Allen's film creativity is informed by the existentialist thought of Kierkegaard, Heidegger or Sartre, on the one hand, and how affected he is in the aesthetic sense by postmodern philosophers Lyotard, Jameson and Baudrillard, on the other. Despite the fact that Woody Allen is not a typical postmodernist, it is challenging and creatively inspirational to examine the specific characteristics of his postmodernist expression (intertextuality, self-reflectiveness, nonlinear narrative, eclecticism, intertwining of genre conventions), as well as the postmodernist narrative techniques he employs (parody, irony, pastiche, satire, allusion).

Key words: Woody Allen, existence, the absurd, freedom, postmodernism, film, parody.

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Introduction

It is difficult and ungrateful to place a person's artistic creativity in certain styles or directions because such actions imply a certain hermetical and formal-aesthetic limitation of the work. It is even more difficult and ungrateful to connect an author's creativity with certain philosophical discourses because creativity (if authentic) escapes discursive interpretation. The difficulties of both are all the greater if they concern atypical creative individualists such as Woody Allen - film director, screenwriter, actor, writer, stand-up comedian, musician.²

In this work, Allen Wood will be conditionally defined as an existentialist (in the philosophical meaning of the word) and postmodernist (in the aesthetic context). Although this artist would surely oppose his placement in various files, there is the reason (and it makes sense) to treat him as a post-modern existentialist. Allen's overall creative practice, above all filmmaking, contains elements of what might be conditionally called postmodern existentialism in the field of film art. Before putting Woody Allen's films under a cultural magnifying glass, it is instructive to shed light on general concepts - first philosophical existentialism and then artistic postmodernism.

Anxiety, existence and total freedom

The emergence of existentialism as a philosophical direction is related to the world economic crisis of the 1930s, and it is evident that its dominance was contributed by the war and post-war difficulties in Europe.³ The crisis of the civilian world and the realization that scientific and technological and industrial progress are no guarantee of the general well-being of humankind have given birth to the philosophy of existence as a platform in the fight for the preservation of human dignity. On the other hand, existentialists emphasize the fact that man's immediate life is strictly personal and unrepeatable and that there are no universal truths that relate to each person individually. Although existentialism as a philosophical direction is not dominant today, the social circumstances of the modern world, accompanied by constant crises, allow it to rise and actualize from time to time like Phoenix. Shaping

² Alan Steward Konigsberg, as the comedian's real name, took the pseudonym Woody Allen, after the famous jazz clarinetist Woody Herman he had loved since childhood.

³ Elements of existential thinking are identified in the history of philosophy in earlier periods, e.g. near St. Augustine, Pascal or Schelling. However, existentialist ideas are more consistently set in contemporary philosophy, beginning with 20th-century thinkers.

the world as a global entity (followed by the information revolution, digitalization, hyper-consumer society, multimedia, and virtual culture) has not at all brought a better life for all people in the world. Moreover, there has been a dramatic polarization of people living in abundance and those unable to make ends meet. The global economy, financial capital, networking, and similar tendencies lead to a distribution of goods and resources that is not fair and proper, and so the losers of globalization become poor countries, regions, and of course, individuals. The whole situation causes widespread insecurity, fears, and suffering and raises again the questions posed by existentialists of the last century. The social circumstances lead to the fact that for human beings these issues in our millennium are even complicated by the social situation created by the turbulent economic and scientific and technological progress that serves not only the general well-being but also the social alienation, which will tell the suffocation of freedoms, managing of people and controlling their behavior.

There is nothing more important to a man than himself - this is how the general motto of existentialism might sound. Considering that the reality projected by the individual is the most important and the only truth is our subjectivity, Søren Kierkegaard opposes in his works the Hegelian conception of speculative rationalism.⁴ He advocates a subjective view of the world illuminated through the prism of personal suffering, and this vision moves around the categories of life, fear, death, and guilt. Believing that man finds calm by relating to the transcendent, this Danish philosopher brings theological views into existentialist philosophy.⁵ Karl Jaspers was also preoccupied with themes of humanism and individual freedom. Like his predecessor Kierkegaard, he incorporates a religious (Christian) tone into his philosophy with a clearly intoned ethical component. Although the said philosophers of existence (as well as those who come after them) did not build a unique and quite coherent theory, it follows from the above that, in general, the essence of human existence is total freedom, which is threatened by the opposite of temporal and eternal. The natural circumstances of life create in a person a feeling of anxiety, trepidation, despair, and loss, which causes him to find tranquility in the transcendent - in faith in God. The conception of the so-called Christian existentialism, however, does not apply to all members of this philosophical course.

Similar to Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger defines a man as “being to death,” and dying as solely “my dying” which is elevated to a higher degree

⁴ Essential in human existence, Kierkegaard believes, is that “he and all human race participate in the individual and the individual throughout the race” (See: Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Belgrade: Serbian Literary Cooperative, 1970. 25).

⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Disease to Death*, Belgrade: Ideas, 1974.

at which death is treated as a constantly occurring “case.”⁶ Without delving deeper into the ontology of existentialist approaches, we will look at those ideas that lead us directly to our topic. These ideas relate to art and were presented precisely by Heidegger, according to which, unlike science and technology, true history plays out in philosophical thinking and in “real” art.⁷ In connection with the phenomenon of death, the knowledge that other people are dying also leads one to the resignation that renders it null and void. Man, therefore, reduces reality to illusion, which leads Heidegger to the idea that artistic illusion becomes a true reality. We will see that despair and dismay (terms so characteristic of existentialists) are significantly present in almost all Woody Allen films, precisely because of the awareness that death is certain and inevitable.

One feels the absurdity and meaninglessness of one’s own existence as “anxiety”, which is why he is resigned and considers his life in vain. Because science has no answer to existential questions, some existentialists (Jaspers, Heidegger), to put it mildly, have been adamant about the value of science. Kierkegaard had already warned that because of knowledge, existence was forgotten, and the preference for existence over knowledge would be even more clearly explained in Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory. He was and remains the most famous and widely read existentialist of the twentieth century. His work *Being and Nothingness* is dedicated to considering a human life that makes no sense. The author writes about a man’s individual consciousness, which is an empty being or nothingness.⁸ However, man as a conscious being can influence the given course of events and give meaning to things. It should be noted that Sartre’s ontology of existential freedom is based on the distinction between being (which is outside of man) and the existence inherent in man. This is where the key to understanding the importance of art lies. Namely, the embodiment of a being in a work of art has an irresistible charm for a human being because in real life he cannot reach the being.⁹

According to this French humanist philosopher, there are two types of existentialists. One he calls Christian existentialists and the other (including himself) atheist existentialists.¹⁰ The common message for both groups is that existence precedes of the essence. This rule is not endorsed by any God, but only by a man who represents what he does of himself.¹¹ Although existen-

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2007. str. 299.

⁷ Milan Damjanović, “Philosophy of Existence”, in: *Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. A. Stojković, Belgrade: “Work”, 1970. 190.

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Belgrade: Nolit, 1981.

⁹ Mirko Zurovac, *Art as Truth and the Lie of Being*, Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1986. p. 170.

¹⁰ According to his conceptual preoccupations, Woody Allen is closest to the type of atheist existentialists

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1964. pp. 10–11.

tialists bind attributes to men such as anxiety, abandonment, and despair, according to Sartre, man is condemned to be free. Man is freedom because he is “responsible for everything he does”.¹² The philosophical ideas mentioned can also be found in Sartre’s novels, and dramas. Thus, in the novel, *Nausea*, he writes about the absurdity of life and about the world as a “great senseless being.” In doing so, he criticizes hypocritical babbitts and various opportunists who flee all responsibility for their non-involvement. According to Sartre, despair at the meaninglessness of life can only be justified by trying to give meaning to that life, and this is achieved through free choice and acceptance of full responsibility for one’s choice.

Every writer and artist deals with, in a way, existential issues. The most prominent existentialists in literature are Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Beckett, and Camus. The last three of them have established the theory of the absurd, thus affirming the aesthetic rule that any authentic work of art is absurd because it is impenetrable, unpredictable, interpretable but not explainable.¹³ Exploring human nature, Fyodor Dostoyevsky came to know the very roots of inhumanity, and by revealing the abysses of evil not only in society but even more so in the individual, he carried out an “immanent critique of individual inhumanity.”¹⁴ When it comes to the literary opus of Franz Kafka, Arnold Hauser considers that the main feature of Kafka’s works is contained in a life-feeling of existentialism that goes far beyond the philosophical teaching of that direction. What is existentialist in Kafka’s portrayal of human life is pessimism, hopelessness, and fear. It is not about understanding the vanity of any particular hope, but that there are absurdity, meaninglessness, and hopelessness of all hopes. There is something more typical of this writer that applies to all existentialists: despite the stereotypicality of certain problems in Kafka’s works, he always remains on a case by case basis and does not attempt to construct a general notion of man and human life. Beckett is even more radical because there is an absolute *nihil*, the irrelevance of alternatives, in short - an “absurd formulation of the absurd.”¹⁵ His work is dominated by reconciliation with the absurd, advocating absolute passivity, which, combined with the absence of any sense, leads to a triumphant pursuit of nothingness.¹⁶

Alberto Camus’s work, including short stories and novels, confirms the existence of *homo absurdus*. Such a man is also assumed in Shakespeare’s characters and in some ways “completed” in Camus’s hopeless “stranger”, a man he

¹² Ibidem, p. 17.

¹³ Arnold Hauser, *Sociology of Art 2*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1986. p. 240.

¹⁴ Milan Ranković, *Dostoevsky’s Literary Creation*, Belgrade: Vedes, 2001. p. 193.

¹⁵ Arnold Hauser, op. cit., 236.

¹⁶ Milan Ranković, *Genral Sociology of art*, Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1996. 307.

was expelled from society. His stranger is a once-alienated rebel who stands up against all social conventions. He is neither good nor evil, neither moral nor immoral, but simply absurd. Here, in the best sense, the ideas that form the core of existentialist teaching are validated, which relate to the meaninglessness and impermanence of existence, to the deterioration, worthlessness, and imperfection of human existence. We also find an absurd man in Woody Allen's films, which combine concepts that are at first glance exclusive, such as "existential absurdity" and "postmodern absurdity." The first kind of absurdity is characterized by individual human pain, nausea and the drama of absent sense, while the second shows the absence of real pain since the subject of postmodern absurdity is part of the collective ecstasy of spectacle projected by the media.¹⁷

Film art is best as a mass medium in which the views taken by existentialists can be summarized. The film is the most influential art because it can "persuade" audiences to think seriously about the life and meaning of human existence. Here, besides existentialist ones, we also address the postmodern aspects of Woody Allen's work. Therefore, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the main features of postmodernism in popular culture, and especially in film art.

Popular Art - Postmodern Film

Postmodern creative practice¹⁸ has played a significant role in erasing the boundaries between popular and so-called high art. Recall that in the age of modernism, the difference between the popular (as gullible, likable and entertaining) and the high in the art (as original and unrepeatable) still existed. It was not abolished by any decree and at once, but its threads thinned out over time so that with the preponderance of the postmodern they would simply be completely destroyed. Artistic times are dominated by cultural forms based on fashion, nostalgia, pastiche, and kitsch¹⁹, and when all these add

¹⁷ Miško Šuvaković, *Postmoderna*, Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1995. 11.

¹⁸ Although postmodern art marked a definitive break with earlier aesthetic principles, it is thought that it is, in a sense, a continuation of modernity. According to some prominent representatives of the postmodernist theory of society, postmodernism builds on the overall legacy of modernity, marking a definite collapse of the meta-narrative (Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Postmodern Situation*, 2005). In this sense, instead of the term postmodernism Zygmunt Bauman uses the term "fluid modernism" (Zygmunt Bauman, *Fluid Life*, 2009), Anthony Giddens refers to a radicalized, late, high mature or advanced modernity (Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, 1998), while Frederick Jameson uses the term "high modernism" (Frederick Jameson, *The End of Art or The End of History*, 2015).

¹⁹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 348.

to the familiar postmodern tendencies, such as intertextuality, self-reflexivity, quotation, eclecticism, irony, parody, non-linear presentation of events, openness of the end, and “death” of the author, then we are dealing with postmodernism in the true sense of the word.

Postmodernism is the art of postmodern culture. In relation to modernism and its avant-garde, he was a new, modern avant-gardism. In the spirit of current terminology, it could be called pos-avant-garde or neo-avant-garde and is known to have abandoned the guiding principles of modernist movements, such as Surrealism, Dadaism, Futurism, and abstract expressionism.²⁰ With the introduction of postmodern principles in the creation of works of art, the illusion of changing the world through art has been shattered and a different attitude towards the past has been broken in the sense that it is no longer being rejected. Finally, postmodernists accept the mass media not as evil but as a reality that strongly influences the formation of reality, and consequently, popular culture and mass media in the postmodern world become the only reference frames for the construction of collective and personal identities.²¹

By abolishing the discriminatory hierarchy of cultural forms, film, popular music, industrial design, videos, comics, posters and various forms of popular entertainment stand alongside those arts that until then were untouchable to all people because they were intended only for the upper classes of society. In the contemporary virtual world of media performances, the individual is, for the first time in history, brought to a state of a complete change in the perception of space and time and blurring the difference between reality and media content.²² The point is, writes David Harvey, that today’s aesthetics triumph over ethics and images dominate over narratives.²³ On the same track is Dominic Strinati, who concludes that “design ideology” in popular culture dictates that style takes precedence over content. In such circumstances, it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between art and popular culture because seriousness, authenticity, realism, intellectual depth and strong narra-

²⁰ The term postmodern has been a feature of some theorists since 1870. However, it is not until the late 1950s and 1960s that we can see the beginnings of what is now understood as postmodernism. Postmodernists attack the official status of modernism, which, according to them, has lost its subversive power, it will say the capacity for shock and harassment. Accordingly, it is a direction that represents a populist attack on the elitism of modernism (John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 2012. p. 183).

²¹ Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004. p. 227.

²² Ljubomir Maširević, *Postmoderna teorija i film na primeru kinematografije Kventina Tarantina*, Beograd: Čigoja štampa, Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, 2011. 116.

²³ David Harvey, op. cit., 328

tives expose the danger of being disturbed. Furthermore, computer graphics of virtual reality can enable people to indirectly gain experience of different forms of reality, where surface simulations take the place of real events.²⁴ To put it mildly, there seems to be no greater creative challenge for postmodern enthusiasts in any art than in the film.

Postmodernism on film is a heterogeneous field of expression that is largely reflected in the recycling of already existing influences. Postmodernism opposes any definition because it is not possible to find a reference point where every postmodern film project would meet. In other words, it is difficult to pinpoint the beginnings of postmodern cinema. Although some clues to the postmodern approach may be evident in the American noir genre or the "French New Wave",²⁵ such claims seem exaggerated. According to Jameson, the first clearer tendencies of postmodern cinema could only be located in the early 1970s, primarily in nostalgia or retro films, such as Lukas's *American Graffiti* in 1973 and Copola's *Rumble Fish* in 1983. Similar opinions have are Bogs and Pollard, according to their view noir traditions in the 1940s and 1950s combine elements of the modern and the postmodern, but it is still far from the postmodern shift that took shape during the 1970s.²⁶ Dominic Strinati looks for specific elements that characterize postmodern artistic expression. He finds that clues in works that emphasize style, spectacle, special effects and images, all to the detriment of content, character, substance, narrative and social commentary, ie. reflections of social reality. He cites Scott's *Blade Runner*, Zemeckis's *Back to the Future*, Gilliam's *Brazil* and Lynch's *Blue Velvet* as examples. These films add to the confusion in the perception of time and space, creating the illusion that we are in the past, present and future at the same time. Strinati, as a sociologist of culture, counts postmodern films as nostalgia films and genre-mixed works, such as the cartoon and detective *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*²⁷ The paradigmatic personality of postmodern cinema is Quentin Tarantino with his entire cinematic oeuvre, in which he is fully consistent with features relating to postmodern artistic procedure - from *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) to *Django Unchained* (2012) and *The Hateful Eight* (2015). It can be noted that postmodern films

²⁴ Dominic Strinati, op. cit., 213.

²⁵ It must be admitted that there is some influence of prominent representatives of the French New Wave on postmodern filmmakers, including Woody Allen. This influence is primarily evident in a number of technical features, of which, in addition to shooting with the camera "out of hand," the most important is that of a dynamic, uneven, elliptical style of montage with a large percentage of montage jumps within scenes. New aesthetic conventions are at the service of destroying the spiritual and temporal continuity that the viewer should accept when watching a movie (David Cook, *History of Film II*, Belgrade: Clio, 2007, pp.182-183).

²⁶ Ljubomir Maširević, op. cit., 209-210.

²⁷ Dominic Strinati, op. cit., 217-218.

are mostly thrillers, though there are other film types, such as comedy, which (including irony, parody and sarcasm) are present in almost every other genre. Woody Allen is unsurpassed in the subspecies of postmodern comedy although, from a purely postmodern point of view, it is inconsistent. It is always autonomous, which will undermine all the rules of cinematic aesthetics, including those associated with postmodernism.

Postmodern Woody or “I just love myself”²⁸

To treat Woody Allen as a film existentialist necessarily involves bringing him into a relationship with other existentialist artists, above all in the field of film comedy. There are numerous associations, but the comparison still focuses on one name and one personality - Charlie Chaplin. These are two top creators. What do they have in common, and how do they differ when considering the existential questions of man in their works?

Chaplin and Allen are, aesthetically speaking, two completely different artists in the field of film comedy. They belonged to different generations and stages in the development of the film genre, and differed in their understanding of the general goals of their work - the first wanted to change and humanize the world, and the second considered life and the world absurd in their transience, and accordingly, though it made no sense to make any effort to change it - just enough to satisfy his egoistic impulses. So, for Charlie alias Charlie, life makes sense and, despite the misery of its own existence, it is worth pursuing that meaning. Although his comedy was based on allusion,²⁹ it would be said that there is an excess of illusion, exaggerated romanticism, and abstract humanism. Woody's approach is the opposite - human life is absurd, meaningless even when you seem to be fulfilled in some elements as human. The characters in his films, as well as in Dostoyevsky's novels, are subject to existential and moral crises³⁰, and there are a plethora of choices before the central character, as Sartre used to say.

²⁸ This is the hit name of the Croatian rock band Psihomodo pop, in which the words are written in the spirit of pure existential solipsism: I love only myself / my only self / I love only myself / my beautiful self.

²⁹ Devid Robinson, *Velikani smeha (The Greats of Laughter)*, Beograd: Institut za film, 1975. 38; Mihailo Vidaković, *Komično u filmu (Comic in Film)*, Beograd: Institut za film, 1995. 241.

³⁰ Zachary T. Ingle, „A full meal with a vitamin pill and extra wheatgerm“: Woody Allen, Dostoevsky, and Existential Morality, u: K. S. Szlezák et al. (eds.), *Referentiality and the Films of Woody Allen*, 2015.

Chaplin's worldview is the view of one typified individual³¹ - the so-called. a small man, a marginal, a vagabond, a poor man, a clumsy and unhappy bungler, a miserable optimist who sets himself the goal of climbing the ladder from the bottom of the social ladder and taking the place of some rich, happy and fulfilled man. In the case of Allen, things are reversed. He does not build the universal type of man according to his character, though his characters carry a lot of autobiographical elements.³² It is mainly about urban intellectuals who are confronted with the absurdity of life, which is why they are in a constant misunderstanding with the conventions of contemporary society. The questions raised by Woody Allen are philosophically intoned, complex and layered, such as those posed by Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky or Schopenhauer. He parodies their sublimity by giving them a humorous note and exposing them to ridicule. Unlike Charles proletarian, Woody's characters speak the language of middle or upper-middle-class members. In his artistic expression, Woody Allen is neo-avant-garde, postmodern and unconventional. This virtuous filmmaker is persevering and consistent in his understanding of art, though fully aware that the kind of intellectual and non-commercial humor he markets is quite airtight and will never have a mass audience.

If we consider Chaplin and Allen's creativity from the point of view of existentialism, we will see that there are some similarities³³ and significant differences in their understanding of the meaning of life. While Chaplin is predominantly focused on anthropology issues because it raises those life themes that represent the "fruits of primordial anthropological universality,"³⁴ Allen delves into the realm of the philosophy of existence and psychology, thinking that life is meaningless, that man's personal problems are unsolvable and cannot be transposed to others people. Chaplin is optimistic because as a "beggar with social aspirations," as Jan Mukarzewski calls him, he believes he can repair society. Woody Allen is an irreparable pessimist, and does not seek to correct society, but seeks to satisfy personal needs in such a society. When it comes to their "films of existence", two parts stand out where

³¹ Chaplin adhered to the tried-and-true rule of classic comedy, which required her interpreters to create a distinctive character that would already look funny and not change from film to film (Vladimir Petrić, *Razvoj filmskih vrsta, -Development of Film Species*, 1970. 76).

³² Woody Allen is not unique in this. Many creators, writers or directors, are known to incorporate individual components of their personality into the characters of their own works, appearing both as authors and as prototypes of their characters (Milan Rankovic, op. Cit., 2001 61).

³³ In their real lives, they both showed affection for girls much younger than them, and it is no coincidence that they made love and even marital relationships with their film partners. But these are elements beyond art and are not directly related to their creative work.

³⁴ Edgar Moren, *Film ili čovek iz mašte (Film or man from imagination)*, Beograd: Institut za film, 1967. 149.

common reference points can be found. They are Chaplin's film *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) and Allen's *Irrational Man* (2015). Both films are a quirky mix of drama, crime and black comedy, featuring the main characters as villains. Chaplin's film is about a Parisian bank clerk who, because of his job loss, starts marrying wealthy settlers, killing them for personal gain. He eventually turns out to be a family man who lost his job and commits crimes for the support of his immobile wife and their child. Allen's film, in turn, is about a professor of philosophy, a depressed person who drinks too much and experiences an existential crisis. On one occasion at a restaurant lunch with his mistress, listening to a conversation at a neighbor's table, he learns that one woman will lose her children in a custody battle in court - all because of a corrupt judge. The professor plans to help that woman by killing a judge!? Finding a new purpose for living in this. He committed the murder, believing it would help him heal his depression. A particular paradox is that altruism serves as an excuse to satisfy his will reduced to the act of murder. By comparison, while Kierkegaard suggests that existential choices are made in a state of fear and trembling, Allen's hero shudders with excitement but not with fear.³⁵

The films mentioned above talk about how the path to hell can be paved with good intentions. Chaplin's *Verdoux* is portrayed as a victim of inhumane society and in a way symbolizes all disenfranchised and humiliated people (socially anthropological milieu), while Allen's professor is preoccupied with self, boredom and unfulfillment and justifies his frustration with crime by allegedly helping another person to solve an important life problem (pathological syndrome). In the artistic process, there is little that connects the two extraordinary artists. Chaplin has never tried to come out of the classic melodramatic and romantic cinematic expression, while Allen in all his works skips the aesthetic rules and conditionality of the genre, and in the best style of a neo-avant-garde artist (more instinctively than intentionally) drifts into the waters of postmodern expression. Admittedly, not always and not at all costs.

Allen's existentialism is evidenced by his collection of short stories entitled *Mere Anarchy*. The writer turns the chaos of the modern world in which there is "total lawlessness" into parody, irony, absurdity and the grotesque. In the essay "So was ate Zarathustra", commenting on the so-called *Diet chef Friedrich Nietzsche*, he tries to find "the link between healthy eating and creative genius" and introduces great philosophers and artists of past epochs into the story. With unusual style and witty commentary, the writer interprets (better to say, distort) the thoughts of Zenon, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, Spinoza, Ashil and Richard Wagner, turning them into culinary tips

³⁵ Skye Cleary, *Existentialism and Romantic Love*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

for maintaining the ideal weight. Particularly striking is his interpretation of Descartes, who, separating the body from the mind, allowed the body to grow while the mind was thinking: Who cares, it's not me. Finally, Allen points out by asking one pragmatic and existential question: "If life doesn't make sense, what to do with soup?"³⁶

Woody Allen's work is particularly layered in the field of film art, in which all the power of his imagination and aesthetic expression comes to light. His films testify to the growing maturity of American film comedy, much of which deals with parodying other traditional film genres. As an "extremely intelligent creator", Allen went from a phase of social satire to reaching the stage when commenting on social phenomena, as in the films *Annie Hall* (1977), *Manhattan* (1979) and *Zelig* (1983). To this series should be added works containing elements of postmodern intertextuality and citation, among which are certainly *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982) and *Broadway by Danny Rose* (1984). Some critics consider *Broadway Danny Rose's* to be merely a recapitulation and inversion of Coppola's *Godfather* (1972).³⁷ Many film critics consider the best and most commercially available *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) among all Allen films. It is one of the author's most subtle comedies about a middle-class American family. Here, on the one hand, different views on family, male-female relationships, love, death, God and the afterlife are reflected, and on the other, essential themes of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism are presented. Unlike Judaism, the religion to which the protagonist belongs by birth, the other two religions offer the possibility of an after-life, which is only partially comforting to one who directly faces death. The paradoxical concept of the absurd was used in that film. It essentially stems from a postmodern imagination in which feelings of the joy of living and nausea produced by life are mixed. Finally, a classic existentialist "diagnosis" is made: if death is the ultimate outcome of all beings, as the Bible preaches, then any action in life is meaningless and irrelevant.³⁸ The thought expressed is almost identical to the one sentiment of Leo Tolstoy that the director puts on the screen as the motto of this movie: "The only absolute knowledge that one can reach is that life is meaningless." It is interesting that Allen, as the author of numerous comedies, based on serious dramatic elements, uses the full range of means offered by the film as an artistic medium, while aesthetically justifying some postmodern "decorations" (lucid and imaginative dialogues, humorous criticism and subversive elements of radical shock).

³⁶ Vudi Alen, *Puko bezvlašće*, Novi Sad: Solaris, 2007

³⁷ Dejvid Kuk, *Istorija filma II (Movie History II)*, Beograd: Clio, 2007. 113.

³⁸ Johanna Petsche, Religion, God and the Meaninglessness of it all in Woody Allen's Thought and Films, *Eternal Sunshine of the Academic Mind: Essays on Religion and Film*, 2009. 26.

In some ways, Woody Allen translates her views on life into movie scripts and attributes them to the main characters he's acting himself.³⁹ He clearly expresses these views in interviews, such as the one from July 2012, published in *The Talks* Web Magazine. The point of the interview is the sentiment that relates to the life of *The Whole Thing is Tragic*, and it is for the right reason the title of the entire interview. Specifically, Allen declares that he has a very dark, pessimistic view of life from early childhood, and that a person can only be happy if he is deceiving himself. The point is that there are good times in life, but the whole thing is essentially tragic. He likens this situation to Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal* (1957), in which there is an idyllic sequence of eating wild strawberries, which is only a moment until he returns to the harsh reality. According to the author of movies that often bring a smile to your face, there are rare moments of happiness in life, and that cannot be controlled. He who is out of luck must be prepared for some degree of suffering.⁴⁰ The end of the interview is followed by a statement from Woody in the style of a good Alanford's note: "If you are not lucky, there is no chance to be happy."⁴¹

And in relation to death, this artist is tragicomic. His existentialist stance on the subject may be related to Heidegger's. Recall that the famous philosopher speaks of death as a constantly occurring "case". Death is therefore indefinite. Something about which the statement "dies" circulates. It can be anyone else, but not Me.⁴² So, it's actually Nobody and Allen can partly agree on that as something comforting. Only one cannot accept the fact that "I am dying". As a man, he simply does not accept the fatal fact of his own death, and no matter how ridiculous it may seem, he is quite serious in that statement. Characteristic in this sense is the sentence he puts into the mouth of the main character in *Whatever Works* (2009), which refers to death as a real phenomenon: *It's unacceptable*. Or when in the cult film *Bananas* (1971), in a scene where freedom is talked about, he dies, to the remark of the revolutionaries that the main character Melisch has the opportunity to die for freedom, he replies: "Freedom is beautiful. On the other hand, if you are dead, it is a hindrance to your sex life" (sic).

³⁹ "Allen's tiny, incongruous and hunched appearance, like the parodies and grotesques enriched by the art world, as well as the character of an eternally insecure intellectual in constant dilemmas, fears and dreams, hidden behind thick-rimmed goggles and the neurotic, pale face of a man with a penetrating gaze, will remain the trademarks of such an authentic figure in the world of film, humor and art in general" (Dragan Uzelac, *Film Classics: Woody Allen*, 2019).

⁴⁰ An exhilarating example of a film that represents the attitude towards happiness as a deciding factor in everything that constitutes human life is Allen's psychological thriller *Match Point* (2005).

⁴¹ *The Talks*, July, 2012.

⁴² Martin Hajdeger, op. cit., 299.

Allen's existentialism can be found in almost every film in which his characters (that is, himself) experience various traumas, survive fears and anxieties, fall into states of panic and despair, face illness and death. He shows feelings of guilt, suffering, anxiety, abandonment, loss, emptiness, nausea and nothingness in his films. In a word, the meaninglessness of life as a basic existentialist category. As an actor, he experiences some of these neurotic states in many of the films he directed and for which he wrote the screenplays. This is the case when, on a psychic basis (as a writer) he loses his inspiration for books and becomes "blurred" (*Deconstructing Harry*, 1997) or when, as a director, experiences psychosomatic blindness due to stress (*Hollywood Ending*, 2002). At the beginning of this film, he utters a dramatic sentence: "I've been thinking about death, darkness and the abyss all day," a thought worthy of philosophers like Kierkegaard, Jaspers, or Heidegger. This comedy by which the author alludes to the banality of Hollywood production ends with a happy end. Then, after a great deal of turmoil, the movie hero sits in the car and in the arms of his beloved woman heads to the airport, and to ask her anxiously, as a self-destructive hypochondriac: "Have you forgotten your nausea remedy?" The End. A neurotic and panicked man needs a doctor, so it's no wonder that many of the men in Woody's films often go to psychotherapy sessions or are married to psychiatrists (*To Rome with Love*, 2012).

In the aforementioned, as well as in other Allen films, we notice reflections on the life of a modern man, who is full of uncertainty, anxiety, and even the most tragic feelings. In them, we recognize Woody Allen - an existentialist who tries to get out of all sorts of trouble, even though he knows in advance that everything will be the same in the end - tragic. Feelings like depression, hopelessness, the artist's creative blockade, love woes and the famous "illness to death" as something most difficult do not leave him even when he gives the viewer some hope that everything will be fine after all. In any case, there are serious philosophies in this author's films - whether in dilemmas, questions or answers. Although he does not miss the opportunity to make fun of it all, he is a keen critic of life, society, politics, religion, and the arts. Apart from this socially existential dimension, there are many elements of postmodern expression in Woody Allen's artistic process. In a time called "postmodern", it is certain that Allen fulfills the essential principles of the so-called "postmodernist" retrograde aesthetics - the aesthetics of "recognizing", retrieving and quoting, decomposing, and ironically reversing meaning.⁴³

Woody Allen is postmodern in a way that does not allow you to mold it into rigid genre divisions. Postmodern expression in him erupts intuitively,

⁴³ Milena Dragičević Šešić, *Umetnost i alternativa (Art and Alternative)*, Beograd: FDU, Clio, 2012. 170-171.

not intentionally. Each of his films is a product of the author's imagination, individuality, creative specialty. As a creative in which the spirit of anarchy and fantasy prevails, he does not abide by the clichés and lucrative rules of the film industry. His films are authorial in the true sense of the word, and there is no talk of some kind of "author death" which implies that creativity is a neutral space in which the subject disappears. In Allen's case, the opposite is true - and even when he is physically absent on the cinema screen, *the artist is present* (let's use the concept artist Marina Abramovic's syntagm). Knowing that the death of an author is one of the characteristics of postmodern art (film) does not mean that there are no other postmodern elements in Woody Allen's works that bring him closer to the new sensibilities of our time. It is about intertextual citation, mixing genre conventions, rejecting meta-narratives, relativizing moral boundaries and, above all, self-reflexivity. The *film's self-reflexivity*, which has existed since the very beginnings of cinema, is a feature of an artistic text that does not imitate reality in it, but that it represents a reflection of itself as fiction, or suggests that it consists of other texts.⁴⁴ Perhaps none of the celebrated postmodern directors made better⁴⁵, more spontaneous and aesthetically more effective use of this "method" of artistic expression than Woody Allen. There is an anthology sequence in the movie *Annie Hall* that has not escaped the attention of any filmmaker, film critic or analyst. The narrative of the entire film is a view of the past, interrupted by conversations with the camera, that is, direct comments by the main character Alvy Singer addressed to the viewers. Alvy, interpreted by Woody Allen, stands in line with Annie's girlfriend at the box office, while someone behind them loudly interprets the theory of the controversial and at the time very popular communicology Marshal McLuhan. Disagreeing with that interpretation, Alvy comes directly to the camera and addresses the audience. This clearly breaks the film's fictionality, which becomes even more apparent when the film's hero loses his patience and introduces a real McLuhan who will confirm that he is right. There are incredibly compelling monologues and audience-oriented speeches in this film, which are thus introduced directly into the story. Ana Halas points out that this film is an unconventional romantic comedy in which the director uses a series of stunning visual effects, including the split-screen in which the characters are dealing with each other. There are also autobiographical flashbacks, subtitles that reveal what the characters really meant, and other weird postmodern expressions not captured by the classic movie aesthetic.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ljubomir Maširević, op. cit., 191.

⁴⁵ The most prominent postmodern film directors are Martin Scorsese, David Lynch, Jim Jarmusch, Ridley Scott, Tim Burton, and Quentin Tarantino. In the realm of a film comedy that uses elements of postmodern expression, Woody Allen is undeniable.

⁴⁶ Ana Halas, *Vudi Alen*, 2017.

The postmodernist procedure can be identified with the union of other films in which similar situations occur. Nevena Daković cites a characteristic example of an Alan film in which there are many elements of self-reflexivity. Namely, considering the issues of film melodrama, she talks about the so-called *women's film* and women as target audiences (those in the middle class, housewives, secretaries, etc.) who find their moments of happiness in daydreaming about transferring events from the canvas to real life. The archetypal fulfillment of such desires is given in the movie *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) when the idol from the movie screen goes into the life of a crying woman from the audience. Such an act is the unbelievability of melodramatic events masked by the convention of the movie illusion.⁴⁷ When it comes to Woody Allen films, situations like a dialogue between actors on screen and people in the audience are not uncommon, and seventh art is ideal for the realization and aesthetic transposition of such ideas.

Postmodern films are full of *citation-intertextual* expressions. Such films imply that the viewer is "equipped" with a solid background, and especially count on his good knowledge of cinema, popular culture and, in general, art history. It is well known that the works of masters of the postmodern film have, in addition to film texts, also emerged from citations of other types of texts, such as literature, religious writings, historical literature, and art. Born in New York, Woody Allen visited the cinemas and was a true filmophile from an early age, so it is no wonder that in the films he directs there are many quotes, allusions, parodies, pastiches, and devotions full of fascination with the world of film and art in general. *Midnight in Paris* (2011) is a paradigmatic example of a work in which there are frames with intertextual ways of expression and quotations from different cultures of past epochs. In particular, another important feature of postmodern saying is *nonlinearity*. This method implies that subjects lose a sense of temporal continuity due to loss of temporality. The narrative structure involves extensive use of flashbacks, thus allowing the objective perspective of seeing an event to slip toward the subjective experience of the film's hero.⁴⁸ The Paris Midnight comedy is full of daydreaming, romance, and melancholy. It is also a film of nostalgia, human warmth, and regrets for some better, more meaningful and creative times. All these attributes are internalized by being placed in the personality of the protagonist (writer Gil Pender), who comes to Paris with a fiancé to complete the novel that began. The filmmaker's imagination allows him a surreal adventure in which Gil goes back to the "golden age" of the 1920s and hangs out with

⁴⁷ Nevena Daković, *Melodrama nije žanr*, Novi Sad, Beograd: Prometej, Jugoslovenska kinoteka, 1994. 76.

⁴⁸ Ljubomir Maširević, op. cit., 187-188.

the most prominent artists of the time - Fitzgerald, Zelda and Scott, Picasso, Dali, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and Bunuel. Walking back through time, he continues with his new partner Adrian, who, like him, longs for the past. They return to “Belle Époque”, a period considered by the girlfriend to be the golden age of Paris. In *Moulin Rose*, they meet the painters of Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, and Degas, for which the most beautiful was the last period of the Renaissance! On the basis of experience, it becomes clear to Gil that all people have their “golden ages” and that it is not, as a rule, in the present but in the past. In this nostalgia film, the process of “skipping” time and space in free-running through time was used. Time and space are not given and objective, but they are left to the freedom of man’s choice.⁴⁹ Historical facts are erased and left to our subjective judgment - facts serve us to play with, combine them at our discretion, assemble and disassemble them like playing children with puzzle elements.

Woody Allen’s many comedies contain elements of parody, and one of them, *Love and Death* (1975) is a typical example of film parody as an essential element of postmodern expression. The film parodies classic works of Russian literature, most notably Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and F. M. Dostoyevsky’s most famous novels - *The Karamazov Brothers*, *The Idiot*, and *The Crime and Punishment*. It is a comedy full of allusions, quotations, and references to classics of literature and European cinema, especially Bergman and his *Seventh Seal*. Particularly striking is the scene of the battle followed by the music of Sergei Prokofiev from Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky* (1938). Some of the more important topics of life, such as love, death, crime, and punishment, are marketed through a myriad of humorous reviews dominated by fantasy, insight, and absurdity.

When it comes to other postmodern tendencies, such as the one that blurs the line between the artistic and the popular (film, pop art, video art, video, etc.), Woody Allen is unsurpassed here as well, with his overall film oeuvre showing the best how aesthetics in popular culture can be made more entertaining, and fun raised to a more “cultural” level.⁵⁰ His films, in general, follow a postmodern principle that addresses the weakening of moral boundaries and the relativization of opposing ethical principles that relate to the struggle between good and evil. The erosion of the moral codes that were in force in the Enlightenment and modern times has led to the fact that what

⁴⁹ Otherwise, since its inception, and unlike other arts, far before the postmodern boom, the film has had the potential to make simultaneous events seem like succession and simultaneous ones. The space on the film loses its static character and becomes somehow mobile. Just as space dynamizes and acquires temporal coefficients, so do temporal relations acquire spatial characteristics (See: Arnold Hauser, op. Cit., 153).

⁵⁰ Nikola Božilović, *Ogledi o popularnom*, Niš: Filozofski fakultet u Nišu, 2016. 42.

was once unacceptable in life, even on film, today seems quite normal and normal. To Allen, this is quite clear, and he spontaneously and unobtrusively communicates his views to the audience. Leaving the viewer in a state of bliss and curiosity, he is able to comically speak of things that are very serious, fateful and tragic, all thanks to the vast array of postmodern artistic means at his disposal, such as allusion, satire, farce, grotesque, sarcasm, and cynicism. Finally, based on the style that this director uses, which consists of special elegance, shock, and sophisticated humor, it can be said that his aesthetics have many attributes attributed to the chem. That aesthetic is similar to that developed by David Lynch, who shows a penchant for the bizarre, the highly visual aesthetic (Woody's unforgettable urban landscapes of New York, Paris or Rome, cf. NB) and parapsychological themes, with a return to the fashions and fashion styles of the 1950s (jazz music, appearance). This kind of directing is in perfect harmony with the Kemp postulates.⁵¹ In a way, she brings together unique and quite distinctive filmmakers such as Allen and Lynch.

Finally, it should be noted that the musical background of Allen's films is an integral part of the overall atmosphere he wants to achieve. Music, primarily jazz, in coordination with the painting, builds an environment in which the characters constitute relationships. Without such a musical background, Woody Allen's films would not have the distinctive romance, brilliance and irresistibility that make viewers fascinated. The soundtrack is simply an extra stamp in this director's author's manuscript. The character of the characters and their complex interrelationships would be difficult to understand and experience without the sound of jazz in the background, whether it be Benny Goodman, Glen Miller, Duke Ellington or Cole Porter. In short, music does not serve this director, as in a silent film, to fill "sound holes";⁵² but to contribute to the building of the atmosphere in cooperation with the image. As a result, the sound material in Woody Allen's films ceases to be an illustration of the image and becomes a movie. The musical background of Allen's films has a retro style, something of a postmodern, and above all, a sense of nostalgia for the 1940s and 1950s, in which jazz represented the symbolic or cultural identification of American society. If all that is done is the masterfully used editing procedures, which imply the simultaneity of time and space, respect for the associative logic of the construction of the work, the introduction of Jean Baudrillard simulacrum and the production of nostalgia-fueled imagery - we get a postmodern film opus par excellence. But again, not the typical but created in a unique - authorial way.

⁵¹ Milena Dragičević Šešić, op. cit., 178.

⁵² Vartkes Baronijan, *Muzika kao primenjena umetnost (Music as an applied art)*, Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti u Beogradu, 1981. 100.

Conclusion

There are many reasons to call Wood Allen an existentialist because he placed personal and intimate feelings (absurdity, anxiety, neurosis, anxiety, alienation, nothingness, fear of death) in the characters of his film heroes, showing that autobiographical elements can have a successful aesthetic transposition. In many ways, Allen has much in common with prominent philosophers of existentialism. For example, Sartre directed his thought toward the individual and his pursuit of total freedom, and Allen is similar in that he criticizes society in his works, giving himself the freedom to behave freely and non-conformity in real life - he is openly promiscuous, loving with barbs and derides the conventional code of ethics. At the same time, he does not hesitate to look with irony on religion, religions and gods, ridicule intellectuals, artists and politicians from authority. In aesthetically shaping his works, above all cinematic ones, he made the best use of all the benefits of expression that the seventh art possesses. In all his films, he skillfully combined the post-modern elements of parody, irony, satire, absurdity, non-linear narrative and other expressive means.

A postmodern movie that excels at mixing genre conventions has many top directors. For Allen, comedy is the starting point from which he embarks on a free walkthrough all genres of film. This jazz lover, a fan of the absurd comedies of Bob Hope and the Marx Brothers, as well as Monty Python's twists, is the only pessimist to end his films with a happy end! If we agree that there are different patterns of comedy in the popular arts (film, comic, television), then we can associate Chaplin's, Alan Ford's and Monty Python's wit with the unique humor of Woody Allen, imbued with elements of post-modern aesthetics.

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