

## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS—ANNIE HALL**

There is a theory, sometimes called the ‘small world theory,’ but more often referred to as ‘six degrees of separation,’ which states that any two people in the world can be connected by a chain of no more than five intermediary acquaintances.

One of the interesting sidelights to this evening’s event is the several examples right here. The first of course is me.

Woody Allen and I were in the same high school graduating class, and I believe, we were together in one or two mathematics or English classes. I would like to say I knew him well, but there were many talented and accomplished students in the school and he did not stand out. After high school our paths diverged. He became famous and wealthy and was sought after by many beautiful women. I didn’t become rich and famous.....

So, everybody here is separated from Woody Allen by only two degrees of separation.

But there’s more. My wife grew up in a neighborhood of NY called Astoria. The local bakery, called Walken’s Bakery was owned by the Walken family, whose younger son, Chris, a bit younger than my wife, often helped at the counter. So, we are all also two degrees removed from Christopher Walken, a very interesting and somewhat enigmatic actor who has a significant role in tonight’s film as Diane Keaton’s brother.

And, finally, in case you still don’t believe what a really small world this is, our young friend Erica, currently living here in Minsk, will return in a few months to her parents’ apartment in Manhattan, which is only a few streets away from----- the residence of Woody Allen.

So much for coincidence. Now, let me take just a moment to introduce you to the film.

Woody Allen has been, and is, a prodigious film maker. His filmography includes more than 50 films in the past 40 years which he has directed, written or acted in. Often he did all three as was the case in ‘Annie Hall.’

This was a ‘break-through’ film for Allen, whose previous efforts were comedies. ‘Annie Hall,’ is his first film that deals with serious themes, though it is couched in a humor and irony that some may find distracting, but that reflect Allen’s persona and illuminate his real genius.

The fleetingness of life, the transience of relationships, intellectual dishonesty, the role of art as an antidote to our temporal situation are some of his themes, repeated throughout his films. He was just about 40 years old at the time he made this film, a time for self reflection, and he ponders the what-ifs and what-might-have-beens.

For an audience, whether foreign or American, the New York urban intellectual milieu that Allen both satirizes and values is sometimes hard to follow and there are many references that may not be readily evident. Marshall McLuhan, for instance, who many of you may know, was a culture

icon in 1970s NY, and a passerby that Allen says looks like Truman Capote is indeed Truman Capote in an uncredited cameo role. The scene in which the real McLuhan briefly appears is one which I have been through more than once, being stuck in a theatre lobby behind a pontificating know-it-all and Allen's dismantling of this character was particularly delicious.

There are three general subcultures involved and satirized in the film. Allen's edgy, somewhat neurotic intellectually restless, constantly striving NYC world of artists and intellectuals, is a world he plainly belongs to, and his attachment and love is evident in much of the cinematography, a trademark of many of his films reaching its peak, perhaps in his film 'Manhattan,' made two years later. Contrasted to this is the WASP world of repressed emotions and confused values represented in particular by Annie's family. The third element is the culturally void world of California which he characterizes with the famous quote, "I don't want to move to a city where the only cultural advantage is being able to make a right turn on a red light."

In watching the film, you will be aware of all the wildly innovative film techniques being used, really an amazing tour de force of extemporaneous film making.

The film is also notable for an amazing cast that includes an unusual amount of name actors of the time and stars to be, right down to the final shot of Sigourney Weaver in her first role, barely visible as Allen's date at the end.

So, being aware that Woody Allen's influences range between Sigmund Freud and Groucho Marx (not to be confused with Karl), but also being aware that he has said that he draws his inspiration from Ingmar Bergman, enjoy this very funny, idiosyncratic, neurotic, but ultimately serious American film maker's vision.