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# Reclaiming the Streets: Investigating Female Experience of Cinematic Urban Violence

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**Abstract:** The spatial ideologies and narrative tropes of gendered victimhood, which are designed to induce fear and anxiety, are routinely employed to govern and restrict female access to and experience of urban spaces—both in cinematic depictions and in the real world. This paper explores how such tropes are challenged and rewritten in three screen narratives based in urban landscapes: London in *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008), Paris in *Amélie* (2001), and New York in *Sex and the City* (1998–2004). Contrary to the ideologies of fear that routinely dominate urban narratives, I will argue that the texts under discussion instead display the city as a space of potential female sexual, social, and spatial emancipation—most notably achieved through employing the comedic genre to express the potentially subversive power of comedy in overthrowing gender and social hierarchies. My primary focus will remain on the narrative techniques that these texts employ to rewrite what I refer to as the “fear script” and to dismantle motifs of gendered victimhood.

**Keywords:** feminism, gender studies, urban studies, sexuality, film, television, flânerie, genre theory, violence

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What would happen ... to the order of the world ...

If the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble?

Hélène Cixous, *Sorties*

So, where do we go from here? First, we need some friends.

Malcolm X, *The Ballot or the Bullet*

Screen portrayals of urban experience routinely display the city as a nexus of dangers and delights. Cinematic depictions oscillate between exhibiting the city as a place of freedom, opportunity, and excitement—in such genres as the romantic comedy—or conversely as a space of control, peril, and crime—most notably, in film noir. What is more, the city has historically been depicted as a gendered experience, since it is frequently imagined as a male playground of capitalist patriarchal power, where women are excluded, marginalized, or made to feel unsafe or inhibited in their movements and behavior due to the seemingly prevalent threat of (male) violence. However, in this exploration of female urban experience, I will investigate the validity of James Clapp’s claim that the city is “the great liberator of women,” because it “unmoored women from their confined traditional social roles and status, exponentially enlarging their possibilities” (2013, 242).

Central to my investigation will be the illumination of the reclamation of city spaces that are traditionally associated with the threat of gendered violence to instead act as sites for female liberation. Indeed, the public spaces of the city—in particular, city streets—have a longstanding historical association with liberation, as frequent sites of sociocultural and political protest. This is especially apparent in the history of the women’s liberation movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as city streets became key sites of protest for the suffragette campaign and for the activists of second-wave feminism. However, the public spaces of the city are also sites of frequent danger and harassment for many women around the world, as highlighted, for example, in Rob Bliss’s video, *10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman* (2014), which explores the aggressive and persistent sexual harassment that many women face on a regular basis in cities around the world. These gendered acts of harassment, assault, and violence are symptomatic of the ways in which patriarchal society imbues many men with feelings of entitlement to women’s bodies and attentions—especially in the public spaces of the city, where women are considered to be “on display” as objects of the (male) spectator’s gaze. The city therefore often presents an ambivalent experience for women, since their desire for freedom and enjoyment is routinely barred or confronted by instances of fear and the threat of harassment and gendered violence. Here, however, through exploring three different urban-based screen narratives, I will examine how such experiences of fear and peril are critiqued and subverted, as the threat of gendered violence is interrogated, deconstructed, and rewritten in these texts to present an alternative narrative space wherein the urban milieu acts as a catalyst—rather than hindrance—for women’s liberation.

In order to examine the deconstruction of gendered urban violence, I will focus on representations of women’s lives in three different cities and distinct screen media: New York in the television series *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) and filmic depictions of Paris in *Le Fabuleux Destin d’Amélie Poulain* (2001) and London in *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008).<sup>1</sup> These texts illuminate the emancipatory potential of the city as both a social and narrative space, and reject the typical male-centred plot that repeatedly dominates screen media and accounts of urban experience. Instead, the cityscape and narrative are shaped by female subjectivity. Through this focus, these texts liberate women from what Elizabeth Wilson terms the “straitjacket of otherness” (1992, 102), since rather than placing women on the periphery of the narrative, or filtering their experiences through a male protagonist, they instead centralize and prioritize female experience. This narrative concentration acts both to foreground the frequently overlooked female urban experience and to highlight the everyday instances of gendered violence and harassment that women face on a regular basis in cities around the world.

These texts may initially appear to be an unlikely trio for comparison, considering the formal differences between television and film, and the contrasting urban aesthetics of *Amélie*’s digitally stylized milieu and *Happy*’s social-realist *mise-en-scène*. However, closer examination reveals that all three texts display comparable difficulties of urban experience that women must overcome in their aspiration for emancipation. All three also employ similar narrative and technical devices—albeit with differing outcomes—to promote liberation for their protagonists. An investigation of these texts therefore provides diverse female viewpoints and urban experiences for analysis. These multiple experiences exemplify Michel Foucault’s observation about the emancipatory potential of a more collective liberation by showcasing “not one single point of resistance ... but instead a ‘plurality of resistances’” (Foucault 1978, 96), with each woman representing different, yet comparable, instances of liberation from the threat of gendered violence in the city.

The first aspect of my investigation will be these texts’ representation of women in the public spaces of the city, which, from *Broken Blossoms* (1919) to *Sin City* (2005), has commonly been portrayed in screen media as a space of danger, where women are prey to violent attack and sexual harassment—typically from

male antagonists. Here, however, I will instead examine how these texts overcome and rewrite what I shall refer to as a “fear script.”

All three texts seemingly choose one of two central methods to establish danger: either through *explicitly* menacing content or through screen language that exploits audience expectations to *implicitly* convey threat. However, these threatening signifiers are ultimately dismissed and rewritten in *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy*, as audience expectations are challenged and destabilized, and apparently dangerous scenarios are instead revealed, through screen action or dialogue, to be comedic. Although women do encounter explicitly threatening situations, they do not become “conventionally” fearful victims. Instead, these texts portray their female protagonists as taking charge of situations and actively overcoming and liberating themselves from danger and violence, thus allowing them to claim their freedom and exert authority over the cityscape. Through rewriting the fear script, *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy* reappropriate urban space to transform it from a site of violent threat to one of female liberation, which I will highlight through my second line of inquiry: an examination of female *flânerie*, as the female protagonists in these urban narratives enthusiastically embrace the traditionally male role of *flâneur*.

Through these investigative foci, I will thus demonstrate how these three texts implicitly and explicitly engage with what Henri Lefebvre terms the “rights to the city” (1991, 19) through rewriting ideologies of confinement and violence that attempt to keep women oppressed, excluded, and marginalized in urban space. Instead, *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy* liberate their female protagonists to pursue their desires for emancipation, fun, professional success, freedom from patriarchal control, and an active expression of their sexuality.

### **Rewriting the Fear Script**

Historically in screen media, Paris, London, and New York have frequently been envisaged by such (male) directors as Jacques Audiard, Guy Ritchie, and Martin Scorsese as spaces of violent male criminality, with women being the common victims. These visions resultantly constitute a threatening corpus of urban representation of potential peril for women, thus reinforcing the ideology of what Catherine Hall conceptualizes as gendered “separate spheres” (1979, 25). Through this ideology, women are confined within the private domestic domain—as they are convinced that this confinement is intended for their safety rather than to control and oppress them—and the public sphere becomes coded as a menacing male space. Such spatial segregation regulates women’s behavior through instilling fear, which prevents them from fully engaging with the city; as Leslie Kern asserts, this oppressive ideology functions “to produce subjects that actively control themselves” (2010, 10). Indeed, through these narratives of fear, women are “trained” in where they are permitted and where they are deterred from going in the city, and what behavior they may carry out there. Resultantly, urban spaces, especially city streets, routinely become sites where patriarchal power is exercised, since women are often made to feel afraid and reliant on male protection to navigate them; as Elizabeth Wilson comments, “the protection and control of women have [historically] gone hand in hand” (1991, 16).

Alternatives to urban narratives of violence and peril have been offered by the popular work of such filmmakers as Richard Linklater, Norah Ephron, and Richard Curtis, who have conversely presented celebratory portrayals of Paris, New York, and London as romanticized spaces of love and excitement, especially for women. However, these filmmakers tend to portray urban spaces as almost entirely devoid of

danger. While the three texts under discussion in this essay also depict urban space as a site of excitement and happiness, I will center my analysis on how these narratives liberate their female characters from fear in the city through an *explicit* engagement with, and overturning of, the often-implicit threats of urban danger that women face, as opposed to glossing over such threats, as the likes of Linklater, Ephron, and Curtis arguably opt to do. Rather than limit women's urban experiences through an avoidance of danger or fear, *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy* rewrite and subsequently dispel threat, thus allowing their female characters to display the freedom usually reserved for (white, heterosexual) men, as they reappropriate previously fearful city spaces for their own liberation. These texts showcase liberation through their depiction of women carrying out many of the activities that they are regularly warned against in the city for fear of gendered violence. Such activities include walking the streets alone at night, visiting clubs and bars with female friends and walking home afterwards, taking recreational drugs, and indulging in casual sexual relationships—all of which result in fun not fear, and emancipation not danger.

Sharon Marcus investigates female fear in her assessment of rape and sexual harassment, which she maintains are patriarchal “micro-strategies of oppression” that attempt to control women through instilling fear and perpetuating gendered concepts of women as perennial victims (1992, 391). Marcus proposes the term “rape script” to express how “social structures *inscribe* on men's and women's embodied selves and psyches the misogynistic inequalities which enable rape to occur,” making rape part of a “gendered grammar of violence” that assigns power roles—women as passive victims, men as active attackers—and resulting in women being predicated as “the objects of violence and the subjects of fear” (1992, 391–3). While Marcus's observations about gendered violence directly engage with the threat of rape, they can also be applied to other forms of female fear in the city—a “fear script,” as I shall propose—which affect women's engagement with the city through such barriers as women not feeling safe to use public transport for fear of assault, or feeling prohibited from walking alone in the city at night for fear of attack. Furthermore, I will illustrate how the fear script is overcome and revised in *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy*, as the female protagonists are transformed from prospective victims into active controllers of potentially menacing situations.

One of the central methods that the three texts employ to assuage fear and threat in the city is laughter, as they are all fundamentally comedies. Female laughter can be transgressive; Kathleen Rowe argues that representations of women in television and film have commonly “centered on their victimization and tears, rather than on their resistance and laughter,” as exhibited in such genres as the soap opera and horror film (1995, 4). Therefore, through adopting the comedic genre to challenge gender norms and rewrite fear, *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy* operate to reject portrayals of women as passive victims and instead depict them as independent and resilient protagonists. Mikhail Bakhtin explores the transgressive, liberating potential of laughter, especially when exercised by oppressed individuals, since, as he contends, laughter “builds its own world versus the official world” (1984, 88). Through this notion, laughing at that which controls and incites fear removes its power over oneself, as sources of power, threat, and fear instead become sources of ridicule. Indeed, Bakhtin maintains that whereas the “official and authoritarian” aspects of society and culture are “combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations, ... fear, and intimidation ...”, laughter, on the contrary, *overcomes fear*, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority” (1984, 90; emphasis added). In these texts, laughter also becomes a sign of rebellion and liberation, with the unruly female mouth defying internalized patriarchal censorship and control in line with Bakhtin's assertion that “laughter liberates not only from external censorship, but ... from the great interior censor” (1984, 94). This is illustrated in repeated scenes of women exuberantly laughing together, especially in *SATC* and *Happy*, where group laughter expresses the strength of female friendships, which

these texts repeatedly highlight as central support units for the protagonists when they are faced with the threatening aspects of urban life.

*SATC* frequently places its protagonists in situations that initially appear threatening or of the kind women in screen media are commonly warned against; yet, in *SATC*, these situations become liberating. This is overtly apparent in the episode “Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-Little,” which begins with Samantha alone in her apartment, vacuuming. The camera moves to a close-up shot of her front door, as an anonymous gloved hand opens it and a man in a balaclava silently enters the apartment without Samantha noticing. Through employing these traditional screen codes of (gendered) danger, the shot appears to establish a scene of attack, with the apparent threat intensified by Carrie’s voiceover stating (while the masked man approaches Samantha): “In New York City, it is a statistical fact that once every 7 minutes...” Carrie then pauses as the masked man grabs Samantha around the neck, and she screams.

Carrie’s implementation of the rhetoric of attack statistics, coupled with this predatory onscreen imagery, suggests that Samantha is about to become a victim of assault. Indeed, this scene employs what Lisa Cuklanz cites as the “basic plot formula” of rape on television, when a woman is attacked from behind by an unseen assailant who clamps his hand over her mouth and throws her to the ground (2000, 6). The threat of home invasion and attack is a danger that women living alone in the city are frequently warned about in other New York narratives such as *Panic Room* (2002) and *Law & Order* (1990–2010). Even Carrie herself states earlier that she has an escape route planned in case “a rapist comes through [her] window” and attacks her (“The Good Fight”). However, *SATC* explicitly engages with this formula to rewrite the scenario as a comedic scene based on clichés, as it soon becomes apparent that Samantha is not the fearful victim but the active controller of the situation. Indeed, when she pulls the attacker’s balaclava off, she reveals her partner, Smith, as Carrie’s voiceover continues: “...an unsuspecting woman dates an actor.” Smith continues to play his role of attacker by repeatedly commanding Samantha to “shut the fuck up!” as he throws her onto the bed and ties up her feet, while she pleads with him, “Please let me go, my husband will be home any minute!” However, Samantha’s employment of the language typically associated with a victim is now disjunctive with the image onscreen, as the audience are aware both that Smith is not an unknown attacker and, especially, that Samantha does not have a “husband.”<sup>2</sup> The audience’s suspicions that this scene is comedic and not threatening are confirmed when Carrie’s voiceover observes: “For Samantha, one of the perks of dating Smith the actor was getting to stage full-scale fantasy productions.”

Contrary to the initial characterization of Samantha as a fearful victim, this scene is revealed to be entirely under her construction and control as she breaks character to tell Smith, “Oh, you’re really good!” to which he retorts, “I said, shut the fuck up!” At this point, the sexually commanding Samantha—with whom the audience are most familiar—reappears, as she grabs Smith’s hair, rolls on top of him into a visually dominant position, and shouts, “No, *you* shut the fuck up and fuck me before my husband gets home. Now!” Samantha refuses to be silenced, and the scene concludes with her laughing ecstatically as she and Smith roll off the bed. This situation rewrites the fear script, since it was initially presented as a dangerous scene of gendered violence but is instead revealed as the enactment of a sexual fantasy, wherein Samantha is the orchestrator and controller as she assertively directs Smith through active and authoritative language. Therefore, arguably, rather than a reenactment of the familiar scenario of female victimization, this scene can be understood as representing female sexual liberation in the city, as it rewrites the traditional, oppressive gendered sexual script that has shaped many female narratives. It dismantles and problematizes the active male/passive female gender dichotomy of sexual relations that, as Laura Mulvey observed, has historically dominated screen media, since both Samantha and Smith occupy active



and passive roles throughout the scenario (Mulvey 1975, 12). Furthermore, this scene subverts the common warning that women living alone in the city are prime targets for attack, since Samantha's apartment—as is the case with each female character under discussion in this paper, who all live alone—is showcased as a space for her to exercise her independence and freedom, and to seek fun and excitement in the city by whatever means she desires.

Although this scene may be read as “liberating” Samantha through its destabilization of the traditional screen codes of gendered violence, which typically write men as the active attackers and women as their passive victims, at the same time it is very provocative, and viewers may agree with Charlotte's opinion that the scenario it enacts “is incredibly offensive” because “Violence against women is a very serious issue!” Indeed, this attack fantasy might be considered to support bell hooks' (1994) discussion of the ways in which women have been “seduced” into believing that they should be enticed by displays of aggressive male conduct and accept and indeed welcome violent sexual behavior as a “natural” display of male sexuality. As Susan Brownmiller contends, female fantasies of sexual attack are indicative of the saturation of “toxic” hypermasculine, heteropatriarchal conceptualizations of male sexual behavior in society and cultural production: “Because men control the definitions of sex, women are allotted a poor assortment of options.... Our female sexual fantasies have been handed to us on a brass platter by those very same men who have labored ... to promote their own fantasies” (1976, 232). Therefore, rather than a liberating and subversive display of female sexual desire, Samantha's fantasy scenario might instead be considered to exemplify the ways in which heteropatriarchal society has conditioned women to conceptualize their sexuality and sexual desires through the lens of male fantasies of power and aggression.

However, rather than exemplifying Charlotte's contention, and being understood as a trivialization of gendered violence and its very real presence in women's urban lives, this scene directly engages with gendered violence to explicitly subvert traditional gender roles and the gendered dynamics of victimization. Contrary to Charlotte's opinion, this scene can instead be understood as an assertion of women's license to express and explore their sexual fantasies; as Samantha replies, “it was a fantasy – fantasies can't be censored,” to which Miranda retorts, “I think the Supreme Court is working on that now!” This exchange thus reveals how female sexual desires and fantasies are typically denied or censored in screen media, and in social and cultural systems and production, in an attempt to oppress, silence, and deny expressions of female sexual desire. Therefore, *SATC* not only rewrites the fear script but also arguably liberates its female characters to express their sexuality and the range of their sexual desires in whatever ways they wish. This feeling of liberation is asserted by Samantha as she tells the other women, “It's so refreshing to be with someone who likes to fuck outside the box!”

While the scene with Samantha and Smith engages with the reality of sexual assault in the city—with women in the United States up to twice as likely to be victims of sexual violence in urban compared to suburban and rural spaces (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2016, 3)—through underlining that rape and sexual assault are almost always committed by someone who is known to the victim, as opposed to the “stranger danger” myths perpetuated in sociocultural narratives, the liberating possibilities of this scene are curtailed by its failure to engage with the racial and socioeconomic dimensions of victimization.<sup>3</sup> African-American women and women of a disadvantaged socioeconomic status are statistically far more likely to be victims of sexual assault and violence than the white middle- and upper-class protagonists of *SATC*.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as the US Department of Justice's report on victims of sexual violence between 1994 and 2010 highlights, women of color in the United States are up to three times more likely to be victims of rape than white women, and women from disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances are also up to three times more likely to be

victims of rape than more affluent women (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2016, 3). Therefore, while the scene discussed here offers a measure of emancipation from the gender roles that routinely shape narratives of female endangerment and victimhood in screen media, *SATC*'s narrative of white and affluent women circumscribes this liberation and empowerment by failing to engage with the fact that sexual violence is a crime that disproportionately affects women at the intersections of race, class, and gender. Consequently, emancipation is seemingly only offered to white middle- and upper-class women in this narrative.

In a similar vein to the narrative techniques employed in *SATC*, *Happy* also overtly rewrites the fear script via humor, and through female assertions of rights to city space. This insistence on women's rights to participate in and appropriate urban space without fear or harassment is explicitly witnessed during Poppy's flamenco lessons, which are established as a homosocial space of female community, enjoyment, and empowerment—being taught and undertaken exclusively by women. This emancipative assertion is especially apparent when the women prepare for a dance move by repeatedly stamping on the floor as they shout “my space!” They thus claim their right to possession of the city space, which director Mike Leigh underscores aurally through his focus on the loud stamping and shouts of the women. While they assert their dominance of “their space,” Leigh moves from a close-up of Poppy's face to a low panning shot of the women's feet to, finally, a crane shot of the entire group of women. This camera movement from Poppy to the wider community of women gathered around her establishes and showcases a collective female will for emancipation. This expression of female solidarity and community resists and challenges what Angela McRobbie conceptualizes as the widespread postfeminist ideology of the 1990s and 2000s. McRobbie argues that this ideology has attempted to undermine the feminist gains made since the 1970s by seeking to promote “competition and unbridled rivalry amongst women” as a means of dividing them and thwarting a collective resistance to patriarchal authority and ideology (2009, 79). However, *Happy*, *SATC*, and *Amélie* all disavow this individualistic narrative to instead showcase the emancipatory potential of female friendship and homosocial community, and the continuing necessity of collective female mobilization and will for change.

The liberating potential of flamenco is underlined in *Happy* when the teacher informs the women that this dance was created by people who have “been squashed down for centuries” but who protested their oppression by declaring, “this [is] my space!” Therefore, it is a form of mobility and assertion that is established as a both transgressive and authoritative practice of reclamation through flamenco's historical origins, as the emancipatory potential of this dance transfers from an ethnic minority group to another frequently oppressed group: contemporary women. While the scene is filmed in an enclosed, somewhat circumscribed space, this declarative act of women's rights to uninhibited possession of space is arguably adopted by Poppy in her wider experiences of the city—most notably when she refuses to allow Scott to impinge on her urban freedom by attacking her during a driving lesson. The attack—a narrative thread I will return to in my discussion of female *flânerie*—is a battle over laying claim to what is representative of patriarchal space. There is a mounting tension between Poppy and Scott throughout the film, as Scott's behavior becomes increasingly aggressive—from bigoted outbursts to Poppy discovering him watching her flat. Scott thus displays similarities to Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* (1976), as an unpredictable, threatening male figure who experiences the city through the space of his car. However, Poppy is undaunted by Scott's behavior; the driving-lesson scene begins with her openly confronting his stalking, telling him flatly, “you should have [said] hello.” However, Leigh immediately establishes threat, employing extreme close-ups of Scott's face that reveal his spitting rage as he verbally abuses other road users and drives erratically around the city, while Poppy's concern with his behavior is highlighted when she covers her mouth and grabs the



car door handle, underscoring her sense of unease with the situation. However, when the car screeches to a halt and Scott and Poppy swap seats, a power reversal occurs, with Poppy now literally and figuratively in the driving seat as she removes the keys from the ignition and informs Scott, “We’re not going anywhere. You’re in no fit state to take this lesson.... I can’t let you drive this car.” Scott attempts to regain control, reminding Poppy, “I am the driving instructor, you are the pupil,” which she ignores, declaring, “I don’t want you to teach me anymore,” and remaining in control of the situation. Leigh creates an atmosphere of intense claustrophobia in this scene between Poppy and Scott through the use of small “lipstick” cameras attached to the car windscreen, which allow for extreme close-ups of the two characters’ faces. In earlier driving scenes, shot-reverse-shot editing functioned to humorously establish Scott’s exasperation at Poppy’s constant undermining of his dictatorial commands through her jokes and innuendos. However, the same editing technique now functions to heighten the mounting tension between them and visually emphasize their warring subjectivities and the increasing threat of violence towards Poppy.

After Poppy refuses to return Scott’s car keys, he aggressively attacks her. His violent grabbing of Poppy and the frenetic scrambling of her limbs as she breaks free fill the screen and bombard the audience visually and aurally, thus heightening the claustrophobia as though we were a third passenger in the car. However, Poppy manages to regain control by extricating herself from the situation, and it is Scott who becomes visibly distressed—crying and anxiously pacing, like a conventionally “feminine” victim—while Poppy remains composed, telling him, “let’s just calm down.” Rather than place Poppy in the role of victim, Leigh instead conveys a power reversal, as Poppy rewrites the fear script to free herself from the threat of male violence with courage and tact. In lieu of fear impinging on Poppy’s urban mobility, it is Scott’s ability to move in urban space that is affected: when he pleads with Poppy, “I just want to get in my car and go home,” she retorts, “That’s not going to happen.” Instead of Scott’s violent outburst affecting Poppy’s actions, it is *she* who is controlling *him* by displaying emotional stability and rationality, as opposed to his childlike fretfulness. Although she does return Scott’s keys, Poppy remains in control as she walks home. In contrast to the containing close-ups Leigh employed to connote the oppressive, violent atmosphere of the car, he now uses wide frames to showcase Poppy’s physical freedom on the streets and to establish this space as a sphere of refuge and liberation for her.

While the confrontation between Poppy and Scott is presented as threatening through Leigh’s reliance on oppressive close-up images, the menace of this scene—like that of Carrie’s mugging in the *SATC* episode “What Goes Around Comes Around”—is lessened through its occurrence in daylight, and on a residential street. This aesthetic decision markedly contrasts with the dark alley where a woman is violently raped in the opening scene of Leigh’s earlier London film, *Naked* (1993), whose dangerous urban vision for women is emphasized through its dilapidated, nocturnal urban milieu. Antithetically to *Naked*, *Happy* envisages London as a fun, exciting, liberating space for women. This excitement is highlighted through the bright colors of the mise-en-scène, as well as by the styling of Poppy herself, whose energy and optimism are reflected through such accessories as her rainbow necklace. Poppy’s optimism is displayed in the concluding scene of *Happy*, which depicts her and her best friend Zoe rowing together in the park. The film’s conclusion thus highlights that Scott’s attack has not censored or impinged on Poppy’s enjoyment or mobility in the city through instilling fear. This ultimately affirmative vision is underscored by the extradiegetic trumpet tune, which—like *Amélie*’s accordion score—is employed throughout the film to underline Poppy’s energy and love for London. Indeed, she tells Zoe, “We’re lucky, aren’t we,” as *Happy*’s final image, similarly to Leigh’s previous London-based film *Career Girls* (1997), showcases the two women laughing and reveling

in their friendship and shared urban life, an insistence on optimism signaled from the outset by *Happy-Go-Lucky's* title.

Conversely to *Happy* and *SATC*, *Amélie* engages with gendered threat in the city in a far more implicit mode. The film's setting in Montmartre is significant; as Ginette Vincendeau observes, historically in French cinema, this neighborhood has been "the traditional area of the Parisian criminal milieu" (2007, 37). However, these historical associations are rewritten in *Amélie*—as New York is in *SATC*—to instead celebrate Montmartre as a liberating, enchanting urban space, which is aesthetically reinforced by the film's bright, color-saturated cinematography. *Amélie* opens with the suggestion that the public spaces of the city are dangerous for women, as the catalyst for the narrative action is the announcement of Princess Diana's death on the Paris streets. However, this is the only instance of the city being overtly represented as threatening for women. It is in fact men who are more at risk in *Amélie*; the film's only expression of open fear comes from male character Collignon, who is spooked by a dark, eerie street in the early hours of the morning, and it is *his* scream that rings out across the cityscape, not a woman's. This apparent male urban vulnerability is echoed by the character of Mr. Dufayel, who is referred to as "the Glass Man" because his bones are extremely frail, placing him at risk if he ventures outside his apartment. Consequently, he is confined within the private domestic space while Amélie ventures across the city, shaping the narrative and mapping out her own adventure. Dufayel lives vicariously through her, acknowledging Amélie's strength by telling her, "Your bones aren't made of glass: you can take life's knocks." This dynamic between Amélie and Dufayel is one of the key sites in the film wherein traditional gendered associations of the occupation of urban space and experiences of fear and vulnerability are rewritten. Indeed, the potency of Amélie's narrative agency is illustrated through Dufayel, who functions as her foil. Dufayel is representative of the male gaze through voyeuristically watching his neighbors from his window, and in this respect he is overtly similar to L.B. Jeffries in *Rear Window* (1954). However, rather than being a powerful figure in the diegesis through his wielding of the male gaze, like the wheelchair-bound Jeffries, Dufayel's entrapment in his apartment because of his frail bones instead makes him symbolic of the powerless, castrated male, who Mulvey argues experiences "enforced inactivity, binding him to his seat as a spectator" (1975, 16). Crucially, while Jeffries is impotently trapped in his apartment because he is *physically* unable to move, Dufayel, by contrast, is *mentally* paralyzed by fear of the potential peril he may experience if he ventures out into Paris in his fragile state. Therefore, Dufayel plays the traditionally female role of confinement within the domestic sphere due to fear, while Amélie, although an equally anxious character, bravely occupies the public city space in her daily wanderings. Like Berlin for the eponymous heroine of *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998), Paris becomes a playground for Amélie to exercise her narrative control over the urban milieu and its residents and to adopt the traditionally male role of the questing hero. Indeed, rather than a male protagonist, it is Amélie who is "free to command the stage ... in which [she] articulates the look and creates the action" (Mulvey 1975, 13).

Although Amélie is presented as shy and anxious while conversing with people, she is confident and active in her movements across the city, as she repeatedly negotiates situations from which women might be discouraged due to a potential threat of gendered violence, such as traveling on the metro alone at night, and sleeping in a photo booth in the station overnight when she misses the last train home. In addition to this more overtly "high-risk" behavior, director Jean-Pierre Jeunet also depicts Amélie overcoming the more implicit threats of male violence that women might face in the city. One such implicit threat is highlighted through Joseph's harassment of Amélie's female coworkers by repeatedly spying on them and documenting their actions with his tape recorder. Joseph's behavior displays what Kern describes as "the traditional

patriarchal desire to survey, control, and restrict the movements of women in public space” through making women feel inhibited in their behavior (2010, 185). However, rather than being properly menacing, these scenes routinely function to create comedy—typically through Joseph’s misunderstanding of the women’s actions. This humor is especially apparent when Joseph thinks Gina is seducing Nino, noting “4.08: docking scheduled,” when through the dramatic irony of the scene the audience know she is actually helping Amélie. However, when Georgette exclaims, “He keeps spying on me—I can’t take it anymore! Psychos are the last straw,” Amélie’s coworkers unite and force Joseph to leave as he laments “blatant female conspiracy.” Therefore, as also witnessed in *SATC* and *Happy*, this scene acts to highlight female solidarity as a tactic to thwart threatening male behavior and foregrounds humor rather than fear for women in the city.

### Sidewalk Moments

Through liberating and empowering women to overcome the fear of gendered violence that routinely affects their mobility and experience of the (screen) city, these texts subsequently allow their protagonists to embrace the traditionally male role of flâneur. From Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Man of the Crowd* (1845) to Gil Pender in *Midnight in Paris* (2011), the flâneur has historically been celebrated as a privileged male figure of urban freedom, mobility, and narrative authority. However, *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy* instead showcase flânerie as a female urban occupation, exemplifying what Michael Dear terms “spatial practices of transgression” (2000, 188) through challenging the gendered occupation of space and narrative authority in the city.

It has been suggested that female flânerie was a near impossibility in the modernist city where the flâneur originated, since the city’s public spaces were policed by what Susan Buck-Morss names as the “politics of loitering” (1986, 118) and were only openly accessible to men. Indeed, Janet Wolff decisively asserts that the flâneur can “only be male,” since only men have the freedom to wander the city without fearing attack or loss of virtue through the immediate association of “streetwalking” with prostitution for women (1985, 37). However, the texts under discussion explicitly challenge Wolff’s claim by envisaging women embracing and reclaiming flânerie as an emblem of their liberation in the postmodern city. Indeed, there have been a number of contentions to the claim that female flânerie was an impossibility, with Lauren Elkin’s expansive study illuminating the complexity and multiplicity of the instances of female flânerie in literature and social history since the eighteenth century. As she states, “the flâneuse does exist, whenever [women] have deviated from the paths laid out for [them], lighting out for [their] own territories” (2016, 23), as women have frequently, yet often invisibly, broken free from the constraints placed on their urban movements and behavior to explore the city and the array of the opportunities it presents. George Sand’s autobiographical writing illustrates the great ecstasy and freedom she found walking across Paris, while Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and the films of Agnès Varda and Jacques Rivette showcase the array of sights and experiences that flânerie can offer women.<sup>5</sup> These texts belong to the literary and cinematic corpus of which the women of *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy* form a part, as they follow in the footsteps of the trailblazing women who have marched before them.

Whereas the modernist flâneur was depicted as an aloof figure, who observed the city without actively participating in the scenes around him, the flâneuses in these texts openly participate in the urban scene, shaping the city. Resultantly, they are examples of what Helen Richards conceptualizes as the “visible flâneuse for the postmodern era” (2003, 15), since they confidently roam the cities they inhabit, enjoying, observing, and documenting the sights and experiences they encounter. Charles Baudelaire established the

flâneur as an urban “observer,” a “painter of the passing moment” (1964, 4–5) who fashions and records the world he inhabits. In *SATC*, Carrie explicitly fulfills this role of urban observer through her occupation as a journalist or, as she calls it in the pilot episode, “a sexual anthropologist,” since she writes about her New York experiences and, as Baudelaire would conceptualize, “the external world is reborn upon [her] paper” (1964, 11). What is more, *SATC*’s long run as a television series allows Carrie to also fulfill Walter Benjamin’s characterization of the flâneur, given that the serial format gives her the opportunity to document Manhattan “life in all its varieties and inexhaustible wealth” (Benjamin 2006, 19).

Carrie’s role as flâneuse is immediately established in the opening credits of *SATC*, where she strides confidently along the Manhattan streets as the jerking hand-held camera movements assert her roaming gaze by mimicking her eye movements across the cityscape. This underlines the centrality of Carrie’s subjectivity to the series and connotes her “ownership” of Manhattan; as she declares in the pilot when walking along Fifth Avenue, “I felt like I owned the city.” Indeed, as the camera follows Carrie’s gaze across the cityscape through eyeline match, the names of the *SATC* actresses are projected onto famous New York skyscrapers. These buildings function traditionally as phallic symbols of male capitalist power—a signification promoted in such films as *Wall Street* (1987) and *American Psycho* (2000). However, here—as the camera cuts between medium shots of Carrie walking along the streets and the buildings displaying the actresses’ names—the women of *SATC* are placed among these men, with this visual device literally writing the women and their subjectivities onto the cityscape. Rather than a traditional male playground of freedom and power, in *SATC* Manhattan is instead established as the island of women and of female financial power and sexual freedom.

These opening credits also allude to Tony Manero’s opening strut in *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), since both Carrie and Tony exert an active gaze that possesses the cityscape as they move through the streets and asserts their narrative authority. However, rather than replicating *Saturday Night Fever*’s misogynistic, violent view of New York where women are sexually objectified and assaulted, *SATC* rewrites this narrative to exhibit female liberation and sexual freedom in the city. Indeed, Carrie displays far more confidence than Tony in her urban movements, which is highlighted in the opening credits through a close-up of her smiling and provocatively cocking her eyebrow as she assesses and possesses the urban scene around her, in contrast to Tony’s more anxious, hesitant expression as he walks through the Brooklyn streets in the film’s opening scene. However, although the credits establish Carrie’s assertive ownership of the city, they end with her rude awakening when a bus that is advertising her newspaper column splashes her as it drives past. This is an ambiguous moment, which both establishes the comedy that *SATC* will center on and suggests the paradoxical nature of the city, which may be exciting and liberating but is also potentially hostile. Carrie’s bus advertisement presents her in a sexually provocative pose alongside the slogan, “Carrie Bradshaw knows good sex (and isn’t afraid to ask).” It thus overtly describes her as sexually confident and knowledgeable, a position that women have rarely been afforded in screen media—and when they have, it has typically been a demonized characterization, as witnessed in such films as *Basic Instinct* (1992). Therefore, the bus splash may be considered as illustrating Judith Butler’s famed observations that “gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences” and that those who “fail to do their gender right” (2007, 190) are frequently punished by society, since Carrie is humiliated here by her own “unfeminine” declaration of sexual confidence.

However, the extent to which the women in *SATC* are in fact punished for their sexually liberal escapades is debatable, as the show establishes many scenes wherein “punishment” might be expected to arise, yet does not. This is particularly apparent in the episode “Running with Scissors,” when Samantha, the most

sexually voracious of the women, completes an HIV test. The test could be framed as a typical narrative incident to showcase the “dangers” of her sexual activity, yet we find out that Samantha is perfectly healthy. Akin to aforementioned scenarios wherein women face threat in the city, tension in this scene is assuaged through comedy as Samantha’s answers to the nurse’s questions comically display the extent of her sexual voracity, instead of promoting a potentially scaremongering scenario. For instance, when the nurse asks her, “How many sexual partners have you had?,” Samantha, after pausing for a lengthy period of time to contemplate her answer, responds with the question, “This year?”

The opening credits of *SATC* also allude to one of its greatest influences, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970–77), which centered on the life of its eponymous heroine, an independent career woman living in Minneapolis. The opening credits of the series conclude, as Deborah Jermyn describes, with Mary “delightfully spinning round on the street, ... freeze-framing her as she giddily and triumphantly throws her beret up into the sky, thus capturing a ... sense of the pleasure the city might hold for women,” to the background music that declares, “You’re gonna make it after all!” (2009, 43). However, this triumphant freeze frame contrasts with Carrie’s look of shock and annoyance in her own freeze frame at the end of *SATC*’s credits. The show’s opening credits therefore establish how, in opposition to its antecedent, *SATC* will provide a liberating yet arguably more balanced portrayal of women’s city life, qualifying female liberation with an array of the harsher aspects of urban experience—including the challenges of building a career in the competitive environment of the capitalist city, and the threat of gendered violence and regular sexual harassment, all of which the women must support each other to overcome in their aspiration for emancipation.

*SATC* has often been criticized for its polished aesthetics and the unrealistically glamorous lifestyles of its protagonists. This is a valid contention, considering that the protagonists routinely wear designer clothes, attend glamorous Manhattan social events, and are all conventionally beautiful by the standards of Western media. The consumerist facet of the series also attests to McRobbie’s observations on the “post-feminist masquerade” of capitalist consumer culture, with discourses that encourage women to “liberate” themselves through purchasing particular items of clothing, accessories, and makeup, which in actuality reinforce—rather than undermine—oppressive gender ideals of highly stylized femininity (2009, 71). However, this criticism arguably neglects a central narrative theme of *SATC*: its pointed revelation of the realities behind the glossy images it presents, as foreshadowed in the opening credits by the splash that interrupts Carrie’s swaggering strut down the Manhattan street. This “realistic” narrative insistence is apparent when Carrie takes part in a fashion show during the episode “The Real Me,” which, rather than being the glamorous event of her fantasies, turns into a series of disasters, culminating in her falling on the runway and becoming “fashion roadkill.”<sup>6</sup> Through scenes such as this, *SATC* constantly undermines its own polished aesthetics and the romantic notions of its characters to instead humorously depict the realities of urban life and human relationships. This direction is declared in Carrie’s opening monologue of the pilot episode, wherein she evokes classic romanticized New York screen narratives only to rewrite them, proclaiming: “Welcome to the age of un-innocence. No one has breakfast at Tiffany’s [or] affairs to remember. Instead, we have breakfast at 7 a.m., and affairs we try to forget as quickly as possible!”

As opposed to *SATC* and *Amélie*, which focus on women walking in the city, *Happy* foregrounds different forms of urban mobility: cycling and driving. While an unconventional form of flânerie, driving allows Poppy to observe the urban scene she inhabits, which, even though it physically removes her from a direct experience of the street, makes her akin to the early flâneurs. Indeed, like the narrator of Poe’s *Man of the Crowd*, Poppy experiences the city from a removed distance, as the car allows her to adopt the traditionally



voyeuristic role of wielding her gaze without it being seen or returned. Like that of Carrie in *SATC*, Poppy's status as flâneuse is immediately established when she actively cycles into the opening scene, standing up on the pedals and letting her bike fly along the London streets with her hair billowing in the wind, thus visually underscoring the exhilaration and liberation this activity brings her. Moreover, Poppy's eyes move across the cityscape when she cycles, as she observes the city around her, greeting people she knows and smiling at the scenes she witnesses. Leigh shoots this scene using a narrow frame and medium or close-up images of Poppy. This cinematic technique visually establishes the centrality of her subjectivity to the narrative, while the final shot of the opening scene widens the frame to reveal the vast cityscape through which Poppy travels, resultantly placing her story in the wider London landscape.

However, when Poppy's bike is stolen, the car instead becomes a key facilitator for female urban mobility and observation in *Happy*, as also witnessed in Tehran-based *Ten* (2002), thus rewriting the common screen narrative that—from *Vertigo* (1958) to *Baby Driver* (2017)—presents urban vehicular experience as a predominantly male domain. Poppy expresses her excitement about her first driving lesson by dancing around her flat as she awaits her instructor's arrival, with Leigh's hand-held camera underlining her ecstasy by mimicking her erratic movements. Poppy's desire for mobility is emphasized when she heads straight for the driver's seat in the car. However, the instructor, Scott, immediately establishes the car as a space of his patriarchal control, telling Poppy, "It's *my* car." Poppy increasingly challenges and overrules this authority during each driving scene, typically undermining Scott's authoritarian declarations through humor. In the end, the car becomes a space in which *she* is the dominant controller, with patriarchal space thus reappropriated for female mobility. Leigh films the majority of the driving scenes from the backseat, a cinematic technique that allows him to visually connote the two warring subjectivities of Scott's patriarchal assertions and Poppy's positive, free-spirited persistence by displaying their split gazes in the car's rearview mirror. A central catalyst for conflict between the two is Poppy's adoption of the flâneur's traditionally wandering gaze, since, much to Scott's annoyance, she is frequently distracted by observing the events on the street outside the car. Poppy's wandering gaze during driving lessons is emphasized through Leigh's camera focusing on her eyes as they trawl the streets when she is driving. While, similarly to *SATC*, Poppy's gaze is appreciative of men—for instance, she exclaims "Oh, he's nice!" when she sees a man crossing the road, to which Scott exasperatedly barks, "Can you please focus on the driving!"—her gaze is not overtly scopophilic but rather an observational aspect of her role as flâneuse. Scott's dislike of Poppy's roaming gaze—admittedly a safety issue for driving—is also symptomatic of his feelings of threat to his superior place in the patriarchal hierarchy, since Poppy's unruly, actively wandering gaze defies his control and asserts her subjectivity over the city. This threat is expressed when Scott tells her, "You have no respect for order—you're disruptive and you celebrate chaos!" Clearly, Poppy's "disrespect" for order as perceived by Scott includes any gender hierarchies wherein he believes himself to be superior, as witnessed by her repeated undermining of his authority through jokes. Indeed, as Dave Calhoun argues, in *Happy*, Poppy is "resistant to crippling outside influences" (2008, 18). Instead, similarly to how she shapes the city through her gaze, she controls and maps out her own path in life, away from social and patriarchal dictates.

In opposition to the arguably postmodern forms of flânerie on display with Poppy's vehicular experience in *Happy*, and Carrie's negotiations of the brash fast-paced Manhattan streets in *SATC*, Amélie—concurrently with the film's nostalgic sepia aesthetics—practices a modernist Baudelarian and Benjaminian form of flânerie. Similarly to the heroine of *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), she often idly wanders around Paris, going "botanizing on the asphalt" (Benjamin 2006, 19). This is exemplified by Amélie's slow-motion stride across Pont des Arts, where she appears in what Benjamin conceptualizes as a "state of intoxication" with the city

(2006, 208); as the narrator explains, she experiences a “feeling of complete harmony.” Here, the tilted camera angle, as it slowly pans around a close-up of Amélie’s face, establishes her subjectivity as the axis on which the cityscape and narrative (quite literally) turn, while her ecstatic engulfment by “a sudden surge of love” for Paris and its residents is connoted through this physical alteration of the urban milieu through the intensity of her “urge to help mankind.” Directly following this walk, Amélie helps a blind man down a busy city street, providing him with a detailed description of the urban scene around them. She is posited as a flâneuse through her observing, documenting, and speculating on the street’s sights, sounds, and smells for the man’s benefit: “We just passed the drum major’s widow; she’s worn his coat since the day he died.... The horse’s head on the butcher’s has lost an ear. That’s the florist laughing. He has crinkly eyes.” Here, Jeunet employs a hand-held camera that quickly and erratically moves across the street, following Amélie’s eyes from a close-up of her and her companion to the scene she details, so that—through use of eyeline match—the audience are shown what she describes, as she becomes a flâneuse observing and documenting the city for the audience, too. It is significant that this scene involves a blind *man*, since this attribution of authority to Amélie’s gaze and subjectivity resultantly destabilizes specifically gendered notions of flânerie by affirming her status as (female) urban wanderer and observer.

*Amélie* concludes with Amélie and her partner Nino’s joint flânerie across Paris on a motorbike, recalling Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday* (1953). The couple’s ecstasy and freedom in this scene is visually signified through the employment of shallow focus and fast-motion photography. The resultant motion blur of the cityscape around them, as they laughingly speed around the Montmartre streets, illustrates—similarly to Amélie’s Pont des Arts walk, where her love for Paris tilted the urban milieu—their exhilarating love for each other and the city they inhabit. Problematically, this collapse into a heteronormative narrative closure may be considered to undermine any potential for liberation inherent in this scene, as Amélie has arguably moved between two agents of patriarchal control in the narrative: from her father to Nino. However, although Nino is in the driving seat, Amélie places her hands over his, visually suggesting an equal hold on power and control in their relationship and on their mobility around the city, as they are both steering their way into the future.

Crucially, all three texts conclude their narratives with women actively mobile in the city: Amélie on a motorbike, Poppy and Zoe rowing in Hyde Park, and the *SATC* women walking through Manhattan together. These concluding scenes underline how, while these texts explicitly and implicitly engage with the ever-present threat of gendered violence in the city, they do so to overtly dismantle and challenge this threat, and do not allow potential peril to impinge on the freedom, mobility, and enjoyment of the female characters’ urban experiences. Instead, the women in these narratives march on through the city streets together, claiming their right to an urban life that is not dampened and circumscribed by harassment and violence.

### **Conclusion: A Woman’s Place Is in the City**

*Amélie*, *Happy*, and *SATC* acknowledge the multiplicity of female urban experience through balancing illustrations of the joy and freedom that the city can provide with the dangers that women may also face. Rather than allowing threats of gendered violence to limit and control their urban experiences, the protagonists all exhibit Bakhtin’s conceptualization of unruly bodies that “transgress [their] own limits” (1984, 26). These “limits” are the oppressive patriarchal ideological dictates that have routinely constrained women’s narratives in screen cities. Instead, through confidently demanding their rights to the city space,

and to uncensored expression and behavior, these women actively generate their liberation and dismantle the gendered narratives of victimhood that routinely dominate representations of female urban experience in screen media.

Crucial to this dismantlement is these texts' comedic narrative insistence, which rewrites female victimization by illuminating the ideology and narrative conventions through which constructions of fear and endangerment are created, and then deconstructing these same conventions to instead foreground female empowerment. As Bakhtin explains, "laughter allows us to ... investigate social constructions of fear [and to] destabilize the ground on which conceptions of fear ... have been built" (1984, 26). This destabilization leads to a central facet of urban liberation: the rewriting of what I have conceptualized as the "fear script," as these texts liberate women from the oppressive conventional dichotomy of gendered violence that has routinely limited female freedom to experience and enjoy the emancipatory opportunities that the city can offer. Although threat of gendered violence is present in these texts, rather than creating displays of female vulnerability, it functions instead to showcase female resilience and the unbreakable bonds of female friendship. The foregrounding of female friendships also rewrites postfeminist discourse that posits women as being in competition with each other, and instead offers a scenario of collective female urban emancipation.

Through rewriting ideologies and screen codes of fear, these texts liberate their protagonists to adopt the traditionally male occupation of flâneur, subsequently allowing women to exert their narrative authority and optic agency in the city. Ultimately, through showcasing the array of emancipatory possibilities for women in cities, these texts celebrate the city as a liberating, exciting space for female social, sexual, and narrative freedom. Significantly for their rewriting of gendered narrative myths and their dismantling of the gendered power relations that routinely dominate representations of screen violence, the texts under discussion were all released within the first decade of the new millennium (1998–2008). Akin to the prominence of the New Woman figure in the nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle, the end of the twentieth century also witnessed a renegotiation of gender identities, as the rise of queer theory and third-wave feminism challenged normative ideologies of gender and sexuality, and encouraged the introduction of cultural representations of women that confronted dominant historical gender stereotypes. Indeed, the late 1990s witnessed the rise of screen representations of what Sherrie Inness (1999) terms "tough" women who challenge restrictive gender stereotypes and essentialist binary identity models—including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001), *GI Jane* (1997), and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991)—which attempted to recode oppressive gender semiotics that cast women as the perpetual victims. Instead, these texts display female strength, independence, and solidarity, and, while they do not directly engage with women's urban experience, they create a cultural climate and cinematic corpus that promote collective female liberation from oppressive gender norms with which *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy* explicitly engage. Indeed, as Inness contends, "in a society where women are warned that they should not walk home alone after dark [and] where women are often considered the 'natural' victims of men, tough women rewrite the script" (1999, 8).

Although the texts under discussion here liberate their protagonists to experience the city in ways that are typically reserved for (white, heterosexual) men, there are limitations to this emancipation. Sarah Jessica Parker maintains that *SATC* illustrates the "voice of a very specific ... woman in a very specific city" (2002, 7). This assertion may be expanded to all three texts under discussion, since their focus on white middle-class women—in what are three of the most ethnically and socially diverse cities in the world—circumscribes

their liberating representations to a limited sector of female experience, as opposed to offering a more universal female emancipation.

While a thorough analysis of the contentions to gendered urban violence in the three texts has been beyond the scope of this paper, such questions might be further explored through an examination of screen media that showcase female protagonists of differing ethnic and socioeconomic origins and an analysis of how their urban experiences of gendered violence compare to the emancipation achieved by the—to a large extent—socially privileged women I have discussed in this paper. This expanded investigation might include the analysis of such films as *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2015) or *Bande de filles* (2015). Indeed, while these films provide a more ethnically and formally diverse offering of female urban experience, like the texts under discussion in this essay they also illustrate Vincendeau's assertion as narratives that display "women appropriating space in a male-dominated world and demanding the right to have their own desire" (2015, 27).

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## Notes

1. Hereafter *SATC*, *Amélie*, and *Happy*.
2. Samantha's cliché "housewife" costume of apron and hair rollers is a further sign that this scene is intended to signify comedy, not danger.
3. According to DOJ statistics, between 1994 and 2010, 78% of rape victims in the United States knew the perpetrator prior to the offence (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006).
4. With regard to race and sexual assault, it is also important to note that in all of the texts under discussion, violence is perpetrated by *white* men. This rewrites the longstanding fears in white sociocultural imagination of the dangerous nonwhite male body, whose unknown Otherness is constructed to represent a (typically sexual) threat to innocent white women—a threat overtly present in such screen narratives as *The Searchers* (1956). For further discussion on racial characterizations of rape perpetrators, see Bouie 2015.
5. Among Rivette's films, this is true in particular for *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (*Celine and Julie Go Boating*, 1974) and *Le Pont du Nord* (1981). The latter film curtails its expression of female liberation through *flânerie* when Marie is killed on the Paris streets by her ex-boyfriend, thus highlighting the constant threat of gendered violence that women face in the city.
6. This focus on the reality beneath the fantasy is underlined by Carrie walking the catwalk to Cheryl Lynn's song "Got to Be Real."

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## Filmography

- A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*. 2015. Directed by Ana Lily Amirpour. Say Ahh Productions.
- American Psycho*. 2000. Directed by Mary Harron. Lions Gate Films.
- Baby Driver*. 2017. Directed by Edgar Wright. TriStar Pictures.
- Bande de filles*. 2015. Directed by Céline Sciamma. Hold Up Films.
- Basic Instinct*. 1992. Directed by Paul Verhoeven. Carolco Pictures.
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- Broken Blossoms*. 1919. Directed by D.W. Griffith. D.W. Griffith Productions.
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. 1997–2003. Created by Joss Whedon. Twentieth Century Fox.
- Career Girls*. 1997. Directed by Mike Leigh. Channel Four Films.
- Céline et Julie vont en bateau*. 1974. Directed by Jacques Rivette. Action Films.
- Cléo de 5 à 7*. 1962. Directed by Agnès Varda. Ciné Tamaris.
- GI Jane*. 1997. Directed by Ridley Scott. Caravan Pictures.
- Happy-Go-Lucky*. 2008. Directed by Mike Leigh. Momentum Pictures.
- Law & Order*. 1990–2010. Created by Dick Wolf. Studios USA Television.
- Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*. 2001. Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Claudie Ossard Productions.
- Le Pont du Nord*. 1981. Directed by Jacques Rivette. Les Films du Losange.

- Lola rennt*. 1998. Directed by Tom Tykwer. X-Filme Creative Pool.
- The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. 1970–77. Created by James L. Brooks and Alan Burns. MTM Enterprises.
- Midnight in Paris*. 2011. Directed by Woody Allen. Gravier Productions.
- Naked*. 1993. Directed by Mike Leigh. Thin Man Films.
- Panic Room*. 2002. Directed by David Fincher. Columbia Pictures.
- Rear Window*. 1954. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures.
- Roman Holiday*. 1953. Directed by William Wyler. Paramount Pictures.
- Saturday Night Fever*. 1977. Directed by John Badham. Robert Stigwood Organization.
- Sex and the City*. 1998–2004. Created by Darren Star. Darren Star Productions.
- Sin City*. 2005. Directed by Frank Miller, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarantino. Dimension Films.
- Taxi Driver*. 1976. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Columbia Pictures.
- Ten*. 2002. Directed by Abbas Kiarostami. MK2 Productions.
- Vertigo*. 1958. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions.
- Wall Street*. 1987. Directed by Oliver Stone. Twentieth Century Fox.
- Xena: Warrior Princess*. 1995–2001. Created by John Schulian et al. MCA Television.