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From Veil to Mourning: Wardrobe, Archive, and the Bridal Narrative in the Transmedia Continuity from Sex and the City: The Movie (2008) to And Just Like That... (2021–2025)

Do véu ao luto: guarda-roupa, arquivo e a narrativa nupcial na continuidade transmídia de Sex and the City: O Filme (2008) a E Assim, de repente... (2021–2025)

Álvaro Navarro-Gaviño[1]

RESUMO

O artigo examina a continuidade transmídia de Carrie Bradshaw (Sex and the City: O Filme, 2008; Sex and the City 2, 2010; E Assim Como Isso..., 2021–2025) segmentando o corpus por formatos: cada filme é tratado como uma unidade fechada com temporalidade concentrada, e cada temporada do reboot como um módulo serial com seus próprios ritmos de elaboração afetiva, colocando o ritual do casamento como o eixo organizador da narrativa. Em 2008, a análise se concentra no espetáculo do casamento e seu fracasso mediado; em 2010, no "casamento sob medida" e no contra-fetiche do diamante negro; na 1ª temporada, na viuvez e na montagem de um arquivo (objetos/roupas) em um corpo que envelhece; na 2ª temporada, na virada arquivística (a recontextualização do vestido Westwood); e na

1 Personal investigador en formación. Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM). email: alvnav01@ucm.es ORCID: https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0001-9819-6598

3ª temporada, na passarela como uma ágora final que desloca o clímax afetivo do altar para o closet. O método combina análise de conteúdo sensível a gênero e idade, análise de figurino baseada em objetos e análise narrativa centrada nos personagens. Na discussão, examina a tensão entre a intenção autoral e a lógica industrial, a monogamia como um horizonte modular e a economia do espetáculo versus uma ética da medida certa, concluindo que o final feliz é reconfigurado pela escolha da solteirice.

Palavras-chave: Figurino; Arquivo; Ritual de casamento; Envelhecimento; Sexo e a cidade.

ABSTRACT

The article examines the transmedia continuity of Carrie Bradshaw (Sex and the City: The Movie, 2008; Sex and the City 2, 2010; And Just Like That..., 2021–2025) by segmenting the corpus by formats: each film is treated as a closed unit with concentrated temporality, and each season of the reboot as a serial module with its own rhythms of affective elaboration, placing the wedding ritual as the organizing axis of the narrative. In 2008, the analysis focuses on the wedding spectacle and its mediated failure; in 2010, on the "tailor-made marriage" and the counter-fetish of the black diamond; in S1, on widowhood and the assembling of an archive (objects/garments) in an ageing body; in S2, on the archival turn (the recontextualization of the Westwood dress); and in S3, on the runway as a closing agora that shifts the affective climax from the altar to the closet. The method combines gender- and age-aware content analysis, object-based analysis of costume, and character-driven narrative analysis. In discussion, it examines the tension between authorial intent and industrial logic, monogamy as a modulable horizon, and the spectacle economy versus an ethics of the right measure, concluding that the happy ending is reconfigured through chosen singleness.

Keywords: *Costume; Archive; Wedding ritual; Ageing; Sex and the city*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Bride's Narrative in Contemporary Cinema

The figure of the bride has been, since the earliest days of cinema, one of the most persistent archetypes of the romantic narrative. The white dress, the solemn ceremony and the 'I do' climax have constituted a recognisable visual repertoire that, over time, has become freighted with ambivalences. The cinematic bride simultaneously embodies the promise of consummated love and the curtailment of female autonomy, a narrative device in which romantic desire becomes a mechanism of social control that channels desire towards traditional family values (Ingraham, 1999). As studies of wedding culture have shown, the nuptial ritual articulates an industrial and media complex that inscribes upon the woman's body both social expectations and practices linked to bridal fashion (editorials and features, wardrobe tests and fittings, selection of designers and suppliers, guest-list tiering, choice of locations, press and publicity management) and that, taken together, standardises the silhouettes, gestures and temporalities of the rite, shifting onto the bride organisational and emotional labour as well as economic costs, preparations and pressures that turn intimacy into public or communal visibility (Freeman, 2002). Romantic cinema has sustained this imaginary, reinforcing the fantasy of the white wedding as narrative climax (Ingraham, 1999; Jeffers McDonald, 2007; Otnes; Pleck, 2003). However, contemporary narratives have begun to strain this convention. Postfeminist romantic comedies place the bride in an ambiguous territory: between the reassertion of individuality and the persistence of the romantic myth during, and even after, marriage. The bride ceases to be exclusively young and ingenuous, becoming also a mature, professional figure, laden with contradictions between personal desire and social demands. Alongside this shift, punitive or unstable

archetypes emerge—the 'bride in limbo', the runaway bride, the bridezilla, the fairy-tale bride, the 'cancelled bride', and even the raped bride (Engstrom, 2012) — which dramatise compromising circumstances, intermittences of desire and collapses in the preparations. These models, often produced and amplified by the media apparatus, tend to ridicule and moralise female conduct, laying bare the artifice and mockery that surround its mediatisation (Navarro-Gaviño, 2025, p. 230) and normalising impossible expectations regarding the wedding, its organisation and the meaning of commitment (Negra, 2009; Whelehan, 2000).

In this context, *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008) introduces a decisive turn. Carrie Bradshaw, the protagonist of the eponymous series and a well-known New York writer, confronts the wedding narrative from an unprecedented position: at forty, with media fame and a milieu that greets the news of her marriage with marked reservations. She is not the debutante bride who crowns her youth in the marriage market, but the 'last bride', a figure who, by age and trajectory, embodies the possible end of a cycle. The construction of this archetype takes place in close relation to fashion discourses and visual mediation: the *Vogue* photo-shoot, the spectacular wedding dress and the public exposure of the engagement make her narrative a cultural object in which consumption, gender and visual memory intertwine. This article proposes to analyse Carrie's story as fiancée, bride, wife and widow from an audiovisual and fashion-studies perspective, understanding the wedding dress as a narrative agent that amplifies and condenses the meanings of romantic failure in relation to her principal relationship and its narrative displacements. To this end, its appearances, strategic absences and re-stylings are examined as mechanisms that activate characters' decisions, reconfigure bonds and mark dramatic thresholds (engagement, public humiliation, mourning, reconciliation, regeneration), as well as its transmedia circulation. The central hypothesis holds that this trajectory not only dramatises the failure of the spectacular wedding, but also reformulates the bridal archetype by shifting the romantic climax towards a minimal,

intimate and almost residual ceremony. The passage from media spectacularisation to the intimate gesture is accompanied by a strategic use of wardrobe that functions as a set of emotional archives of amorous experience.

1.2 State of the Art: The Wedding Spectacle

The so-called *wedding industrial complex* names the articulation between heteronormativity, the fashion industry, the media, and the cultural and religious ritual that regulates bodies, temporalities, and the economies of the nuptial bond (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002; Freeman, 2002). From a postfeminist perspective, the wedding functions as a test of authenticity and a site of ambivalence between desire and discipline (Negra, 2009; Radner, 2011; Tasker; Negra, 2007). The collection *The Wedding Spectacle Across Contemporary Media and Culture* (Kay; Kennedy; Wood, 2020) updates this field from feminist and queer vantage points, underscoring that the wedding spectacle cannot simply be taken for granted or dismissed in analyses of identities, but must be examined in its ambivalences and contradictions. Within this volume, Deborah Jermyn (2020) looks specifically at *Sex and the City: The Movie*, highlighting how the spectacular wedding becomes a space of tension between female authenticity and cultural pressure. Anna Varadi (2011) has linked the failed wedding in *Sex and the City*to literary antecedents such as *Jane Eyre*, noting the threat posed by the wedding and fashion industries to female autonomy. For his part, Niall Richardson (2013) has examined the representation of gay masculinity in the film, extending the analysis of fashion and gender to secondary characters. Taken together, these contributions reveal that the cinematic wedding spectacle functions as a site where multiple tensions are inscribed: age, class, and various identity facets associated with sexuality and gender. While the literature has addressed isolated elements of the films and the original series, there remains no systematic analysis of how a long-running media character like Carrie rewrites this archetype within a

transmedia continuity since 2008. This gap is understandable given that the serial continuity has only recently concluded (August 2025), which for the first time enables a panoramic reading of the arc. This shift allows her construction to be connected with age-studies scholarship on representations of female ageing in cinema and serial fiction, and opens a specific field for the visual and narrative analysis of the mature postfeminist bride.

1.3 The Popularity of the Original Series (1998–2004): Significance and the Impetus for the 'Reboot'

Before its move to cinema and its subsequent reboot, the original *Sex and the City* series (HBO, 1998–2004) set a new standard for serialised stories of urban women, articulating an audiovisual poetics of desire in which women's fashion and the city functioned as co-protagonists of the text. The columnist's voice-over, the serialisation of intimacy, and the conversion of wardrobe into discourse consolidated an imaginary that critics have read as part of 'quality TV' and the postfeminist turn in popular culture (Akass; McCabe, 2004; Jermyn, 2009; McCabe; Akass, 2007). In terms of industrial classification, the series and its cinematic ecosystem converse with so-called *chick flicks*: contemporary romantic comedies and melodramas centred on female subjectivities, where consumption and fashion operate as languages of agency and conflict; the term, used critically within cultural studies, is approached as a category corresponding to formal and market conventions rather than a pejorative label (Ferriss; Young, 2008; Negra, 2009, Radner, 2011). The cultural success of romantic narratives centred on female subjectivities—where fashion and consumption articulate agency and conflict—explains the franchise's continuation through two films and a follow-on series. This is not a *spin-off* (a derivative series focused on secondary characters), but a sequel–revival titled *And Just Like That…* (2021–2025)—a serial reboot—that extends the diegetic universe and activates its

transmedia capital in the multiplatform era (Jenkins, 2006; Lotz, 2014). The return responds to several vectors: (a) brand value and audience loyalty; (b) the economy of nostalgia; (c) the possibility of narrating age and relationships in one's fifties with the same repertoire of aesthetic motifs (while insisting on visibility for other bodies and experiences); and (d) the migration of aesthetic motifs across formats (from the series to the films and finally to the reboot), enabling rewritings and updates of motifs already embedded in the franchise's universe. The recent conclusion of the reboot in 2025 makes it possible to read the whole and justifies this article's contribution: to offer a panoramic view of the arc of a character who has been on screen across four decades and has mobilised different discourses through her shifting archetypes—from singleton to bride, from wife to widow—and through the fashion dispositifs that articulate them, insofar as dress constitutes a structural component of the character's universe—a system of identity and affective inscription (Woodward, 2006).

2. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts an audiovisual content-analysis methodology with a gender- and age-aware lens, following Navarro Gaviño and Muñoz Torrecilla (2024) and Zurian Hernández and Muñoz Torrecilla (2023), who have shown how processes of female ageing in cinema can be read as narrative and visual devices traversed by cultural tensions. Applying this perspective makes it possible to position Carrie Bradshaw not only as a spectacularized bride, but as a subject whose age and sentimental trajectories rewrite the bridal archetype across four decades of transmedia continuity, moving through distinct life stages (bride, wife, widow) that problematise the representation of mature femininity within postfeminist culture.

As regards female spectacularity, the methodological model previously developed in Navarro-Gaviño (2025) is employed, in which the construction of female

spectacularity is examined as a regime of visibility that both underlines and, at the same time, ridicules women's bodies in contexts of high media exposure. It is used here as a methodological tool to examine how dispositifs of visibility—wardrobe, press, editorial photography, runway—produce an aesthetic intensification that simultaneously exposes the protagonist's vulnerability. Following this model, the wedding dress and its constellation of associated objects (shoes, headpieces, jewellery) are understood as narrative agents capable of translating affective turns, intensifying both the spectacularity and the failure of the romantic promise, and modulating the protagonist's agency between media climaxes, archives of mourning, and decisions about intimacy.

Character analysis likewise draws on the methodology proposed by Navarro Gaviño and Muñoz Torrecilla (2024), grounded in Casetti and Di Chio (2003) and Pérez Rufí (2016), which enables the study of characters' dramatic function and evolution through dress within audiovisual narration. To this is added the notion of romantic conflict (Chatman, 1978), understood as the network of internal and external obstacles that shapes Carrie's trajectory in relation to Big, Aidan and the female chorus of friends, but also in relation to the media dispositifs that intervene in her desire and structure the logic of the narrative.

With regard to sample selection, the analysis is delimited from *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008), since it is at this point that the protagonist's bridal representation emerges explicitly. The prior series (1998–2004) had articulated Carrie's sentimental conflict in terms of relationships, break-ups and reconciliations, but it is the film that inaugurates her itinerary as the 'last bride' and allows, coherently, the tracing of the developmental arc that culminates in *And Just Like That*...(2021–2025). The decision to divide each film and each season into an individualised analysis responds to the need to attend to the creative and temporal conditions specific to each work (production, reception, socio-cultural context) and to its narrative sequentiality. This strategy allows, on the one hand, for the

assessment of each instalment's specificity as an autonomous cultural product and, on the other, for the subsequent recomposition of the transmedia continuity as a whole. In this way, a panoramic reading of the 2008–2025 arc is secured while preserving each piece's aesthetic and narrative singularity within its context of broadcast and reception.

The interpretive framework draws on feminist film theory (Mulvey, 1975), given that the serial universe originates in the visual culture of the 1990s; it is taken as a historical point of departure rather than a universal model. Subsequently, postfeminist and queer cultural studies (McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009; Tasker; Negra, 2007) are integrated to interrogate gender ideology and the normativities implicit in the bridal narrative, and to specify the franchise's ongoing discursive updates. From this perspective, the nuptial dispositif is analysed as an artefact that reveals and strains normative, medical and technological discourses, showing how the stylisation and haute couture involved configure a contentious aesthetics of the body: an assemblage of experiences and cultural projections where gender norms, symbolic violence and latent resistances converge. The combination of these perspectives favours a transversal reading of the franchise, attending both to spectacular failures and to subjective reappropriations that reconfigure female agency within the transmedia continuity. It is useful to situate Carrie alongside other female archetypes in film and popular culture—the professional singleton, the fiancée in limbo, the postfeminist wife negotiating work and partnership, the divorcée and the widow—together with liminal figures such as the runaway bride and the bridezilla (brides out of control, determined to stage their dream wedding at any cost, capable of turning planning into a nightmare for those around them). These typologies have been discussed from complementary frameworks: analyses of the *chick flicks* (Ferriss; Young, 2008; Radner, 2011; Whelehan, 2000) and of wedding culture (Freeman, 2002; Howard, 2006; Ingraham, 1999; Otnes; Pleck, 2003).

3. RESULTS

The analysis is articulated in eight levels that trace Carrie's principal relationship with Mr Big and the way each narrative layer (personal, other people's, media, and runway) reconfigures her will and desire: (1) the media fabrication of the bride through the *Vogue* editorial; (2) the ceremonial expansion and subsequent collapse of the monumental wedding; (3) the mutation of mourning into a female journey and intimate writing; (4) reconciliation and domestic closure via a minimal wedding in *Sex and the City* (2008); (5) the reconfiguration of the 'tailor-made marriage' in *Sex and the City 2* (2010), with the recovery of Carrie's single-woman flat as a space of writing/negotiation and the black diamond as counter-fetish; (6) the processing of grief over Big's death and its affective archive in *And Just Like That…* (S01E01); (7) personal rewriting through the archive and a relationship from the past (S02E01); and (8) closure of the arc in the final bridal runway and the enunciation of chosen singleness (S03E12). Each level mobilises a set of wardrobe elements (dress, Hangisi shoes, headpieces, jewellery, flat keys, wardrobe boxes) and spaces (dressing room/wardrobe, registry office, the New York Public Library, runway) that do not decorate the action but determine it: they condense pacts, generate tensions, and archive or display wounds.

3.1 Fiancée, Bride and Wife: *Sex and the City* (2008)

From the outset, the trigger for commitment in the narrative does not reside in a ring but in the key to the shared flat: as in classic melodramas—from *Wuthering Heights* to *Love Story*—the domestic space acts as a catalyst for a shared future, a metaphor of stability that is soon dragged into the public showcase. The afternoon jewellery auction, presented as innocuous leisure, introduces a miniature warning—

the story of the model who, after divorcing, is left with nothing but her jewels—which sows the suspicion that a wedding guarantees neither financial security nor emotional calm, and that echo of fragility continues to resonate in Carrie. At the same time, the friends' external narrative exerts pressure: Steve's infidelity after a period of abstinence erodes Miranda's trust and reverberates through the group, while Big, facing his third marriage, oscillates between desire and an ironic weariness at the preparations. What begins as an agreement about cohabitation ends in a logic of visibility, with decisions measured more by prestige and ostentation than by intimate meaning. The passage from singleton to fiancée operates as a change in narrative status that reorders desires, temporalities and objects. The flat key—more than the ring—shifts the focus from romance to cohabitation and sets off a chain of decisions no longer measured by intimacy but calibrated according to visibility (guest list, venue, dress).

3.1.1 The Last Bride: the *Vogue* Photoshoot

Carrie's mediatic condition—'the quintessential singleton', bolstered by her track record as a columnist and writer—turns her transition to wife into a social event and triggers an escalation of scale: the guest list grows from seventy-five to two hundred; the dress changes from a vintage find to a designer piece; and the ceremony, initially discreet, moves to a historic building—the New York Public Library. The initial desire to 'be dressed by nobody' dissolves as the designer-name machine (press, schedule, architecture) imposes pomp and theatricality; the media narrative colonises the personal narrative and rewrites desire in terms of imposition rather than intimate experience.

Figure 1 - Carrie shows Charlotte and Anthony her chosen wedding dress

Source: *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008).

Within this context falls the opportunity to take part in a *Vogue* shoot which does not document a bride so much as fabricate one: the 'last bride', a forty-year-old woman granted a final veiled portrait before slipping—*as the editor cruelly suggests*—into the 'socially ridiculous'. The editorial dispositif unfurls an authorial constellation with cameos by André Leon Talley and wedding dresses by Vera Wang, Carolina Herrera, Christian Lacroix, Lanvin, Dior, Óscar de la Renta and, as climax, Vivienne Westwood (in order of appearance, fig.2), inscribing Carrie's body within an aspirational logic closer to the runway than to a photo-essay, where the dress ceases to be a garment and becomes an emblem. Here, ostentation is not an excess; it is the constructive principle of the scene—and of the character's universe itself: *Vogue*'s consecrating prestige—its canonical authority within fashion—acts as a magnet to which Carrie, by taste and by trajectory, neither can nor wishes to oppose herself. In this framework, the event is relegated and the accreditation of the commitment no

longer resides in the act itself but is displaced to its media circulation, which ends up imposing itself and eclipsing it.

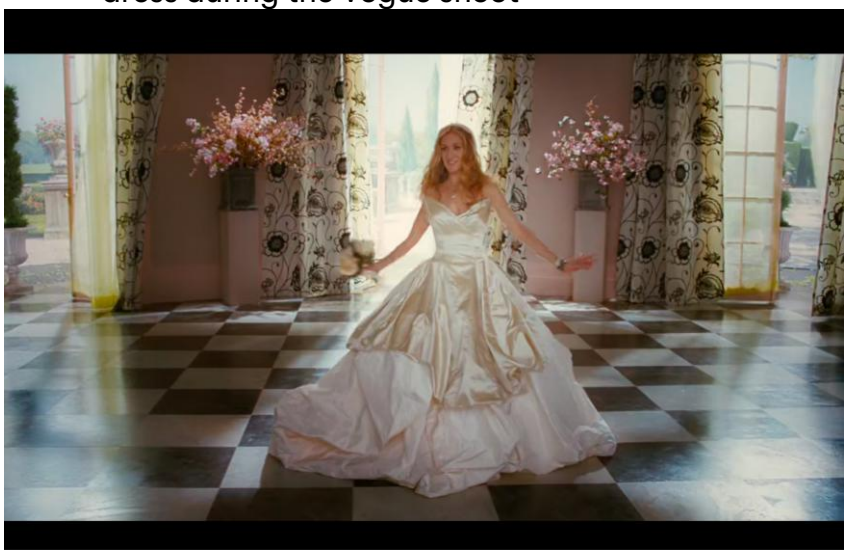
Figure 2 - Stills of Carrie in different wedding dresses for the *Vogue* shoot.

Source: *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008).

Westwood's gift of the cloud dress introduces an implicit obligation: it is not a neutral present but a commitment that demands a particular contract of visibility. Its female authorship intensifies the gesture of recognition between women, but precisely because it comes from an iconic designer it activates a logic of mutual reciprocity: accepting the dress equates to accepting the apparatus that sustains it (media spotlight, scale of the event, choreography of images). Hence the replacement of the initial suit; the desire to 'be dressed by nobody' yields to the prestige economy of the magazine and the runway. In this sense, the wedding dress not only clothes but determines the frame from which the wedding must be read. The fairy-godmother metaphor is apt: as in the tale, the gift grants access to the 'ball'—legitimation, belonging, consecration—yet imposes conditions (place, hour, protocol, appearance). The garment functions as both safe-conduct and contract of form, enabling Carrie to occupy the centre of the narrative but under the rules of the fashion apparatus. If the initial desire pointed to a contained ceremony, the gift shifts

the measure towards grand staging and reorders the protagonist's agency in terms of ritual compliance. The very logic of the backstage becomes the main stage, and the production of the photo-shoot comes to constitute the signature of the sequence; the couple's time is subordinated to the industry's time. Thus the shoot seals the definitive displacement of private desire towards the economy of display and sets in motion the causal chain that will culminate in a wedding of monumental dimensions.

Figure 3 - First time Carrie wears Westwood's cloud dress during the Vogue shoot



Source: *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008).

3.1.2 The Spectacular Failure, or the Abandonment at the Altar

The narrative climax occurs at the moment of the thwarted wedding. Westwood's cloud dress, presented as the pinnacle of editorial glamour, becomes an aesthetic trap: the grander the attire, the more outsized the failure that accompanies abandonment at the altar. Elevated to a media icon, the bride is also the figure most vulnerable to public humiliation. And this fall does not take place in an intimate space, but on the monumental stage of the New York Public Library (NYPL), before two

hundred guests and surrounded by cameras, gowns and a display of luxury that intensifies the emotional wound. The reticent milieu feeds this collapse: Big, facing his third marriage and the pressure of a definitive commitment to monogamy, never manages to involve himself with the enthusiasm Carrie expects, which becomes one of the narrative obstacles. Miranda's remark—'marriage ruins everything'—resounds like a prophecy and blocks her ability to write her vows the night before. In this framework, the excess of the celebration—the expanding guest list, the choice of dress and venue, the media pressure—ceases to add and begins to suffocate the couple; the ceremonial machinery, designed to consolidate the bond, precipitates Big's flight.

Figure 4 - Encounter in the middle of a New York avenue after the failed wedding

Source: *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008).

A practical element aggravates the misunderstanding: amidst the preparations Carrie misplaces her phone, so she does not hear Big's insistent calls in the hours before. That lack of communication turns doubt into a form of stage panic, fixes an information asymmetry between them and hastens the outcome: when they

finally meet, the damage is already done. The street concentrates that loss in a very clear image (fig. 4): two limousines crossing in New York and, between them, Carrie bringing the bouquet down on Big. The intimate becomes public thoroughfare; what was meant to seal the pact unravels in full view. The final image fixes the scene's meaning: flowers turned to petals on the tarmac, the visible trace of how ostentation ended up unravelling the signs that had once underwritten their love.

3.1.3 From Honeymoon to Girlfriends' Trip and Reconciliation

After the abandonment, the narrative turns towards Mexico and shifts the axis from the conjugal bond to the female community. The planned honeymoon with Big becomes a shared journey of mourning, where Charlotte, Miranda and Samantha support Carrie and restore a framework of care. Wardrobe ceases to celebrate and instead cushions; it functions as a sign of withdrawal and, at the same time, as a way of naming the loss without verbalising it. In this passage, the romantic nuptial narrative gives way to a narrative of sisterhood: what cannot be sustained as a couple is preserved as friendship, and that network redefines how the protagonist begins to measure herself once she is single again. This newly arrived singleness is not a simple return to a prior status; it brings with it a reordering of temporalities and of looking. Without the inertia of the wedding calendar, Carrie stops projecting herself and observes herself in the present: she sleeps, recovers, looks at her body without trappings, and learns to economise exposure. Mexico deactivates the machinery of ostentation—at least in part—lowers the volume of external social exertions and allows the character to think her desire without noise.

On her return, intimate mourning collides with a mourning of visibility. The *Vogue* editorial is published precisely when the scandal is fresh: Carrie goes brunette so as not to be recognised as the ingenuous 'last bride' (fig. 5) and to differentiate herself from that printed image she no longer feels is hers. The issue, released at Hallowe'en, insists on the label: 'the Preston–Bradshaw wedding could not take place; she remains single'. The public accreditation of the failure places her intimacy on the cover and forces her to reconfigure her subjectivity beyond the nuptial spectacle: she is no longer a failed bride; she is a woman deciding what to do with that remainder that looks back at her from the news-stands. Here the media narrative, which previously colonised her desire, becomes material to be contradicted.

Figure 5 - Photograph of Carrie in the *Vogue* The Age Issue: Forties

Source: *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008).

In parallel, Carrie reopens the writing of mourning and, with it, recovers her own voice. The mediation of Louise from St. Louis—another woman poised on the threshold between rupture and commitment—facilitates the ordering of the archive: recovery of passwords and re-reading of Big's apology emails. The move from ceremonial spectacularity to an epistolary regime entails a double change of medium and temporality, displacing the bond from the breathless performativity of the

ceremony towards asynchronous communication. The password is, literally, 'love'. Carrie does not arrive at it by chance: she remembers it when she is ready to read what she has been avoiding—that is, when she can emotionally sustain that material. The shift from abandonment to email exchange also changes the rhythm of the bond: it allows thought before response. Measured reading and unhurried writing replace the altar's 'yes/no' with a process of repair, unlocking the final phase of mourning and preparing reconciliation.

3.1.4 The Minimal Wedding: a Reconciliation in Right Measure

The shared home, which marked one of the principal pressures towards commitment, once again makes room for the couple. On the last day of possession of the shared flat, Carrie returns to collect the blue Manolo Blahniks. Diegetically, the heel—the only object left in the flat—functions as the material remainder of the bond and as a nuptial fetish that survived the rupture. Closure occurs where everything began: if the story was set in motion by the purchase of the apartment, it also ends with it, for it was the last thing still uniting them. Carrie herself puts it plainly: 'we rushed into marriage because we were afraid that not doing so would mean something'. The wardrobe—first emblem of excess and later a stage of loss—now reappears as a space of reconciliation. The re-reading of love letters (Beethoven, Byron, Keats, Voltaire) juxtaposes the romantic canon with the fragility of a man unable to pronounce vows; the recovery of the shoe activates the circularity of affection within the arc; and the proposal with the Manolo in place of a ring operates as a fetishistic substitution, as the fashion object becomes an alliance, displaces the traditional ritual, and seals the union in a code of their own (fig. 6). Thus the

wardrobe—an archive of losses and removals—reconfigures itself as an archive of memory, closing this phase according to the logic of dress as an emotional dispositif.

The conclusion proposes a radical turn with respect to the previous wedding: Carrie and Big decide to marry in a minimal ceremony, without ornaments or monumental architectures. From the excess of the Library and the constellation of designers they move to the registry office, a reduced guest list and a second-hand dress. The result deactivates the consecrating logic of the 'grand event' and relocates the bond at its intimate scale. The personal signature remains—the Manolo Blahniks as a signature mark (fig. 7)—but now it operates as a detail of continuity rather than as a trophy of ostentation.

Figures 6 and 7 - Big uses the Manolo Blahnik as a symbol of his renewed commitment. Later, Carrie wears the same shoes at the registry-office wedding celebration

Source: *Sex and the City: The Movie* (2008).

In narrative terms, the use of a second-hand wedding dress functions as an anti-fetishist gesture: it replaces the accumulation of luxury with the right measure of the bond, refusing to turn the dress into a guarantee of love. In semiotic terms, it breaks the chain of the proper name (brand, cover, spectacle) and redirects attention towards decision: it does not inaugurate a myth; it edits a shared life. In cultural terms, it introduces a politics of reuse and archive: a garment with a prior life underscores that this marriage does not begin from zero but from what has been learnt—including the wound; its 'patina' metaphorises an affective maturity that shuns the inaugural fantasy of the 'first time'. And, in terms of agency, it shifts the focus from prestige to discernment: authority no longer derives from *Vogue* or from the marble of the NYPL, but from the capacity to decide form and scale. Thus the 'happy ending' is rewritten in a postfeminist key: far from the fairy tale, what is celebrated is the possibility of loving on one's own terms, beyond media pressures and the script of ostentation. Second-hand commemorates that choice—less consecration, more measure—and sets a bond in which style does not cloak affection: it accompanies it.

3.2 The Tuxedoed Best Man in *Sex and the City 2* (2010) and Renegotiation

The wedding of the gay friends—with Liza Minnelli performing "*Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)*"—works as a staging of conjugal normalisation for same-sex couples—"*even the gays get married*"—and, at the same time, ironises the mandate of the ring or of marriage itself, shifting the solemn register towards a playful celebration of diversity. Within this frame, Carrie assumes the role of best man in a black tuxedo and bow tie—a nod to Marlene Dietrich—with a headpiece that preserves her signature style. The inversion of codes is clear and unsettles the matrimonial binary: bridal white does not identify the bride; it is worn by her friend Stanford while

she occupies a masculine ritual position, without relinquishing her fashion identity but decentring the monopoly of nuptial white. The chromatic and role distribution undoes the bride–groom binary and redistributes "white" as a mark of ceremonial centrality onto another body. In this way, Carrie's wedding dress remains off-screen throughout the film; however, the nuptial narrative does not disappear, it expands: it is re-articulated through other people's ceremonies, sustained by material signs and by the concerted management of the space and time the couple share.

Figures 8 and 9 - Inversion of codes and colours between Carrie and Stanford

Source: *Sex and the City 2* (2010).

One key element is the reappearance of her ex-boyfriend Aidan, which acts as a stress test for the rushed bond of the previous film: he does not return to reinstall the romantic triangle but to reveal that Carrie and Big's conjugal model requires negotiation. The kiss in Abu Dhabi operates as an event that exposes the fragility of the pact when security is mistaken for routine. The narrative thus reconfigures spectacularity inward: there is no longer a monumental altar but conversations about space and time (living together or not always together), about privacy, and about conjugal symbolism (the weight carried by stories with other people, inside and outside marriage). In this shift, the black diamond Mr Big gives Carrie at the end of the film functions as a nuptial counter-fetish: it refuses the transparent solitaire of the white wedding and replaces normative sparkle with a symbol of alterity—"*because you're not like the others*". It is a self-aware gesture that prolongs the 2008

ending (the minimal wedding) and affirms that project of living a tailor-made love. The film also inscribes a lesson about the risks of excess exposed in the first film: luxury no longer legitimates; excess becomes a risk to be managed (as with time apart—on the trip to Abu Dhabi itself—time together, watching black-and-white films on the plasma television, or nights out and cocktails).

To this is added the normative pressure of motherhood: Carrie and Big do not wish to have children, a decision that strains the romantic script but which the film legitimates as part of a marriage to measure. The diegesis further underlines the cost of child-rearing through Charlotte and Miranda, whose plotlines expose the demands of parenting, reinforcing the validity of a bond without offspring. Meanwhile, the decision to spend a few days apart, maintaining Carrie's single-woman flat, is articulated as a clause of the "marriage to measure": a flexible cohabitation arrangement that manages distance and desire. It is not a symptom of rupture but a negotiated strategy to deactivate routine and preserve creative autonomy (a space for writing) and intimacy. The together-apart alternation reorganises rhythms and displaces myth in favour of a negotiated model of partnership.

3.3 Transmedia Continuity in *and Just Like That...* (2021–2025): Mourning, Archive, and Female Regeneration

3.3.1 Season 1. The fall: Big's Death and The Work of Widowhood

The reboot definitively shifts the centre of the narrative from the wedding to widowhood and the labour of memory. Big's death in the bathroom of the shared home during the first episode (S01E01) collapses the symbolic commitment erected around the wardrobe and the library: the blue Manolo Blahnik Hangisi shoes reappear as a conjugal relic and as the sign of a threshold in their relationship. The very object that inaugurated the new dressing room, sealed the reconciliation, and accompanied both the abandonment at the altar and the minimal wedding returns as a device of

mourning: footwear that allows one to walk—literally and metaphorically—across the territory of losing a shared life. The gesture of taking off her shoes (or a shoe falling) as she tries to help Big (fig. 10) re-reads the motif of footwear within nuptial iconography: far from operating as a sign of consecration, it functions as an index of the bond's closure.

Figures 10 and 11 - Carrie removes her shoes to help Big, who is suffering a heart attack

Source: Episode 1, Season 1 (S01E01) of *And Just Like That...* (December 2021)

The series makes the fashion archive a method for working through grief: garments are not only kept and reappear; they are reactivated in new contexts, now in tension with the body and with age. Carrie's hip operation—diegetically linked to years of walking in heels—problemmatises the reuse of that same wardrobe—at times

outdated or old-fashioned—and generates asynchronies with her age and with the body's materiality. This friction between archive and present corporeality contributes to a figuration of widowhood not as a suspension of style (indeed, the funeral episode is titled 'Little Black Dress'), but as a curatorship attentive to vulnerability.

3.3.2 Season 2. Rewriting the Archive at the Met Gala

The reuse of the Westwood dress for the Met Gala—under the theme '*Veiled Beauty*'—now adjusted with teal-blue gloves, retaining the birdcage veil as a souvenir of commitment and restyled for the occasion, is not a strategy of nostalgia but an aesthetic reprogramming of the protagonist's trauma: it affirms the continuity of the self without denying the wound. The gesture converts the spectacle machine of 2008 into a testimonial garment that, far from humiliating her, protects her and gets her out of a tight spot. Fashion thus signs a second life for the dress as a still-living document that fits the theme of the Met Gala: a piece that migrates from film to series, from public failure to intimate resilience, and that allows Carrie—now in her fifties—to interrogate the affective cost of her history with Big without renouncing the continuity of herself.

Figure 12 - Carrie reuses her wedding dress for the *MET Gala: Veiled Beauty*

Source: Episode 1, Season 2 (S02E01) of *And Just Like That...* (June 2023).

Once her widowhood has stabilised, the narrative reopens the historic triangle by its second vertex: Aidan. His return does not operate as romantic restoration but as a stress test of the present: two ageing subjects in different senses, with asymmetrical obligations (familial, geographical) and domestic rhythms that no longer align. The tenderness remains, but the project fractures in the logistics—city, housing, time—and in the material memory of spaces (what they were and can no longer be). The attempt leaves a sober lesson: love can persist without translating into a conjugal project or daily cohabitation, and this realisation prepares the denouement. For Carrie, the learning is not to marry again, but to step out of a subjectivity tied to commitment and its archives: to recognise that her identity is no longer organised around promise or ritual.

3.3.3 Season 3. The final decision: a bridal runway to remember

The final episode of the third season (S03E12) closes the arc with a bridal runway that operates as a device of recapitulation and self-critique: while spectacular silhouettes parade, the protagonists confront their own decisions—what led them to '*I do*', what they would repeat, what they would relinquish. The sequence enters into intertextual dialogue with the 2008 *Vogue* editorial: from backstage and flashbulbs we move to a diegetic runway that both exhibits and problematises the logic of the white wedding after so many years. Turned into a critical agora of spectators, the catwalk ceases to capture the bride in order to question the meaning of sacrifice and, in passing, to decentralize the monogamous mandate as the sole horizon of affective legitimacy.

Figures 13 and 14 - Bridal runway to which the protagonists are invited

Source: Episode 12, Season 3 (S03E12) of *And Just Like That...* (August 2025).

Within this framework, Carrie articulates a subjectivity unprecedented in her trajectory: in parallel with the closing of her novel of fiction—with a strong autobiographical bent—she rehearses singleness as a choice and not as a stigma. '*Maybe accepting just me. Not a tragedy, just a fact*'. The final shot shows her dancing alone in her home, a space that no longer feels oversized when inhabited by her own body in motion. The voice that once feared being alone and sought love through the streets of New York now rearticulates itself as agency: '*She was not alone, she was on her own*'. In continuity with the transmedia arc, this ending condenses earlier lessons and shifts the centre of gravity from the bridal fetish to singleness: from the dress as public promise to a reconciliation with life on one's own.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The arc analysed confirms a paradox at the heart of the franchise's protagonist: whenever Carrie attempts to deactivate the spectacular logic (reducing scale to the 'intimate measure'), she turns back to fashion in order to narrate herself—whether as repair, mourning or reappropriation. The wedding dress and its derivatives (shoes, headpieces, jewellery) are not ornaments but operators of the narrative: they fabricate the promise (2008), negotiate the contract (2010), and archive the loss (2021–2025). There is no 'outside' of fashion for the character; rather, there is a reflective use of dress as a language of the self, which displaces the romantic climax towards a decentralisation of monogamy as the condition of affective legitimacy (Arend, 2016; Woodward, 2006). At both the beginning and the end, the editorial–runway dispositif functions as a centrifugal force that expropriates the intimate scale. This trajectory is also traversed by a dramaturgy of romantic conflict: internal and external obstacles that strain desire not only in interaction with Big or Aidan and the female 'chorus' of friends, but also in relation to the media dispositifs that frame it

(Jeffers McDonald, 2007). Hence the milestones that re-orient the story—truncated altar, kiss in Abu Dhabi, widowhood—are not accidents but the structural beat that continually reinstalls uncertainty and conditions (without cancelling) the protagonist's agency. The result is a suffering subjectivity that coexists with gestures of aesthetic modernity (a tuxedoed best man, the black-diamond counter-fetish, Westwood's archival re-readings): innovations that do not erase the affective cost, but frame it and render it legible by demanding decisive renunciations and re-calculations—supports of memory that enable a recomposition of the self in one's fifties. The franchise's shift towards the archive is reinforced by the changing of the costume team following Patricia Field's departure: the reboot replaces the promise of novelty with a curatorship that recontextualises pieces, acknowledges the friction between body and age, and activates the character's material memory. The 'archival turn' is not nostalgia; it is a politics of conservation that allows Carrie to sustain her aesthetic identity while processing losses and reorganising her scale of visibility. In this framework, reusing, recombining and citing her own wardrobe does not prettify trauma; it documents it: it is not the garments that add biography to Carrie, but her biography—inscribed in a body that changes over several decades—that deposits layers of meaning upon the garments (Mida; Kim, 2015; Woodward, 2006). Thus the swerve materialises, on the surface of the clothes, the tension between continuity and wound. Fashion no longer legitimises the rite; it preserves memory and makes loss habitable.

Across its extended duration, Carrie's arc couples with—and at times jars against—the different feminist discourses that traverse each decade. The first cycle (late 1990s–early 2000s) metabolises the postfeminist sensibility of 'choice' and self-stylisation: the city as a gymnasium of freedom, fashion as a grammar of agency, and the wedding as a negotiable rather than imposed horizon. The 2008 cycle lays bare the cost of that ideology: nuptial spectacularisation appears not as empowerment but as self-government under public pressure; failure returns the body

to the calculus of shame, forgiveness and measure. In 2010, in tune with 'lean-in' and the rhetoric of resilience, the protagonist assays a marriage à la carte (black diamond, flexible rules), while flirting with queer gestures that unsettle the classic division of roles without entirely disarming her privilege of race and class. The 2021–2025 restart absorbs the fourth wave (intersection, care, consent) and shifts the centre of the narrative from 'having it all' to 'holding oneself together': mourning, friendship as chosen kinship, the ageing body, and the affective archive as a technology of survival. The final scene with Seema, in the midst of a runway, condenses that shift: the catwalk no longer captures the bride—or inscribes expectations upon body and desire—but functions as a place from which to ask about the meaning of sacrifice.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, Carrie's case configures a counter-archetype of the contemporary bride: between spectacle and right measure, she chooses the intimate without renouncing the pleasure of dressing, and confirms that the visual analysis of costume is key to understanding amorous bonds in postfeminist culture. The franchise's own transmedia trajectory must be situated within the tension between authorial intent and industrial logic. The closure of the original series 'ended up betraying' its initial impulse—to break with the classic script in which female happiness depends on marriage—by being steered towards a conventional romantic comedy due to the demands of brand, audience and serial closure (Akass; Mccabe 2004). Read through that friction, the subsequent continuity does not close off that turn; it reconfigures it: 2008 exposes the spectacular failure of the wedding; 2010 assays a 'marriage to measure' that modulates normative monogamy; and 2021–2025 decentres the couple through widowhood and an archive of objects and garments that register the character's biographical layers. Thus the bride–fiancée–

wife–best-man–widow arc displaces the matrimonial *telos* towards an ethics of the right measure (intimate scale, pacts, reuse) and towards a regime of memory in which fashion no longer consecrates the rite but documents losses and sustains autonomy. Rather than culminating at the altar, the narrative widens the affective horizon beyond the wedding and inscribes love—and its losses—within a regime of memory rather than a normative culmination.

In postfeminist terms, this trajectory relocates the 'happy ending' from the romantic climax to a pragmatics of decisions: loving according to one's own rules, without abdicating autonomy or desire, and without renouncing the languages of fashion or a collectivised view of female experience (McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009). Sisterhood operates as a network that, when necessary, substitutes the conjugal narrative and sustains subjective rewriting (from the trip to Mexico to the shared front row), while fashion shifts from promising consecration to preserving memory. From the vantage of age studies, the passage from one's forties to one's fifties also relocates that spectacularity: the mature bride ceases to be a ridiculable exception of the media dispositif and asserts herself as a decisive subject of the apparatus, capable of domesticating spectacle and modulating her visibility. In that modulation, the dressing room—and not the altar—emerges as the place of decision: where the cloud dress, the Hangisis and the second use of Westwood—and of so many other spectacular garments—cease to function as fetishes of promise and come to document a biography that 'ages' without renouncing its own narration.

Methodologically, this article assembles three scales of analysis whose combination is rarely pursued: (1) an object-based reading of wardrobe items as narrative agents and affective archive (reuse, recombination, and the dating of trauma in the ageing body)—an approach close to object-based fashion research (Mida; Kim, 2015); (2) narrative and character analysis (conflict, functions, obstacles) applied to a transmedia arc spanning four decades; and (3) an intersectional critical framework that articulates gender/age studies, feminist film theory, and postfeminist

culture to interrogate monogamy as a normative horizon (Tasker; Negra, 2007; Zurian Hernandéz; Muñoz Torrecilla, 2023). This tripod makes it possible to move from the material detail (the object-garment) to the industrial and authorial logics that modulate the character's visibility, showing how fashion ceases to consecrate the rite and comes instead to preserve memory.

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