CATASTROPHE: TRANSATLANTIC LOVE IN EAST LONDON

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A pivotal scene occurs early on in the first series of Catastrophe (Channel 4, 2015 – present). Rob (Rob Delaney) floats the idea of he and new partner Sharon (Sharon Horgan) relocating from London to Boston in the United States. The move is logical. As Rob observes, living in Boston is ‘cheaper by probably about, 500%,’ and given that his employers are increasingly sceptical of his plans to create a European office, his career prospects in advertising appear to be more secure in Massachusetts than they are in Greater London. Nonetheless, a cut to Sharon’s disgusted facial expression reveals that she is appalled by the very idea. ‘Once you graduate to a city like London or New York, you don’t regress to Boston,’ she explains. Dismissing Rob’s concerns about his unemployment, Sharon affirms that the couple will ‘sort it out here.’ The audience thus understands that Catastrophe, its characters and its (anti)romantic narrative can only be located in London, the quintessential global city.¹ This chapter examines how love across the Atlantic, as embodied by Sharon and Rob’s budding relationship, is mediated through its London setting. As I demonstrate, romance is increasingly viewed as a pragmatic, rather than idealised, solution to precarity in contemporary culture. In Catastrophe, this is made manifest through both characters’ – and especially Rob’s – troubled relationship to their urban environs. Examining the show’s mobilisation of discourses of authenticity, realism, and ‘quality’ television itself, this chapter considers why the show is set in the areas around London Fields, in the borough of Hackney. In the context of increasingly transatlantic models of television distribution, I argue that the show’s use of a globalised East London speaks to a transnational and upmarket aesthetic that is modelled on the types of urban locales made visible in Catastrophe.
CROSSING THE ATLANTIC, CROSSING GENRES

*Catastrophe* is the fruit of a relationship forged across the Atlantic between Sharon Horgan, a London-born Irishwoman who co-wrote the less popular (though much admired) *Pulling* (BBC3 2006-2009) and *Dead Boss* (BBC3, 2012), and Rob Delaney, an American stand-up comedian dubbed ‘the funniest person on Twitter’ (Erickson 2012: n. pag.). The two co-writers also star in the show, playing ‘Sharon’ and ‘Rob’ respectively, who, upon meeting in a hotel bar, embark on a ‘6-night stand’ that concludes when Rob returns to the US. When Sharon unexpectedly finds herself pregnant – the ‘catastrophe’ of the show’s title – Rob moves permanently to London and establishes a relationship with her. In this brief plot summary can be found not only the serendipity of the initial encounter that is central to the romantic comedy, but also the subsequent development of that attraction, which brings into play elements of the domestic family sitcom, even while the humour in the series is frequently darker than that typically associated with both romcom and sitcom. The tension between the happenstance and sexual spark of the pair’s first meeting, and a quotidian aftermath that is founded in duty as much as it is physical attraction, is reflected in the indeterminacy of the television romantic comedy, sometimes termed the ‘romsitcom’ in reference to the genre’s hybridity (Haggerty 2015: n. pag).

Both the romantic comedy and the sitcom possess low cultural capital, as a result of their associations with artificiality. Tamar Jeffers McDonald’s study of the romantic comedy film begins with her observation that the genre is (erroneously) believed to provide uncomplicated, escapist pleasures in a form that should ‘remain below one’s notice’ (Jeffers McDonald 2007: 7-8). In turn, the sitcom’s conventionally proscenium staging, studio audience, and theatrical performances of characters whose situation never alters from one episode to the next, likewise gives rise to criticisms that the genre lacks realism (Mills 2009: 14). Both modes are also associated with the feminine. Elana Levine and Michael Z
Newman’s work on the legitimation of television observes that the medium’s recent acquisition of cultural capital has been concomitant with the masculinisation of the medium. The television set was first promoted to women as an aspirational household object, alongside other mod cons like refrigerators and washing machines (Levine and Newman 2012: 10). In contrast, the exemplars of the recent so-called ‘golden age of television,’ such as *The Sopranos* (HBO 1999-2007), *The Wire* (HBO 2002-2008), *Mad Men* (ABC 2007-2015) or *Breaking Bad* (ABC 2008-2013) all focus on troubled male protagonists. It is therefore significant that *Catastrophe*, a sitcom/rom-com hybrid, co-written by a woman, escapes the designation of the feminine and, as I demonstrate, is instead positioned in the terms of quality television.

A principal means through which *Catastrophe* escapes the low cultural capital associated with the genres to which it ostensibly belongs is through its preoccupation with discourses of realism and authenticity. Suggestions of verisimilitude abound in the show. Further to naming the show’s leads after themselves, Horgan and Delaney use their own personal histories in the narrative. Perhaps most obviously, the very premise of *Catastrophe* takes its cue from the story of how Horgan met her real-life husband, himself an American advertising executive whom she married soon after becoming pregnant with their first child (Iqbal 2017 n.p.). In turn, Rob Delaney’s namesake is, like the comedian himself, a recovering alcoholic. It is partly as a result of these claims to realism that *Catastrophe* has been effusively praised for its authenticity and brutality, with Horgan in particular described as ‘honest, messy and real’ (Iqbal 2017: n. pag.) and a ‘brutal romantic’ (Paskin 2016: n. pag.). This strategic deployment of discourses of authenticity and honesty allows *Catastrophe* to escape the low cultural capital associated with its ostensible generic positioning. The challenges encountered in the show, such as the fractious discussion over where the couple might raise their child, constructs this transatlantic romance as an especially difficult one.
Thus, romance is not idealised, but presented as a site of messiness, realism and therefore authenticity. As I demonstrate, too, East London, has also come to be associated with discourses of the authentic.

Despite adopting certain codes of realism, *Catastrophe* nevertheless continues to embrace significant elements of the romantic comedy. London-set examples of the genre, in which romantic partners hail from either side of the Atlantic are commonplace, as seen in *Notting Hill* (Michell, 1999), *Last Chance Harvey* (Hopkins, 2008), and more recently, *Bridget Jones’s Baby* (Maguire, 2016). Beyond the show’s supposed authenticity and brutality, *Catastrophe* is also praised for the chemistry between, and likeability of, the two leads, bringing it squarely in line with conventional markers of excellence in the romantic comedy (Raeside 2015: n. pag.; Hu 2015: n. pag.). While Horgan and Delaney decided to omit declarations of love from the show, thereby distancing themselves from the romantic comedy, Sharon and Rob are noticeably ‘sweet’ and affectionate towards one another (Moylan 2015: n. pag.). In turn, being white, middle-class and heterosexual, Sharon and Rob are precisely the kinds of normative figures that overwhelmingly populate romantic comedy. Clearly, then, the terms under which *Catastrophe* is deemed an original text differ from most of its generic stablemates.

Many studies of the cinematic romantic comedy make clear that urban settings have been central to the genre. As Deborah Jermyn observes, ‘a spectacular aerial view or bravura panning shot across the New York City skyline signals entry into romcom territory’ (2008: 11). That is, the very fact of establishing the film’s location in a glamorised, glossy Manhattan immediately reveals that text’s generic belonging. Jermyn argues that New York’s status as a global city is central to its function in the romantic comedy. For her, the city’s embodiment of modernity, and of possibility, corresponds with the uniquely American mythos of the ‘pursuit of happiness,’ and secures the audience’s belief that anything – even
meeting one’s soulmate – might be possible in such an environment. In New York, these qualities combine in the city’s historic ambition to welcome immigrants from around the world, and relatedly in its ethnically diverse population. The vertically-oriented architecture, spectacularly showcased in precisely the types of opening sequences Jermyn describes thus constitute an index of, and proxy for, Manhattan’s highly populated landscape. In the New York-set romantic comedy, the city’s modernity and cosmopolitanism enables the central romance.

In contrast, despite London’s shared status as a global city in Saskia Sassen’s influential typology, the metropolis idealised in romantic comedy films set there retreat from modernity. Instead, as Claire Mortimer observes, London-set romantic comedies portray the city as a ‘prosperous, sophisticated, cosy world that has seen little development since the nineteenth century’ (Mortimer 2010: 96). This is not to say that the London found in the romantic comedy is not spectacularised. The London of the transatlantic romantic comedy focuses principally on the areas immediately around the Houses of Parliament, in Westminster, and takes in a number of internationally recognisable landmarks, including the London Eye, Tower Bridge and, to a lesser extent, Buckingham Palace. For Annabelle Honess Roe, such a narrowly focused representation of the city demonstrates these films’ attempt to reinforce particular ideals of Britishness that dodge the realities of the modern metropolis in favour of a distinctly twee, even village-like, city of red buses, black cabs and reliably white Christmases (Honess Roe 2008: 85). Rather than finding romantic promise in the city’s modernity and cosmopolitanism, these films construct the long-standing, monumental landscape, and the construction of Britishness evoked therein, as an index of the durability of the romance being established on screen.
TRANSATLANTIC ‘QUALITY’ AUDIENCES

_Catastrophe_ does not offer up this time-honoured London aesthetic. Nor does it follow Hollywood, offering a glamorous, modern aesthetic using the soaring follies of the City of London. Instead, the show is set in and around London Fields, in Hackney, a formerly gritty, inner-city borough of East London. But the show’s setting is not parochial. As _Catastrophe_’s director, Ben Taylor, reveals, the area was chosen with one eye on the show’s marketability to American distribution. In so doing, he aimed to portray ‘a beautiful, exciting and aspirational version of London. Not a Richard Curtis Notting Hill but a more Brooklyn-style East End, a bit dirty and textured and cool’ (Taylor, quoted in Jones 2016: n. pag.).

There is much to unpack in Taylor’s brief description of his ideal setting for the show. The invocation of a ‘Richard Curtis Notting Hill’ against which _Catastrophe_ is to be distinguished foregrounds the latter as a site of authenticity and ‘cool’ in comparison to its aesthetically pleasing, though chintzy, Working Title forbear. Secondly, the director’s stated ideal of a ‘Brooklyn-style East End’ speaks to a transatlantic connection between Manhattan’s less ritzy neighbour and the areas of East London in which _Catastrophe_ takes place. Such a connection speaks not only to the recent construction of a ‘quality’ audience that transcends national boundaries, and to the rapid gentrification and associations with hipster culture that both areas possess. I argue that the show’s East London setting, with its troubled construction of authenticity and rapid urban change, is inherently connected to its articulation of precarious transatlantic romance.

The construction of authenticity of _Catastrophe_ is secured through aesthetic choices as well as the show’s tone, and the hints of realism discussed in the previous section. The frequent use of handheld camera seems to tie the show to a documentary-realist aesthetic rather than the three-camera set-up more often associated with the sitcom (Mills 2009). Further to the supposed realism of the narrative itself, the bleak veneer that _Catastrophe_ casts
over the romance, and its subsequent development into a nuclear family, seems to contest dominant postfeminist discourses idealising these heterosexual norms. While Taylor implicitly constructs the romantic comedy as idealising heterosexual romance, and in turn, the setting in which it takes place, it is notable that the very title of the show positions these conventionally happy phenomena as a form of disaster. A self-conscious positioning as an authentic, and thus problematised, vision of the romance narrative permeates Catastrophe, an element to which I will return.

The connection that Taylor makes between Brooklyn and London’s East End demonstrates that Hackney is presented as bearing a transnational connection. Certainly, as previously stated, despite first appearing on Channel 4, the showrunners maintain that Catastrophe was always intended for transatlantic distribution (Jones 2016 n. pag.). Jorie Lagerwey and Taylor Nygaard’s study of what they term ‘Horrible White People shows’ is instructive in this regard. Typically 30-minutes in length and focusing on domestic spaces and families, these shows portray self-identified liberal, white characters, whose comedic difficulties are, they argue, ‘complicit in a rhetorical shift toward white suffering that has helped sustain structural white supremacy and worked to support the rise of the political Right’ (Lagerwey and Nygaard 2017 n. pag.). Significant to this cycle of programming, which includes Catastrophe, is a transatlantic model of co-financing and distribution that, combining traditional broadcasters and Streaming Video on Demand (SVOD) services, seeks out commonalities of race and class among an elite audience of highly educated urban dwellers in both the US and the UK. In Catastrophe this transatlantic audience is even modelled on Horgan and Delaney’s respective national backgrounds. Such an association is played out in Horgan’s subsequent project, Divorce, made in the US for HBO (2016 - ). Lagerwey and Nygaard argue that these elite audiences on both sides of the Atlantic have more in common with each other, than they might with others possessing lower cultural
capital from their respective nations (2017). In this way, national specificity, once crucial to the reception of television comedy, is eroded in an increasingly globalised television market in which securing small audiences for ‘prestige’ shows emerges as ever more significant.

There is ample evidence to support Catastrophe positioning itself for an elite audience. In the UK, the show is broadcast on Channel 4, a terrestrial, free-to-air network. Despite its widespread availability, Hannah Andrews observes that since the end of the 1990s, Channel 4 has increasingly focused on youth markets, satisfying its public service mandate to target minority audiences, while also honing in on the ‘top end ABC1 demographic’ (Andrews 2012: 573). In the United States, Catastrophe airs on Amazon Prime, a SVOD service, for which users must pay a premium. Both media cultivate a reputation for advocate aesthetic distinctiveness, fostering their perception as possessing high cultural capital.

That Channel 4 is keen to signal Catastrophe’s positioning amongst a landscape of transatlantic quality television is apparent from the show’s sponsorship. When first aired in 2015, Catastrophe was billed as the ‘new comedy from Sharon Horgan’ and accordingly received as a further example of her acerbic comedy found in BBC 3 shows Pulling and Dead Boss (Raeside 2015: n. pag.). At this point, the show was sponsored by Fosters, a brand of lager whose idents have accompanied comedy commissioned by Channel 4 since 2010. However, by the time of the third series’ broadcast in 2017, the show was sponsored by luxury car brand, Lexus, and presented not as a comedy, but as a drama. While the tone of the series had become considerably bleaker between the first and third series, it seems significant that Lexus’ media planners position their idents as accompanying ‘talked-about, award-winning, critically-acclaimed, high-rating programmes such as Homeland, Fargo, The Good Wife and The Mill’ (Thinkbox 2016: n. pag.). Thus, the change of sponsorship moves Catastrophe out of the arena of the mass-market, domestic sitcom, or feminised romantic comedy, and into a transnational model of quality television.
Taylor’s description of a ‘Brooklyn-style East End’ speaks to the connections between these spaces, as well as their inhabitants. Perhaps most obviously, these are areas outside the immediate economic and cultural centres, embodied by Manhattan and Westminster respectively. What is more, both Brooklyn and East London have seen rapid and accelerating gentrification within the last 10-15 years. Studying this process in London through the lens of changing retail spaces, Phil Hubbard observes that the British capital has followed New York and other cities in the United States in pursuing ‘arts-led gentrification’ (Hubbard 2017: 208). In this process, hard-up artists are attracted to an area for its low-rents (and frequently, large, disused industrial spaces). After some time has passed, that area starts to become known for its artist population, attracting first visitors, then those who wish to relocate to that area. Eventually the extent and capital of these incomers push the prices of that area to such a level that even the now-successful artists can no longer afford the spaces they once occupied, and are displaced to another part of town, where the cycle seems doomed to repeat itself.8

On the other side of the Atlantic, Sharon Zukin’s study of gentrification in New York City finds a certain irony in this process. As she observes, a significant factor making these areas attractive is their supposed authenticity, which here is connected to the bohemian mores of the artists, and to the independent boutiques, restaurants and bars that surround them (2009). However, when others are attracted to that same area, these are precisely the features that are frequently displaced. This arts-led gentrification, and its associated displacements and ill-fated quests for authenticity bring together Brooklyn and Hackney. Like these areas, Catastrophe derives its cultural capital from its supposed construction of authenticity and realism, tapping into precisely the same discourses impelling urban change.
A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT?

In *Catastrophe*, Hackney is an area that the show’s inhabitants have actively chosen. Although Horgan was in fact raised in the borough, it is implied through references to Sharon’s parents and her oldest friend still living in Ireland, that she, and her brother, Fergal (Jonathan Forbes) have moved to London as adults. Strikingly, aside from the young children at Sharon’s school, none of the show’s principal characters are native Londoners. While the latest census data states that 48.6% of Hackney’s population reported themselves as Black or Minority Ethnic, (BME) such an ethnic profile is barely visible in *Catastrophe.*\(^9\) Rob, of course, is American, whose move to the city occurs in the show itself. His American friend, Dave (Daniel Lapaine) has lived in the city only slightly longer than Rob. Scottish couple Fran (Ashley Jensen) and Chris (Mark Bonnar), and Fergal’s Spanish wife, Mallandra (Marta Barrio) complete the ensemble. In this, we are perhaps closer to Jermyn’s ideal of the modern, cosmopolitan city that provides fertile ground for romance to bloom, than we are used to seeing of London in the romantic comedy. For all of these white, middle-class characters, London has been a conscious choice, providing not only an embodiment of the transnational quality audience with whom the show identifies, but also the incoming gentrifiers in East London.

Sharon and Rob are presented as incomers to the urban space they inhabit, whose presence is paradoxically said to connote authenticity. Of the two, Rob is more obviously positioned as an outsider. As an American, he stands out among the show’s characters, the majority of whom derive from other parts of the UK, or EU nations who – at the time of writing at least – are freely permitted to settle in London.\(^10\) As a consequence, Rob is acutely conscious of his contingency, particularly when losing his job puts him at risk of losing his visa. His precarity is made clear through the show’s use of urban space. In the first series’ second episode, Rob ventures along the nearby Regents Canal. As he walks along the
towpath gazing at his surroundings, a cyclist yells, ‘Get out of the way! Fucking idiot!’ knocking him off balance. Undeterred, Rob next heads to Broadway Market, a short high street, and occasional grocery market, which joins the canal to the southern tip of London Fields. Here, Rob goes into a café, and, viewed from outside the window, he is seen knocking his head on a low-hanging lamp, before he takes his drink outside. Even this otherwise agreeable spot, in which Rob briefly smiles to himself, is marred by the presence of a bulldog, which proceeds to defecate in front of him. The dog’s similarly gruff owner is unapologetic, grunting a confrontational ‘what are you looking at,’ after which he walks away, leaving the faeces immediately by Rob’s table. Taken together, these instances give the impression that Rob’s presence here is unwelcome, and undercut any romantic sensibilities that might have been fostered for this American for his new life in London.

These sequences make plain the extent to which as an American, Rob is out of place in London’s public spaces. A recurring theme is his physical size, described in The Guardian as ‘6’3 and broad with it – a huge petrol tank of a man’ (Hattenstone 2017: n. pag.). Sharon finds his presence in her small flat stifling, while his body is not easily accommodated by the café he goes to. By series three, Rob’s body has replaced Sharon’s maternal body as a comedic site of excess. After yet another failed interview in advertising, he decides to sign up to a ‘big and tall’ modelling agency, who, seeming not to find him sufficiently big or tall, swiftly reject him. His dimensions mark him as out of place, and tap into stereotypes of the large, coarse American, whose presence cannot be accommodated. Yet he is not of sufficient size to capitalise from being ‘big and tall.’ Instead, he simply does not fit, underlining the sense of out-of-placeness inherent in the couple’s unconventional transcontinental union.

These examples of Rob’s precarity and bodily excess are played for comedy, which connects his body with the changing urban landscape around him. As Hubbard points out, ironic humour has been a central hallmark of retail gentrification in the UK and elsewhere. In
both acknowledging and disavowing the displacement that occurs through gentrification, Hubbard claims that these moments of irony are a type of ‘symbolic violence’ (2017: 209). He cites ‘the Asian Women’s Advisory Centre’ on Mare Street in Hackney, which was replaced by a ‘burger and craft beer joint’ dubbed ‘The Advisory,’ while retaining the original signage. Further such attempts at comedy are apparent in ‘The Job Centre’ in Deptford, a bar that usurped an establishment of the same name, which served to locate employment opportunities for the unskilled. In both cases, organisations designed to assist the vulnerable and marginalised have been displaced in favour of middle-class spaces of conspicuous consumption knowingly retaining their original hallmarks. The new bars’ comedic names not only work to domesticate and nullify such displacement, but also serve to anchor those establishments as somehow authentic to that part of London.

It would be a mistake to argue that the hostility that Rob briefly encounters is connected to his status as an immigrant. Catastrophe is replete with cosmopolitan characters who have chosen to settle in London. Nonetheless, Rob’s position as an American does make him more contingent than the others. Sharon’s Irish accent signals her as not originally ‘from there’ even while it is accompanied by white, middle-class privilege. For Sharon, the streets function as spaces where her anxieties might return. An unexpected encounter with ex-boyfriend, Owen (Sam Spruell) prompts her to question whether she is still attractive, to ponder the doctoral thesis that she did not complete, and to compare herself negatively with the woman for whom Owen left her, who is now a successful author of young adult fiction. These anxieties, though, are private to her, in contrast to the very public hostility that Rob experiences. Both characters experience the streets of London as challenging when they are alone. The question, then, is how romance is presented as a solution to the characters’ precarity.
ROMANTIC PRAGMATISM

Lauren Berlant’s study of what she terms ‘cruel optimism’ includes the following description of a scene from Mary Gaitskill’s novel, *Two Girls Fat and Thin*: ‘a contingent being tries, aversively and indirectly, to induce through an improvised relation to a semi-stranger, an attachment that might become a solidarity that could produce more and better traction in the world’ (Berlant 2011: 162). Such an account could well be applied to *Catastrophe*, in which a brief sexual encounter is transformed into the supposedly stable structures of marriage and the nuclear family. Berlant describes ‘cruel optimism’ as the situation ‘when something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing’ (2011: 2). It is, she argues, the defining affective dimension of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, wherein pursuit of ‘the good life’ is inevitably doomed to fail owing to systemic precarity. While this term continues to describe the parlous economic situation of those on the very bottom of the social scale (see Savage et. al. 2013), However, Berlant argues that precarity has progressed beyond the economic such that it permeates the affective environment (2011: 192). What is more, the condition of precarity now subsumes those who might be regarded as privileged, such as Sharon and Rob.

Berlant’s work chimes with the arguments put forward by Lagerwey and Nygaard, who argue that ‘Horrible White People Shows’ emphasise the plight of the well-off who must come to terms with ‘their loss of access to markers of middle-class status,’ (2017 n. pag.). *Catastrophe* is no exception, as Sharon and Rob are depicted as both economically and affectively precarious. While an unexpected child puts strains on both characters’ finances, Rob’s status as an American situation places the couple under additional strain, and provides a clear pragmatic – rather than romantic – rationale for the pair to marry. It is because of his precarity that Rob disavows his scruples when he finds employment with an unethical pharmaceutical firm. It should, of course, be acknowledged that the couple nevertheless
remain financially comfortable. Despite Sharon’s frequent jokes about her ‘teacher money,’ she nevertheless finds herself promoted to the position of Deputy Head following the death of one of her colleagues. Precarity is discussed in economic terms, but perceived principally in affective ones.

Sharon and Rob’s marriage, is presented as a practical solution to their unplanned child. Despite the chemistry between the characters, then, romance and marriage are not idealised in the show. Questioning Sharon’s decision to marry Rob, Melissa (Sarah Niles) reminds her that ‘it’s not 1934,’ with the implication that there no longer exists a societal, moral, nor financial imperative to marry the father of her baby. In response, Sharon veers between the apocalyptic and the practical, arguing that she wants someone to ‘plough a path through a nuclear winter,’ for her and the baby, and, more prosaically, that she appreciates his offer of domestic help. Marriage, then, is not idealised here in romantic terms, but is referred to strategically, as a way of becoming less precarious.

The cityscapes portrayed in the series provide a considerable lens through which romance is not regarded as a ‘happy object’, to use Sara Ahmed’s term (2010), but as a practical response to precarity. Whereas scenes of the characters alone in London are fraught, often taking place in grey, gloomy conditions, those in which the two characters are together take advantage of soft autumnal lighting and textures. Notably, these shots use limited depth of field such that the viewer focuses only on the characters, rather than the landscape they travel through. Such a conception of romance is distinct from many cinematic examples of the romantic comedy, where the city provides an environment where romance might thrive. In contrast, Catastrophe shows London as a space in which the characters have only the most fragile of connections to one another. Marriage thus provides a legal means of anchoring oneself to the landscape that conspires to reject them.
Considering romance as a pragmatic, rather than idealised phenomenon puts \textit{Catastrophe} on the opposing side of postfeminist discourses in which heterosexual desirability – and its attendant realisation in a romantic relationship – is paramount (Negra 2009: 6). Here, I draw from Ros Gill’s influential work in which postfeminism is figured as a ‘sensibility’ that characterises much of the contemporary media landscape (2007: 148). As Gill makes clear, regarding postfeminism as a sensibility has the advantage of making postfeminism itself the object of analysis, rather than an epistemological lens through which to view something else. In turn, Gill draws from Angela McRobbie’s oft-cited claim that postfeminism ‘takes feminism into account’ (McRobbie 2004: 255) and is attentive to the ways in which postfeminism remains tangled up with feminism. Indeed, Gill reaffirms that the postfeminist sensibility both embraces key tenets of feminism as taken-for-granted, while also repudiating the need for continuing feminist activism. It is precisely such a doubled gaze – both within and outside the romantic comedy and the sitcom – that is in evidence within \textit{Catastrophe}, and apparent in the use of landscape. The relationship could only have occurred in London, but the city also engenders the characters’ economic, and affective precarity.

In conclusion, \textit{Catastrophe}’s setting predominantly in and around London Fields in Hackney serves a number of purposes that have an impact on the show’s articulation of love across the Atlantic. In the first place, the show’s aspirational, yet ‘authentic’ setting, alongside its positioning on Channel 4 and Amazon Prime, has allowed \textit{Catastrophe} to court an elite audience, whose members share more in common with their counterparts across the Atlantic, then they might with many of their lower-class compatriots. Considering \textit{Catastrophe} as an example of ‘quality’ television connects the show to its desirable, East London landscape. Romance is thus displaced from its idealised position. While there is no question that the affection between the characters is genuine, romance is shown to be a means of finding security in a contingent space.
The differences between film and television should be noted in this regard. In *Catastrophe*, the wedding provides a fitting conclusion for the first series. However, it is by no means the end of their story. In this, the television romantic comedy provides a striking contrast to its cinematic counterpart, which conventionally provide a clear narrative denouement for the central couple. In portraying romance that goes beyond this initial high point of attraction and its subsequent development into a lasting partnership through marriage, the televisual romantic comedy provides greater scope for portraying the inherent instability and indeterminacy of the relationship on screen. In *Catastrophe*, such indeterminacy is particularly acute, given the couple’s transcontinental union. As the UK-US ‘special relationship’ curdles under the current administrations’ protectionist and populist tendencies, television’s focus on middle-class precarity demonstrates that romance is a strategic defence, rather than an aspiration.

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1 My use of the term ‘global city’ defers to Saskia Sassen’s influential study, which deems London and New York to be global cities par excellence by virtue of their economic, political and cultural clout. See Sassen (1991).

2 For clarity, I will refer to the pair as ‘Horgan’ and ‘Delaney’ in reference to the actors/writers, and ‘Sharon’ and ‘Rob’ when talking about the characters they play in Catastrophe.

3 The male showrunners, too, have also acquired a reputation for talent and skill on a par with that of a cinematic auteur. See Martin (2014).
4 See Jermyn (2009); Jeffers McDonald (2007).

5 For more information about the borough, see A Profile of Hackney, its People and Place, published by the London Borough of Hackney, 2018.

6 It should be noted that the construction of Notting Hill in Curtis’ film as overwhelmingly white and middle-class, and concomitant eradication of the area’s ethnic diversity, was deemed problematic at the time of the film’s release, given the area’s strong associations with the history of immigration. See Orr (1999).

7 Fosters have since been replaced by another beer manufacturer, Coors Light.

8 See Martha Shearer’s essay in this collection for a more in-depth look at gentrification and its impact on the romantic comedy.

9 Census data reported in A Profile of Hackney, 2018.

10 Between the time of the show’s broadcast in 2015 and the time of writing in 2018, the UK narrowly voted to leave the European Union. It is not currently known to what extent freedom of movement and labour will continue.

11 Nonetheless, the UK’s EU referendum June 22nd 2016, and the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States in November that same year, were regarded as a victory for populist fears over immigration. In the UK, an unprecedented increase of 23% in hate crimes against immigrants was reported in the 11 months following the vote. (See Bulman 2017).