

Website:

www.mutualappreciation.com www.myspace.com/mutualappreciation.com

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Justin RiceAlan
Rachel CliftEllie
Andrew BujalskiLawrence
Seung-Min Lee Sara
Kevin Micka
Bill MorrisonWalter
Pamela CorkeyPatricia
Mary VarnRebecca
Гаmara LuzeckyjEsther
Ralph TylerJerry
Kate DollenmayerHildy
Keith GessenJulian
Peter PentzScotty
Salvatore BottiRon
FILMMAKERS
Writer, Director, Editor
Writer, Director, Editor
ProducersEthan Vogt, Morgan Faust, Dia Sokol
Producers Ethan Vogt, Morgan Faust, Dia Sokol Director of Photography Matthias Grunsky
Producers

Director's bio

Andrew Bujalski's first feature film, *Funny Ha Ha*, was released theatrically by Goodbye Cruel Releasing and finished a 20-city theatrical run grossing \$80K and is available from Wellspring on DVD. The film made ten critics' Top 10 lists, including AO Scott, *New York Times*; Amy Taubin and Michael Koresky, *Film Comment*; Gerald Peary, *Boston Phoenix*; and Warren Curry, cinemaspeak.com. At the 2004 Independent Spirit Awards, Bujalski won the "Someone to Watch" award. The *Boston Globe* describes him as "unerringly polite and somewhat disheveled." He types 81 wpm.

Mutual Appreciation brief synopsis

Alan (Justin Rice), a musician whose band has just broken up, shows up in New York to support his burgeoning rock and roll career. He starts by searching for a drummer for a show he's already lined up and otherwise goes about the mechanics of self-promotion. He finds a newfound champion in Sara (Seung-Min Lee), an aggressive DJ who sets her sights on the submissively uninterested Alan (but finds a drummer for him). In down time, Alan drinks and strategizes with his old friend Lawrence (Andrew Bujalski), a grad student, and Lawrence's girlfriend Ellie (Rachel Clift), a journalist. Alan endeavors to keep his shoulder to the wheel while Ellie meanwhile finds herself compelled by Alan. The attraction is mutual, but both parties are reluctant to take a next step.

A note on the production

Mutual Appreciation continues in the same methodological vein that director Andrew Bujalski and much of the same crew developed on their previous film, Funny Ha Ha—characters and stories inspired and acted by Andrew's friends, minimal equipment and crew, shaped by an insightful script with room for "happy accidents"—but the filmmakers have stumbled upon possibly a darker, funnier tone with Mutual Appreciation.

Festivals and awards

South by Southwest, Woodstock, Thessaloniki, Rotterdam, Munich, Sydney, Chicago, Sonoma Valley, AFI, East Lansing, Atlanta, Sidewalk, Boston Independent, Virginia, Vancouver, Wisconsin, Newport, Portland, Woodshole, Jeonju, Nashville, Las Palmas, Munich, Arizona, Maryland, !F Istanbul, Titanic Budapest, IndieLisboa, Durban, Peñíscola, New Zealand, Era New Horizons, Hawaii, SANFIC, Rio, Edinburgh, Melbourne, Alternativa Barcelona, Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires, Guadalajara, Lyon, Montreal POP, Rio, Sao Paolo, Milano, and Vienna.

Best Screenplay - Newport, Best Director - Sidewalk, Village Voice Best of 2005 Film Series, Best Actress - Rachel Clift, Peñíscola International Comedy Film Festival (Spain)

Fun facts

Justin Rice (Alan) sings and plays guitar in the band **Bishop Allen**. The other lead singer of Bishop Allen, Christian Rudder played one of the leads in *Funny Ha Ha*. Their debut album *Charm School* received four stars from *Rolling Stone*, in addition to praise from *GQ*, *The Village Voice* and many others, NPR's "Weekend Edition" ran a feature story on the group in 2003. Bishop Allen is in the process of self-releasing one four-song EP for every month in 2006. The songs Justin plays in *Mutual Appreciation* are his own and Bishop Allen's.

Bill Morrison (Walter) makes his acting debut in *Mutual Appreciation*. He is an experimental filmmaker who has five films in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, including *Decasia*.

Many of *Mutual Appreciation*'s other cast members are filmmakers: in addition to director Andrew Bujalski, Bill Morrison, and Justin Rice (whose short documentary *Look Back, Don't Look Back* had a tremendous festival run beginning in 1999), other filmmakers in the cast include Pamela Corkey (*Easy Listening*), Kate Dollenmayer (experimental shorts including *The Whole Other Side to My Busyness*), Salvatore Botti (*Dreams of Her*), and Rachel Clift (doc short *Take It from Me*).

The producers, Ethan Vogt, Morgan Faust, and Dia Sokol, have worked in many different roles on many different projects. Ethan shot and co-edited the award-winning doc *On Common Ground and produced Funny Ha Ha*. Morgan and Dia both worked on Errol Morris' *First Person* series for IFC, and Dia recently worked as a producer on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

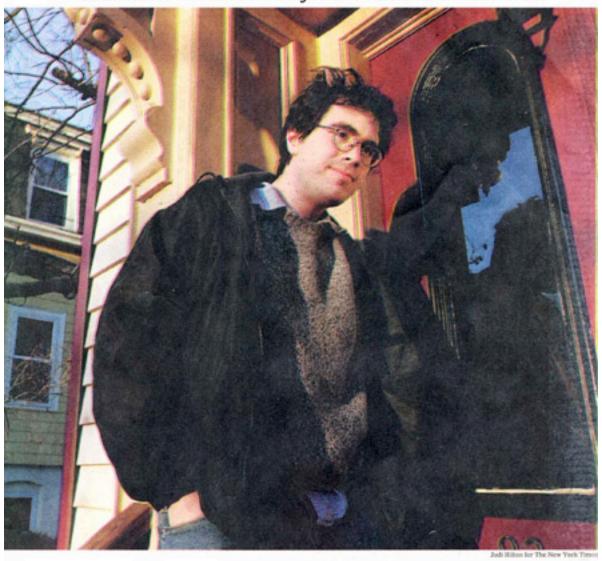
The New York Times

January 8, 2006

Arts&LEISURE

The (Mumbled) . . . Halting . . . Voice — of a Generation

What's so funny about post-college malaise? The characters in Andrew Bujalski's films know. Kind of.

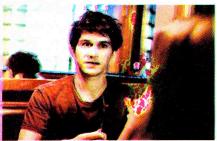


The New York Times

By DENNIS LIM

HE angsty youth, reflective and thinskinned, is one of American indie cinema's favorite archetypes, but the writer and director Andrew Bujalski manages to subvert it in one crucial respect. Instead of being motormouths, his characters speak in half-sentences that trail off into excruciating silences. Compared to Richard Linklater's earnest philosophers or Noah Baumbach's poised wiseacres, Mr. Bujalski's sheepish drifters are mortifyingly tongue-tied. But their verbal tics, taken together, could stand as a fumbling generation's poignant cri de coeur: "I guess," "I mean," "I'm sorry," "I don't know."

At 28, Mr. Bujalski has already made two homespun, micro-budget features, both set deep within the befuddling gray zone of post-collegiate life. In his first, "Funny Ha Ha," Marnie, a



Goodbye Cruel Releasing

23-year-old recent graduate, floats between dead-end temp jobs while nursing an unrequited crush and fending off an unwelcome suitor. His latest, "Mutual Appreciation," centers on a more ambitious but equally restless protagonist: Alan, an indie rocker who arrives in Brooklyn with a gig but no band mates.

Marnie and Alan are the most unassuming of existentialist heroes, slouching toward not epiphanies but the tiniest shifts in perspective. Both films are slow-burning comedies about the fear of adulthood made by someone who isn't yet inclined to sentimentalize or belittle these threshold years. As Mr. Bujalski presents it, the quarter-life crisis is an inherently funny condition, but it's not necessarily a laughing matter.

"Funny Ha Ha" was completed in 2002, but failed to secure distribution despite strong endorsements from critics and bloggers, not to mention a "Someone to Watch" prize at the 2004 Independent Spirit Awards. In April of last year, with the help of Houston King, a fan turned investor, Mr. Bujalski finally released his film

through a company called Goodbye Cruel Releasing.

Though still an industry outsider, Mr. Bujalski is emerging as a critics' favorite — A. O. Scott of The New York Times named "Funny Ha Ha" one of the 10 best films of 2005. The film was also a modest hipster phenomenon long before it opened, thanks to Sundance Channel showings and one-off screenings at colleges and art houses. On a recent Saturday evening, about 150 people, many of whom would not have looked out of place in Mr. Bujalski's movies, turned up at Anthology Film Archives in the East Village for the barely publicized local premiere of "Mutual Appreciation." (If no distributor comes forward, Mr. Bujalski and Mr. King say they will release the film themselves later this year; in the mean-DVD's are for sale .mutualappreciation.com.)

The post-screening discussion at Anthology opened with a predictable question: How much of the film was improvised and how much scripted?

"I've gotten that at every Q & A," Mr. Bujalski said the following day. "I could have said, 'This is now a question I've answered a hundred times, so I have a scripted response, but I'm also making it up as I go along, so maybe this is a good analogy for how it works.' "

But the start-stop chatter in Mr. Bujalski's films is less arbitrary than it seems. A master of the mixed message and a veritable sculptor of dead air, he's deft at showing how inarticulateness can serve as defense tactic and passive-aggressive weapon.

Besides keen-eared writing, a key to his films' eccentric charm is his strange talent for casting nonprofessionals, often his friends. Kate Dollenmayer, the star of "Funny Ha Ha," and Justin Rice, the lead in "Mutual Appreciation," are both former roommates (with real-world accomplishments — Ms. Dollenmayer worked as an animator on Richard Linklater's "Waking Life" and Mr. Rice leads the indie-pop band Bishop Allen). Mr. Bujalski assigned himself the role of the spurned love interest in both films.

His preference for nonactors dates to his senior thesis film at Harvard; a change in shooting location abruptly forced him to write new scenes for new performers, and he found he had an easier rapport with the nonpros in his cast. The filmmaker Chantal Akerman, who was Mr. Bujalski's thesis adviser, recalled that once she suggested he cast a fellow student she had spotted outside her office. "I said, 'Run after her — she could be good,' "Ms. Akerman said in a recent telephone interview.

In today's independent film landscape, Mr. Bujalski is at once an anomaly and a stubborn

idealist. While digital video is the default medium for low-cost moviemaking, he insists on grainy 16 millimeter. "There's a deliberateness to film," he said. "If these films were on video they would feel a lot more frivolous. Film allows you to make the statement that this is on purpose." Mr. Bujalski also prefers the tactile splices of flatbed editing to cutting with a desktop computer.

Robb Moss, a documentarian and Harvard lecturer who lent Mr. Bujalski a Steenbeck editing machine for "Funny Ha Ha," said, "One of the charms of Andrew's films is that they spend no energy convincing you of his ambition."

Mr. Bujalski, who lives in Boston and still holds down a day job as a junior high school substitute teacher, cautioned against the temptation to romanticize his D.I.Y. process. "It's completely unsustainable," he said. "I've been absurdly lucky." (Both his films were financed through a combination of savings, grants, private investment and contributions from family and friends.)

He now finds himself grappling with the same career anxieties as his "Mutual Appreciation" hero, who goes through the motions of networking and self-promotion with an ambivalence that often shades into dread. Mr. Bujalski has acquired an agent and is looking to the economic models of independent stalwarts like John Cassavetes and John Sayles, who financed personal projects by taking on work for hire. Hoping for a shot at Hollywood screenwriting, he recently connected with some executives in Los Angeles, though he said he treated the meetings more like therapy sessions: "I would go in and tell them my problems," he said. "They always had a couch."

As the big 3-0 looms for this chronicler of 20something malaise, his first two features increasingly represent not just an impractical way of working but also a quixotic way of life. "As I get older and my friends get older," Mr. Bujalski said, "it's harder to say to people, "Take a month off from your life and work for me for free.'"

The New York Times

When 'In Search Of' Is Not a Phrase in the Ads

September 1, 2006 By Manohla Dargis

The wonderful independent film "Mutual Appreciation" looks like something that just came out of a time capsule, but there's nothing dusty about it. Shot on expressively grainy black-and-white celluloid, the film has the kind of artfully artless, low-fi vibe that brings to mind the French New Wave of the late 1950's and the East Village film scene of the late 1970's. It's the sort of unassuming discovery that could get lost in a crowd or suffer from too much big love, and while it won't save or change your life, it may make your heart swell. Its aim is modest and true.



The film was written and directed by the 29-year-old Andrew Bujalski, who, in keeping with the D.I.Y. ethos of classic independence, plays one of the film's leads, a teaching assistant named Lawrence. He enters soon after the film opens, as another young man, Alan (Justin Rice), talks with a young woman, Ellie (Rachel Clift), on a bed plopped on the floor of a sparsely furnished apartment. The two are clothed, but from the easiness of their conversation and the way her arms move, almost as if they wanted to reach out across the bed, it feels as if maybe they wish they weren't.

The bed belongs to Lawrence, who, on entering this cozy setup, promptly wedges his body between his girlfriend and best friend. Lawrence loves Ellie, and she says she loves him, but one year into the relationship she seems uneasy. Maybe it's Lawrence or maybe it's Alan: your boyfriend's rock-musician best friend can do that to a girl, though Mr. Bujalski would never propose something so psychologically crude. His characters are self-conscious if not especially self-aware, and he isn't about to let on that he's more on the ball than they are. And, in a sense, they're both still figuring it out. Mr. Bujalski earned some serious critical attention with his even more unassuming first feature, "Funny Ha Ha," which was more knowing than its scruffy surfaces might suggest. The more openly ambitious "Mutual Appreciation" shows that the first film wasn't a fluke and that Mr. Bujalski is beginning to appreciate visual beauty.

"'Mutual Appreciation" is what might be called character-driven, because not much happens. But Alan, Ellie and Lawrence don't actually drive the film; they inhabit it, like people who took up residence long ago. So, what's it about? Everything, nothing. Mostly, though, it's about a group of young people trying to figure out where they fit into the world. And so they talk and talk and talk some more, circling and hedging and stammering "you know, umm." Ellie teases Lawrence, who's so deep in the relationship he

can't see her struggle. Hiding behind a killer smile, Alan repeats questions like a defense witness, as when Sara (Seung-Min Lee) asks if he has a girlfriend. "Do I have a girlfriend?" he echoes, as if wondering the same

That scene with Alan and Sara is just about perfect. Alan, the only remaining member of a band called the Bumblebees, meets Sara at a radio station where she's a D.J. They end up at her apartment, where he scrutinizes her books as if looking for clues. She offers him a beer and sits on her bed, apologizing that there are no chairs. (Never mind the sofa in the other room.) After she asks about a girlfriend and he repeats the question, Mr. Bujalski cuts from the two sitting together to Sara climbing onto Alan's suddenly prone body. The cut underscores the scene's painful comedy (it's funny ha ha), but it also deepens the feeling because it reminds us of how bodies can speak more plaintively than words.

In writing about "Funny Ha Ha," critics sometimes invoked John Cassavetes, the godhead of American independent cinema. Cassavetes too often serves as shorthand for anything that looks and sounds somewhat rough around the edges, authentic and seemingly unscripted (though what a burden that name can be, especially for young filmmakers). But what connects "Funny Ha Ha" and "Mutual Appreciation" to Cassavetes, or at least his legacy of willful independence, isn't the handheld camera work or the persistent intimacy, which could have easily been learned from cinema verite. If Mr. Bujalski has learned anything from Cassavetes, it's that films should be about life, not death, fashion or virtuosity, and that there are few more meaningful subjects for art and for personal expression than other people.

If "Mutual Appreciation" doesn't look like any film out on screens today, it does boldly look back at Jean Eustache's landmark of modern French cinema, "The Mother and the Whore." Released in 1973, Eustache's long generational bleat pivots on a handful of chatty young Parisians who are blotto with booze, sex and narcissism. The men and women in "Mutual Appreciation" often come across as being as inwardly directed as those in the Eustache; the crucial difference is that the shadow of 1968 that hangs over the French characters invests their self-absorption with an intimation of tragedy. Mr. Bujalski's characters, by contrast, don't even have generational failure on their side, an absence of history, of myth, alluded to by Alan's drunken confession that all he wants out of life is "a good story."

In a different film, that good story might mean a record deal and a surfeit of cool. But, like Ryan Fleck's "Half Nelson" and Kelly Reichardt's forthcoming "Old Joy," two other hopeful signs of cinematic life from young American directors, "Mutual Appreciation" is a film that makes a strong, sincere case that we only get that good story with other people. It's not for nothing that Alan is a man in search of a band. The need for mutual appreciation, as it were, is beautifully telegraphed by Mr. Bujalski in that scene when Sara abruptly tackles Alan. She tells him he seems nervous, not knowing that one of his hands is hovering above her back, trembling like a flag of surrender. "I just have, uh," he stammers, "a congenital tremor."

Mutual Appreciation -Opens today in New York and Los Angeles.

Written, directed and edited by Andrew Bujalski; director of photography, Matthias Grunsky; songs by Justin Rice & Kevin Micka, Bishop Allen, Omzo, Matty & Mossy, the Common Cold and Brandon Patton; produced by Ethan Vogt, Morgan Faust and Dia Sokol; released by Goodbye Cruel Releasing. In Manhattan at the Cinema Village, 22 East 12th Street, Greenwich Village. Running time: 110 minutes. This film is not rated.

\WITH: Justin Rice (Alan), Rachel Clift (Ellie), Andrew Bujalski (Lawrence), Seung-Min Lee (Sara), Kevin Micka (Dennis), Bill Morrison (Walter), Pamela Corkey (Patricia) and Mary Varn (Rebecca).

"One of the Top Ten Films of the Year"

Art Forum, Cinematical, Film Comment, Cineaste, Cleveland Scene, Nashville Scene, Houston Press, Cinema Scope, Seattle Weekly, Portland Oregonian, Boston Phoenix, San Francisco Bay Guardian, Phoenix New Times, The Onion AV Club, Time Out Chicago, Village Voice, Greencine, OC Weekly, Dallas Observer

Praise for Mutual Appreciation



"If John Cassavetes had directed a script by Eric Rohmer, the result might have looked and sounded like "Mutual Appreciation." Indie auteur Andrew Bujalski ("Funny Ha-Ha") has studied his mentors closely -- Mike Leigh and Jim Jarmusch are among his other obvious influences -- and put whatever lessons he learned to good use in this unaffectedly naturalistic and appealingly quirky low-key comedy about twentysomethings in the process of inventing themselves."—Joe Leydon



"I bet Andrew Bujalski is sick of reading that he's the voice of his generation, when most of that neoslacker demographic has never had the opportunity to see his films. Like Funny Ha Ha, Mutual Appreciation is hardly your standard Amerindie ... it's shot on 16mm black-and-white, thus confirming Bujalski's allegiance to a strain of maverick films—*Shadows*, *Stranger than Paradise*, *Clerks*—that bring poignantly accurate renditions of subcultures of which their directors have intimate knowledge to otherwise homogenized screens.."—Amy Taubin



"You might think of *Mutual Appreciation* as an emo cover of Godard's *Masculine/Feminine*: a meditation on the crisscrossed subjectivities of boys and girls, their mutual comprehension or lack thereof. Bujalski makes intuitive portraits of his people from the inside out rather than fixing them into a conventional drama. If his improvisational flux seems slightly random—each scene finding its own idiosyncratic entry and exit points, its own stubborn, singular rhythm—a closer look reveals coherent symmetries at play. In *Mutual Appreciation*, watch how Bujalski comments on hetero befuddlement with a pair of gender-switch conceits. Early in the film, Lawrence is invited to participate in a theater event where men read aloud monologues written by women. Later, an extremely drunk Justin stumbles into a house party where three feisty girls proceed to dress him up in drag. The movie is full of such deft patterns."—Nathan Lee



"Bujalski is making what may prove to be the defining movies about a generation, which is to say my own, marked by its very lack of definition."—Scott Foundas

The Boston Globe

"...shows the influence of Cassavetes and early Godard, but it's also very much of the moment." -Ty Burr

"Mutual Appreciation is the second chapter in what seems like Bujalski's statement about people trying to find the right words as they move toward adulthood and negotiating their fears of commitment of any kind -- to a job, a person, or a complete thought. He could have called this movie "A Tentative Yes." Of course, that title should do nothing to stop you from making an absolute commitment to see this film.."

— Wesley Morris

PHOENIX

"[An] apologetic masterpiece. Mutual Appreciation shows life as contingent, conditional, enigmatic, never finally realized, as, in short, everything that the Harvey Mansfields of the world abhor, and it shows why to accept this kind of life is an act of strength. – Chris Fujiwara

Los Angeles Times

"His characters may be contemporary, but his narrative style owes everything to the old-fashioned avant-garde. There's a rawness and immediacy to his work that cuts straight to the experience, a starkness that's startling in an age of bloated spectacle." – Carina Chocano



"[A] brilliantly, original young filmmaker..." - David Edelstein

San Francisco Chronicle

"Bujalski's writing is so good, and every shot and edit seems exactly right. Hopefully, there will always be a place for a film like this on a theater screen, no matter the whims of the marketplace." - G. Allen Johnson

DAILY®NEWS

"Here's hoping that somehow, this intelligent, uncommonly perceptive film finds the fairy-tale success it deserves." - Elizabeth Weitzman



"...the fresh voice of a generation." - Owen Gleiberman

Additional Kind Words for Mutual Appreciation

"Even though he's only made two movies, Andrew Bujalski is, as I write this, one of my favorite American filmmakers... His movies exude the unique personality of an artist who is clearly doing it his own way, and the result is another beautifully personal and expressive film. ...Bujalski is making movies that perfectly capture the awkward voice of many members of his generation. It's time more people take notice.."—Warren Curry, Entertainment Insiders • "There's a timeless quality to Bujalski's talky-talky set pieces and black-and-white real-film cinematography. Star Justin Rice has a bit of a young Mick Jagger in him ...by way of, like, Rick Moranis.."—Karina Longworth, Cinematical • "One of Bujalski's gifts is his ability to give every part, no matter how big or small, a sense of intelligence and life that extends beyond the frame and running time, and in this his work recalls the best of both Mike Leigh and Richard Linklater."—Jim Healy, Chicago Reader • "All this loveliness reaches its inevitable apotheosis in Mutual Appreciation's final scene. The exact nature of which I'll decline to reveal, except that it slyly tweaks a warm reconciliation with residual sexual tension, awkward physicality, and underlying dishonesty, and the tight framing and deeply suggestive throwaway lines typical of Bujalski transform a happy ending into something much richer. It's simply among the most searingly, intuitively "right" moments in all of cinema"—Sky Hirschkron, Stylus Magazine • "Director Andrew Bujalski and his amazing cast create such a unique and addicting experience that these 110 minutes go by in no time at all and the only thing you want when it's all over is more... Authentic and hilarious."—Eric Campos, Film Threat • "Andrew Bujalski is the Renoir of Gen Z (or whatever the heck letter we have devolved down to in this new and otherwise fairly unfunny century). Funny Ha Ha and Mutual Appreciation give us new eyes and ears. They let us hear emotional dog frequencies—and watch the butterfly flutters of feeling that bring us together and pull us apart. Bujalski makes us laugh at our foibles—and shed a tear of self-recognition at our fumblings of love."—Ray Carney, author of Cassavetes on Cassavetes • "Mutual Appreciation...represents a significant achievement."—David Smedberg, Cinema Veritas • "...with Funny Ha Ha and Mutual Appreciation, he has created two of the freshest, most original movies of the decade."-Fiona Morrow, Terminal City Vancouver • "What Douglas Sirk did for big-budget Hollywood melodrama in films like "Imitation of Life", Andrew Bujarski is doing for the low-budget indie.." - John Anderson, Newsday • "...fascinating micro-budgeted indie." - J. Hoberman, Village Voice • The film's mood and style are pitched somewhere between '60s American indie and French New Wave and, as you watch these people, they seem painfully, amusingly on-target." • Michael Wilmington, Chicago Tribune • ",,,a singular talent." • Scott Tobias, The Onion

Press Highlights from Andrew Bujalski's Debut, Funny Ha Ha

"One of the Top 10 films of the year."

The New York Times, Variety, Film Comment, Cinemaspeak, Boston Phoenix, Austin Chronicle, Art Forum, Portland Oregonian, The New York Sun, Stylus Magazine, City Pages, Eye

The New York Times

April 29, 2005

Postgraduate Depression, When True Love Is as Elusive as High Pay and Low Rent



Kate Dollenmayer, left, and Christian Rudder in "Funny Ha Ha."

By A. O. SCOTT

Marnie (Kate Dollenmayer) is 23, and she drifts through "Funny Ha Ha," Andrew Bujalski's low-budget first feature, in search of love and employment - with pretty disappointing results. The young men she is drawn to don't reciprocate, and she can't quite bring herself to respond to the one guy who seems to be genuinely smitten with her. After temping for a while, she finds a job doing research for a professor, which seems reasonably tolerable.

What gives this film its quiet pathos is not so much the relative bleakness of Marnie's circumstances but the modesty of her expectations. At one point, she makes a to-do list, and its lack of ambition - "spend more time outdoors," "make friends with Jackie," "learn to play chess" - is both funny and sad.

Marnie would never admit to anything more acute than mild depression, and Mr. Buialski

captures the ache of her existence without pity or melodrama. She is lonely, but far from alone, because "Funny Ha Ha," much as it is the story of a few difficult, uneventful months in her life, is also a deft group portrait of recent college graduates - her friends, co-workers and would-be lovers - groping their way across the flatlands of early adulthood.

Their conversational tics sound at once stylized and improvised, and the movie's narrative rhythms are loose and ambling. It feels as artless and scattered as Marnie and her cohort, who wear old T-shirts with holes in them and decorate their apartments with nondescript furniture, some of it probably hauled in from the sidewalk. But this scruffiness is a bit deceptive, as "Funny Ha Ha" has both a subtle, delicate shape and a point.

Like John Cassavetes, whose influence is apparent here, Mr. Bujalski is an acute and intelligent dramatist who uses the appearance of chaos as a means of emotional exploration. I would bet that the ragged, swerving scenes in his film are much more tightly scripted and carefully rehearsed than they sometimes seem, which was almost always the case with Cassavetes. The main difference is that while Cassavetes's characters are often at the mercy of their feelings and pushed to the point of eruption, Mr. Bujalski's are cut off from theirs, and able to communicate only by painful, semiironic indirection.

If it were not so resolutely modest, and so rigorously confined in its minute observations of individual behavior, you might almost call

"Funny Ha Ha," which was completed in 2002, a generational statement. But that would be false to both the film's aesthetic and to its insights. Mr. Bujalski's characters do not make statements; they barely make eye contact with one another, and they communicate in a hesitant, noncommittal idiom, prefacing

every utterance with phrases like "I don't know" and "I'm sorry." They spend their days working in grungy offices and their evenings drinking beer and eating hummus at impromptu parties.

The anomie of middle-class 20-somethings is hardly an unexplored subject in American movies, and "Funny Ha Ha" might at first glance be taken as yet another example of post-"Slacker" indie solipsism. But Mr. Bujalski's artistic self-confidence and the low-key idiosyncrasy of his cast resist such easy labeling.

This movie feels less like a careerist calling card than like a genuine effort to use film - and it is film, rather than the more modish digital video - to probe and reveal the curious facts and stubborn puzzles of contemporary life. It is a small, plain movie, shot in 16 millimeter in dull locations around Boston; but also, like its passive, quizzical heroine, it is unexpectedly seductive, and even, in its own stubborn, hesitant way, beautiful.

Funny Ha Ha

Opens today in New York and Boston.

Written, directed and edited by Andrew Bujalski; director of photography, Matthias Grunsky; music by Bishop Allen, the Crack Pipes, Dead Cat Bounce and Matty and Mossy; produced by Ethan Vogt; released by Goodbye Cruel Releasing. At the Cinema Village, 22 East 12th Street, Greenwich Village. Running time: 89 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Kate Dollenmayer (Marnie), Christian Rudder (Alex), Myles Paige (Dave), Jennifer L. Schaper (Rachel) and Andrew Bujalski (Mitchell).