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RETHINKING THE NORM: JUDITH BUTLER AND THE HOLLYWOOD TEEN MOVIE

FRANCES CATHERINE ELIZABETH SMITH

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the construction of gender in the Hollywood Teen Movie, often perceived as ‘the odious norm’ of Hollywood cinema with little to warrant serious analysis.¹ Although Timothy Shary’s work has done much to promote the genre as an area of academic enquiry, there have been few sustained textual analyses of the Teen Movie.

Through close textual analysis of seven representative case studies, this thesis stages an encounter between Butler’s work on gender and the Teen Movie. Butler’s theorisation of performativity denaturalises and deconstructs the assumption of heteronormativity, enabling a detailed analysis of the genre’s ‘sexual coming-of-age narrative.’² Further, the textual analyses complicate and augment aspects of her theories.

Following a review of the literature on the Teen Movie, and an examination of Butler’s *oeuvre*, the thesis is divided into three sections. Firstly, the prom is explored as a typical narrative conclusion to the School Film. Secondly, the following chapter analyses star performance and film acting in the youth delinquency film. The final chapter examines the genre’s construction of the past in the “nostalgic” teen movie.

The original contribution to knowledge is twofold: the thesis significantly expands existing work on the Teen Movie, and uses the depth and range of specific examples from the case studies to complicate Butler’s work. Textual analysis of each film’s construction of heteronormativity demonstrates that this normative and mainstream genre offers a more complex and critical presentation of heterosexual norms than previously appreciated. The thesis rethinks the norm by demonstrating the complexity of normative culture, which demonstrates a range of examples that call for a reconsideration of Butler’s theorisation of gender norms.

¹ A Martin, 1989, ‘The Teen Movie: Why Bother?’ *Cinema Papers*, Vol. 75, No. 12, p. 11

² J Feuer, 1993, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd Ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 125

INTRODUCTION: WHY BOTHER?

In 1989, Adrian Martin presented the issue of analysing the Teen Movie in the starkest possible terms, asking simply, ‘why bother?’³ Fourteen years later, Robin Wood’s essay on the genre leads with the same question, adding that ‘everyone knows these films are trash.’⁴ Beginning with a somewhat guilty defence of the genre, both critics acknowledge – and arguably uphold – a widespread critical consensus deeming the Teen Movie to be part of the ‘the odious norm of contemporary commercial cinema,’ with little to warrant sustained attention or analysis.⁵

Justifying his interest in the genre, Martin argues simply that ‘it exists, it’s popular’ provides sufficient reason to investigate the Teen Movie further.⁶ Certainly, the enduring popularity of these films – and their resulting profitability – cannot be disputed, as the recent *Twilight* franchise demonstrates. Following four wildly successful adaptations of Stephanie Meyer’s novels, the series’ conclusion, *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2* (Dir. Bill Condon, 2012), has so far generated gross worldwide sales of \$830 million from a budget of \$120 million.⁷ As Martin argues, such popularity alone merits academic consideration.⁸ Beyond box office success, Martin asserts that the Teen Movie possesses further value as an artefact of youth culture. Further, since the genre aims principally to entertain its audiences, analysis of these films may lead to a greater understanding of popular entertainment.

³ A Martin, 1989, op. cit., 10-15

⁴ R Wood, 2003, *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan ... and Beyond*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 309

⁵ A Martin, 1989, op. cit., p. 11

⁶ A Martin, 1989, *ibid.*, p. 13

⁷ Total of domestic and foreign receipts is \$829,685,377. Data taken from Box Office Mojo, accessed at <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=breakingdawn2.htm> on May 9th 2013

⁸ A Martin, 1989, op. cit., p. 11

Having outlined his personal enjoyment of ‘some’ examples of the genre, a factor that is likewise at play in Martin’s essay, Wood situates his interest in the Teen Movie as part of a wider preoccupation with Hollywood cinema.⁹ Indeed, although Martin identifies the genre’s conventionality as a principal reason for its neglect,¹⁰ Wood notes that the ‘great work’ of the Classical Hollywood era was also strongly conventional, suggesting that the Teen Movie may be capable of bringing forth films of a similarly high quality.¹¹

Revisiting the genre twenty years later, Martin argues that the Teen Movie facilitates the exploration of liminality. Understood as ‘the heightened moment of suspension between two conditions,’ liminality typically refers to a transition from childhood to adulthood, the Teen Movie’s defining subject matter.¹² During liminal periods, Martin argues, everything seems ‘eternal and possible,’ recalling the iconography of the endless summer that so often features in the genre.¹³ Such imagery is most obviously present in American International Pictures’ *Beach Party* cycle, in which teens engage in carefree adventures over a seemingly eternal, transformative summer.¹⁴ However, the image endures in other examples of the genre such as *Grease* (Dir. Randal Kleiser, 1978), in which the initial romance between Danny and Sandy occurs at that deliberately vague but instantly recognisable location, “the beach” and in *Dirty Dancing* (Dir. Emile Ardolino, 1978), where a transformative romance occurs during a family holiday to the Catskill mountains in New York State.

Many of the observations from Martin’s first essay remain relevant today, despite its publication more than twenty years ago. Certainly, the work of Timothy

⁹ R Wood, 2003, op. cit., p. 309

¹⁰ A Martin, 1989, op. cit., p. 11

¹¹ R Wood, 2003, op. cit., p. 310

¹² A Martin, 2009, ‘Live to Tell: Teen Movies Yesterday and Today,’ *Lumina*, No. 2, p. 8

¹³ A Martin, 2009, *ibid.*, p. 8

¹⁴ T Shary, 2005, *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*, London: Wallflower, pp. 31-33

Shary in particular has done much to chart the development of the genre and that of its many subgenres and cycles, providing a far greater understanding of the Teen Movie than at the time of Martin's essay. Nonetheless, academic and critical coverage remains limited relative to the volume of texts that could be considered part of the genre. As a consequence of its recent conceptualisation as a genre too, the Teen Movie remains under-theorised, such that surface judgements and value distinctions continue to dominate the discussion. Although many critics continue to lament the genre's conservative representation of gender roles, few have explored how gender is constructed in the Teen Movie. Providing narratives of coming-of-age and with it, the assumption of gender, the genre's lack of theorisation creates a regrettable research gap in Film Studies.

I therefore propose to take up Judith Butler's theorisation of gender to analyse the Teen Movie. Articulated in her 1990 publication, *Gender Trouble*, and later revised and expanded in *Bodies that Matter* in 1993 and *Undoing Gender* in 2004, Butler disputes gender's purported stability and ontology. Rather, she contends that gender should be understood as 'a set of repeated acts, within a highly rigid, regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.'¹⁵ In other words, gender is performative, since the identity seemingly expressed through culturally understood signs is repeatedly and perpetually constructed through those very signs.

Although Butler considers neither adolescence nor the Teen Movie, the liminality Martin identifies in the genre is significant to the potential for a reading informed by her work. Indeed, the Teen Movie portrays adolescence, a time during which characters assume sexual maturity and take up normative gender roles.

¹⁵ J Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, p. 45

Introduction: Why Bother?

Depicting characters at this heightened moment of gender assumption, the Teen Movie can be seen to portray gender at its most unstable. Consequently, Butler's conceptualisation of performativity, where gender is seen to be socially constructed and assumed, rather than innate and natural, promises to denaturalise and destabilise the Teen Movie's account of the assumption of heteronormative gender.

I therefore aim to address the following research questions:

- How does each film construct normative ideals of gender?
- How do individual characters negotiate heteronormative trajectories of gender assumption?
- Do characters resist normative gender roles, and in what ways do they do so?
- How might concepts put forward by Butler be used to provide a critical analysis of mainstream, normative culture?

More than simply applying Butler's work to the Teen Movie, this thesis aims to stage an encounter between the two. Butler's concepts promise to elucidate and foreground the complexity – and failure – of the heteronormative project portrayed in the Teen Movie. Further, it is hoped that the films will provide complex, concrete examples that draw out how Butler's work might itself be developed and complicated.

These questions will be addressed through close textual analysis of key examples from the genre, in the form of case studies. Martin is critical of those who appear to ascribe greater significance to 'dark, subversive, Gothic and parodic' examples of the Teen Movie.¹⁶ Rather, he argues that analysis of the genre – indeed of any genre – necessitates an appreciation of its more typical, conventional manifestations. The scant critical attention the Teen Movie has hitherto received

¹⁶ A Martin, 2009, op. cit., p. 9

means that there have been few instances of sustained textual analysis, even of those films widely recognised as the mainstays of the genre. Consequently, I will take as my case studies films that are either particular indicative of a significant facet of the genre, or have been demonstrably influential to its development. Thus I have avoided singling out a select few as “not your average teen movie,” while casually dismissing the remainder of the genre, an approach of which Martin is critical.¹⁷ The corpus of films is instead chosen in order to represent the Teen Movie’s significant conventions.

Although films about or aimed at teenagers have been released in a variety of countries and production contexts, it is in Hollywood cinema where the generic tropes of the Teen Movie have been forged.¹⁸ Thomas Doherty quotes the claim made in the American Dictionary of Slang that by 1945, the term ‘teen-ager’ had entered common usage in the US,¹⁹ and that ‘the US is the only country considering this age group as a separate entity whose influence, fads and fashion are worthy of discussion apart from the adult world.’²⁰ Although the dictionary probably overstates the case for the unique understanding of teenage culture in the US, Hollywood cinema nevertheless continues to provide the genre’s defining examples. Indeed, attesting to Hollywood’s overwhelming influence, Roz Kaveney argues that imagery of youth has been colonised such that British teenagers now conclude their schooling with a prom, and aspire to the titles of ‘Homecoming Queen’ and ‘Student Body President’ that have

¹⁷ A Martin, 2009, *ibid.*, p. 14

¹⁸ For examples of teen cinema in a global context, see T Shary and A Seibel, Eds., 2007, *Youth Culture in Global Cinema*, Austin: University of Texas Press

¹⁹ The American Dictionary of Slang, quoted in T Doherty, 2002, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilisation of American Movies in the 1950s*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 34

²⁰ T Doherty, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 34

been popularised by the Teen Movie.²¹ In order to advance claims about the genre's mainstream development, then, the case studies will be taken from Hollywood cinema.

The first chapter explores critical approaches to the Teen Movie, observing its development and recent conceptualisation as a genre. Next, the chapter will examine Butler's initial conceptualisation of performativity and investigate how this has been taken up in the study of film. Having elucidated areas of significant interest that could be explored in the Teen Movie, the chapter will lastly examine Butler's later work and determine which elements of her *oeuvre* will be taken up in the later case studies.

Following the review of literature, the thesis is divided into three principal sections, each of which assesses a well-known aspect of the Teen Movie, and provides an opportunity to explore a particular facet of Butler's work on gender. The second chapter thus investigates the role of the prom in the high-school Teen Movie. Purportedly celebrating high-school graduation, the prom can be seen to indicate teens' assumption of adulthood. Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, the requirement to attend as part of a heterosexual pair reveals the prom as a locus of gender – and indeed of class – interpellation. The chapter's two case studies explore how the film's protagonists negotiate their attendance at the prom. Informed by Butler's work, close textual analysis elucidates the films' construction of gender. In turn, the focus on the prom provides the opportunity to develop Butler's conceptualisation of the role of particular spaces in performativity.

Having explored some of the discursive compulsions faced by characters in the Teen Movie, chapter three examines those protagonists who appear to resist such pressures: juvenile delinquent characters. Historically, the psychological disturbances

²¹ R Kaveney, 2006, *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television From Heathers to Veronica Mars*, London: IB Tauris, p. 2

of these figures have provided an opportunity for young stars to demonstrate their acting skill, as the memorable performances of Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* (Dir. Laslo Benedek, 1953) and James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Dir. Nicholas Ray, 1955) attest. This chapter proposes to explore the effect of particular performance gestures on the construction of gender in the films. The chapter's aims are thus twofold: to explore how star performance affects the construction of gender in the case studies, and to investigate the role of rebellion in the construction of teen masculinity. Indeed, while these male rebels purport to flout the rules of society, rebellion is itself shown to be a norm of masculinity, which these characters are seen to negotiate with varying degrees of success.

The genre's reconstruction of the past provides the focus of chapter four. Analysing Teen Movies set in the past, the chapter examines films whose purported idealisations of earlier, more innocent periods leads them typically to be regarded as nostalgic.²² Since Butler deals with the effect of time on the construction of gender in only a limited way, her work is complemented by that of Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon and Barbara Creed, whose theories explore the effect of postmodern culture on the construction of history.

The thesis aims to provide a necessary reflection on a genre that remains under-examined in academic Film Studies. Analysis of the prom as a locus of gender interpellation, the anxiety of the juvenile delinquent, and the genre's construction of the past informed by Butler's work on gender, augmented where necessary by other theorists, promises to rethink this 'odious norm' of Hollywood cinema.²³ Through close textual analysis, I will demonstrate that Teen Movies, which have rarely, if ever,

²² See for instance, L Speed, 1998, 'Tuesday's Gone: The Nostalgic Teen Movie,' *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 28

²³ A Martin, 1989, op. cit., p. 11

Introduction: Why Bother?

faced such detailed examination, amply reward such attention. In turn, the genre's case studies promise to provide a range of examples that develop and complicate Butler's theorisation of gender.

1 – THE TEEN MOVIE AND PERFORMATIVITY

1.1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE TEEN MOVIE

Timothy Shary observes that the establishment of the cinema as an art and entertainment form, and the codification of adolescence as a definable phase in physical, psychological and social development, were both relatively recent and roughly coincident.²⁴ In 1904, G Stanley Hall's ground-breaking publication, *Adolescence: its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, made the case for characterising adolescence as a period of 'storm and stress' between childhood and adulthood.²⁵ In turn, James Monaco notes that it was between 1896 and 1912 that experiments in motion picture started to indicate the potential for the development of cinema as it is experienced today.²⁶

Hall's work on adolescence was undoubtedly influential, and popularised the notion of a distinct developmental stage between childhood and adulthood.²⁷ Nonetheless, Mary Celeste Kearney reminds us that during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, the period of time between childhood and adulthood was minimal.²⁸ Shary echoes Kearney's observation, noting that in the early years of the twentieth century, the majority entered the labour market having left school at 14 years of age.²⁹ Indeed in 1900, only 6.4% of Americans attended high school.³⁰ As a

²⁴ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 1

²⁵ GS Hall, 1904, *Adolescence: its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, New York: Appleton, Vol. 1, p. 2

²⁶ J Monaco, 2009, *How To Read a Film: Movies, Media and Beyond*, 4th Ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 254

²⁷ JJ Arnett and H Cravens, 2006, 'G Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*: A Centennial Reappraisal, *History of Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 165. Arnett and Cravens note that 25,000 copies were sold at the time of publication, a huge number for a two-volume work totaling over 1,300 pages, p. 165

²⁸ MC Kearney, 2002, 'Girlfriends and Girl Power: Female Adolescence in Contemporary US Cinema,' in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p. 126

²⁹ T Shary, 2002, *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 3

³⁰ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p.3

result, although Hall argued that adolescence occurred between the ages of 14-24,³¹ such an extended transition period between childhood and adulthood remained an unfeasible luxury out of the grasp of most people.

Since the socioeconomic environment precluded those who might have been regarded as teenagers from adolescence as Hall understood it, no film genre specifically catered to teenagers as a specific, definable group in the early decades of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, both Catherine Driscoll and Shary identify key precursors to the Teen Movie, in the form of child actors, such as “America’s sweetheart,” Mary Pickford.³² For Driscoll, the ingénue, exemplified by Lillian Gish, or Pickford’s role in *Birth of a Nation* (Dir. DW Griffith, 1915), represents ‘innocence on the point of disappearing.’³³ Held on the edge of adolescence, Driscoll asserts that these girls embody a nation under contestation, their innocence providing a symbol of opposition against the corrupting forces of modern life.³⁴

Even in these early stages of the development of cinema, the importance of newly emergent teenagers was already being felt. At the beginning of what came to be known as Hollywood’s “‘Classical’ period’ in the 1920s, teenagers gathered in cinemas *en masse*, increasing their visibility as a specific, definable group.³⁵ Although Shary ascribes greater importance to the development of the multiplex in the late 1970s as a site of teen congregation, Driscoll argues that these earlier teens are at least as important to contributing to the increased currency of Hall’s conceptualisation of adolescence by this point.³⁶ Illustrating the interconnectedness of the teenager and the

³¹ GS Hall, 1904, op. cit., p. 4

³² C Driscoll, 2011, *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction*, London: Berg, p. 14

³³ C Driscoll, 2011, *ibid.*, p. 16

³⁴ C Driscoll, 2011, *ibid.*, p. 16

³⁵ D Bordwell, J Staiger and K Thompson, 1985, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, London: Routledge, p. vii

³⁶ C Driscoll, 2011, op. cit., p. 13

cinema in the mid-1920s, Driscoll refers to an article in *Photoplay*, in which producer J. P. Schulberg describes the film industry as ‘adolescent,’ given its potential and lack of formalisation in comparison to more established art forms.³⁷ Consequently, both adolescence and cinema can be argued to possess a shared history, in which one contributes to the vitality of the other.

Seeking to define the Teen Movie in her critical overview of the genre, Driscoll argues that ‘the teen film is determined most of all by its audience.’³⁸ Consequently, although child stars such as Mickey Rooney, Shirley Temple and Judy Garland featured in numerous films during the 1930s and 1940s, Shary argues that their collective star presence, embodying ‘all-American wholesomeness, hard work and perseverance’ signal their appeal to adults.³⁹ Under Driscoll’s definition, then, the films in which those stars featured should not be regarded as Teen Movies.

Driscoll’s contention that an intended teen audience is the decisive factor determining whether a film can be regarded as a Teen Movie echoes Doherty’s influential work on the development of the ‘teenpic’ in the 1950s.⁴⁰ However, despite a marked demographic swell in the youth population during that decade,⁴¹ Doherty observes that the film industry – reluctant to place its faith in market research statistics indicating the increasing youthfulness of its audience – was relatively late in creating films that specifically targeted teenagers.

This is not to say that the American teenager remained unnoticed by the film industry. Doherty notes that the increased numbers of teenagers in the 1950s in

³⁷ JP Schulberg, 1924, ‘Meet the Adolescent industry’ noted in C Driscoll. 2011, *ibid.*, p. 5

³⁸ C Driscoll, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 1

³⁹ T Shary, 2005, *op. cit.*, p.8

⁴⁰ T Doherty, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 2

⁴¹ In addition to the widely documented post-war baby boom, Doherty observes that the number of 5-9 year olds grew by 24% between 1940 and 1950, leading to a marked increase in the teenage population during the 1950s, T Doherty, 2002, *ibid.*, pp. 34-35

comparison to previous generations led to a strong sense of group identity, fostered by growing youth culture, particularly in the form of rock and roll music, and the cultivation of certain spaces, such as the drive-in cinema.⁴² Capitalising on sensational, alarmist media coverage portraying teenagers as delinquent tearaways, whose values differed starkly from those of their parents' generation, studios began producing films exploring juvenile delinquency.⁴³ They were assisted in this endeavour by the Supreme Court's "Miracle Decision" of 1952, which applied Constitutional freedom of speech to the motion picture, thereby allowing for the hitherto banned depiction of 'the sexuality of minors, crime and drug use.'⁴⁴

Significantly, Daniel Biltereyst argues that juvenile delinquency films such as *The Wild One* (Dir. Laslo Benedek, 1953), *Blackboard Jungle* (Dir. Richard Brooks, 1955) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Dir. Nicholas Ray, 1955) were intended as cautionary tales for wary, watchful parents and as a general lament on the dramatic transformation in social values that teenagers embodied.⁴⁵ Certainly, juvenile delinquency had also featured in social problem films of the 1930s and 1940s. However, whereas those films had portrayed errant youth as the product of poverty and poor education, the 1950s juvenile delinquency films suggested that a delinquent might be found in any ordinary suburban home, a fear encapsulated by the very title of *Knock On Any Door*, (Dir. Nicholas Ray, 1949).⁴⁶

Further indications of an intended adult audience are found in the stern warnings that open many of these films. For instance, *The Wild One* begins with the

⁴² T Doherty, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 14

⁴³ D Biltereyst, 2007, 'American Juvenile Delinquency Movies and the European Censors: The Cross-Cultural Reception and Censorship of *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, in T Shary and A Seibel, Eds., 2007, *Youth Culture in Global Cinema*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 11

⁴⁴ D Biltereyst, 2007, *ibid.*, in T Shary and A Seibel, Eds., 2007, p. 9

⁴⁵ D Biltereyst, 2007, *ibid.*, in T Shary and A Seibel, Eds., 2007, *ibid.*, p. 9

⁴⁶ T Shary, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 19

following parental call to arms: “This is a shocking story. It could never take place in most towns – but it did in this one. This is a public challenge not to let it happen again.”⁴⁷ Other appeals to parental vigilance are found within the films themselves. In *Rebel Without a Cause*, when Jim’s parents are driven to the planetarium in a police car to see their son, his mother looks directly into the camera as she remarks: “you hear about this happening to some families, but you never dream it could happen to yours.”

Despite these indicators of the films’ adult appeal, and British and American censorship boards placing X and R ratings respectively on *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*,⁴⁸ Doherty notes that these films found favour with the era’s teens.⁴⁹ Indeed, a Gilbert Youth Research Report from 1956 found that *Blackboard Jungle* was the favourite film of high-school students, and James Dean the preferred actor. Consequently, Doherty argues that while these juvenile delinquency films cannot themselves be regarded as Teen Movies, their appeal for youth provided studios with evidence of the potential success that might accrue from specifically targeting the teen audience. The juvenile delinquency films should therefore be regarded as significant, influential precursors to the Teen Movie.

Both Doherty and Shary consider *Rock Around the Clock* (Dir. Fred Sears, 1956) to be the first example of a film that was marketed to teens at the exclusion of their elders.⁵⁰ Indicating the influence of the juvenile delinquency film on the nascent Teen Movie, Sears’ film took up Bill Haley and the Comets’ “Rock Around the Clock” that had previously been used in the opening and concluding sequences of *Blackboard Jungle*, and which was widely suspected to be a significant element of the earlier film’s

⁴⁷ D Biltereyst, 2007, op. cit., in T Shary and A Seibel, Eds., 2007, op. cit., p. 13

⁴⁸ D Biltereyst, 2007, ibid., in T Shary and A Seibel, 2007, ibid., p. 16

⁴⁹ T Doherty, 2002, op. cit., p. 57

⁵⁰ T Doherty, 2002, ibid., p. 55; T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 30

teen appeal.⁵¹ Shot within a month on a shoestring budget, and featuring the rock and roll music favoured by youth audiences, *Rock Around the Clock* established the blueprint for a large number of films specifically aimed at teens in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵²

Further examples of what Shary describes as the Rock Film followed, generally featuring teens defending their musical preferences against older detractors, and concluding with a long dance sequence as characters revel in their final triumph.⁵³ Having exhausted the appeal of the Rock film by the 1960s, American International Pictures – a studio established solely to produce low cost, teen-oriented fare – created the Beach Film. Thought to begin with *Beach Party* (Dir. William Asher, 1963), the films portrayed the light-hearted exploits of Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello over an extended summer. Like the Rock Film, the Beach Films provided formulaic and fairly simple narratives, aiming to portray “clean-cut kids who just wanted to have fun.”⁵⁴

Observing the progression from the juvenile delinquency films to the Rock and Beach Film appears to validate Driscoll’s assertion that a teenage target audience is the primary determinant of the Teen Movie. However, Doherty’s thesis on the juvenilisation of the American film industry argues that since the 1950s, all Hollywood releases have come to cater primarily to the teen audience.⁵⁵ Wheeler Winston-Dixon agrees, contending that the importance of the teen audience for box-office success means that all major Hollywood films released since the late 1990s should be regarded as Teen Movies.⁵⁶ Consequently, although Driscoll is surely right that youth appeal is

⁵¹ T Doherty, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 57

⁵² T Doherty, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 60

⁵³ T Shary, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 31

⁵⁴ W Asher, quoted in T Shary, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 31

⁵⁵ T Doherty, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 1

⁵⁶ W Winston-Dixon, 2000, ‘Fighting and Violence and Everything, That’s Always Cool,’ in W Winston-Dixon, Ed., 2000, *Film Genre 2000: New Critical Essays*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 126

important in determining whether a text can be deemed a Teen Movie, the widespread targeting of this audience necessarily means that it cannot be the genre's sole identifying criterion. Rather, alternative narrative or stylistic identifiers are needed in order to locate the specificity necessary to characterise the Teen Movie as a genre.

Films appealing to teens during the 1960s and 1970s did not lend themselves well to a stylistic appraisal, since they typically reflected contemporary trends in youth culture. Indeed, as the political climate became increasingly charged in the 1960s, Teen Movies incorporated youth protest movements into their narratives. Likewise, taking their cue from the recent popularisation of recreational drug use, Shary observes how films such as *The Trip* (Dir. Roger Corman, 1967), adopted unusual camera angles, fast edits and unnatural colours in a bid to re-create the psychedelic experience on screen.⁵⁷

The aggressive targeting of the teen audience from the mid-1950s onwards leads Doherty to describe the Teen Movie as a type of exploitation film.⁵⁸ Observing the development of this terminology in the film industry, he notes that in the 1920s, "exploitation" simply referred to the marketing and publicity accompanying a new release.⁵⁹ The term's pejorative association with a particular category of film release occurred much later. Indeed, it was in 1956 when *Variety* defined the exploitation film as 'low budget films based on controversial or timely subjects that made newspaper headlines ... engineered to appeal to "uncontrolled" juveniles and "undesirables."'”⁶⁰ Although Doherty notes that other subjects featured in exploitation films, teenagers remained their primary target audience in all cases.⁶¹ As a consequence, more than any

⁵⁷ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 39

⁵⁸ T Doherty, 2002, op. cit., p. 2

⁵⁹ T Doherty, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 3

⁶⁰ H Hollinger, 1956, 'Teenage Biz vs. Repair Bills,' *Variety*, December 19th, quoted in T Doherty, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 9

⁶¹ For instance, Doherty cites the "blaxploitation," films, targeting African Americans, *ibid.*, p. 9

other genre, the Teen Movie became predominantly associated with the designation of exploitation film.

The origins of the Teen Movie as a low-budget exploitation film, quickly produced with little regard to style, characterisation or innovation, have had consequences for its consideration as an object worthy of close analysis. Indeed, Wood argues that of the two potential standpoints from which to examine the genre – the artistic and the sociocultural – the latter is the more productive.⁶² For Wood, the commercial success of the Teen Movie indicates its ability to reflect dominant trends in youth culture, or possibly ‘how young people would like things to be.’⁶³ Echoing Wood in justification of her socio-discursive methodology, Driscoll argues that ‘teen film is generally thought more interesting for what it says about youth than for any aesthetic innovations.’⁶⁴

In addition to, and partly as a consequence of, the Teen Movie’s exploitation origins, interest in the representation of youth at the expense of the films’ stylistic content is arguably connected to teens’ perceived vulnerability and susceptibility to the media they experience. Indeed, Hall was remarkably prescient in presaging contemporary concerns on the influence of the mass media on adolescents. Of course, writing in 1904, Hall could not have foreseen the advent of popular cinema, computer games or the internet, which dominate contemporary concerns about the influence of the media on the young. Nonetheless, he identified the print media as an area of potential concern, claiming that ‘inflamed with flash literature and “penny dreadfuls,”’ suggestible teens might be incited to commit a crime.⁶⁵

⁶² R Wood, 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 311

⁶³ R Wood, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 311

⁶⁴ C Driscoll, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 2

⁶⁵ GS Hall, 1904, *op. cit.*, p. 361

Driscoll argues that Hall's work led to concerns of the potential influence of the cinema image, contributing to the codification of the strict Hays Code in 1926.⁶⁶ Unease concerning the influence of the media continues to this day, as a recent study calls for the application of higher rating classifications for films featuring characters smoking.⁶⁷ Having monitored 6022 teenagers over a period of two years, the researchers determined that teenagers were substantially more likely to smoke if they viewed PG13 rated films featuring the activity. This example – one among many exploring the effects of the media on adolescent behaviour – continues to construct teenagers as vulnerable objects of adult regulation and concern.

The first book-length study of teens in film, David Considine's *Cinema of Adolescence*, appears to draw on discourses concerning the protection and regulation of the images viewed by vulnerable teenagers. Published in 1985, Considine deserves praise for providing such a wide ranging account of an area that had hitherto received only limited attention. However, likening cinema to a mirror, which has the ability either to reflect or to distort reality, his approach primarily concerns how teens are represented in film.⁶⁸ More problematically, there is a clear moral undercurrent to Considine's work as he describes as 'lamentable' those films that do not represent teenagers in a positive light.⁶⁹ Appearing to take up Hall's reading of adolescence as a time of particular suggestibility, Considine suggests that the distorted representation of teenagers is a missed opportunity to impart a more positive image than is typically

⁶⁶ C Driscoll, 2011, op. cit., p. 6

⁶⁷ See J Sargent, S Tankski, M Stoolmiller, 2012, 'Influence of Motion Picture Rating on Adolescent Response to Movie Smoking,' in *Pediatrics*, Vol. 130, No. 2, 228-236

⁶⁸ D Considine, 1985, *The Cinema of Adolescence*, London: McFarland, p. 9

⁶⁹ D Considine, 1985, *ibid.*, p. 273

portrayed.⁷⁰ As a result of these value judgements, Considine neglects to explore either the films' appeal to teens or their stylistic elements.

Published in 2002, Shary's *Generation Multiplex* builds on Considine's work and has contributed greatly to our understanding of the Teen Movie. Indeed, having 'viewed and analysed hundreds of films,' Shary can reasonably claim to have written one of the most comprehensive works on the subject.⁷¹ Importantly, unlike Considine who considered the representation of teenagers across a number of genres, *Generation Multiplex* demonstrates that the 'youth movie,' as Shary describes it, should be conceptualised as a genre.⁷² Noting the frequent difficulty in describing a genre based on subject matter, theme or narrative form, Shary opts for the seemingly simple designation of 'films where youth appear,' and are positioned in lead roles.⁷³ Significantly, in making no reference to an intended audience, Shary's description of the Teen Movie differs from those proffered by Driscoll and Doherty.

In order to ensure the specificity of his conceptualisation of the youth movie, Shary defines precisely at what age characters can be defined as youths. To that end, he refers to the Library of Congress' *Moving Image Genre: Form Guide*, in which films featuring characters of 12 years old and younger, such as *Stand By Me* (Dir. Rob Reiner, 1987), were designated as "children's films." At the opposite end of the spectrum, young adults portrayed in a university environment, or as in the case of *St Elmo's Fire*, (Dir. Joel Schumacher, 1985) immediately following college graduation, were deemed to be "College Films." Although Shary's definition of youth includes 12 year old characters, since this is the age at which Americans begin middle school, he

⁷⁰ D Considine, 1985, *ibid.*, p. 273

⁷¹ T Shary, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 11

⁷² T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 11

⁷³ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 17

echoes the Library of Congress' and incidentally Considine's, delimitation of youth to between 12-20 years of age.⁷⁴

Although Shary's work is undoubtedly ambitious in its aims and achievements, his principal aim 'to determine how recent generations of young people have been represented in American cinema' echoes Considine's concern for the representation of youth at the expense of an analysis of film style or narrative form.⁷⁵ Distinct from Doherty's work, which highlights the privilege of the American teenager, Shary perceives youth as a marginalised minority, and correspondingly positions his work alongside Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape*, and Thomas Cripps' *Slow Fade to Black*, which respectively explored the cinematic representation of women and African Americans as marginalised groups.⁷⁶ It is perhaps this concern for upholding the interests of youth as a distinct minority that leads Shary to deploy a number of value judgements on whether youth are seen to be portrayed in a positive or a negative light, thereby obfuscating other insights that might have emerged from more nuanced analysis of the films themselves.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, Shary is surely correct in identifying an explosion in the number of Teen Movies released in the 1980s.⁷⁸ Speculating on the reasons for this apparent resurgence of interest in the genre, he identifies the emergence of the shopping mall and the multiplex as significant sites of teen congregation.⁷⁹ Conversely, Martin contends that three significant films of the 1970s provided the catalysts for the emergence of the post 1980s Teen Movie: *American Graffiti* (Dir. George Lucas, 1973),

⁷⁴ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 17

⁷⁵ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 11

⁷⁶ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 12

⁷⁷ Shary's work identifies films as 'positive' and 'negative' on various occasions. See for instance, T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 162; p. 78; p. 140

⁷⁸ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 6

⁷⁹ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 6

Animal House (Dir. John Landis, 1978) and *Saturday Night Fever* (Dir. John Badham, 1977).⁸⁰

For Martin, *American Graffiti* is notable for its use of music to create a particular youth-oriented sonic space, and in the portrayal of private life as public spectacle.⁸¹ Of course, Lucas' film is typically associated with the 1970s 'nostalgia boom,' which looked back to the seemingly more innocent 1950s and 1960s.⁸² Indeed, writing in 1979, Monaco argued that 'the seventies have no culture of its own, no style, unless it's nostalgia.'⁸³ Although Martin notes the film's greater contribution beyond the popularisation of nostalgia, the success of *American Graffiti* led to the popular TV series *Happy Days* (ABC 1974-1984), which presented an idealised 1950s adolescence.

Secondly, Martin argues that the success of the crass *Animal House* led to a number of films featuring similarly "low" comedy, such as *Porkys* (Dir. Bob Clark, 1982).⁸⁴ Its influence continues to this day, as evidenced by the successful *American Pie* (Dirs. Paul Weitz, Chris Weitz, 1999) in the 1990s and the more recent *Superbad* (Dir. Greg Mottola, 2007). Lastly, Martin contends that the impact of *Saturday Night Fever* was felt in the film's portrayal of gritty, urban adolescence, from which its protagonist, Tony Manero, is temporarily able to escape through mastery of the dance floor.⁸⁵ Moreover, the film's distinctive Bee Gees soundtrack and John Travolta's impressive dance-led performance surely contributed to the proliferation of teen-oriented musicals in later years. Indeed, released only a year after *Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease*

⁸⁰ A Martin, 2009, op. cit., p. 9

⁸¹ A Martin, 2009, ibid., p. 9

⁸² P Grainge, 2000, 'Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes and Media Recycling,' *Journal of Comparative American Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 28

⁸³ J Monaco, 1979, *American Film Now: The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies*, New York: New American Library, quoted in T Doherty, 2002, op. cit., p. 192

⁸⁴ A Martin, 2009, op. cit., p. 9

⁸⁵ A Martin, 2009, ibid., p. 10

(Dir. Randal Kleiser, 1978) also deployed the music of the Bee Gees, and placed Travolta alongside Olivia Newton-John in a musical.

Further to *Saturday Night Fever*, Shary identifies MTV's debut in 1981 as a significant influence on the development of the teen musical in the 1980s. The impact of the music video aesthetic is readily apparent in a wave of films, such as *Footloose* (Dir. Herbert Ross, 1984) and *Flashdance* (Dir. Adrian Lyne, 1986), which often themselves spawned music videos from spin off music releases. These films incorporated a specifically recorded soundtrack and well-choreographed dance sequences without the diegetic singing typically held to be a key determinant of the musical genre. For Kay Dickinson, MTV shaped the style of 'Teen Movies' themselves,⁸⁶ describing the accelerated pace of shots and rhythmic editing styles found in many recent Teen Movies, which she argues are traceable to the music video.

Despite the continued influence of MTV, the six films that John Hughes wrote and directed between 1984 and 1987 remain central not only to the 1980s Teen Movie, but to the development of the genre as a whole. As Shary notes, 'no other director has so thoroughly affected the way that young people are shown in films.'⁸⁷ For Ann De Vaney, the success of Hughes' work can be attributed to his ability to formalise the use of specific sets of visual codes of behaviour and dress to denote different character types and social cliques in the high school environment.⁸⁸ These codes could then be transferred from film to film, by the use of a particular turn of phrase or item of clothing that had become invested with a particular character type. The most enduring of Hughes' films – and a paradigmatic example of the

⁸⁶ K Dickinson, 2001, 'Pop, Speed, and the "MTV Aesthetic" in recent teen films,' *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*, June 2001, p. 6. For instance, Dickinson cites *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, (Dir. Baz Luhrman, 1996)

⁸⁷ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 72

⁸⁸ A De Vaney, 2002, 'Pretty in Pink? John Hughes Reinscribes Daddy's Girl in Homes and Schools,' in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, op. cit., p. 203

phenomenon De Vaney describes – is undoubtedly *The Breakfast Club* (Dir. John Hughes, 1985), which presented five character types, “the brain, the athlete, the basket-case, the princess and the criminal” that still retain their currency today.⁸⁹

Particularly significant to the appeal of the Hughes' work was their ability to appropriate the mannerisms and vernacular of contemporary white, middle-class, suburban teenagers. Adult authority figures are subject to ridicule, as the mockery of ineffective or officious teachers in *The Breakfast Club*, and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Dir. John Hughes, 1986) illustrates. However, problematising this gleeful ridicule of authority, De Vaney argues that the status quo is never seen to be under serious threat.⁹⁰ Hughes' films, she asserts, provide spectator pleasure in allowing teens to negotiate a pleasurable, safe path between rebellion and conformity.

De Vaney is especially critical of the representation of femininity in Hughes' films. Although the position of women had become increasingly politicised by the 1980s, she argues that this progress is not reflected in Hughes' work. Rather, in films such as *Sixteen Candles* (Dir. John Hughes, 1984), and *Pretty in Pink* (Dir. Howard Deutch, 1986), which was written and produced by Hughes, girls are seen to perform neoconservative sex roles, most often as the “Daddy's girl.”⁹¹ Consequently, De Vaney contends that Hughes' films should be perceived as part of a backlash against the many advances made by women by the 1980s.⁹² However, she observes that many spectators who grew up watching these films recall them fondly, many continuing to view them well into adulthood.⁹³ Further, although contemporary teens cited retro irony as their chief motivation for watching these products of the 1980s, De Vaney

⁸⁹ Quoted from *The Breakfast Club*, (Dir. John Hughes, 1985)

⁹⁰ A De Vaney, 2002, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, op. cit., p. 203

⁹¹ A De Vaney, 2002, ibid., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, ibid., p. 202

⁹² A De Vaney, 2002, ibid., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, ibid., p. 203

⁹³ A De Vaney, 2002, ibid., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, ibid., p. 201

notes their unalloyed enjoyment of Hughes' films.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, she rejects the possibility that viewers perceive subversive discourses that resist these neoconservative narrative trajectories.

By the mid-1990s, a plethora of successful teen-oriented television series, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB 1997-2003) and *Dawson's Creek* (WB 1998-2003), provided filmmakers with a ready cohort of young stars, and reassured studios of the teen market's lucrative potential. The 1990s also saw a further change in the Teen Movie's conceptualisation. Indeed, Martin takes up Rick Altman's approach to film genre, in which a genre is said to be comprised of semantic elements, 'common traits, attitudes, characteristics, shots and locations,'⁹⁵ while syntax refers to the 'certain constitutive relationships' that structure those building blocks.⁹⁶ In so doing, Martin asserts that the Teen Movie possesses specific semantic elements, comprised of 'the prom, cheerleaders, snatched conversations at the school locker, the shopping mall and the juvenile delinquent gang.'⁹⁷ However, observing the teen-oriented musicals, horror films and romantic comedies that filled the multiplexes during the 1980s and 1990s, Martin concludes that the genre's syntax is always derived from elsewhere.⁹⁸

The wave of teen-oriented literary adaptations in the 1990s arguably reinforces Martin's conception of the Teen Movie. Indeed, the mid-1990s saw multiple adaptations of canonical texts, such as *Emma* (*Clueless* (Dir. Amy Heckerling, 1995)), *The Taming of the Shrew*, (*Ten Things I Hate About You*, (Dir. Gil Junger, 1999)), and

⁹⁴ A De Vaney, 2002, *ibid.*, in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, *ibid.*, p. 201

⁹⁵ R Altman, 1987, 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,' in BK Grant, Ed., 2003, *Film Genre Reader III*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 34

⁹⁶ R Altman, 1987, *ibid.*, in BK Grant, Ed., 2003, *ibid.*, p. 34

⁹⁷ A Martin, 1994, *Phantasms: Dreams and Desires at the Heart of Our Popular Culture*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, p. 66

⁹⁸ A Martin, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 34

Pygmalion (*She's All That* (Dir. Robert Iscove, 1999)).⁹⁹ The eminence of these adaptations' source texts, and their transposition to the high-school environment in which the semantic elements Martin identifies are found, can be seen to illustrate his reading of the Teen Movie as a productive tension between an original semantic and derivative syntactic level.

Refuting Martin however, Jane Feuer argues that the 'sexual coming-of-age narrative,' has emerged since the 1980s as a syntax particular to the Teen Movie.¹⁰⁰ Driscoll agrees, citing coming-of-age plots centred on graduation and loss of virginity.¹⁰¹ Indeed, although these adaptations arguably demonstrate the Teen Movie's derivative syntax, the way in which these texts are adapted calls attention to a sexual coming-of-age narrative that remains an undercurrent in their source texts. As such, Howard Davis observes that the high school, to which these texts are most often transposed, provides an apt reflection of the ritualised and self-contained environments of the original works.¹⁰² These adaptations thus provide the opportunity to explore the continuities, such as the prom as a representation of the marriage or final festival, as well as the evident differences between the two texts. Making use of the precedents set by both their literary sources and by Hollywood to create texts which at once fulfilled the generic requirements of being 'frothy and lightweight,' Wood argues that these literary adaptations aspired to the universality and insight of their literary forbears.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Robin Wood provides a list of significant 1990s teen adaptations and their adapted texts in R Wood, 2003, op. cit., p. 319

¹⁰⁰ J Feuer, 1993, op. cit., p. 125

¹⁰¹ C Driscoll, 2011, op. cit., p. 2

¹⁰² HH Davis, 2006, 'I Was a Teenage Classic: Literary Adaptations in Turn of the Millennium Teen Films,' *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 55

¹⁰³ R Wood, 2003, op. cit., p. 320

The portrayal of the teenage girl changed significantly during the 1990s. The unintentionally murderous protagonist of *Heathers* (Dir. Michael Lehmann, 1989) paved the way for representations of what Shary and Kimberley Roberts have respectively termed the Tough Girl and the Angry Girl, whose presence was felt in the mid-1990s.¹⁰⁴ Films such as *Foxfire*, (Dir. Annette Hayward-Carter, 1996), *Girls Town* (Dir. Jim McKey, 1996) and *Freeway* (Dir. Matthew Bright, 1996) depicted the teenage girl, either alone or in small groups, as fundamentally and justifiably angry at the rest of the world.

In the latter part of the 1990s and into the 2000s, the "angry girl" gradually morphed into *Mean Girls* (Dir. Mark Waters, 2004). Although both undeniably aggressive, the manner in which the Mean Girl expresses her hostility distinguishes her from the Angry Girl. In *Freeway*, for instance, Angry Girl Vanessa Lutz, is depicted physically assaulting her attackers. However, in *Mean Girls*, the rich girl clique, "The Plastics," deceive Cady, and place her in socially humiliating situations – examples of what Crick and Grotpeter defined in 1995 as "Relational Aggression," that is, 'harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships.'¹⁰⁵ There is certainly a class distinction to be acknowledged here: while Vanessa is homeless and on the run from her family, the *Mean Girls*' clique's immaculate and ever-changing clothing indicates a privileged upper-middle class background.

For Jessica Ringrose, the progression from angry girl to mean girl reflects the popularisation of postfeminist discourses.¹⁰⁶ Ringrose takes up McRobbie's reading of

¹⁰⁴ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 93, and K Roberts, 2002, 'Pleasures and Problems of the Angry Girl,' in M Pomerance and F Gateward, 2002, Eds., *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p. 217

¹⁰⁵ Crick, NR and Grotpeter, JR, 1995, 'Relational Aggression, Gender and Social-Psychological Adjustment,' *Child Development*, Vol. 66, No. 3, p. 711

¹⁰⁶ J Ringrose, 2006, 'A New Universal Mean Girl: Examining the Discursive Construction and Social Regulation of a New Feminine Pathology,' *Feminism and Psychology*, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 406

postfeminism as a state wherein ‘feminism is taken into account’ such that it may be repudiated, paradoxically revealing its continued relevance.¹⁰⁷ Postfeminist discourses, Ringrose argues, claim gendered equivalence in aggression, yet stipulate that it occurs in gender-specific forms. As such, violence is expected of an aggressive boy, while girls are said to express relational aggression through manipulation of their peers.¹⁰⁸ Consequently she argues that the “mean girl” archetype serves to constrain the acceptable behaviours of girlhood such that violent girls come to be viewed as doubly pathological: they violate the terms of femininity as well as the norms of social life.¹⁰⁹

Observing the Teen Movie today, a significant development is the re-emergence of the outsider figure, which had become unpalatable in the wake of real life high-school shootings perpetrated by individuals who had been described in those terms. Nonetheless, treating the outsider as an object of comedy, films such as *Youth in Revolt* (Dir. Miguel Arteta, 2009), and *Kick-Ass* (Dir. Matthew Vaughn, 2010), explore the dramatic potential of these figures. Reflecting their interest in marginal characters, these films possess an “indie” aesthetic, with low budgets and correspondingly low production values. The indie Teen Movie has spawned a new cohort of stars, such as Michael Cera, Ellen Page and Aaron Johnson, all of whom, in keeping with the indie film’s preference for unconventionality, are noted more for their acting talents than their photogenic good looks.¹¹⁰

Examining the history of both the Teen Movie itself, and its analysis by film scholars, this review has observed two broad approaches to the genre: those like Shary who argue that the dominant presence of teenage characters determines a film’s

¹⁰⁷ A McRobbie, 2004, quoted in J Ringrose, 2006, *ibid.*, p. 406

¹⁰⁸ J Ringrose, 2006, *ibid.*, p. 406

¹⁰⁹ J Ringrose, 2006, *ibid.*, p. 407

¹¹⁰ See MZ Newman, 2011, *Indie: An American Film Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 235

categorisation as a Teen Movie; and those like Doherty who consider an intended teen audience as more significant. Both nonetheless share a conceptualisation of the teenager that the Teen Movie features, or to whom it is said to appeal. However, Martin muddies these otherwise clear waters with his assertion that “teen” refers not necessarily to a teenager, but to a youth sensibility.¹¹¹ In doing so he observes Robert Benayoun’s list of qualities denoting youth: ‘naiveté, ideation, humour, hatred of tradition, erotomania and a sense of injustice.’¹¹² Driscoll takes up Martin’s conceptualisation of youth as a sensibility rather than a biological age, arguing that ‘not every film with the conventional content about teenagers is a teen film, and some films not literally about teenagers are.’¹¹³ Under Driscoll’s reading, *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (Dir. Judd Apatow, 2005) becomes a Teen Movie, despite centring on middle-aged characters, as the film features the humour, erotomania and the sex quest narrative commonly associated with the genre.

That Apatow’s film may be considered a Teen Movie indicates the lack of specificity in current conceptualisations of the genre. As discussed, given the importance of the teen audience to all Hollywood releases, the approach that regards appeal to the teen audience as central to determining which films can be regarded as Teen Movies is insufficiently discriminating. Further, although Shary is particularly strict in determining the age at which characters can be defined as youths, his conceptualisation of the genre as one in which those youths are predominantly featured does little to address the constituent elements of the films’ syntax. Moreover, in his concern for the films’ representation of youth, Shary does not consider whether the Teen Movie possesses certain stylistic features.

¹¹¹ A Martin, 1994, op. cit., p. 66

¹¹² R Benayoun, quoted in A Martin, 1994, ibid., p. 66

¹¹³ C Driscoll, 2011, op. cit., p. 2

Concern for the on-screen representation of youth has likewise had consequences for the analysis of gender in the Teen Movie, which primarily examines teenage girls in film. Implicitly positioned as doubly vulnerable by virtue of their gender as well as their age, work discussing gender in the Teen Movie has been particularly responsive to concerns of the vulnerability of teenage girls. Perhaps as a consequence, researchers examining the representation of girlhood, such as De Vaney, allowed little consideration for alternative readings that may contest these apparently conservative representations.

In order to determine which films will form the case studies, I will take up key elements of current readings of the Teen Movie. Primarily, I will take up Feuer's conceptualisation of the Teen Movie, as structured around a 'sexual coming-of-age narrative.'¹¹⁴ However, in order to ensure teen specificity, I also follow Shary and Considine in their delimitation of the Teen Movie as predominantly featuring characters between 12 and 20 years of age.¹¹⁵ In turn, reflecting the insights of Doherty and Driscoll, who maintain that the Teen Movie is defined by its intended teen audience, I consider only films marketed with that audience in mind.¹¹⁶

As a sexual coming-of-age narrative, the Teen Movie's very syntax portrays key moments of the assumption of gender, such as the prom, named by Martin as a key element of the genre's semantic level.¹¹⁷ Indeed, often concluding with a heterosexual romance, the Teen Movie provides narratives where the assumption of heterosexual, adult identity is idealised and naturalised. As the following sections will demonstrate, Judith Butler's work on gender provides a framework with which to analyse these moments of sexual coming-of-age. Indeed, arguing that gender is a compelling

¹¹⁴ J Feuer, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 125

¹¹⁵ T Shary, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 17

¹¹⁶ C Driscoll, 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 1

¹¹⁷ A Martin, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 66

illusion, formed of an incoherent aggregate of repeated acts, Butler crucially provides a way of denaturalising the Teen Movie's narratives of gender assumption. Performing close analyses of key examples of the genre informed by Butler's work on gender promises to foreground the labour of assuming coherent, gendered subjectivity. I will thus demonstrate that the ostensibly simple narratives of the Teen Movie possess greater ambivalence and complexity in its accounts of the normative assumption of gender than has hitherto been acknowledged.

1.2 – GENDER TROUBLE: FEMINISM AND THE SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY (1990)

This section explores Judith Butler's work since the publication of *Gender Trouble* in 1990. Firstly, key concepts from *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* will be examined, before observing how these have been taken up in the study of film. I will then assess the theorist's later work, which questions the nature of the human, ethics, responsibility and critique, focusing particularly on *Giving an Account of Oneself*, and *Undoing Gender*. Finally, I will explain which elements of Butler's *oeuvre* will be taken up in close analyses of the Teen Movie.

1.2.1 – SEX, GENDER AND THE BODY

Situating her most widely-known work on gender as an immanent critique of core feminist beliefs, *Gender Trouble* begins with a provocative attack on the notion that women are the 'rightful subjects of feminism.'¹¹⁸ Indeed, Butler is critical of the taken-for-granted feminist contention that women have suffered systematic political, social and economic disadvantage owing to a hegemonic patriarchy with a vested interest in maintaining women's subaltern status. Rather, she proposes to widen the debate, to

¹¹⁸ J Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, p. 2

explore how the categories of “woman” and “man” are constructed, and to determine what is excluded by those delimitations.

One of the key aims of what Butler describes as ‘humanist feminism,’ is to discover the origins of patriarchy, which would demonstrate the contingency of women’s oppression and so establish how it might be brought to an end.¹¹⁹ For Butler, these efforts do not succeed in destabilising these unbalanced power relations. Rather, focus on prepatriarchal possibilities in fact serves to undermine the possibility of further emancipation in the construction of a post-hoc linear narrative that sees the systematic repression of women as its inevitable result, and so as somehow justified.¹²⁰ As a result, any utopian “post patriarchy” is inevitably tempered by the retroactive critical impetus that created it.¹²¹

Key to the humanist branch of feminist theory is the differentiation between a seemingly natural, biological sex and culturally constructed gender.¹²² This distinction draws from Claude Lévi-Strauss’ raw/cooked binary, where sex occupies the ‘raw’ position, whilst gender is perceived as ‘cooked.’¹²³ Lévi-Strauss’ binary is aptly illustrated by Simone de Beauvoir’s memorable assertion that ‘one is not born a woman, but becomes one,’ apparently describing a ‘raw’ pre-cultural animating spirit that becomes ‘cooked’ into the cultural construction of womanhood.¹²⁴ Disaggregating biological sex from culturally constructed gender enabled feminists to interrogate culturally authored expectations of women, and consequently to disavow notions of a “feminine essence,” or “nature.”¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 14

¹²⁰ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, pp. 48-49

¹²¹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 48

¹²² J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 48

¹²³ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 50

¹²⁴ S de Beauvoir, 1949, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Paris: Gallimard, p. 57

¹²⁵ T Moi, 1985, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, London: Routledge, p. 92

Although Butler concedes that "woman" as an ontological category was certainly necessary to early feminist struggles for emancipation, she is critical of those who inadvertently install 'sex' as a 'pre-cultural, passive and immutable anatomical substance which precedes gender interpretation.'¹²⁶ Instead, Butler proposes to subvert the latent chronology of a natural sex subsequently morphed through culture, positioning gender as the discursive means by which sex is constructed as 'the neutral space on which culture acts.'¹²⁷ Butler's dismissal of the distinction between sex and gender as 'no distinction at all' was undoubtedly one of her most disruptive interventions.¹²⁸ Indeed, if the ontological category of "woman" is discursively produced, then 'sex' is just as constructed by culture as gender. In the terms of Lévi-Strauss, 'the raw is always already cooked.'¹²⁹

With the assertion that culture determines what manifestations of gender come to be described as "woman," Butler seeks to open up feminism to investigate how some gender identities are sanctioned while others are marginalised. She observes that a female, heterosexual, feminine woman is the only combination of sex, sexual practice, desire and gender that we recognise as a 'culturally intelligible' woman.¹³⁰ Butler deems such a coherence of gendered attributes to be an effect of the heterosexual matrix, the regulatory framework that mandates gender as a binary, heterosexual relation, such that the masculine is constructed in opposition to the feminine and vice versa.¹³¹ Although the stability of these categories appears fragile, being guaranteed only in the context of the heterosexual matrix, Butler explains that the lure of a position outside it, from which a critique of existing gender relations

¹²⁶ V Kirby, 2006, *Judith Butler: Live Theory*, London: Continuum, p. 23

¹²⁷ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 10

¹²⁸ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 10

¹²⁹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 51

¹³⁰ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 23

¹³¹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 30

might be possible, is illusory and created by the heterosexual matrix itself.¹³² As a consequence, any critique of this regulatory framework must necessarily occur within its very boundaries. Nonetheless as will become apparent, Butler argues that the very structure of the heterosexual matrix creates the possibility for its subversion.

Butler draws from Michel Foucault's introduction to the journals of the intersexed Herculine Babin in order to demonstrate the consequences of failing to present the 'metaphysical unity' of gender attributes necessitated by the heterosexual matrix.¹³³ Describing Babin's ambiguous anatomy, appearance and sexual practices, Butler argues s/he presented a combination of traits considered impossible under the heterosexual matrix.¹³⁴ For Foucault, as for Butler, what is revealing in the journals is Babin's existence not as an identity, but as 'the sexual impossibility of an identity,'¹³⁵ since his/her body and gender identity refused to present the culturally mandated coherence of sex, gender and desire.¹³⁶ Consequently, Butler argues that Babin's "incoherent" identity reveals that all gender is a series of attributes, arbitrarily ordered in order to uphold the primacy of heterosexual desire.

Proposing ways in which the heterosexual matrix might be undermined, Butler argues that a 'political genealogy' is required to create a narrative that exposes the seemingly natural as arbitrary and contingent.¹³⁷ To that end, Butler argues that gender is performative: that otherwise disparate 'acts, gestures and desire *produce the effect* of an internal core or substance on the surface of the body.'¹³⁸ In other words, rather than taking gender as the outward manifestation of an essential, inner self, gender and the

¹³² J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 42

¹³³ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 30

¹³⁴ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, pp. 32-33

¹³⁵ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p.32

¹³⁶ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 32

¹³⁷ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 45

¹³⁸ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 185, emphasis added

sexed body are a collection of acts, which together assume the illusory appearance of an innate identity. The cause/effect relation posited by the heterosexual matrix, where certain practices are said to follow from specified gender identities, is thus shown to be spurious. Rather, the identity they claim to express is merely the illusion of unity created by 'an iterative production of regulated corporeal signs.'¹³⁹ This key contribution of Butler's conceptualisation of gender is maintained throughout her work and will be significant to the readings of the Teen Movie in later chapters.

Exposing gender as a construction, performativity reveals how gender norms are created and reinforced through a specious coherence among otherwise disparate ontological attributes. Consequently, the descriptive narrative of heterosexual coherence is exposed as a 'regulatory fiction.'¹⁴⁰ Further, Butler's theorisation of gender as performative allows us to question why certain configurations of desire, sexual practice and appearance are deemed inadmissible within culture, considerations which will prove central to her later work discussing what constitutes the human.

1.2.2 – PROHIBITION, THE PHALLUS AND IDEALISED GENDER

For Jay Prosser, the way in which Butler marries Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytic accounts of the assumption of gender with Foucault's juridico-discursive conception of power, is 'the greatest achievement of *Gender Trouble*.'¹⁴¹ Fusing these paradigms, Butler's theorisation of gender rests on two central claims: firstly that discursive power produces the subjects it oversees, and secondly, that all social systems are structured through language. The latter claim echoes the work of Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss, among others, whose theorisation of culture is modelled on a universal, contained structure of

¹³⁹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 185

¹⁴⁰ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 33

¹⁴¹ J Prosser, 2006, 'Judith Butler: Queer Feminisms: Transgender and the Transubstantiation of Sex,' in S Stryker and S Whittle, Eds., 2006, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, p. 265

the type described in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. That is, a closed system of forms termed *langue*, within which the 'relational and differential' meaning of individual elements, the *parole*, is determined.¹⁴²

Butler's conceptualisation of the heterosexual matrix as the inescapable framework of culture draws on Lacan's reading of the Symbolic as the domain of language and of social life.¹⁴³ Butler also takes up Lacan's assertion that the subject's relation to the Phallus determines their role within the heterosexual dichotomy. Under Lacan's typology, the masculine position is that of possessing the Phallus, while the feminine position is equated with that of embodying the Phallus.¹⁴⁴ Some have argued as a result that sexual difference is determined by the presence or absence of the penis. One such critic, Elizabeth Grosz, argues that while Lacan enjoyed using provocative puns to illustrate his arguments,¹⁴⁵ his use of the term "Phallus" privileges the male, since it is only as a result of a conflation of Phallus and penis, that 'women can be regarded as castrated,' as lacking a male organ, rather than possessing a female one.¹⁴⁶

If however, the subject is constructed through language as Lacan contends, the Phallus should be understood not as an organ or metaphor, but as a signifier in the Saussurian sense. That is, as part of a sign pairing, in which the signifier (*signifiant*) bears an arbitrary relationship with the signified (*signifié*) with which it is affiliated.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, there is no logic or rationale for any particular pairing, nor are there fixed universal signifieds to be paired with fixed universal signifiers.¹⁴⁸ The sign operates only in the context of a wider framework of other terms. However,

¹⁴² J Culler, 1976, *Saussure*, London: Fontana, p. 19

¹⁴³ J Lacan, 1997, *Écrits: A Selection*, London: Routledge, p. 95

¹⁴⁴ J Mitchell and J Rose, 1985, *Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, London: Nolan Press, pp. 83-85

¹⁴⁵ E Grosz, 1989, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, p. 20

¹⁴⁶ E Grosz, 1990, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, London: Routledge, p. 116

¹⁴⁷ J Culler, 1976, op. cit., p. 25

¹⁴⁸ J Culler, 1976, *ibid.*, p. 25

explaining its difference from other signifiers, Lacan argues that the Phallus constitutes the 'signifier of signifiers,' representing *langue*, and the patriarchal family structure.¹⁴⁹ The Phallus thus defines the subject's accession to the Symbolic order, causing the irredeemable splitting of the subject between conscious and unconscious agency.¹⁵⁰ As a result, the accession into language is simultaneously accompanied by the assumption of a phantasmatic, gendered position.

For the subject approximating the position of possessing the Phallus, women 'as' the Phallus 'promise the recovery of *jouissance*,' the pure plenitude enjoyed by the subject prior to its accession to the Symbolic.¹⁵¹ Consequently, such a subject is idealised, and holds the key to the male subject's self-actualisation as the one who possesses the Phallus. For Jacqueline Rose, Lacan's account of female sexual identity is problematic, since if women are said to reflect male power, then woman is rendered a mere 'symptom of man.'¹⁵² However, Butler reverses this paradigm, arguing that Lacan's work implicitly illustrates the dependence of the male subject position on the female for his sense of autonomy.¹⁵³ Butler's reading recalls Alexandre Kojève's take on Hegel's master-slave dialectic, in which the master's position is paradoxically dependent on the slave's acknowledgement of their status.¹⁵⁴

For the male subject, the subject who appears to embody the Phallus seems to hold the promise of his unity. However, since the Phallus is a signifier, and both masculine and feminine positions are signified in language, neither position can be fully assumed, but merely approximated. Consequently, the search for the subject who

¹⁴⁹ E Grosz, 1990, op. cit., p. 125

¹⁵⁰ E Grosz, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 121

¹⁵¹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 60

¹⁵² J Rose, 1985, in J Mitchell and J Rose, 1985, op. cit., p. 48

¹⁵³ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 61

¹⁵⁴ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 61

embodies the Phallus will inevitably prove dissatisfying.¹⁵⁵ For Butler, the continued compulsion to approximate these impossible positions is an occasion for laughter, and that the male subject's endless search for the impossible embodiment of the Phallus, should be understood as a 'comedic failure.'¹⁵⁶

Butler argues that discursive and cultural prohibitions ensure the successful perpetuation of the heterosexual matrix. To illustrate, she takes up Lévi-Strauss' *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, in which he argues that the successful reproduction of the family structure is dependent firstly on positioning women as 'objects of exchange' between kinship structures, and secondly on a prohibition on incest.¹⁵⁷ In Lévi-Strauss' account, incest refers only to heterosexual desire between the son and the mother, where only the son is granted sexual agency. As Butler notes, universal heterosexuality and the conferral of sexual agency to the masculine subject are 'nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed.'¹⁵⁸ Lévi-Strauss positions incest as a discursive construct, even blithely remarking 'acts of incest have never been committed.'¹⁵⁹ Butler nonetheless agrees with the anthropologist that a discursive prohibition on incest exists to ensure successful heterosexual reproduction.

Butler's articulation of a discursive prohibition on incest takes up Gayle Rubin's 1975 essay, 'The Traffic of Women: The Political Economy of Sex.' Rubin argues that since cultures seek to reproduce themselves, the taboo against heterosexual incest is likewise a prohibition against homosexuality.¹⁶⁰ Butler is critical of Rubin's contention that a biologically male or female child acquires a heteronormative gender identity through cultural institutions and laws, such that prior to this transformation,

¹⁵⁵ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 62

¹⁵⁶ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 62

¹⁵⁷ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 52

¹⁵⁸ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 58

¹⁵⁹ C Lévi-Strauss, 1969, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, quoted in J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 57

¹⁶⁰ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 99

the child is said to enjoy an 'ideal and unconstrained ... sexuality.'¹⁶¹ Rather, Butler argues for a Foucaultian account of the role of prohibition in subject formation, which understands that the law is not created *after* sexuality, so as to prohibit some forms of sexuality and grant approval to others. Rather, the law should be understood to 'produce both sanctioned heterosexuality and transgressive homosexuality.'¹⁶² In other words, Butler argues that both forms of sexuality, and the very idea of a free sexuality prior to the imposition of the law, are effects produced by the law itself.

Butler takes up Foucault's contention that the law produces the subjects it oversees in her observation that the law 'creates and sustains' the subject's desire for the mother and the prohibition that forbids it.¹⁶³ For Butler, the ideal of a repressed sexuality that might flourish once the law prohibiting it has been overthrown is just as much a part of that same repressive law. Further, Butler asserts that if the incest taboo creates coherent gender identities, which are in turn dependent on heterosexuality, then homosexual desire must also be subject to a prohibition. Indeed, the existence of a coherent heterosexuality requires a coherent homosexuality that is intelligible, though forbidden. This does not mean that homosexuality is excluded from the cultural matrix of intelligibility. Rather, Butler argues that it exists on the margins of intelligibility, a position that comes to be significant to her later work.

Butler's account of the assumption of gender through prohibition takes up Freud's concept of melancholia to describe how the subject reacts to, and learns to accept the loss enforced by, the incest taboo. Indeed, in 'Mourning and Melancholia,' Freud distinguished two potential reactions to loss. Mourning refers to a finite reaction to grief that transfers the cathexis from the lost object to another, resolving

¹⁶¹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 100

¹⁶² J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 100

¹⁶³ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 104

the loss. Conversely, when afflicted with melancholia, the subject is said to incorporate the lost object into the ego through ‘magical acts of imitation’ that preserve the object and mitigate its loss.¹⁶⁴ Significantly, Freud’s account of melancholia provides Butler’s first model of the incorporation of the external world within the subject, which later becomes central to her conceptualisation of ethics.

Freud remarks that the resolution of the Oedipal complex can be either “positive” or “negative” in the sense that the taboo on incest can lead to either a same-sexed, or an opposite-sexed identification.¹⁶⁵ In his account, the subject must choose between a masculine or feminine “disposition,” and resulting object of desire, according to the ‘strength or weakness of masculinity and femininity in [the child’s] disposition.’¹⁶⁶ Freud’s vague, tautological definition of “disposition” appears only to be determined by the subject’s object choice, so that a desire for the father indicates a feminine disposition and a desire for the mother a masculine one. Butler disputes this circular definition, arguing that the incorporation of the lost love object ‘is a way of inscribing and then wearing a melancholic identification in and on the body.’¹⁶⁷ Equivalence between the interior and the surface of the body is crucial to her argument that there is no ‘facticity of the body [...] that comes to bear “sex” as its literal truth.’¹⁶⁸ Rather, the body is constructed as a psychically incorporated space. Corporeal interiority is thus indexical of the literalising fantasy of heterosexual melancholia, its incorporative response to the prohibition of homosexuality.

The internalisation of the lost love object through melancholia is also informed by the taboo on homosexuality. If, as Freud argues, the incorporated other

¹⁶⁴ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 79

¹⁶⁵ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 85

¹⁶⁶ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 82

¹⁶⁷ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 63

¹⁶⁸ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 88

goes on to form the subject's super-ego, then the melancholia of heterosexual gender identification should be understood as the 'internalisation of an interior moral directive which gains its structure and energy from an externally enforced taboo.'¹⁶⁹ As a result, the prohibition on homosexual incest might be said to 'create the heterosexual "dispositions" through which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible.'¹⁷⁰ Far from the primary, basic essence of sexual identity they appear to be, dispositions show themselves to be the cultural effects of the juridical law. As such, Butler asserts that the law 'produces sexuality in the form of "dispositions,"' which subsequently create the prohibition on incest in order to secure heterosexual reproduction.¹⁷¹ Butler thus reveals how the law transforms itself into an effective narrative that posits spurious primary entities as the origins of sexuality.

1.2.3 – SUBVERTING THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX

Throughout *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues for a critical genealogy of gender in order to expose the regulatory fiction of the heterosexual matrix and ultimately to pave the way for the acceptability of non-normative gender identities. The exposure of gender identity as performative – a contingent, arbitrary construction repeatedly and convincingly produced under the duress of discursive power – is central to this endeavour. Consequently, although Butler concedes that subversion of the heterosexual matrix must occur within its very bounds, she asserts that it is possible to 'act' gender in ways that draw attention to the contingent, arbitrary construction of the regulatory matrix in which it appears.¹⁷²

Butler asserts that gender is parodic, since it is always produced in a relation of imitation. Arguing that gender is 'an imitation without an original,' Butler invokes

¹⁶⁹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 87

¹⁷⁰ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 87

¹⁷¹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 88

¹⁷² S Salih, 2002, *Judith Butler*, London: Routledge, p. 57

Fredric Jameson's articulation of 'pastiche,' which is defined in those terms.¹⁷³ Although Jameson describes pastiche as a 'neutral practice of mimicry [...] without laughter,' Butler maintains that the loss of the 'original' as an impossible ideal can in fact be an occasion for laughter and subversive confusion.¹⁷⁴ Therein lies an important distinction in tenor from Lacan's tragic account of subject formation, in which the subject endlessly searches for a *jouissance* s/he can never again attain. As discussed, Butler argues that the subject's inevitable, perpetual failure to embody idealised masculinity or femininity should be understood as a comic phenomenon.

Exploring the possibilities to expose gender as a comedic failure, Butler takes up the work of Esther Newton whose study of camp established that 'drag subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks the expressive model of gender, and the notion of a true gender identity.'¹⁷⁵ Drag thus has the capacity to reveal the process through which disparate aspects of the gendered experience – desire, appearance, and the sexed body – are arbitrarily naturalised through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In other words, the cross-dressed performer offers the opportunity to expose the regulatory machinations of normative heterosexuality, which might otherwise pass unexamined. Significantly, in proposing drag as a means of undermining the heterosexual matrix, Butler locates the possibilities for subversion on the margins of intelligibility.

While Butler argues that drag is potentially subversive, she does not endorse the view that it is always so. Indeed, as she later observes, drag performance can merely serve to police the boundaries between male and female, and between gay and

¹⁷³ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 189

¹⁷⁴ F Jameson, 1988, quoted in J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 189

¹⁷⁵ E Newton, 1975, quoted in J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 186

straight subjects.¹⁷⁶ The subversive potential of drag must therefore depend on context and reception. However, Butler is vague on precisely which contexts and reception practices might be conducive to the cultivation of gender identities that challenge normative heterosexuality. This imprecision undoubtedly leads critics to conclude erroneously that Butler believes drag always to be subversive, and which leads the theorist to refine her work on parodic gender in relation to linguistic citation in *Bodies that Matter*.¹⁷⁷

1.3 – BODIES THAT MATTER: ON THE DISCURSIVE LIMITS OF SEX (1993)

Following the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Butler received criticism for the seeming vagueness of her definition of performativity.¹⁷⁸ Indeed towards its conclusion, performativity becomes increasingly synonymous with performance. One such elision occurs where Butler defines gender as a ‘performance with clearly punitive consequences,’ seemingly invoking a conscious agency that attempts to evade these regulatory sanctions.¹⁷⁹ The ambiguity surrounding performativity can be attributed to the disparate functions attributed to the concept in *Gender Trouble*. Indeed, performativity initially serves to expose the contingency of normative gender,¹⁸⁰ before becoming conceptualised as a model of gender formation,¹⁸¹ and finally as a potential mechanism for undermining the heterosexual matrix.¹⁸² Perhaps unsurprisingly, critics drawing from Butler’s work have either subsumed performativity within performance, or taken it as advocating a theatricalised form of gender.

¹⁷⁶ J Butler, quoted in S Salih, 2002, op. cit., p. 58

¹⁷⁷ See for instance J Phillips, 2006, *Transgender On Screen*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 128

¹⁷⁸ See for instance, M Lloyd, 1999, ‘Performativity, Parody, Politics,’ *Theory, Culture, Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 195-213

¹⁷⁹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 191

¹⁸⁰ See for instance, J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 34

¹⁸¹ See for instance, J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 185

¹⁸² See for instance, J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 186

Bodies that Matter develops and expands upon many of the theorisations found in Butler's 1990 publication. Like *Gender Trouble*, this later work also takes up Lacan's Symbolic, understands that the subject is constructed through language, and accepts Foucault's account of discursive power. Nonetheless, *Bodies that Matter* is distinct in its focus on the critical encounter between discourse and the physical materiality of gender. The "matter" of Butler's punning title refers to her focus on the materiality of the body, thus aiming to ground what had been criticised as ephemeral, cultural constructs, in the domain of the physical and biological. Moreover, *Bodies that Matter* interrogates the value respectively ascribed to subjects who occupy positions at the centre and on the margins of the heterosexual matrix. Butler's second work on gender thus provides a precursor to her later interest in how those who lie on the margins of intelligibility come to be constructed as unreal, and so less than human.¹⁸³

1.3.1 – PERFORMATIVITY, CITATIONALITY AND THE SEXED BODY

Setting out to examine the way in which materiality has been perceived as a sign of cultural construction but not itself as a construction, Butler locates the sexed body within discourse. As such the body becomes subject to discursive power and available for critical genealogy. Asserting that the body is always posited as 'prior to the sign,'¹⁸⁴ Butler questions what political interests are served by the 'presupposition of the body.'¹⁸⁵ Taking up Foucault's account of punitive practices enacted by the law, as articulated in *Discipline and Punish*, Butler notes that power is constituted in the materiality of the body of the prison and of the prisoner.¹⁸⁶ If, as Foucault asserts, 'materiality is the effect and gauge of investiture in power relations,' then successful

¹⁸³ See for instance *Precarious Life*, in which Butler questions how value is ascribed to different subjects, and how that value affects the reactions provoked by their death. In *Undoing Gender* too, Butler explores how subjects are variously constructed as human, or unreal.

¹⁸⁴ J Butler, 1993, *Bodies that Matter*, London: Routledge, p. 30

¹⁸⁵ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 30

¹⁸⁶ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 34

power operations will construct material effects as primary givens, thus masking their genealogy and allowing their perpetuation.¹⁸⁷ Consequently, despite the ability of the heterosexual matrix to pass itself off as ahistorical, this regulatory framework should itself be understood as a reiteration of hegemonic norms.¹⁸⁸

Relating her theorisation of performativity to the work of language philosopher JL Austin, *Bodies that Matter* develops Butler's conceptualisation of performativity. In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin defined the performative utterance as a speech act where 'in saying what [we] do, [we] perform the action.'¹⁸⁹ Consequently, Austin designates the performative utterance as 'the doing of a certain kind of action, the performance of which ... would not normally be described as just "saying" or describing something.'¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the utterance constitutes the event. He illustrates this idea with the marriage ceremony: 'When I say before the registrar or altar etc "I do", I am not reporting on a marriage, I am indulging in it.'¹⁹¹ Austin provides further examples, such as in gambling, where a bet is constituted of a verbal agreement, and in naming ceremonies. His illustrations explicitly contrast descriptive prose, which merely state that an action has occurred, and the performative, permanently in the present tense, which brings the event into being, indeed, it constitutes the event itself. For Butler, the examples provided by Austin are notable both for their intentionality and ritualistic qualities.

Although Austin maintains that performatives can be neither true nor false, their effect being generated regardless of any dissonance between intent and action, he nonetheless stipulates four criteria that must be fulfilled in order for the performative

¹⁸⁷ M Foucault, 1975, quoted in J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 35

¹⁸⁸ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 107

¹⁸⁹ JL Austin, 1962, 'Performative Utterances', in RJ Stainton, 2000, *Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language: A Concise Anthology*, Peterborough: Broadview Press, p. 242

¹⁹⁰ JL Austin, 1962, *How to do Things with Words*, 2nd. Ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 5

¹⁹¹ JL Austin, 1962, *ibid.*, p. 6

to prove effective. Firstly, ‘the convention must exist and be accepted.’¹⁹² Secondly, ‘the circumstances in which we purport to invoke this procedure must be appropriate for its invocation.’¹⁹³ Thirdly, ‘there must not be any misunderstanding,’¹⁹⁴ and lastly, ‘[we must not be] performing the act under duress or in other circumstances which make us not responsible for what we do.’¹⁹⁵ In other words, the utterance must be spoken by the person designated to do so in an appropriate context, the context and conventions having been determined in advance and widely accepted. If these criteria are not fulfilled, then the performative is ineffective. To illustrate, Austin supplies the example of a man who, having decided to divorce his wife, stands squarely in front of her and bellows “I divorce you!” Despite his clear intent, the man remains married to his wife as his actions do not correspond with the Judeo-Christian convention for divorce, the context in which Austin’s examples originate. As will become apparent, the legacy of convention embedded in the performative will prove central to Butler’s re-conceptualisation of performativity.

Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Austin’s work in ‘Signature, Event, Context’ highlights the citationality of the performative utterance. Indeed, Derrida observes that in order for the performative to have its intended effect, it must be recognised by its audience as ‘conforming to an iterable model [and so] identifiable as a citation.’¹⁹⁶ If we consider again the marriage ceremony of Austin’s account, we can see that legal investment in the partnership is conferred by virtue of social acceptance of the ritual being performed in a way that cites the conventions of other previously recognised partnerships.

¹⁹² JL Austin, 1962, in RJ Stainton, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 242

¹⁹³ JL Austin, 1962, in RJ Stainton, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 243

¹⁹⁴ JL Austin, 1962, in RJ Stainton, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 244

¹⁹⁵ JL Austin, 1962, in RJ Stainton, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 244

¹⁹⁶ J Derrida, 1977, ‘Signature, Event, Context,’ in G Scraff, Ed., 1988, *Limited Inc.*, Seattle: Northwestern University Press, p. 18

Derrida next turns to the “infelicities” Austin describes, where the effect of the performative fails to materialise as the speaker intended.¹⁹⁷ Importantly, Derrida argues that ‘what Austin excludes as an anomaly, an exception, or “non-serious” citation, is the determined modification of a general citationality without which there could not be a successful performative.’¹⁹⁸ In other words, the successful performative utterance paradoxically requires what Derrida terms the ‘parasitic’ – the utterance that does not possess its binding power – in order to assert itself as the authentic performative utterance. The “inauthentic” remains manifest in discourse, but is denied the investment applied to performative utterances that cite their rituals faithfully. The possibility of latent subversion contained within the performative is also apparent when Derrida argues that since these utterances are grounded in ritual, the very existence of these infelicities means that ‘every ritual is liable to every form of infelicity.’¹⁹⁹ Once again, Butler looks to the margins of intelligibility in order to articulate how the heterosexual matrix might be undermined. Indeed, subversive repetition of gender performatives will later provide Butler's model for the undermining of the hegemonic heterosexual matrix.

Drawing on Derrida's reading of Austin's account of the performative, Butler argues that ‘performativity cannot be understood outside a process of iterability.’²⁰⁰ Developing her earlier work, where performativity was conceptualised as a repeated production that created the illusion of a coherent gendered subject, Butler asserts here that it is the process of repetition itself that creates the conditions for that illusion.²⁰¹ Further echoing Derrida's work, Butler positions performativity as citational, such that the performative is understood to repeat particular conventions.

¹⁹⁷ JL Austin, 1962, in RJ Stainton, 2000, op. cit., p. 242

¹⁹⁸ J Derrida, 1977, op. cit., in G Scraff, Ed., 1998, op. cit., p. 17

¹⁹⁹ J Derrida, 1977, *ibid.*, in G Scraff, Ed., 1988, *ibid.*, p. 18

²⁰⁰ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 95

²⁰¹ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 95

It is their citationality that leads Butler to contend that performatives constitute a form of ‘authoritative speech,’ since when uttered, these speech acts perform an action and often, as illustrated by the example of the marriage ceremony, assert a binding power.²⁰² However, she disputes Derrida’s reading of the power of the performative utterance as ‘*derivée*’ (derived),²⁰³ arguing instead that its power is located in the very act of citation rather than through recourse to a prior authority. To illustrate, she provides an example of a judge pronouncing a sentence. Although it appears that the judge refers back to a previously codified law, Butler argues that it is through the citation itself that the ‘priority’ of that law is established.²⁰⁴ In other words, citation of the law creates its prior authority so that its binding power actually consists solely in its citation.

Both Austin and Derrida call attention to the constraints that limit the effectiveness of performative utterances. Indeed, Austin observes that infelicities in an utterance’s context or circumstances can prevent the performative from assuming its full effect. Conversely, Derrida argues that these ineffective performatives serve to reinforce the value of those that are constructed as authentic. Butler agrees with Derrida, arguing that such constraints ‘impel and sustain’ performativity.²⁰⁵ As noted in the discussion of homosexuality in *Gender Trouble*, performativity is shown to require a constitutive “outside,” which serves as a discursive prohibition to ensure gender performatives conform to a heterosexual binary. Moreover, Butler argues that since approximations of gender identification will always prove inadequate, the repeated

²⁰² J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 225

²⁰³ J Derrida, 1977, *op. cit.*, in G Scraff, Ed., 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 20

²⁰⁴ J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 225

²⁰⁵ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 95

effort to regulate norms stems from the anxiety that discursive prohibition might not prove effective.²⁰⁶

The discursive power with which the performative is invested is significant to Butler's distinction of performativity from performance. Indeed, 'performance as a bounded "act" is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's will or choice.'²⁰⁷ In other words, performance is conceptualised as a discrete, controlled, conscious decision, while performativity describes the process of the subject's construction through citation of gendered norms. Nonetheless, Butler is keen to move away from the prevailing binary that presents gender as either innate and fixed or constructed and so malleable. Rather, she describes gender as 'neither fully free nor fully fixed,' enabling her to acknowledge the subject's position within a discursive field of power, whilst allowing for a limited agency that allows for a potential subversion of gender.²⁰⁸ For Butler, the subject is compelled through regulatory norms, though not entirely determined by them.

1.3.2 – PROHIBITION, INTERPELLATION AND THE ASSUMPTION OF GENDER

Butler takes up Lacan's account of the castration complex, which occurs at the resolution of the Oedipal conflict, in order to understand how prohibition affects the formation of the gendered subject. Crucial to Lacan's interpretation of Freud's account is that the punishment figured in the castration trope is not carried out on a pre-existing gendered subject, but in fact 'makes a girl a girl and a boy a boy.'²⁰⁹ To summarise, Lacan asserts that the subject's initiation into language creates the desire

²⁰⁶ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 96

²⁰⁷ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 234

²⁰⁸ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 94

²⁰⁹ J Mitchell, 1985, in J Mitchell and R Rose Eds., 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 7

for the mother that cannot be acted upon. In the Imaginary, the child is placed in a dyadic relation to the maternal body, experiencing no distinction between itself, the outer world and the mother's body, existing in a state of plenitude, or *jouissance*. Subsequently, acting as paternal metaphor, the Phallus splits the dyad and propels the subject into the domain of language, to assume a position as "I". Perceiving that the father has the Phallus the mother lacks, the subject acquiesces to the father's authority. From this point, the maternal body is confined to the Imaginary, whilst the Symbolic father is internalised as ego-ideal, the precursor to the super-ego which provides the subject's overarching moral framework. The threat contained within the paternal metaphor is that of castration.

The subject's accession to the Symbolic, taking place under the Law of the Father, is likewise an initiation, or interpellation into a patriarchal kinship structure. In *Gender Trouble*, we observed how Butler drew from Lévi-Strauss' account of the structures of kinship that necessitate a prohibition on incest and on homosexuality for their successful perpetuation. In this case, *Bodies that Matter* focuses on the name as token of the subject's belonging to a particular clan. Making the subject signifiable, the name represents the subject's successful accession into the Law of the Father, and acquiescence to the castration imperative.²¹⁰

Butler argues that the imposition of a name, a form of address conferred upon accession to the Symbolic, recalls Louis Althusser's work on interpellation, in whose account a subject turning to respond to a police officer calling "Hey you!" acknowledges and compels that subject's initiation into ideology.²¹¹ For Althusser, interpellation has competing implications for the subject: although signalling

²¹⁰ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 72

²¹¹ L Althusser, 1972, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an investigation)' in A Sharma and A Gupta, Eds., 2006, *The Anthropology of the State: a Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 88

recognition as a social subject by the law, that status is qualified by the individual's acknowledgement of their subjugation under that law. Providing an everyday example of gendered interpellation, Butler highlights what she refers to as 'medical interpellation,'²¹² where a doctor declares "It's a girl!" at the birth of an infant. Significantly, Butler argues that the doctor's declaration does not state a pre-existing fact, but initiates what she describes as 'a process of girling,' wherein that subject is repeatedly interpellated into her position in the gender binary, and compelled to cite the norms of heteronormative girlhood.²¹³

Butler's re-reading of Lacan through Althusser questions the narrative Lacan provides in his account of the body's assumption of sex. If prohibition – emblematised in the figure of castration – determines the sexed identification of the subject, then the juridical law must pre-exist that subject. However, Butler argues that the body has already received a predetermining mark of sexed identification, even before it receives the mark of sex in the Symbolic. In other words, the 'law marks the body *first* with fear, [before] mark[ing] it again with the Symbolic stamp of sex.'²¹⁴ The law prepares the body for its inscription through threat. It is only once the body is marked the second time, in the Symbolic, that the body becomes a signifiable subject, and assumes a name. Paradoxically then, any narrative we might be tempted to postulate about the status of the body prior to its sexed assumption in the Symbolic, can only take place within the Symbolic itself. Likewise, any critical genealogy of the body must likewise take place within discourse.

Lacan's account of the formation of the sexed body states that male subjects identify with the position of having the Phallus, and so fear its privation through

²¹² J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 7

²¹³ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 7

²¹⁴ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 101, emphasis in original

castration. The key sanction conferred by the Symbolic is that of psychosis, the dissolution of the subject. In turn, the female subject is considered already punished with castration, embodying the very threat to the male subject's dissolution, whilst confirming for the male subject that he possesses the Phallus. If the male subject is punished with castration, and the female body is deemed to be castrated, Butler argues that any male subject resisting the laws of the Symbolic is punished with feminisation. Conversely, Butler speculates that identification with a figure of destructive, 'excessive phallicism' is the consequence of the female subject's refusal to adhere to the castration imperative.²¹⁵

The male subject's feared 'feminisation' and the figure of the murderous phallic woman that resistant female subjects face, prompts Butler to assert that the juridical imperative to cite binary heteronormative gender norms is both haunted and reinforced by the abject figures of the 'feminised fag and phallicised dyke.'²¹⁶ Dissolution of the subject is thus equated with homosexuality. Although Butler is quick to point out that those two cultural archetypes are by no means an exhaustive representation of homosexual subjects, she nonetheless maintains that the Symbolic enacts a prohibition on homosexuality.

Butler questions the need for juridical law to govern the assumption of gender identity, concluding that 'if the law compels feminine identification with the position of castration, then [it] "knows" that identification could function differently.'²¹⁷ Crucially, sexed identifications are not figured as a single event. Rather, following her earlier assertion that gender is constituted of a 'set of repeated acts,'²¹⁸ Butler argues

²¹⁵ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 102

²¹⁶ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 103

²¹⁷ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 104

²¹⁸ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p.45

here that identifications are ‘incessantly reconstituted,’²¹⁹ such that sexed identifications are ‘vulnerable to the logic of iterability,’ namely, that one of those instances of identification could fail to conform to heteronormative expectation.²²⁰ Each gendered identification is part of a trajectory of the attainment of gendered subjectivity, and interpretation of gender norms. Equally however, each identification presents an opportunity to expose the gendered norms being cited as ‘privileged’ and thus arbitrary, undermining the primacy of the norms that the subject purports to approximate.²²¹

Foucault’s argument that power produces the subjects it oversees and controls is crucial to Butler’s understanding of prohibition and discursive power in *Bodies that Matter*. For Foucault, in the process of articulating [a] prohibition, the law provides the discursive occasion for a resistance and subversion of that law.²²² In the domain of sexuality then, it’s possible that practices denigrated and prohibited under the law in fact produce the occasion for the proliferation and eroticisation of those practices. As a result, Butler proposes that the homosexual figures, whose abjection is required in order to assume gendered subjectivity, may return as erotic cathexes in the Symbolic.

1.3.3 – NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR SUBVERTING THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX

As with *Gender Trouble* before it, *Bodies that Matter* echoes Foucault in his assertion that when juridical law seeks to ‘confine, limit or prohibit some set of acts ... the law provides a discursive occasion for resistance and potential subversion of that law.’²²³ Put simply, the law is creative and formative as much as it is restrictive and prohibitive. In a similar fashion, Althusser’s “Hey You!” demonstrates the unilateral

²¹⁹ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 105

²²⁰ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 105

²²¹ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 108

²²² M Foucault, 1976, quoted in J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 109

²²³ M Foucault, 1976, quoted in J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 109

power of the law to compel fear, whilst providing ‘official’ recognition of the subject under the law. Notably, Butler points out that neither Foucault nor Althusser acknowledge the range of disobedience that might occur in the interaction between the subject and the interpellating law. Indeed, she argues that it is this very ‘slippage between the discursive command and its appropriated effect which provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience.’²²⁴

Considering how that disobedience might occur, Butler argues that the law might be refused through ‘parodic inhabiting of conformity that calls into question the legitimacy of the command.’²²⁵ That is, although the subject may appear to be obediently adhering to the exigencies of the law, in doing so in a hyperbolic, excessive manner, the law and its authority come to be undermined. Butler argues that such disobedience becomes possible as the performative creates consequences that exceed its intent. Stating that slippage always occurs between the performative’s intention and its result, she maintains that the possibilities for subverting the law are found within the very structure of performativity itself.

Moreover, as the discursive effect of incessantly reconstituted citations of idealised gender, Butler argues that gender identity is ‘at once an interpretation of the norm and an occasion to expose the norm itself as a privileged interpretation.’²²⁶ That is, since gender is a process that is constantly repeated, every single iteration holds the opportunity to expose the norm as arbitrary and contingent. Indeed, Butler argues that agency emerges in the interstices of ‘different and competing rules and variation of

²²⁴ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 122

²²⁵ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 122

²²⁶ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 108

their repetition.²²⁷ Butler thus locates the possibility of change within the very structures through which subject formation occurs.

Examining further possibilities for subverting gender norms, Butler returns to drag as a potential means of destabilising heteronormativity. With a note of caution, she asserts that heterosexual culture produces certain cross-dressing performances in order to police its boundaries against queerness. For instance, Butler cites Dustin Hoffman's performance in *Tootsie* (Dir. Sydney Pollack, 1982), where belligerent Michael Dorsey attains stardom by cross-dressing as an alter ego named Dorothy Michaels. In *Tootsie* and others like it, cross-dressing is undertaken purely for practical reasons, and discarded once it becomes an obstacle for heterosexual desire. Far from troubling normative gender, the spectator is continually assured of Michael's "true" gender identity. As a result, the status of the heterosexual matrix as an organising principle of subjectivity remains unquestioned, if not reinforced. So there is no necessary link between drag and subversion. Rather, drag is subversive only to the extent that it 'reflects on the imitative structure by which all hegemonic gender is produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim to naturalness and originality.'²²⁸

Butler's analysis of Jennie Livingstone's 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning* examines the role of "realness" in the potential for subversion in queer drag performances.²²⁹ "Realness" is assessed in the context of the drag balls in the film, the conclusion of which sees the murder of drag artist, Venus Xtravaganza. We presume Venus, as a preoperative transsexual engaged in prostitution, is murdered by one of her clients for her status as Other – as neither coherently male, nor female; neither white nor black. Her killing, Butler argues, is 'performed by the Symbolic that would

²²⁷ J Butler, 1993, quoted in V Kirby, 2006, *Judith Butler: Live Theory*, London: Continuum, p. 45

²²⁸ J Butler, 1993 op. cit., p. 125

²²⁹ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 126

eradicate phenomena that require an opening up of the possibilities for the resignification of sex.²³⁰ Butler's reading of the film highlights the costs incurred if subjects are not coherently gendered. Significantly, the type of Symbolic violence exemplified by *Paris Burning* is taken up as a central concern in *Undoing Gender*, as Butler makes the case for the reconceptualisation of the human. However, it should nevertheless be noted that Venus Xtravaganza's successful passing as a woman earlier in the film, opens up the possibility of denaturalising sex, if only within a theatrical hiatus sanctioned within the confines of the Symbolic.

1.4 – JUDITH BUTLER IN FILM STUDIES

As will be explored later in the chapter, Butler has produced further work on gender. However, it is her two earlier works, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, which have been embraced by scholars of film. As her allusions to *Tootsie* and *Paris is Burning* demonstrate, Butler occasionally illustrates her concepts with reference to film. Taking their cue from her peripheral interest in cinema, film scholars have used Butler's concepts in order to investigate the construction of gender on screen. The frequent use of visual vocabulary in Butler's work makes it particularly applicable to Film Studies. Consider for instance her assertion in *Gender Trouble* that individuals 'displaying' incoherent gender attributes risk cultural unintelligibility, or indeed that the 'appearance' of an innate gender is produced by the regulation of disparate attributes along culturally established lines of coherence.²³¹ This section explores how Butler's earlier work has been taken up in film studies, providing potential methods of engaging with the Teen Movie.

²³⁰ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 131

²³¹ See J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 189

1.4.1 – PARODY, PASTICHE, CAMP

Gender Trouble specifically cites ‘parody’ in reference to the production of gender identity and to the subversive potential of drag performances.²³² As discussed, although the notion of gender as an ‘imitation without an original’ invokes Jameson’s conceptualisation of pastiche, parody better describes Butler’s account of the comic potential of gender identity as incessantly approximated yet inevitably failed.²³³ Critics taking up Butler’s use of parody in the construction of gender fall into two groups: those who use parody as a subversive reading structure with which to read the cinematic construction of gender, and those who use parody as a category with which to define certain films.

Richard Dyer’s study of pastiche is an example of the latter tendency. Significantly, his conceptualisation of pastiche differs from the humourless version of Jameson’s account, discerning in pastiche the existence of wry self-awareness in its imitation of an already widely available cultural product.²³⁴ Discussing the pastiche Western, Dyer argues that characters appear to be ‘aware of the Western as a distinct choice with certain expectations.’²³⁵ In contrast to productions that merely ‘reflect on the promulgation of images in the West,’ the pastiche Western reveals the genealogy of this particular narrative form, examining character expectations and significant narrative structures.²³⁶

The notion of the “authentic” Western subsequently imitated by its pastiche counterparts is itself contested. Although *Stagecoach* (Dir. John Ford, 1939) is generally considered a classic example of the genre, Dyer notes that the film was viewed at the

²³² J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 192

²³³ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 188

²³⁴ R Dyer, 2007, *Pastiche*, London: Routledge, p. 8

²³⁵ R Dyer, 2007, *ibid.*, p. 94

²³⁶ R Dyer, 2007, *ibid.*, p. 95

time of its release as a modern, revisionist take on the Western form.²³⁷ The search for authenticity likewise has an impact on the construction of gender in the Western. Jane Tompkins echoes Dyer in her belief that the Hollywood Western offers the promise of ‘a translation of the self into something purer and more authentic.’²³⁸ For Dyer and Tompkins, authenticity is connected to a construction of masculine integrity, where masculine identifications are prescriptively inscribed as whole, unproblematic and self-sufficient.²³⁹ The wry self-awareness of the pastiche Western therefore offers the opportunity to question and undermine the supposed authenticity of masculinity. As such, the films can be seen to instantiate Butler’s work, which disputes gender’s purported ontology.

Dyer analyses two pastiche Westerns of the mid-1990s, *Bad Girls* (Dir. Jonathan Kaplan, 1994) and *The Quick and the Dead* (Dir. Sam Raimi, 1995). In both films, women occupy the central position often associated with an autonomous, masculine protagonist in the “conventional” Western. Dyer analyses these female protagonists in the light of Butler’s work on performativity, and Joan Rivière’s conception of femininity as masquerade, which grants a greater level of agency to the gendered subject than Butler allows.

Dyer observes how both characters effectively embody masculinity. In *The Quick and the Dead*, Ellen’s masculinity is drawn into focus by her excessively feminine performance when obliged to wear women’s clothes. Any femininity the spectator might be tempted to ascribe is offset by her confident stride and the ‘phallic gun

²³⁷ R Dyer, 2007, *ibid.*, p. 97

²³⁸ J Tompkins, quoted in E Savoy, 1999, “‘That Ain’t All She Ain’t!’ Doris Day and Queer Performativity,” in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, *Out-Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, London: Duke University Press, p. 160

²³⁹ J Tompkins, in E Savoy, 1999, *ibid.*, in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, *ibid.*, p. 160; R Dyer, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 97

concealed in amongst the lace.²⁴⁰ Significantly, male characters are also shown to aspire to an idealised archetype of masculinity, thus contesting the myth of authentic, naturalised masculinity in which the Western is so heavily invested. However, Dyer observes that although the films depict female characters taking up typically masculine roles, and in turn aping the norms of the masculine Western hero, he also notes that the masculinity of the male characters is shown to be 'not assumed but an embodiment of how they are.'²⁴¹ Indeed, he notes a number of plot contrivances that force these men to give way to their female counterparts. As such, Dyer argues that while the films appear to portray masculinity as a set of freely available behaviours to be taken up by any character, it is made clear that these actions are most appropriate for male characters, thus maintaining a belief in a necessary connection between maleness and masculinity.²⁴²

Sarah Smith likewise assesses the implications of pastiche in her work on her study of subversive repetition in the films of Tracey Moffatt. Examining *Lip* (1999) and *Love* (2003), which each deal with racial stereotyping, Smith takes up Butler's assertion that statements repeated to the extent that they become invisible must be rendered visible in order that they might be undermined.²⁴³ Examining Moffatt's films, Smith observes how the director repeatedly invokes racial stereotypes in order to reframe those images, and so encourage the spectator to question the genesis of these stereotypes.²⁴⁴ In both *Lip* and *Love*, fragments of pre-existing texts are compiled in order to form a new one. Maintaining traces of the originals, Moffatt ensures that the

²⁴⁰ R Dyer, 2007, *ibid.*, p. 115

²⁴¹ R Dyer, 2007, *ibid.*, p. 117

²⁴² R Dyer, 2007, *ibid.*, p. 117

²⁴³ S Smith, 2008, '*Lip* and *Love*: subversive repetition in the pastiche films of Tracey Moffatt,' *Screen*, Vol. 49, No. 2, p. 210

²⁴⁴ S Smith, 2008, *ibid.*, p. 210. Given her concern with race one might have expected Smith to reference *Excitable Speech*, which explores the performativity of hate speech. However, of Butler's *oeuvre*, she takes up only *Gender Trouble*.

effect of her ‘pastiche combination’ is rendered visible to the spectator.²⁴⁵ Further, the texts highlight the ‘separateness of each clip,’ so as to detract from the immersive, suturing elements of cinema and so maintain the distance from the on-screen narratives that enables critical engagement with the text.²⁴⁶ Smith thus positions Moffatt’s work as a filmic solution to the questions of subversion raised by Butler.

In contrast to Smith, who examines cultural products already marked as somewhat distinct from a mainstream body of work, Pamela Robertson takes up Butler’s work as part of a reading strategy for creating subversive effect from within mass culture itself. Robertson draws on Andrew Ross’ definition of camp: when ‘cultural products of an earlier moment have lost their power to dominate meanings and become available in the present according to contemporary codes of taste.’²⁴⁷ The use of camp as a strategy for subversion is particularly apparent in studies of cinematic spectatorship, where the term has been used to describe the distancing effect between the diegesis and the filmic spectator created by certain films, and stars.

Crucially, the ‘camp effect’ requires critical recognition on the part of spectators, so that the effects of staging and spectatorship are as important – often more so – than the performer’s intentions.²⁴⁸ Like Austin’s performative utterance, for a gender performance to be perceived as camp it must be presented by certain individuals authorised to do so, to an audience licensed to interpret it. Examining Butler’s analysis of *Paris Is Burning*, Robertson argues that camp provides a framework for feminist and queer critics to view drag performances.²⁴⁹ Indeed, in both feminist

²⁴⁵ S Smith, 2008, *ibid.*, p. 211

²⁴⁶ S Smith, 2008, *ibid.*, p. 212

²⁴⁷ A Ross quoted in P Robertson, 1999, ‘What Makes The Feminist Camp?’, in F Cleto, Ed., 1999, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.267

²⁴⁸ P Robertson, 1999, *ibid.*, in F Cleto, Ed., 1999, *ibid.*, p. 269

²⁴⁹ P Robertson, 1999, *ibid.*, in F Cleto, Ed., 1999, *ibid.*, p. 271

and queer discourses, camp has come to be associated with ‘a tradition of subverting the image and culture making processes,’ which are taken as representative of a straight, patriarchal dominant ideology.²⁵⁰

1.4.2 – THE CROSS-DRESSED PERFORMER ON SCREEN

Butler’s frequent references to drag have led her work to be taken up in the analysis of cross-dressing on screen. Literature discussing the cross-dressing comedy has tended to omit the possibility of reading these films as subversive. Dubbed “Temporary Transvestite Narratives,” Chris Straayer’s term refers to films where characters don the clothes traditionally assigned to a gender other than their own, largely out of necessity.²⁵¹ Crucial to their spectatorship is the awareness of the character’s “true” gender underneath the mask, while also believing that the disguise fools other characters within the diegesis.

John Phillips’ analysis of the cross-dressing comedy is rooted in his belief that filmic portrayals of transvestism are heterosexist, since in permitting only temporary deviations from the norm, that norm is paradoxically reinforced.²⁵² Consequently, he argues that the subversive potential of the cross-dressed performer is contained and domesticated by the dominant popular culture, which is powerful enough to absorb its meagre blows. Phillips highlights several formulaic plot constructs of the cross-dressing comedy, such as ‘the unveiling’ of feminine apparel to reveal the male body underneath, and the characters’ compulsory heterosexuality.²⁵³ These traits, Phillips contends, contain any potential subversion at a temporary, ephemeral level. Drawing on Bahktinian notions of carnival, Phillips emphasises the temporary, pragmatic and

²⁵⁰ P Robertson, 1999, *ibid.*, in F Cleto, Ed., 1999, *ibid.*, p. 271

²⁵¹ See C Straayer, 1992, ‘Re-dressing the “Natural”: The Temporary Transvestite Film,’ in BK Grant, Ed., 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 417

²⁵² J Phillips, 2006, ‘The Cross-Dressing Comedy,’ in *Transgender on Screen*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 65

²⁵³ J Phillips, 2006, *ibid.*, p. 68

asexual cross-dressed performances found in these films. Indeed, he asserts that these films provide a ritualistic release for the heterosexual economy, echoing Straayer who identifies such films as a quick 'gender fix.'²⁵⁴

As discussed, Butler is particularly critical of the representation of cross-dressing in *Tootsie*. However, Phillips asserts that the film's portrayal of Michael Dorsey's success at appropriating the norms of femininity demonstrates Butler's contention that all gender is a performance.²⁵⁵ Justifying his assertion, he highlights scenes in the film where television producers attempt to manufacture femininity and sexual desirability out of their non-telegenic star. Certainly, *Gender Trouble* does indicate that gender might be understood as a performance. However, the agency implicit in this claim is later substantially moderated. Phillips' interpretation of Butler's work reintroduces the pre-discursive body and subject endowed with the agency to assume one of a number of pre-defined gender identities.

Phillips' analysis of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Dir. Stephan Elliott, 1994) rests on his contention that Butler 'sees drag as a subversive, political act, as it shows gender to be fundamentally performative.'²⁵⁶ As discussed, Butler clarifies her position on the subversive potential of drag in *Bodies that Matter*, stating that 'drag is not a paradigm for the subversion of gender,' merely an example of it.²⁵⁷ Phillips' reading serves to adapt Butler's work to his overall thesis: that filmic cross-dressing is a ritualistic, temporary release available only to heterosexual subjects. He

²⁵⁴ C Straayer, 1992, op. cit., in BK Grant, Ed., 2003, op. cit., p. 418

²⁵⁵ J Phillips, 2006, op. cit., p. 65

²⁵⁶ J Phillips, 2006, ibid., p. 128

²⁵⁷ F Roden, 2001, 'Becoming Butlerian: On the Discursive Limits (and Potentials) of "Gender Trouble" at Ten Years of Age,' in *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2, p. 27

therefore concludes that filmic cross-dressing, 'far from subverting masculinity, [...] reinforces gender polarity through caricature and excess.'²⁵⁸

In contrast to Phillips, Jeffrey Brown's analysis of female action heroines of the 1980s and 1990s builds on Butler's view of drag as offering the potential to reveal the contingency of all gender identity. Indeed, Brown argues that earlier action films constructed the body of the female action heroine as symbolically coded male, and is thus constructed as a man in drag.²⁵⁹ For instance, he cites Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* (Dir. James Cameron, 1991), and Sigourney Weaver's Ripley in *Aliens* (Dir. James Cameron, 1986), whose muscularity and aggression, he argues, appropriate traits more often found in male characters.²⁶⁰ Quoting Susan Bordo, Brown argues that 'muscles ... continue to symbolise masculine power as physical strength, operating as a means of coding the "naturalness" of sexual difference.'²⁶¹ These characters' excessive muscularity would therefore reinforce gender difference, since they implicitly acknowledge that the only authentic expression of muscularity or aggression may be embodied by the male. However, informed by Butler's work, Brown argues that a woman bearing the hard-earned muscular body is disruptive to the heterosexual matrix, which is so strongly invested in the male coding of the muscular body.²⁶²

Brown argues that it is the conventionally feminine bodies of Maggie in *Point of No Return* (Dir. John Badham, 1993) and the eponymous heroine of *La Femme Nikita* (Dir. Luc Besson, 1990), that produce the most 'destabilising effect to normative gender categories.'²⁶³ To illustrate, in *The Point of No Return*, Brown asserts that

²⁵⁸ J Phillips, 2006, op. cit. p. 129

²⁵⁹ JA Brown, 1996, 'Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the Point of No Return,' *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3, p. 55

²⁶⁰ JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 56

²⁶¹ S Bordo, quoted in JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 62

²⁶² JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 62

²⁶³ JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 62

Maggie's combination of phallic gun and cocktail dress creates an impression that defies binary gender categories.²⁶⁴ Indeed, in the two films discussed, it is thanks to their 'passing' as feminine that both Maggie and Nikita are able to escape their aggressors.²⁶⁵ Conversely, Brown demonstrates that Maggie's femininity is shown to be artificial as her use of language shifts to indicate a subtle gender performance, rather than a reflection of an innate gender identity.²⁶⁶ Brown refers to this practice as 'dual drag:' Maggie has mastered the stylistic gestures that amount to femininity and masculinity in Western culture, but there is no original gender to which she properly belongs.²⁶⁷ Rather, these characters demonstrate that masculinity and femininity are not mutually exclusive, thus confounding heteronormativity. Brown's work thus supplies an answer to Butler's question of how subversive gender identifications might occur within the Symbolic.

With the exception of Smith, the studies discussed so far all take up Butler's work in order to analyse the construction of gender in mainstream cinema. In contrast to Butler, for whom subversion of normative gender occurs on the margins of intelligibility, Dyer, Robertson and Brown have taken up her conceptualisation of performativity in order to examine to what extent mainstream constructions of gender might be regarded as subversive. Bringing to the fore the process through which gender norms are imposed in mainstream culture, film scholars draw on Butler's work in order, to paraphrase Smith, to make visible the invisible norms that govern the normative construction of gender. As a result, Film Studies can be seen collectively to have developed an alternative take on Butler's concepts that will prove significant to my analysis of the Hollywood Teen Movie.

²⁶⁴ JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 62

²⁶⁵ JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 62

²⁶⁶ JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 65

²⁶⁷ JA Brown, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 67

1.4.3 – STARDOM

Perhaps stars themselves are the ultimate expressions of performativity. For Butler, gender is constructed through iterative approximations of a norm. Likewise, star persona is produced as the result of an actor's repeated performance of a certain type of role. Consequently, many film scholars have taken up Butler's work to analyse stardom and performance in cinema.

A significant example of such scholarship is provided by Martin Shingler, whose essay reads Bette Davis' stardom and performance through Butler's theorisation of drag. Rather than analysing the productions for which Davis is famous, such as *All About Eve* (Dir. Joseph L Mankiewicz, 1950) or *Now Voyager* (Dir. Irving Rapper, 1942), Shingler focuses on less critically-acclaimed roles in which Davis appears to take femininity to an extreme. As Miss Moffat in *The Corn is Green* (Dir. Irving Rapper, 1945) for instance, he observes how Davis, with her voice pitched unusually high, approaches the foolish Squire 'with her head lowered deferentially to one side and her hand placed melodramatically over her heart.'²⁶⁸ For Shingler, Miss Moffat's swift change in demeanour following the squire's departure and her comment to her companion that she has effectively deceived him, means that her performance should be considered as masquerade.²⁶⁹

Shingler explores the effect of Davis' stardom on the interpretation of her performances noting that the star had previously played women who 'were as masculine as they were feminine.'²⁷⁰ Conversely, as Fanny in *Mr Skeffington* (Dir. Vincent Sherman, 1944), Davis is said to render the character incredible through excessively feminine costume and falsetto voice. Shingler takes up Butler's work to

²⁶⁸ M Shingler, 1995, 'Masquerade or Drag? Bette Davis and the Ambiguities of Gender,' *Screen*, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 180

²⁶⁹ M Shingler, 1995, *ibid.*, p. 180

²⁷⁰ M Shingler, 1995, *ibid.*, p. 181

discuss whether Davis' performances in *The Corn is Green* and *Mr Skeffington* constitute masquerade or drag. That is, whether Davis disguises or displays her masculinity. He concludes that drag is the more likely effect of Davis' performance, since he finds no motive for the defensiveness associated with female masquerade. Shingler's conceptualisation of an "innate" masculinity that is either concealed or exposed differs from Butler, whose theorisation of performativity disputes the ontology of gender. Nonetheless, his study remains useful for his analysis of individual gestures and as a demonstration of how Butler's work allows for a reading that observes a multiply layered performance of gender. Additionally, Shingler's study explores the effects of a performer cast against type, where the role works against a star's established persona.

Eric Savoy takes up Butler's work to analyse Doris Day's performance in *Calamity Jane* (Dir. David Butler, 1953). Rather than performing a close reading of Day's performance gestures, as Shingler does, Savoy uses examples from the film as a platform from which to analyse Day's stardom through queer theory. Central to Savoy's study is Butler's conceptualisation of performativity as bearing an iterative structure, which allows for 'gaps and fissures' to open up in its construction.²⁷¹ These gaps and fissures, Savoy argues, allow Day's performance to be read in a way that allows for 'lesbian visibility and reception practices.'²⁷² The song "A Woman's Touch," for instance, can be simultaneously construed as a paean to the female domestic role, or literally as a female erotic touch.²⁷³

Savoy is conscious of his retrospective stance as he examines Day's star persona, and notes her tendency, between 1949 and 1959, to display performance gestures that went against the otherwise heteronormative narrative trajectory of the

²⁷¹ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 10, quoted in E Savoy, 1999, op. cit., in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, op. cit., p. 158

²⁷² E Savoy, 1999, ibid., in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, ibid., p. 167

²⁷³ E Savoy, 1999, ibid., in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, ibid., p. 173

films in which she featured.²⁷⁴ To illustrate, Savoy cites *Young Man With a Horn* (Dir. Michael Curtiz, 1950) where, though purportedly a love triangle film, the importance of Kirk Douglas' character gradually fades to leave only Lauren Bacall and Day as a potentially lesbian couple.

Further, Savoy takes up Butler's work to assert that gender trouble might be instantiated as 'genre trouble.'²⁷⁵ Indeed, since *Calamity Jane* is neither fully a Western nor unambiguously a Musical, Savoy speculates that such a generic tension might affect the construction of gender on screen. For instance, he argues that the Western's concern with (masculine) authenticity and integrity comes to be undermined by the Musical's tendency for 'campy excess.'²⁷⁶ Day's ambivalent performance can consequently be attributed to this uncomfortable mix of generic traits. Additionally Savoy turns to Butler's work to argue that Day's persona provides an example of 'a refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity.'²⁷⁷ Although her performance confounds the film's heteronormative narrative trajectory, it cannot be said to entirely negate or be complicit with the film's narrative. Savoy's study is notable for his consideration of how generic convention might influence how audiences interpret a star's performance.

Robert Shail's analysis of Dirk Bogarde begins with a lament on the paucity of literature examining masculinity from a Butlerian perspective. Despite the deeply held associations between masculinity and authenticity, Shail notes that Butler considers masculinity and femininity equally as constructions. Consequently, he is keen to demonstrate the ways in which her work might be used to examine 'the changing

²⁷⁴ E Savoy, 1999, *ibid.*, in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, *ibid.*, p. 157

²⁷⁵ E Savoy, 1999, *ibid.*, in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, *ibid.*, p. 159

²⁷⁶ E Savoy, 1999, *ibid.*, in E Hanson, Ed., 1999, *ibid.*, p. 159

²⁷⁷ J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 122, quoted in E Savoy, 1999, *ibid.*, in E Hanson, Ed., *ibid.*, p. 160

constructions of masculinity within a given historical context.²⁷⁸ Although he is interested in Bogarde's career as a whole, Shail focuses on the star's performance in *Victim* (Dir. Basil Dearden, 1961) as a masquerade of masculinity.²⁷⁹ Observing that Bogarde's performance in *Victim* was notably distinct from those of his earlier films while under contract at Rank, Shail speculates that the progression to character actor provided an arena in which dominant cultural values could be undermined. While Shail is principally concerned with the processes through which audiences identify with a star, his study is useful for its focus on masculine stardom and resulting recognition that Butler's work could be taken up outside of feminist and queer studies. Moreover, Shail's study of stardom across a period of time, and the fluidity of gendered identities he observes, are likewise significant to this thesis.

These three authors use Butler's concepts in order to perceive how star performances may work against the conservative narratives of the films in which those actors appear. In the light of Butler's focus on the prohibition on homosexuality, particularly in *Gender Trouble*, it is revealing that these critics have chosen to focus on Classical Hollywood film where, amongst other sociocultural factors informing their production, homosexuality was illegal. These analyses nonetheless point to the inherent ambiguity and intertextuality of stardom and star performance.

1.5 – JUDITH BUTLER POST *BODIES THAT MATTER*

Although only *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* have been taken up in film studies, Butler has since written a further eight single-authored books: *Psychic Life of Power* (1997), *Excitable Speech* (1997), *Antigone's Claim* (2000), *Undoing Gender* (2004), *Precarious Life* (2004), *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), *Frames of War* (2009), and most recently,

²⁷⁸ R Shail, 2001, 'Masculinity and Visual Representation: A Butlerian Approach to Dirk Bogarde,' *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 96

²⁷⁹ R Shail, 2001, *ibid.*, p. 103

Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism (2012). In what follows, I will outline their key arguments and explore how they build on, or differ from, those of Butler's earlier work on gender.

Published in 1997, *The Psychic Life of Power* revisits the account of gender identification as a form of melancholia that Butler had previously elaborated in *Gender Trouble*. Aiming to build a bridge between the work of Freud and Lacan on the one hand, and Nietzsche and Foucault on the other, Butler proposes that the subject is not only constituted through discourses of power, but is also reliant on them, in a form of subjection.²⁸⁰

In their overview of Butler's *oeuvre*, Anita Brady and Tony Schirato argue that following *The Psychic Life of Power*, the theorist moves away from addressing the construction of gender and subjectivity, to a consideration of the 'processes and techniques that characterise symbolic violence.'²⁸¹ Expanding on her earlier re-framing of performativity within Austin's account of speech acts, *Excitable Speech* provides a key example of this shift. Published in 1997, *Excitable Speech* discusses hate speech as examples of the performative utterance and investigates whether legislation should prohibit such speech acts. Although observing the evident injury caused by hate speech, Butler concludes that laws advocating censorship paradoxically further the very discourses such rules endeavour to suppress.²⁸² Three years later, *Antigone's Claim* revisits the prohibition on incest that, following Lévi-Strauss, was central to the accounts of the assumption of gender provided by Freud and Lacan, and which forms the basis for Butler's articulation of the process. Investigating the implications of taking Antigone, rather than Oedipus as the starting point for the formation of

²⁸⁰ J Butler, 1997, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 2-3

²⁸¹ A Brady and T Schirato, 2011, *Understanding Judith Butler*, London: Routledge, p. 91

²⁸² J Butler, 1997, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, London: Routledge, pp. 18-19

gendered subjectivity, Butler proposes a model of kinship that does not assume a heterosexual relation.

Butler's more recent, politically motivated work investigates what constitutes the "human," discussing how certain subjects come to be constructed as culturally intelligible, and others as unintelligible, even unreal. For Moya Lloyd, these concerns are presaged in *Bodies that Matter*, where Butler briefly explores abjection, and considers the multiple elements – beyond gender – that contribute to the construction of certain subjects as abject.²⁸³ Published in 2004, *Precarious Life* provides five essays reflecting on the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001. Taking up the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Butler argues that the destruction of the World Trade Centre does not justify the subsequent military engagement in Iraq. Five years following *Precarious Life*, *Frames of War* presents a collection of talks and essays discussing media representations of war. For Butler, those who are killed by American and allied military forces are constructed as not fully human in the media. Denied recognition as subjects, Butler argues that it is not possible to grieve for the lives of opposition forces lost in the conflict.²⁸⁴ More recently, *Parting Ways* provides a discussion of the contemporary meanings of Judaism. Discussing the perennial Arab-Israeli conflict, Butler asserts that the concept of Zionism must change so as to recognise the Palestinians' equal claim to a spiritual homeland.

Grounded in the ethics of contemporary politics, these later works subsume the discussion of gender into the broader question of the human, rendering them less relevant to my analysis of the construction of gender in the Teen Movie. I will now explore two of Butler's other later works, *Giving an Account of Oneself* and *Undoing*

²⁸³ M Lloyd, 2007, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics*, Cambridge: Polity, p. 137; Butler's brief consideration of the abject in *Bodies that Matter* occurs on p. x

²⁸⁴ See for instance J Butler, 2009, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, London: Verso, p. 75

Gender, published in 2005 and 2004 respectively, in more detail. *Giving an Account of Oneself* is typical of Butler's later work in not specifically addressing the construction of gender. However, the arguments put forward there encapsulate her conceptualisation of ethics and politics such that it warrants consideration here. Since *Undoing Gender* presents a return to Butler's earlier interest in the construction of gender, I will examine this work in more detail, considering the continuities and differences from her earlier theorisation of gender, and indicate how it will be taken up in the later analysis of the Teen Movie.

1.5.1 – GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF ONESELF

Published in 2005, *Giving an Account of Oneself* constitutes Butler's first foray into moral philosophy, and establishes an ethical, non-violent mode of responsibility based on a primary relation to the other. As Butler acknowledges, *Giving an Account of Oneself* is influenced by the work of an eclectic range of philosophers, including Emmanuel Levinas, Jean Laplanche and Theodor Adorno.²⁸⁵ However, a degree of continuity with her earlier work is signalled by the evident influence of Hegel and Nietzsche, Lacan's conceptualisation of the linguistic construction of the subject, and Foucault's account of juridical power.

Butler opens with the contention that any attempt by the subject to tell its story – to give an account of itself – will inevitably result in failure, as the subject is unable to narrate its own origins. This opacity to oneself, she argues, occurs as a result of two interrelated factors: the prevailing matrix of norms into which the subject is inaugurated, and the subject's origins themselves. Both factors demonstrate the impossibility of the subject establishing a relation to itself that is not also a relation to the other.

²⁸⁵ J Butler, 2005, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York: Fordham University Press, p. 135

Firstly, Butler argues that when the subject tries to give an account of itself, and in so doing, narrate its own emergence, he or she finds themselves already implicated in a matrix of norms.²⁸⁶ Evidently, the conception of a discursive matrix of intelligibility bears similarities to the heterosexual matrix of Butler's earlier work. Further, invoking the terms in which gender performativity was articulated in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler argues that this matrix of norms 'precedes and exceeds' the subject.²⁸⁷ Existing prior to the subject's emergence, these norms supply the conditions by which subjectivity is negotiated such that in order to maintain cultural intelligibility, the subject must establish a relation to these norms.

Butler takes up Foucault's account of self-reflexivity to assert that 'any relation to the regime of truth will at the same time be a relation to myself.'²⁸⁸ As a consequence, the subject's attempt to narrate the story of its origins has the potential to jeopardise its very existence. Explaining this point, Butler states that norms, being historically constituted and arbitrary, are certainly able to transform over time, and should not therefore be considered essential or fixed. However, in order for norms to become naturalised, that contingency and temporality must be denied. Indeed, considering the historical origins of the prevailing matrix of social norms leads to questioning 'what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate.'²⁸⁹ Since norms sustain intelligible subjectivity, the subject's attempt to provide an account of its emergence – thereby calling up the repressed history of the prevailing matrix of norms – presents a significant risk to the subject's intelligibility.

²⁸⁶ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 8

²⁸⁷ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 9; Butler describes performativity as that which precedes and exceeds the will of the performer in *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, p. 95

²⁸⁸ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 22

²⁸⁹ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 23

The second factor preventing the subject from giving an account of itself is what Butler describes as the subject's primary opacity and relationality. In order to articulate how the subject is inaugurated through a relation to the other, Butler takes up the psychoanalytic accounts of subject formation offered by Jean Laplanche and Emmanuel Levinas. In Laplanche's theorisation, an infant's subjectivity emerges as a result of the 'overwhelming, enigmatic' impressions made by the adult world.²⁹⁰ Indeed, Laplanche argues that although the infant must be open to the adult world in order to secure its basic needs, openness also entails exposure to the adult world of unconscious sexuality. This overwhelming, unmasterable exposure creates lasting impressions, which Laplanche describes as primary trauma. The infant subsequently represses this trauma, or rather, a 'thing-representation' of those primary impressions, and in so doing, institutes what comes to be understood as the unconscious.²⁹¹ Since this inaugurating address is repressed, the subject cannot hope to provide an account of its origins.

Reflecting on Laplanche's account, Butler argues that a relation of trauma causes an originally external object to be installed as the unconscious, deemed the source or cause of sexual drives. These drives then, should not be understood as primary, but are the result of the internalisation of the enigmatic desires of the other, carrying with them the residues of these originally external desires. Consequently, that which the subject calls "their" unconscious is not theirs alone, but is always partly constituted by the desires and impressions of the other. Since the subject is inevitably 'besieged and engulfed' by the other from the moment of its inauguration, Butler

²⁹⁰ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 71

²⁹¹ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 72

argues that the subject's attempt to provide an account of themselves as an autonomous individual will prove impossible.²⁹²

The subject's primary relation to the other is central to Butler's attempt to establish a new conception of responsibility, based not on self-preservation or individual agency, but on that very vulnerability to the other. In doing so, she turns to the work of Levinas, whose *Otherwise than Being* supplies an account of responsibility based on the subject's fundamental susceptibility to the actions of the other.²⁹³ Levinas' description of the formation of the subject echoes much of that provided by Laplanche. Like Laplanche, Levinas argues that the subject is formed through the address of the other. Further, much like Laplanche's description of the overwhelming address of adult sexuality toward the infant, Levinas argues that the primary address through which the subject emerges is one of 'persecution.'²⁹⁴ That is, a relation that is 'unwilled' and that cannot be changed.²⁹⁵

For Butler, Levinas' account is significant for describing the subject's unwilled persecution by the other. Indeed, following Levinas, she argues that primary susceptibility should be understood as an ethical resource, since it establishes the subject's founding vulnerability to the other, who inflicts that inaugurating persecution.²⁹⁶ As such, Butler demonstrates her opposition to violence in the name of self-preservation or revenge. Although acknowledging that "responsibility" is typically associated with notions of individual agency and freedom, Butler argues that the subject's primary relationality connects the life of the subject with that of the other, such that 'one cannot preserve one's own death at the expense of the other without

²⁹² J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 74

²⁹³ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 87

²⁹⁴ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 87

²⁹⁵ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 88

²⁹⁶ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 91

the other's death implicating me in my own.²⁹⁷ Consequently, the subject cannot hope to disavow its founding sociality.

In order to conceptualise how the subject's primary susceptibility might constitute a new mode of ethics, Butler next turns to Adorno who, like Levinas, ascribes responsibility as the domain of the injured party. Examining Adorno's claim that 'he who is rebuffed becomes human,' Butler notes the inevitability of injury in the process of becoming human.²⁹⁸ However, Adorno further argues that 'in the innermost blindness of love ... lives a demand not to be blinded,' identifying a degree of resistance to the subject's seemingly unavoidable injury by the other.²⁹⁹ Nonetheless, Butler maintains that any efforts at self-preservation deny the subject's primary sociality, and are thus doomed to failure.

Butler argues that the value of Adorno's work for a new conception of ethics emerges from the tension he identifies between the compulsion to defend oneself against the injuries of the other, and resistance to that very compulsion.³⁰⁰ In contrast to existentialist claims deeming the human self-defined and self-asserting, Adorno claims the human consists of self-restraint, from the very failure to assert a right not to be subject to injury from the other.³⁰¹ Indeed for Adorno, the very assertion of one's right not to be treated badly constitutes the "inhuman." Constructed as a compulsion that the subject must resist, it appears that the inhuman is not the opposite of the human, but rather, exists within it, providing an 'immanent critique' of the human.³⁰²

²⁹⁷ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 75

²⁹⁸ T Adorno, 1974, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, London: Verso, p. 164; quoted in J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 102

²⁹⁹ T Adorno, 1974, *ibid.*, p. 164, quoted in J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 102

³⁰⁰ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 103

³⁰¹ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 105

³⁰² J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 106

Butler thus argues that the inhuman should be understood as the means through which the subject becomes human.

Adorno's account of ethics and responsibility is implicated in a wider discussion of sociality. Indeed, he states 'the quest for a good life is the quest for the right form of politics,' indicating a move from a consideration of the individual to a collective engagement.³⁰³ Although arguing for the creation of new modes of subjectivity, he dismisses the prospect that new norms might stem from individual creativity.³⁰⁴ In contrast, Butler observes Foucault's contention that individual subjectivities may challenge the primacy of the prevailing social norms. When these norms are tested by subjectivities that dispute their claim to universality, they are shown to be 'malleable and replicable,' and so undermined.³⁰⁵ Evidently, as indicated earlier, challenging social norms poses a significant risk to the intelligibility of the subject. However for Butler, a willingness to take this risk is the logical extension of the subject's responsibility to the other, indeed, is 'our chance of becoming human.'³⁰⁶

The demand to give an account of oneself requires that individual to examine how it came to be established as a speaking subject. This inevitably proves impossible, since the inauguration of the subject precedes its emergence in language and consequently, the ability to speak as an "I." Butler establishes that the subject does not come into being without the address of the other, and emerges into a wider domain of norms. The subject's primary sociality, which it seeks to deny or curb when injured by the other, cannot be willed away. Rather, Butler argues that ethical responsibility consists not of subjecting the other to violence, or otherwise to shore up one's self-

³⁰³ T Adorno, 2001, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 176, in J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 133

³⁰⁴ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 133

³⁰⁵ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 133

³⁰⁶ J Butler, 2005, *ibid.*, p. 136

sufficiency, but to resist these compulsions and accept the founding vulnerability to the other. Moving from a consideration of the individual to a broader discussion of social life, Butler finally argues for a more expansive conceptualisation of normativity that will recognise the broadest possible range of subjects as “human.” Crucially, *Giving an Account of Oneself* subsumes gender into a broader account of the human. Since this project is specifically engaged in analysing the construction of gender in the Teen Movie, this work will not be taken up in the film readings later in the thesis.

1.5.2 – UNDOING GENDER

Published in 2004, *Undoing Gender* returns to the questions of sex, gender and sexuality initially explored in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*. Unlike those two works, *Undoing Gender* does not present a single, sustained thesis, but instead provides a collection of essays detailing how Butler’s thoughts on gender have since developed.

Significantly, Lloyd argues that the majority of the positions established in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* remain intact.³⁰⁷ Nonetheless, in a subtle shift in emphasis from her earlier work, *Undoing Gender* does much to remind us that, as the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* pointed out, ‘there is a person here.’³⁰⁸ Indeed, perhaps partly in response to Martha Nussbaum’s bruising critique of Butler as lacking concrete, collective strategies for social reform,³⁰⁹ *Undoing Gender* focuses on real, lived experience and activism, as evidenced in discussions of same-sex marriage and coercive surgery on intersex children. Further, Butler discusses events and encounters from her own life that have prompted her views to develop.

³⁰⁷ M Lloyd, 2007, op. cit., p. 136

³⁰⁸ J Butler, 1999, ‘Preface,’ in J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. xvii

³⁰⁹ MC Nussbaum, 1999, ‘The Professor of Parody: The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler,’ *The New Republic*, February 1999, 37-45, accessed at <http://hagocratfiles.wordpress.com/2012/06/nussbaum-martha-professor-parody.pdf> on April 13th 2013

In *Undoing Gender*, as in much of her later work, Butler seeks to situate gender as one contingent norm among many that together constitute the “human.” Indeed, she identifies a complex nexus of attributes that regulate the subject’s recognition as human, and as shall be explained, liveability. These are ‘race, the legibility of that race, morphology, the recognition of that morphology, its sex, the potential verifiability of that sex, ethnicity and the categorical understanding of that ethnicity.’³¹⁰ As such, *Undoing Gender* attempts to articulate a more obviously global project than the tacitly Western contexts of either *Gender Trouble* or *Bodies that Matter*.³¹¹ Nonetheless, blind spots remain, as Butler continues to neglect social class as an index of subjectivity.

This conceptualisation of the human leads Butler to distinguish two senses of life, such that the term denotes not only the fact of existence, but also the ‘minimum conditions of liveability’ defined as cultural legibility under the prevailing matrix of social norms.³¹² Arguing that these two senses of life are interlinked, Butler takes up Hegel’s argument which, following Spinoza, states that ‘if we are not recognisable, then it is not possible to persist in one’s own being.’³¹³ Articulated in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes recognition as a reciprocal process, wherein the subject and the other are constructed as offering and receiving recognition for each other.³¹⁴ Just as in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, this dyad must have recourse to a pre-existing, shared set of norms that stipulate the frame of reference for the human.

Butler is interested in what happens when the subject encounters an other that incorporates norms in such a way as to challenge their viability, or that falls outside of the established norms of intelligibility. Indeed, through her work on the board of the

³¹⁰ J Butler, 2004, ‘Introduction: Acting in Concert,’ in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 7

³¹¹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 9

³¹² J Butler, 2004, ‘Beside Oneself; On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,’ in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 39

³¹³ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 31

³¹⁴ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 31

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission in San Francisco, Butler observed the results of numerous acts of violence suffered by those who were deemed culturally unintelligible. This type of violence is arguably exemplified by the murder of Venus Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning* who, Butler contends, is killed for her gendered and raced incoherence.³¹⁵ For Butler, these acts of violence occur when, upon encountering an other whose existence troubles the prevailing social norms, the subject seeks to negate and destroy the challenge that this other represents.³¹⁶

The unintelligibility of those whose morphology, gender and ethnicity fall outside of the prevailing matrix of norms categorises these subjects as unreal: the ‘other against whom the human is made.’³¹⁷ Although activism typically seeks to overcome oppression in one form or another, Butler argues that the task facing activists is significantly greater. Indeed, while to be oppressed is to be the ‘visible but suppressed’ other for the master subject, to be unreal is to be culturally unintelligible, and thus an impossibility under the laws of culture and language.³¹⁸ Violence committed against those who are deemed unintelligible is not recognised: it ‘leaves a mark that is no mark.’³¹⁹ Consequently, activism must work to redefine the category of the human.

Butler’s belief that a relation of recognition is essential to the task of reworking the category of the human leads her to Adriana Cavarero’s ethical account of the encounter with difference. In the place of a violent response, which refuses the challenge to rethink the conception of the human, Cavarero argues that when faced with the other, the subject should ask “who are you?” a question that allows for

³¹⁵ See the discussions of *Paris is Burning* in section 1.3.3. See J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 131 for Butler’s discussion of the murder of Venus Xtravaganza.

³¹⁶ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 34

³¹⁷ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 30

³¹⁸ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 30

³¹⁹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 25

unknowingness about the other, without foreclosing its challenge to the subject's own intelligibility.³²⁰ Although Cavarero's intervention provides a way in which alterity might be encountered in a non-violent way, Butler characteristically maintains it is the norms of intelligibility themselves that must be the focus of political change. Taking up Foucault's contention that 'it is necessary to look for the conditions by which the object field is constituted and the limits of those conditions,'³²¹ Butler argues that the unreal presents a challenge to the prevailing matrix of norms, as demonstrated by the violence with which those deemed unreal are frequently met.

Butler provides potent examples that demonstrate how the unreal might open up the prevailing matrix of norms and so establish greater possibilities for liveability. Indeed, she examines the case of David Reimer whose complicated life story came to be used as an allegory for competing and flawed theories of gender. Following a bungled circumcision, Reimer underwent surgery to remove his remaining genitalia, and was raised as a girl. Despite repeated monitoring and encouragement of Reimer's – now Brenda's – assimilation of femininity, she proved resistant. Seeking alternative medical advice soon after puberty, Reimer discovered she was chromosomally male, and accepted a proposal to undergo further surgery and live as a man.³²²

Reimer's story has been taken up as an exemplar for two competing theories of gender. While his initial doctor, John Money, used Reimer as a test case for his belief that gender was socially constructed and malleable, Milton Drummond, the physician to whom he later turned, argued that Reimer's resistance to assimilating femininity demonstrated that gender is chromosomally determined and so innate.³²³

³²⁰ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 35

³²¹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 27

³²² J Butler, 2004, 'Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality,' in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 59

³²³ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 66

Refuting both theories, Butler notes that in each case, their premises are contradicted by the means by which they are implemented. Malleability is shown to require forceful imposition and careful monitoring, while supposed naturalness must be sought artificially, through surgery and other medical means.³²⁴

For Butler, the central element of interest of Reimer's story is found in his own testimonies, in which he recounts the acute discomfort in femininity that contributed to his decision to transition as a man. In interviews with psychiatrists some years after his transition he states

"I thought I was a freak or something ... I looked at myself and said I don't like this type of clothing, I don't like the types of toys I was always being given. I like hanging around with the guys and climbing trees and stuff like that and girls don't like any of that stuff."³²⁵

Reimer's account demonstrates a distinct awareness that certain types of behaviour count as evidence for the assimilation of or divergence from, the norms of femininity. For Butler, Reimer's heightened awareness is caused by the intense, normalising scrutiny to which he was subjected during his childhood.³²⁶ Indeed, she observes that Reimer's testimony sees him situating himself within a particular framework of norms in which he falls short of expectations.

Butler takes up Reimer's case to argue that the norms governing intelligible gender ought to be opened up so that infants presenting with mixed genital attributes, for instance, are recognised as human. Indeed, Butler notes research indicating that a large proportion of individuals are chromosomally various, suggesting the falsity of

³²⁴ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 66

³²⁵ M Diamond and K Stigmundsen, 1997, 'Sex Reassignment at Birth: A Long Term Review and Clinical Implications,' *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, No. 151, p. 299, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 68

³²⁶ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 67

coherent, binary gender.³²⁷ Nonetheless, the founder of the Intersexed Society of North America, Cheryl Chase, maintains that the medical profession ‘can’t conceive of leaving someone alone.’³²⁸ Consequently, in continuing to subject infants to coercive surgery, the medical profession perpetuates the normalisation of a sexed binary, and thus the dehumanisation of individuals whose existence contests that binary.

For Butler, Reimer’s testimony situates him at the very limits of the human, such that he is able to offer a critical perspective on the norms of intelligibility. For Butler, ‘distance from the knowably human ... operates as a condition of critical speech.’³²⁹ Consequently, Reimer’s story can be seen to exemplify Butler’s model for the subversion of normative gender, wherein only those on the margins of intelligibility are seen to possess the critical perspective required to subvert the prevailing matrix of norms. Additionally, noting the work of intersex activists who campaign against coercive surgery on intersexed children, Butler argues that Reimer’s case demonstrates the need to open up the norms of intelligibility such that a greater number of subjects might be recognised as human.³³⁰ As was observed in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, questioning the prevailing matrix of norms puts the intelligibility of the subject at risk. Nonetheless, Butler maintains that openness to the unknowable possibilities presented by rethinking the human is essential to ensure liveability for the widest possible range of subjects.³³¹

While much of *Undoing Gender* argues for the expansion of social norms to recognise a wider permutation of subjects, Butler does observe the potentially

³²⁷ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 65

³²⁸ C Chase, 1998, ‘Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism,’ in *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 191, quoted in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 64

³²⁹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 72

³³⁰ J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, in J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 37

³³¹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 39

problematic consequences that can occur as a result of the ‘ambivalent gift’ of normalisation.³³² Discussing the recent legislative successes of same-sex marriage, Butler, though supportive of those who wish to marry, is concerned that the extension of marriage as a norm may further delegitimise forms of relationship that do not resemble marriage. While monogamous same-sex couples are now constructed as oppressed, and on the point of securing recognition, other sexual practices now become illegible, the irreversible, irrecoverable past of legitimacy.³³³

Noting Hegel’s contention that ‘desire is always a desire for recognition,’ and that recognition is necessary for the subject’s continued existence, Butler contemplates the consequences of not desiring recognition.³³⁴ In such a case, she argues, the subject will only endure on the condition that s/he evades the prevailing matrix of norms.³³⁵ While conceding that a subject that is not recognised by social norms will find themselves ‘lacking social belonging,’ Butler argues that gaining a sense of intelligibility under particularly restrictive norms will inevitably lead to the subject’s demise.³³⁶ Although Hegel insists on the need for recognition in order to survive, Butler argues that the subject must resist attaining intelligibility under destructive or damaging

³³² J Butler, 2004, ‘Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?’ in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 105. It should be noted that legislation on same-sex marriage in the USA and France, the two countries Butler discusses, has developed since the time of her essay. In the USA, although not yet sanctioned in Federal Law, same-sex marriage is performed in the states of Connecticut, DC, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont and Washington. In France, Butler refers to the PACS (*pactes civils de solidarités*), civil unions analogous to British civil partnerships, though also available for heterosexual couples. Further, proposals for same-sex marriage were approved by the Senate on April 12th 2013. See ‘Le Sénat adopte le projet de loi sur le mariage pour tous,’ *France-Info*, accessed at www.franceinfo.fr/politique/le-senat-adopte-le-mariage-pour-tous-949915-2013-04-12 on April 12th 2013.

³³³ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 106

³³⁴ J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 2; and J Butler, 2004, ‘Can the “Other” of Philosophy Speak?’ in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 240

³³⁵ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 3

³³⁶ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 3

norms. For Butler, one must retain a critical, distanced relation from norms, risking unintelligibility in doing so.³³⁷

Butler's conceptualisation of gender as a norm leads her to revisit her earlier work where she contends she made what she sees as a problematic elision between 'sexual difference as a category that conditions emergence into language, and gender as a sociological category.'³³⁸ Drawing from Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, Butler contends that *Gender Trouble*, described here as 'a text I probably wrote too quickly,' set up universal, transhistorical gendered positions with limited capacity for both the recognition of cultural difference and the possibility of subversion.³³⁹ She suggests as a consequence that the positions of having and being the Phallus appear to be constructed as Symbolic and thus as phantasmatic, transcultural and eternal. This would certainly conform to the traditional Lacanian view, which sees the position of the father, for instance, as unaffected by varying permutations of paternity across time and place.³⁴⁰ In order to move away from the Lacanian position, Butler is keen to emphasise what she believes is a new reading of gender constructed through the sociological discourse of the norm. Considered thus, gender is re-situated in the domain of the empirical and is therefore constructed as changeable.³⁴¹

However, my account of *Gender Trouble* and Butler's articulation of the sexed positions determined by the Phallus disputes her later interpretation of her work in *Undoing Gender*. Indeed, in the account offered earlier I demonstrated that *Gender Trouble* conceptualises the Symbolic as the performative aggregate of repeated iterations, which then takes on the appearance of the inevitable and transcultural.

³³⁷ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 3

³³⁸ J Butler, 2004, 'A Question of Social Transformation,' in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 210

³³⁹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 213

³⁴⁰ J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 43

³⁴¹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 47

While Butler acknowledges Lacan's conceptualisation of the Symbolic as a 'culturally universal structure of signification',³⁴² and that the positions he theorises are therefore to be understood as phantasmatic, her scepticism of this paradigm in *Gender Trouble* is already marked by her question, 'what determines the domain of the phantasmatic?'³⁴³ Consequently, noting that Lacan's description promotes 'cultural stasis,' Butler is demonstrably dubious of Lacan's account of Symbolic sexed positions.³⁴⁴

As I have demonstrated, within *Gender Trouble*, Butler reads Lacan's account of the Symbolic alongside Foucault's conceptualisation of juridical power, which produces the subjects it regulates. Foucault's work enables Butler to situate the idealised heterosexual binary determined by the Phallus as 'a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the field it purports to describe.'³⁴⁵ Butler follows Foucault's contention that the law is incorporated on the surface of the body.³⁴⁶ Moreover, she argues that the sexed body is itself a performative reiteration of norms. Butler's reading of Lacan's work alongside Foucault's theorisation of power enables her to argue that the Symbolic, and the idealised positions of having and being the Phallus are likewise performative, and so founded and repeatedly constituted in social life. These positions can thus be seen as representing an aggregate of a range of identities within the categories of masculinity and femininity.

Although Butler claims that her move away from Lacan's work in *Undoing Gender* presents a drastic revision of her earlier conceptualisation of gender, I have demonstrated that her earlier work already reconsiders the Symbolic to situate it within the social. Lloyd agrees, arguing Butler demonstrates that the 'distinction between the

³⁴² J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 60

³⁴³ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 75

³⁴⁴ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 75

³⁴⁵ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 185

³⁴⁶ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 183

symbolic ... and the social is untenable.³⁴⁷ Brady and Schirato too, although writing in relation to *Antigone's Claim*, likewise echo my account of Butler's position, as they note how Butler's use of Foucault's work allows her to demonstrate how Symbolic prohibitions are created through normative and regulatory social practices.³⁴⁸ In order to reflect the distinction between Butler's reconceptualisation of Symbolic subject positions as historical and contingent, and the traditional Lacanian understanding of them, I will refer to the positions of having and being the Phallus as symbolic positions (with a small 's') throughout this thesis.

In *Undoing Gender* Butler is keen to emphasise how reframing gender as a norm grants further possibilities for subversion. However, her account of the precariousness of the norm precisely parallels her articulation of the vulnerability of the heterosexual matrix in her earlier work. Indeed, both the heterosexual matrix in *Gender Trouble* and the prevailing matrix of norms in *Undoing Gender* ensure their efficacy by appearing 'independent of the practices [they] govern.'³⁴⁹ Further, Butler takes up Pierre Macherey's argument that, drawing on Foucault, 'norms only persist as a norm to the extent that it is acted out in social practice.'³⁵⁰ Moreover, the norm not only produces the field of action it oversees, but in doing so, also produces itself.³⁵¹ Just as Butler argued that the iterative structure of the heterosexual matrix created the conditions for its vulnerability in *Bodies that Matter*, so too she argues in *Undoing Gender* that the norm is shown to be paradoxically dependent on its approximations. The construction of the norm is consequently shown to echo that of the heterosexual matrix in her earlier work.

³⁴⁷ M Lloyd, 2007, op. cit., p. 95

³⁴⁸ A Brady and T Schirato, 2011, op. cit., pp. 107-108

³⁴⁹ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 48; J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 177

³⁵⁰ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 48

³⁵¹ J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 52

The vulnerability of the prevailing matrix of norms to citations that challenge their primacy leads Butler to consider the possibilities afforded by fantasy. Conceptualised as the limits of the current framework of norms, Butler argues that fantasy possesses a radical critical potential and provides a space in which alternative norms might be instituted.³⁵² For Butler, drag presents an important example of fantasy. Indeed, more than an enjoyably subversive spectacle, drag ‘allegorises the spectacular and consequential ways in which reality is produced and contested.’³⁵³ As such, drag provides an example of how, following Macheray, norms are seen to be embodied by individuals, and are thus vulnerable at the moment they are cited. Although, as previously discussed, cross-dressing performances can serve to shore up heteronormativity, other instances offer the possibility to expose norms as contingent, and thus neither natural nor inevitable.

Although *Undoing Gender* is presented as a revision of Butler’s earlier work, I have demonstrated that the volume is better understood as building on her earlier theorisation of gender. The model for the subversion of heteronormativity Butler articulates in *Bodies that Matter* is strongly reflected in the possibilities she later identifies for deconstructing the prevailing regime of norms. Nonetheless, Butler’s renewed focus on the importance of recognition for the subject’s survival does expand on her earlier work on gender. Whereas *Gender Trouble* presented a ‘mundane social audience’ as the context in which performativity occurs,³⁵⁴ *Undoing Gender* identifies this audience and their recognition of a subject’s approximated gender as vital for their cultural intelligibility.

³⁵² J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004 *ibid.*, p. 29

³⁵³ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 218

³⁵⁴ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 192

1.6 – CONCLUSION

This chapter observes the current scholarship on the Teen Movie and establishes the case for close textual analysis informed by Judith Butler's theorisation of gender. Examining existing approaches to the Teen Movie revealed that, perhaps as a result of its origins in exploitation cinema, the genre's narrative and style have largely escaped academic scrutiny. Indeed, critics such as Martin stated that the genre's syntax, the structures that underpin its narratives, is derived from elsewhere.³⁵⁵ However, I argued that in addition to the prom, and the juvenile delinquency narratives, which Martin himself identifies as specific to the Teen Movie,³⁵⁶ the 'sexual coming-of-age' narrative proposed by Feuer effectively describes the genre's syntax.³⁵⁷

As a sexual coming-of-age narrative, the genre's syntax makes it particularly apposite for an analysis informed by Butler's work on gender. Indeed, *Gender Trouble* argued that gender was not innate, but a performative aggregate of repeated approximations of an idealised norm. Developing this point in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler articulates how these norms might be undermined through parody and excess. As Teen Movies portray their characters undergoing makeovers, attending proms and participating in dangerous rituals of masculinity, Butler's work denaturalises these trajectories of gender assumption enabling them to be read as contingent and labour-intensive. While Butler provides a robust account of the discourses that regulate the assumption of gender, she addresses neither childhood gender identities nor the transition between childhood and adulthood. An analysis of the Teen Movie informed by Butler's work thus also provides an opportunity to develop her theorisation of gender in these areas.

³⁵⁵ A Martin, 1994, op. cit., p. 66

³⁵⁶ A Martin, 1994, ibid., p. 66

³⁵⁷ J Feuer, 1993, op.cit., p. 125

Examination of Butler's most recent work revealed that she largely subsumes the discussion of gender into the broader consideration of recognition, intelligibility and the human. In contrast, *Undoing Gender* relates the conceptualisation of the human to the construction of gender, and revisits Butler's earlier work. Building on her earlier theorisation of gender, *Undoing Gender* considers the importance of recognition for the cultural intelligibility of the subject. Nonetheless significant continuities remain. Although Butler states her wish to move away from the universal, transhistorical positions of binary sexual difference she believes were posited in her earlier work, re-examination of *Gender Trouble* reveals that these positions were always already performatively constituted and so grounded in sociality. Moreover, Butler retains her conceptualisation of gender as performative, and continues to articulate the possibilities for subverting the prevailing matrix of norms through parodic citation.

A further significant consistency across Butler's work is her contention that political change occurs when those located on the margins question the prevailing regime of norms. Butler's works on gender all propose drag as a means of highlighting, and so undermining, the arbitrary naturalisation of gendered attributes, while *Undoing Gender* presents fantasy as an important space for the establishment of new norms. In *Bodies that Matter* too, Butler follows Derrida's in his consideration of the infelicities of the performative, which were seen to constitute the "outside" that establishes the authenticity and effectiveness of the original performative utterance. Such infelicities actually offer the possibility of subverting the performative utterance from within. Similarly in *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that David Reimer's testimony, situated on the margins of intelligibility, brings the prevailing matrix of norms into question. In all cases then, the possibilities for subversion occur when those situated on the margins challenge the norms of intelligibility. The question of how subjects

negotiate the imposition of the norm from a position of intelligibility is not therefore one that interests Butler.

Many film scholars have nonetheless taken up Butler's work in order to consider to what extent a seemingly normative on-screen construction of gender might be regarded as subversive. Notably, much of this scholarship, such as that of Dyer, Brown, and Savoy, takes up Butler's concepts in order to interrogate the normative in mainstream genre films. Since I aim to take up Butler's conceptualisation of performativity explore the construction of gender in the Hollywood Teen Movie, unquestionably an artefact of mainstream culture, I will also adopt this approach to Butler's work. However, unlike existing studies, which seek simply to apply Butler's concepts to a particular selection of films, I intend also to observe how the films can be seen to augment, and even complicate her work on gender.

The Hollywood Teen Movie typically concludes with a heterosexual romance, and as such provides narratives that do not ostensibly challenge the prevailing regime of gender norms. The genre is thus doubly coded as mainstream: as both an undemanding, mass-market, Hollywood product and containing within it conventional characters and heteronormative coming-of-age stories. Taking up Butler's concepts in order to analyse these films, I intend to interrogate and denaturalise their normative coming-of-age narratives. In doing so, I intend not only to expose the vulnerability of heteronormativity, but also to reveal how the Teen Movie contains within it an account of gender assumption that is neither natural, nor inevitable but a repeated labour. Consequently, I aim both to develop Butler's theorisation of the possibilities for providing a critical assessment of normativity, and to demonstrate that the Teen Movie possesses a greater complexity than has hitherto been acknowledged.

2 – THE PROM AND THE HIGH-SCHOOL TEEN MOVIE

2.1 – LOCATING THE HIGH-SCHOOL TEEN MOVIE IN GENRE SCHOLARSHIP

Teen Movies set in the high school are among the most popular and enduring examples of the genre. For Shary, the ‘School Film’ is to be recognised by the ‘focus on the setting of high school or junior high campuses.’³⁵⁸ Describing the School Film as a subgenre of the Teen Movie, Shary reflects Feuer’s definition of the category as ‘historically broad-based and characterised by shifts in the semantic field over time.’³⁵⁹ This is distinguished from the cycle, a ‘temporally brief but numerically and aesthetically significant outpouring of films.’³⁶⁰ As a result of the School Film’s longevity, from *Blackboard Jungle* (Dir. Richard Kelly, 1955) to recent examples such as *Mean Girls* (Dir. Mark Waters, 2004), I follow Shary in considering the group as a subgenre.

The emphasis on setting in Shary’s definition of the School Film recalls the work of Thomas Schatz, who argues that the setting of genre films determines how they negotiate cultural conflicts.³⁶¹ For Schatz, it is possible to distinguish two broad types of genre: genres of determinate space and genres of indeterminate space. Citing the Western as an example of the former, Schatz asserts that fundamental values are seen to be in a state of conflict enacted within a ‘familiar locale according to a prescribed system of rules and behavioural codes.’³⁶² In these films, a struggle for control of a key space stands in for a conflict in value systems. To illustrate, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Dir. John Ford, 1962) portrays the struggle between the urge

³⁵⁸ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 26

³⁵⁹ J Feuer, 2010, ‘The International Art Musical: Defining and Periodising the Post-1980s Musical,’ in S Cohan, Ed., 2010, *The Sound of Musicals*, London: BFI, p. 55

³⁶⁰ J Feuer, 2010, *ibid.*, in S Cohan, Ed., 2010, *ibid.*, p. 55

³⁶¹ T Schatz, 1981, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Film-Making and the Studio System*, Austin: McGraw Hill, pp. 14-29

³⁶² T Schatz, 1981, quoted in S Neale, 2000, *Genre and Hollywood*, London: Routledge, p. 222

for statehood, and the freedom of the Old West, respectively embodied by lawyer Ransom Stoddard, (James Stewart) and rancher, Tom Doniphon (John Wayne).

In contrast, films that form part of genres of indeterminate space take place in an ideologically stable, civilised setting, whose source of conflict is located in a highly conventionalised value system. Consequently, Schatz positions the Musical, the Melodrama and the Romantic Comedy, among others, as genres of indeterminate space.³⁶³ His conceptualisation of the doubled protagonist in the guise of the romantic couple is reflected in Rick Altman's reading of the musical as dual-focus narrative, in which diametrically opposed values are seen to be embodied by opposite-sexed characters, to which I will return in later chapters.³⁶⁴

Schatz argues that the genre of indeterminate space portrays the eventual unity and synthesis between two value systems. For instance, *When Harry Met Sally* (Dir. Rob Reiner, 1989) portrays the union of two characters who begin the film with starkly divergent philosophies about relationships. However, unlike the genre of determinate space, which depicts the victory of one set of values, the genre of indeterminate space valorises community and integration through synthesis of formerly opposed value systems. Significantly, the integration of conflicting value systems respectively embodied by two protagonists of the opposite sex can be seen to naturalise the binary sexed difference that Butler argues is discursively produced and reinforced under the heterosexual matrix.³⁶⁵

Since the School Film is defined through its setting, it will be important to consider whether it should be conceptualised as either a genre of determinate or indeterminate space. However, complicating the classification of the subgenre, the

³⁶³ T Schatz, 1981, op. cit., p. 29

³⁶⁴ See R Altman, 1987, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press

³⁶⁵ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 31

function of the high school differs markedly from film to film. Indicating its potential categorisation as a genre of determinate space, the school is often portrayed as a site of conflict for which various groups compete to control. Tensions may occur between students and teachers, as in *Election* (Dir. Alexander Payne, 1999), or more commonly, between cliques battling to govern particular strategic sites. In *Mean Girls* for instance, the “Plastics” assert their dominance in the cafeteria, a key social space within which characters can freely express their opposition and affiliation with each other. The cafeteria’s importance to the social organisation of the high school is apparent in its frequent use in the ‘anthropology shot,’ which provides an overview of the school’s social ecosystem.³⁶⁶

Although conflicts undoubtedly do occur, the Teen Movie’s typical location in middle-class suburbia serves to construct the filmic high school as an ideologically stable space. Indeed, Steve Bailey and James Hay echo Shary in their belief that in the Teen Movie, the high school often functions as a sociological microcosm of American society, and should therefore be considered an indifferent location.³⁶⁷ Consequently, the School Film’s categorisation as a subgenre of indeterminate space is more fitting. As discussed previously, the genre of indeterminate space upholds the heterosexual couple as the idealised synthesis of formerly conflicted value systems. Reading the School Film in the light of Butler’s work on gender consequently promises to expose the mechanisms through which heterosexuality is naturalised and idealised.

Schatz argues that the conclusions of genre films provide important indications of their ritual and ideological function.³⁶⁸ In the School Film, the high-

³⁶⁶ R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 56

³⁶⁷ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006, ‘Cinema and the Premises of Youth: Teen Films and their Sites in the 1980s and 1990s, in S Neale, Ed., 2006, *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, London: BFI, p. 224; T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 26

³⁶⁸ T Schatz, 1981, op. cit., pp. 30-32

school prom often constitutes the narrative denouement. Notably, the prom corresponds to Schatz's conception of the 'ritual, or formal celebration' that provides the final site of the characters' integration in the genre of indeterminate space.³⁶⁹ Indeed for Schatz, the 'emotive climax' of the celebrations serves to gloss over the necessary loss incurred in the compromise that enabled this final synthesis of values.³⁷⁰

The significance of the high-school prom to the School Film is further elucidated by Amy Best's ethnographic research. Observing the prom's current positioning as a celebration of the completion of high school, Best observes that it was initially intended as a 'democratised version of the debutante balls,' and thus as an assimilation of an upper-class ideal of female coming-of-age.³⁷¹ Fusing the completion of high school, and as such, the inauguration of adulthood, with the assumption of heterosexuality, the prom can readily be perceived as vehicle of heterosexual gender interpellation. As Best notes, the prom's legacy as a precursor for marriage is apparent in the strictly gendered dress codes, and the requirement to attend with a partner of the opposite sex.³⁷²

In addition to the high school, Bailey and Hay locate two further significant sites in the Teen Movie: the family home and the shopping mall.³⁷³ Asserting that these spaces constitute distinct economies of regulation according to their perceived distance from authority, Bailey and Hay conceptualise the family home as a site of conflict between teens' desire for freedom and their continued dependence on domestic comforts.³⁷⁴ This struggle is apparent in the familiar house party trope, where

³⁶⁹ T Schatz, 1981, *ibid.*, p. 32

³⁷⁰ T Schatz, 1981, *ibid.*, p. 32

³⁷¹ AL Best, 2000, *Prom Night: Youth, Schools and Popular Culture*, London: Routledge, p. 12

³⁷² Best notes the rigidity of many the prom's rules and their ideological significance in AL Best, 2000, *ibid.*, pp. 97-99

³⁷³ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006 in S Neale, Ed., 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 218

³⁷⁴ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006, *ibid.*, in S Neale, Ed., 2006, *ibid.*, p. 232

parental absence enables characters to appropriate the bourgeois family home for their own purposes.³⁷⁵ In turn, the shopping mall simultaneously both provides a site of freedom of expression, as it does for Cher in *Clueless*, (Dir. Amy Heckerling, 1995), and a locus of stultifying conformity.³⁷⁶ Allison Bain highlights the unexpected meaning of the spaces identified by Bailey and Hay, observing that teens often perceive the family home as a site of surveillance.³⁷⁷ Conversely, the public arena of the mall provides anonymity and consequently, relative privacy.³⁷⁸ The distinct regimes of regulation of these spaces indicate the way in which Butler's work might be complicated by the School Film. Indeed, while she maintains that there is a single matrix of norms that grant cultural intelligibility, the high-school Teen Movie is shown to contain multiple spaces that possess distinct norms and regulations of their own.³⁷⁹

The high school's positioning as a microcosm of US society in the School Film, as Bailey and Hay argue, is indicated by the frequent focus on class and social status.³⁸⁰ The two case studies analysed in this chapter, *Pretty in Pink* (Dir. Howard Deutch, 1986) and *She's All That* (Dir. Robert Iscove, 1999) both centre on a lower-class, female protagonist. Significantly, both films do not represent class position solely through apparent household income, but through the characters' tastes and cultural knowledge.

Recent studies indicate the difficulty of theorising class in the USA, further complicated by its construction as a classless society.³⁸¹ Indeed, for Paul Fussell, even

³⁷⁵ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006, *ibid.*, in S Neale, Ed., 2006, *ibid.*, p. 232

³⁷⁶ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006, *ibid.*, in S Neale Ed., 2006, *ibid.*, p. 225

³⁷⁷ AL Bain, 2003, 'White Western Teenage Girls and Urban Space: Challenging Hollywood's Representations,' *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 202

³⁷⁸ AL Bain, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 202

³⁷⁹ J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, in J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 41; J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 60

³⁸⁰ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006, *op. cit.*, in S Neale, Ed., 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 224

³⁸¹ J Scott and D Leonhardt, 2005 'Class in America: Shadowy Lines that Still Divide,' *The New York Times*, May 15th 2005, unpaginated.

to raise the issue of class is to undermine the myth of American meritocracy.³⁸² Problematising class analysis further, *The New York Times* notes that the recent expansion of access to consumer credit has led to increased difficulty in reading people's 'status through the clothes they wear, the cars they drive.'³⁸³ Echoing the newspaper's findings, Fiona Devine takes up David Halle's ethnographic study of chemical workers in New Jersey to demonstrate the need for a theorisation of class that moves beyond social stratification according to access to capital.³⁸⁴ Halle noted that the workers held two identities simultaneously. In the workplace, although avoiding the term "working class," they would describe themselves as 'working men.'³⁸⁵ However, at home these same workers identified their lifestyles as middle or lower-middle class in accordance with their standard of living.³⁸⁶ Devine thus demonstrates how class may be experienced differently according to the type of labour performed. Indeed, the chemical workers' physical labour led them to identify as working men in spite of their high salaries.

A similar tension is evident in *She's All That* when Laney's father, Wayne, speculates why "some people say that being a pool man is not a very respectable way to earn a living." He proceeds to list his home ownership, and status as small business owner – attributes Devine describes as 'common denominators for those who identified as middle class.'³⁸⁷ Nonetheless, Wayne observes that a substantial part of

A poll conducted in *The New York Times* found that 40% of Americans believed that the chance of moving up from one class to another had risen over the last 30 years. In fact, the opposite is true.

³⁸² P Fussell, 1984, *Caste Marks: Style and Status in the USA*, London: Heinemann, p. 12

³⁸³ J Scott and D Leonhardt, 2005, *ibid*, unpaginated

³⁸⁴ D Halle, 1984, 'America's Working Man: Work, Home and Politics among Blue-Collar property owners, in F Devine, 2005, *op. cit.*, in F Devine et. al. Eds., 2005, *Rethinking Class: Culture, Identities and Lifestyle*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 144

³⁸⁵ F Devine, 2005, 'Middle-Class Identities in the United States,' in F Devine et al., Eds., 2005, *ibid.*, p. 153

³⁸⁶ F Devine, 2005, *ibid.*, in F Devine et. al., Eds., 2005, *ibid.*, p. 144

³⁸⁷ F Devine, 2005, *ibid.*, in F Devine et. al., Eds., 2005, *ibid.*, p. 153

middle class identity is denied to him owing to his profession's perceived lack of respectability.

The above examples reveal how individuals' experiences of class cannot be captured by their macro-economic categorisation into pre-ordained groups. In the place of such 'stratification analysis,' Rosemary Crompton, and Devine and Savage, identify a 'cultural turn' in studies of class, indicating the increased currency of methodologies derived from Cultural Studies.³⁸⁸ Much of this later work draws on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, whose theorisation of taste and class, particularly in *Distinction*, successfully combines an analysis of structural economic inequality with a consideration of class as a lived social relation.³⁸⁹ Moreover as Toril Moi points out, Bourdieu is interested in the sociology of 'various ways of chewing one's food, different forms of dressing, musical tastes ... home decoration, the kinds of friends one has and the kinds of films one likes to see.'³⁹⁰ In other words, Bourdieu echoes Butler's concern for the significance of the mundane, repeated actions of everyday life.

Bourdieu develops Weber's and Marx's theories of stratification, which are premised on a social hierarchy according to individuals' economic capital. Indeed, he proposes three further types of capital, which he argues affect an individual's experience of class: the cultural, the social and the symbolic. For Bourdieu, cultural knowledge (specifically, knowledge of what he describes as "high" culture) and other cultural competences determine an individual's level of cultural capital.³⁹¹ In turn, social capital refers to the extent of an individual's networks and connections, while

³⁸⁸ R Crompton, 2008, *Class and Stratification*, 3rd Ed., Cambridge: Polity, p. 43; F Devine and M Savage, 2005, 'The Cultural Turn, Sociology and Class Analysis,' in F Devine et. al., Eds., 2005, op. cit., p. 4

³⁸⁹ R Crompton, 2008, *ibid.*, p. 44

³⁹⁰ T Moi, 1991, 'Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture,' *New Literary History*, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 1020

³⁹¹ P Bourdieu, 1986, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, London: Routledge, p. 250

symbolic capital relates to the respect and reputation in which one is held. An individual's varying levels of these types of capital combines in the habitus, described by Crompton as 'a system of dispositions shared by those who are products of the same conditioning.'³⁹²

Significantly, Crompton argues that Bourdieu's sociology is premised on the notion that 'inequalities are reproduced, sustained and modified through the daily actions of individuals.'³⁹³ As such, Bourdieu can be seen to conceive class not as a static description of social life but as a constant, active process of social differentiation, implicitly recalling Butler's theorisation of gender as an endless series of repeated approximations of a norm.³⁹⁴ Despite this apparent similarity, Butler does not address Bourdieu's theorisation of class. Indeed, as the previous chapter observed, although her later work considers a number of intersecting vectors of identity construction, social class does not feature in Butler's conceptualisation of the human.³⁹⁵

The absence of class from Butler's work can perhaps be attributed to its perceived lack of essence, particularly when considered from an American standpoint. Indeed for Catherine Rottenberg, the 'American Dream discourse' constructs class as readily changeable.³⁹⁶ The promise of transformation through individual efforts and personal qualities distinguishes class from gender and race, both of which have

³⁹² R Crompton, 2008, *ibid.*, p. 101

³⁹³ R Crompton, 2008, *ibid.*, p. 100

³⁹⁴ See for instance, J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 191

³⁹⁵ Butler conceptualises the human in the following terms in *Undoing Gender*: 'race, the legibility of that race, morphology, the recognition of that morphology, its sex, the potential verifiability of that sex, ethnicity and the categorical understanding of that ethnicity.' (J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, in J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 7). Further illustrating the surprising absence of class from Butler's theorization, she discusses performativity in relation to critical race theory in J Butler, 1993 'Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia, in R Gooding-Williams, Ed., 1993, *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, London: Routledge, 15-22.

³⁹⁶ C Rottenberg, 2004, 'Salome of the Tenements, the American Dream and Class Performativity,' *American Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 p. 71

traditionally been perceived as innate.³⁹⁷ Regenia Gagnier agrees, arguing that unlike gender performativity, which displaced essentialist discourses that have caused the oppression of women, conceiving class as performative obscures economic inequalities and upholds the status quo by reconfiguring 'class as choice.'³⁹⁸ Consequently, the construction of class as performative is seen to lack the disruptive potential of gender performativity.

For Terry Lovell, a combination of Bourdieu's sociology of class with Butler's theorisation of gender is needed to provide an effective methodology for analysing gender, class and the ways in which they intersect. Examining their work, Lovell notes that although Bourdieu and Butler both draw on JL Austin's account of the performative utterance, they each reach quite different conclusions.³⁹⁹ For Bourdieu, the institutions that Austin asserts are recalled in the performative also form the habitus.⁴⁰⁰ Consequently, Bourdieu argues that although the habitus is acquired, and comprised of cultural arbitraries, it is no less difficult to alter than if it were a natural attribute.⁴⁰¹ In contrast, Butler takes up Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's account of the performative in order to argue that each individual citation of the performative presents the opportunity to rework the conventions and social institutions that govern and compel it.⁴⁰²

Bourdieu disputes what he perceives as Butler's voluntarism, arguing that fundamental social structures cannot be abolished through individual acts.⁴⁰³ In turn,

³⁹⁷ C Rottenberg, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 71

³⁹⁸ R Gagnier, 2000, 'The Functions of Class at the Present Time: Including Taste, or Sex and Class as Culture,' *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, p. 43

³⁹⁹ T Lovell, 2001, 'Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu,' in B Fowler, Ed., 2001, *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 31

⁴⁰⁰ P Bourdieu, 1991, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 73

⁴⁰¹ T Lovell, 2001, *op. cit.*, in B Fowler, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 31

⁴⁰² J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225

⁴⁰³ P Bourdieu, 1998, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 110; quoted in T Lovell, 2001, *op. cit.*, in B Fowler, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 32

Butler's critique of Bourdieu in *Excitable Speech* argues that his account of performativity does not allow the possibility of change. Indeed, she maintains that Bourdieu has failed to 'grasp the logic of iterability that governs the possibility of social transformation.'⁴⁰⁴ Nonetheless, in order to provide an effective account of gender and class together, Lovell argues for a methodology that combines Bourdieu's understanding of the governing structures of social life, with the possibilities for subversion evident in Butler's work.⁴⁰⁵

For Lovell, Beverley Skeggs' study of working-class women in North-West England exemplifies the type of analysis of gender and class that becomes possible when the work of Bourdieu and Butler are successfully combined.⁴⁰⁶ Skeggs' research is notable for its consideration of how class affects the lived experience of gender. Indeed, she argues that femininity itself is a 'classed sign,' that came to be defined in terms of delicacy, physical frailty and sexual propriety.⁴⁰⁷ In contrast, the physicality of the labour historically undertaken by working-class women led them to be regarded as 'healthy, hardy and robust, while paradoxically a source of disease and infection.'⁴⁰⁸ To paraphrase Butler, working-class women have historically been constructed as the other against which the feminine is made. The construction of femininity as a middle-class competence leads Skeggs to observe that her working-class participants did not feel able to describe themselves as feminine. However, recognising the conduct and appearance of femininity as markers of cultural capital, Skeggs notes that the women

⁴⁰⁴ J Butler, 1997, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, London: Routledge, p. 147

⁴⁰⁵ T Lovell, 2001, op. cit., in B Fowler, Ed., 2001, op. cit., p. 39

⁴⁰⁶ T Lovell, 2001, ibid., in B Fowler, Ed., 2001, ibid., p. 39

⁴⁰⁷ B Skeggs, 1997, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, London: Sage, p. 99

⁴⁰⁸ B Skeggs, 1997, ibid., p. 99

made investments in femininity in order to distance themselves from their perceived positioning as ‘vulgar, pathological, tasteless and sexual.’⁴⁰⁹

The women’s ambivalent identification with femininity is indicated as Skeggs observes their preparations for an evening out. The construction of a feminine appearance, she notes, is a collective, time-consuming – but nevertheless clearly enjoyed – endeavour.⁴¹⁰ The evident labour of their efforts can be seen to correspond to Butler’s conceptualisation of gender as consisting of repeated approximations of an endlessly sought norm, rather than an innate property. For Skeggs, the ‘raucous, outrageous’ atmosphere of these gatherings, which belie the feminine appearance they work so hard to create, demonstrates the status of femininity for these women as a public performance.⁴¹¹ As such, Skeggs argues that for working class women, femininity is not an identity to which they feel they belong, but a construct that can be taken on and off at will.⁴¹²

Skeggs argues that the women’s interest in fashion and appearance can equally be regarded as forms of ‘disidentification,’ a means through which to distinguish themselves from the fantasised pathological other they identify as working class.⁴¹³ Indeed, clothing they termed “classy,” or “elegant” allowed the women to ‘present a picture of non-working-classness.’⁴¹⁴ Skeggs identifies their desire not to be seen as working class as ‘passing,’ a concept to which Butler refers in relation to Venus Xtravaganza, a Latina drag performer portrayed in Jennie Livingston’s *Paris is Burning*.⁴¹⁵ As Butler observes, although Venus succeeds in passing as ‘light-skinned,’

⁴⁰⁹ B Skeggs, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 100

⁴¹⁰ B Skeggs, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 105

⁴¹¹ B Skeggs, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 106

⁴¹² B Skeggs, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 106

⁴¹³ B Skeggs, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 87

⁴¹⁴ B Skeggs, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 85

⁴¹⁵ See J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-133

she is not able to pass as a woman, for which she is eventually murdered.⁴¹⁶ Venus's efforts at passing, Butler argues, are subversive, since they destabilise the prevailing norms of gender and race.⁴¹⁷ Just as Gagnier and Rottenberg warn, Skeggs argues that attempts to pass as not working class do not possess such potential for subversion. Indeed, the women's endeavours to escape their class identity seek not to trouble the prevailing matrix of gender and norms, but to attain legitimacy in its terms.⁴¹⁸

In the discussions of class passing and working-class negotiations of femininity, clothing has emerged as a key mechanism through which class is negotiated. Significantly too, the focus on clothing echoes both Bourdieu's contention that 'bodily dispositions carry the markers of social class,'⁴¹⁹ and Butler's argument that gender is performatively constituted on the surface of the body.⁴²⁰ Interestingly, both Catherine Mintler and Rottenberg identify mass production as significant to how clothing operates as a determinant of class. Indeed, discussing class performativity in relation to fashion in the modernist novel, Mintler argues that the increased availability of mass produced clothing in the twentieth century facilitated imitation and performance across class.⁴²¹ Similarly, examining the novels of Anzia Yeziarska, Rottenberg argues that the homogeneity engendered by mass production is the condition for the possibility of distinguishing oneself through dress, and thus, class.⁴²² Consequently, both Mintler and Rottenberg demonstrate the importance of costume to class performativity and social mobility.

⁴¹⁶ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 129

⁴¹⁷ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 125

⁴¹⁸ B Skeggs, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 87

⁴¹⁹ B Skeggs, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 82

⁴²⁰ See for instance, J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 185

⁴²¹ CR Mintler, 2008, *Fashioning Identity: Consumption, Performativity and Passing in the Modernist Novel*, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, p. 8

⁴²² C Rottenberg, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 79

Drawing on Skeggs' understanding of femininity as a classed discourse, Yvonne Tasker argues that Hollywood cross-dressing narratives transgress race and class boundaries as well as those of gender and sexuality. To illustrate, she cites Julie Andrews' costume in *Victor/Victoria* (Dir. Blake Edwards, 1982). For Tasker, Victor's tuxedo constitutes a masquerade of class and nationality as much as gender identity.⁴²³ Further, Tasker identifies *Working Girl* (Dir. Mike Nichols, 1989) and *Pretty Woman* (Dir. Garry Marshall, 1990) as narratives of 'cross-class dressing'.⁴²⁴ At the conclusion of *Working Girl*, Tasker observes, Tess is shown to inhabit neither the middle-class world into which she has trespassed, nor the working-class community she has sought to escape.⁴²⁵ While heterosexual romance is positioned in the narrative as the connection between these spaces, Tasker argues that Tess's relationship with Trainer does not seem secure at the film's conclusion.⁴²⁶ Consequently, Tasker draws on Marjorie Garber, for whom cross-dressing introduces a third term, 'a space of possibility,' that cannot be accounted for by gender or class binaries.⁴²⁷ As such, Tasker demonstrates the complex interrelationship between gender and class.

The above studies demonstrate the complexity of class analysis and its relationship to gender. Although Butler does not consider the role of class in her theorisation of performativity, others, such as Mintler and Rottenberg have taken up Butler's work to consider literary constructions of class as performative. Indeed, for Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, so applicable is Butler's theorisation of performativity to class that it is possible to replace "gender" where it appears in the final chapter of

⁴²³ Y Tasker, 1998, *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*, London: Routledge, p. 24

⁴²⁴ Y Tasker, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 39

⁴²⁵ Y Tasker, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 28

⁴²⁶ Y Tasker, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 29

⁴²⁷ M Garber, 1992, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, London: Routledge, p. 11, quoted in Y Tasker, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 29

Gender Trouble with “class.”⁴²⁸ In social theory too, Bourdieu’s contention that class is a lived relation repeatedly produced and sustained through everyday actions can be seen to prefigure the construction of class as performative. Despite the clear differences in approach, Lovell demonstrates the necessity of combining the work of Bourdieu and Butler in order to provide an effective analysis of the intersections between gender and class. Skeggs’ work provides a significant example of the possibilities enabled when the work of Bourdieu and Butler are combined. Consequently, in addition to Butler’s theorisation of performativity, the textual analyses in this chapter will also be informed by Skeggs’ research.

Significantly, Skeggs, along with Mintler, Rottenberg and Tasker, all identify clothing as a crucial domain through which gender and class identities are negotiated. Both *Pretty in Pink* and *She’s All That* depict the transformation of a lower-class female protagonist, for which the prom provides both the final realisation of these makeovers, and a test of their success. Consequently, the films provide an opportunity to reflect on the prom as an ideological locus of gender and class interpellation. Although the event itself occurs at the films’ conclusion, Best observes that the dance is but a mere footnote of a ‘series of practices, events and relations’ that precede it.⁴²⁹ Consequently, I will demonstrate that the prom – and the gender and class norms it compels – permeates the films’ narratives throughout. Combining the work of Butler and Skeggs will both enable the ideological mechanisms that compel attendance to the prom to be perceived, and to observe how the film’s characters negotiate the gender and class expectations of the event.

⁴²⁸ GA Foster, 2005, *Class Passing: Social Mobility in Film and Popular Culture*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, p. 39

⁴²⁹ AL Best, 2000, op. cit., p. 12

The chapter also provides an opportunity to develop Butler's theorisation of gender. Indeed, informed by Schatz, the work of Bailey and Hay points to the distinct modes of regulation of the 'Teen Movie's different spaces. As a consequence, examining the characters' use of space in the film may indicate distinct economies of regulation that complicate Butler's account of a single, prevailing matrix of norms. Moreover, since Butler does not theorise class, it is hoped that combining her work with Skeggs' research will indicate the importance of a consideration of both gender and class in narratives of heteronormativity.

2.2 – CASE STUDY 1: PRETTY IN PINK (DIR. HOWARD DEUTCH, 1986)

2.2.1 – INTRODUCTION

Written and produced, by John Hughes, *Pretty in Pink* forms part of the small corpus of Teen Movies associated with Hughes that continues to define the genre's reference points today.⁴³⁰ Discussing the portrayal of the teenage girl in the 1980s, Jonathan Bernstein singles out Hughes' films as the exception to the roles typically allocated to girls to 'display good-natured tolerance in the face of stalking, voyeurism, or fumbled attempts at seduction.'⁴³¹ Further, Bernstein argues that Hughes' characters are often portrayed as 'railing against cliques and caste systems.'⁴³² For Bernstein, then, as Anthony Bleach likewise observes, Hughes' films are distinct in their treatment of gender and class.⁴³³

However, in his first collaboration with Hughes, *Pretty in Pink* is directed by Howard Deutch, a former director of music videos. Consequently, the film can be seen to combine Deutch's knowledge of contemporary pop music, with the 'cosy

⁴³⁰ See for instance, A De Vaney, 2002, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds, 2002, op. cit., pp. 200-216, T Shary, 2002, and 2005

⁴³¹ J Bernstein, 1997, *Pretty in Pink: The Golden Age of Teenage Movies*, New York: St Martins Griffin, pp. 173-4

⁴³² J Bernstein, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 5

⁴³³ AC Bleach, 2010, Post-feminist cliques? Class, Post-feminism and the Molly-Ringwald-John Hughes Films,' *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 3, p. 26

sentimentality' that was Hughes' calling card.⁴³⁴ Discussing Deutch's contribution to the 'MTV aesthetic' that became increasingly prevalent in the 1990s, Dickinson observes his tendency to subsume aesthetic content to the requirements of a pre-recorded, contemporary soundtrack.⁴³⁵

Pretty in Pink centres on Andie Walsh, a working-class scholarship student attending a private high school. She has a distinct personal style and is devotedly pursued by a fellow student with similarly idiosyncratic tastes and class background, Duckie, who she rejects in favour of Blane, one of the "richies" at her school. The pairing of Blane and Andie receives widespread hostility, particularly from Blane's friends Steff and Benny, who disapprove of his association with a lower-class girl. Under increasing pressure, Blane reneges on his invitation to take Andie to the prom, as a result of which she decides to attend alone as an act of defiance. Finally, as Blane stands up for his relationship with Andie, the prom provides the scene for the pair's reunion, and the film's ending.

The film's portrayal of class disparity, in addition to the heteronormative imperative of the prom, offers potential to observe how gender and class intersect in the Teen Movie. Reading *Pretty in Pink* informed by Butler's work on gender reveals Andie's ambivalent positioning in relation to the heterosexual matrix. Undeniably, her self-actualisation is shown to be achieved through a transformative romance with Blane. However, Andie's parodic performances of "middle classness" through her sartorial choices and dialogues with Duckie and Iona reveal her mockery of the gender and class norms to which Andie knows she is required to aspire.⁴³⁶ Andie's gender and

⁴³⁴ Both Roz Kaveney and Ann De Vaney discuss John Hughes in these terms. See R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 50; A De Vaney, 2002, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, p. 202

⁴³⁵ K Dickinson. 2001, op. cit., pp. 1-13

⁴³⁶ R Moseley, 2002, 'Glamorous Witchcraft: Gender and Magic in Teen Film and Television,' *Screen*, p. 405

class identity is thus portrayed as a complex negotiation of the heterosexual romance narrative, an ambition to transcend her class status through work, and her subcultural affiliation with Duckie and Iona.

2.2.2 – DOMESTICITY AND DAUGHTERHOOD IN *PRETTY IN PINK*

As Kaveney observes, although critics examining Hughes' films are typically keen to credit the director with the creation of the modern 'Teen Movie,' many criticise his 'over-sentimentality, simplicity and tendency to pathologise,' as evidence of his conservatism.⁴³⁷ Hughes does of course acknowledge teens with problematic home lives, such as John Bender and Alison Reynolds, respectively the "criminal" and "basket case" of *The Breakfast Club*. Nonetheless, his portrayal of teenagers is overwhelmingly comprised of Midwestern upper-middle class, white high-school suburbanites.

As was observed in the previous chapter, De Vaney is particularly vehement in her criticism of Hughes' films as 'neoconservative' in their treatment of gender, race and class.⁴³⁸ Moreover, contending that the films re-inscribe domesticity as the rightful domain of femininity, De Vaney argues that the films constitute a backlash against the significant advances that had been made towards gender equality by the mid-1980s.⁴³⁹ De Vaney observed that teens enjoyed the films' mockery of vindictive authority figures, such as Principal Vernon in Hughes' classic *The Breakfast Club*. However, she maintains that despite the gleeful derision these figures receive, there is never any question of overthrowing their authority. Consequently, De Vaney argues that the rebellions in Hughes' films, such as those of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (Dir. John Hughes,

⁴³⁷ R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 45

⁴³⁸ A De Vaney, 2002, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, op. cit., p. 204

⁴³⁹ A De Vaney, 2002, ibid., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, ibid., p. 204

1986), are carefully contained, offering the promise of subversion while maintaining the primacy of adult authority.

Key to Hughes' conservative representation of teen girls, De Vaney argues, is the reassertion of the father's ownership and control over their daughters, intensified by the frequent absence of the mother.⁴⁴⁰ As Martin and others have noted, adolescence facilitates the on-screen portrayal of liminality, since teenage subjectivity exists in a state of transition, where identities emerge, morph and finally consolidate into adulthood.⁴⁴¹ For De Vaney however, Hughes' films contain liminality so that his female characters alternate neatly between childhood and adulthood, thus avoiding the tensions, repressions and prohibitions encountered in this liminal phase.⁴⁴² Instead, heteronormative gender identity is presented as undisputed and already fully finalised. Since for Butler, the assertion of authority provides the discursive occasion for its subversion, an analysis of Hughes' films informed by her work presents alternative possibilities.⁴⁴³ Consequently, if De Vaney is correct that the film reinscribes normative values, Butler's work can be seen to open the possibility for a reading that destabilises the film's purported normativity.

Pretty in Pink opens with crane shots depicting a bare, unpopulated street, following an industrial vehicle as it passes slowly in front of a house and the railway that runs alongside the street. Positioned literally as "the wrong side of the tracks," the presence of industrial equipment combined with the lack of cars and people on the street invite the spectator to infer that this is a lower-class residential area. The film then cuts to lingering close-ups of Andie's hands, arms, legs and ears, as she selects

⁴⁴⁰ A De Vaney, 2002, *ibid.*, in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, *ibid.*, p. 210. De Vaney observes that in 30 films that John Hughes wrote between 1982-2000, 'mothers are absent, preoccupied, neglectful or uncaring.'

⁴⁴¹ See A Martin, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 9

⁴⁴² A De Vaney, 2002, *op. cit.*, in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 210

⁴⁴³ J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 109

and puts on the ostentatious clothing and jewellery that characterise her fashion style. The evident juxtaposition of class signifiers between these opening scenes disputes De Vaney's claim that Hughes' films diminish the liminality of adolescence, since Andie is seen to inhabit middle and lower class positions simultaneously. Further, foregrounding the role of costume in the construction of gender and class identity, the film echoes Butler's theorisation of gender, and Skeggs' understanding of femininity for working class women, as something done, or put on, rather than innate.

Once Andie is dressed, the film cuts to a medium-long shot of her standing in the doorway of her room, looking out of frame into the hallway shouting "Daddy! It's seven-thirty!" The shot scale allows us to take in Andie's clothing, which (we assume) she put on in the previous sequence, and further underscores the contrast between her baroque, multi-layered clothing and the plain, unadorned hallway in which she lives. A further contrast is created between the non-diegetic music used in the scene and Andie's clothing. While Andie's pearls and floral dresses are more commonly associated with older women, the Psychedelic Furs' song "Pretty in Pink," plays throughout the scene, exemplifying Dickinson's assertion that Deutch was one of the few directors to deploy music 'the hip kids were actually listening to.'⁴⁴⁴ Rather than using music from successful mainstream artists of the mid-1980s, such as A-Ha, The Bangles or Lionel Richie, Deutch selected a hitherto little known British post-punk group to provide the title song for his mass market teen film. The director's taste for the alternative continues into the rest of the soundtrack, which features tracks from The Smiths, New Order and INXS, most of which did not reach the top 10 in the charts when released as singles.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴ K Dickinson, 2001, op. cit., p. 6

⁴⁴⁵ Source: US Chart data, accessed at <http://www.billboard.com/#/album/original-soundtrack/pretty-in-pink/65041>, on November 11th 2010.

Heard alongside Andie's pink clothing, car and bedroom, the spectator is encouraged to associate the song with her. "Pretty in Pink" depicts Caroline, a casually used sex object. The lyrics state:

All of her lovers

All talk of her notes

And the flowers that they never sent

And wasn't she easy

And isn't she

Pretty in Pink⁴⁴⁶

However, this description bears little resemblance to the chaste Andie, who angrily rebukes Steff's aggressive advances outside the school gates. Deutch's unusual choice of signature music consequently signals Andie's taste in music, indicating her subcultural affiliation, which I will shortly discuss more fully.

Her cry, "Daddy! It's seven thirty!" indicates a further oscillation between childhood and adulthood since it infantilises her in the use of the term "Daddy," while placing Andie in the role of responsible parent who provides encouragement and support for her indolent father in search of better paid employment. Her position as child-parent is reinforced in the next shot, where a medium close-up of a coffee pot pouring into a mug gives way to a close-up of Andie's face as she repeats her command to her father to get out of bed. The contrast between Andie's image and the role she is required to play in this scene is reminiscent of the tensions between the comfort of the domestic space, and the desire for social and sexual freedom, to which

⁴⁴⁶ Lyrics accessed at <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/pretty-in-pink/prettyinpink.htm> on January 8th 2011

Bailey and Hay refer in the portrayal of the parental home in the Teen Movie.⁴⁴⁷ Once again, rather than efface liminality as De Vaney contends, the scene portrays Andie inhabiting a number of identities simultaneously.

As Andie enters her father's bedroom, a medium-long shot follows her in, allowing us to observe its cluttered interior. Jack's rumpled sheets, indicating disturbed sleep, combined with his vague apologies about "getting in late" signify possible alcoholism, although this is never explicitly stated in the film. The film thus establishes Jack as a failed patriarchal figure, unable to provide adequately for his child. Gratefully taking the coffee Andie has prepared, Jack complains that she is "nagging [him] all the time" in urging him to locate better-paid work. Significantly, "nagging" is often associated with a persistent request from a spouse, rather than a daughter. This impression is reinforced by the positions of the two characters, as Andie sits on the bed looking down at her father, while he is laid on his back, with his head propped up by two pillows. Consequently, although the interaction can be seen to demonstrate De Vaney's claim that Hughes' films contain female characters in 'mother or wife-like roles,' the position of Andie relative to her father in this scene indicates the power that can accrue from this status.⁴⁴⁸

As their conversation develops, Jack enquires how "things are going at school." Probing no further into Andie's response that "it's okay," turning his attention instead to the prom arguably demonstrates Best's contention that the event has a wider significance beyond the dance itself.⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, Jack can be seen to imply that Andie's heteronormative socialisation is more significant than the academic education that is usually understood to be the high school's purpose. Revealing that

⁴⁴⁷ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006, in S Neale, Ed., 2006, op. cit., p. 220

⁴⁴⁸ A De Vaney, 2002, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, op. cit., p. 210

⁴⁴⁹ AL Best, 2000, op. cit., p. 12

she has not yet secured a date for the event, Andie turns her head from her father as if in shame, while close-ups of Jack reveal his bewilderment and concern for his daughter. Significantly, Best notes that in high school, popularity, or social capital, is 'bound up with normative constructions of masculinity and femininity.'⁴⁵⁰ Further, girls' popularity was shown to accrue as a result of their attractiveness to the opposite sex.⁴⁵¹ As Andie states that she has not yet been asked to the prom, she can be seen to reveal her low social capital and consequently her poor assimilation of heteronormative femininity, demonstrating the complex intersection between gender and class.

Asking "what is this anyway?" Jack shows interest in Andie's clothing and brings her unusual style to the viewer's attention. Following the opening sequence, which fetishised the process of dressing oneself, this scene emphasises her dress-making skills and creativity. Indeed, Andie states that she made most of her outfit herself, while her shoes are a second-hand purchase. A close-up of Jack reveals his admiration for Andie's work, although it remains unclear whether his pleasure lies in his daughter's thrift and sewing expertise, skills Moseley describes as 'the feminine ideals of the past,' or in the outfit itself.⁴⁵² Nonetheless, the scene leaves us with the impression both that Andie's personal appearance meets her father's requirements, and that adhering to those expectations is important to her. Consequently, in addition to establishing Andie's class status, these opening scenes construct her as striving to adhere to the norms of femininity, for which her father currently serves as the arbiter.

⁴⁵⁰ AL Best, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 72

⁴⁵¹ AL Best, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 72

⁴⁵² R Moseley, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 405

2.2.3 – SUBCULTURE AND PERFORMANCES OF RESPECTABILITY

Moseley argues that *Pretty in Pink* allows for and celebrates difference through ‘attention paid to spaces [Andie] inhabits and details of her dress.’⁴⁵³ For Dick Hebdige, subculture can be defined as an ‘opposition to the mainstream.’⁴⁵⁴ Significant to the applicability of his work for this analysis, Hebdige both identifies subculture as the preserve of the working classes, and locates the subversive potential of subcultural style.⁴⁵⁵ The group comprised of Andie, her childhood friend Duckie, and Iona, her employer at record store “Trax,” are constructed as a representation of a subculture that opposes the elite represented by Blane, Steff and Benny through style of dress and preferred use of space. Their opposition is demonstrated through hostility towards their wealthier peers, as when Blane is seen to infiltrate the concrete hangout where he asks Andie on a date, and in Cats, the bar to which he later accompanies her.



FIGURE 2.1 – A SUBCULTURE: ANDIE (MOLLY RINGWALD), DUCKIE (JON CRYER), AND IONA (ANNIE POTTS)

In *Pretty in Pink*, subcultural opposition is expressed through more than simple contrarianism. Indeed, through what Ken Gelder describes as ‘anachronistic self-fashioning,’⁴⁵⁶ and Kaja Silverman simply as ‘retro,’⁴⁵⁷ the clothing worn by Andie,

⁴⁵³ R Moseley, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 405

⁴⁵⁴ D Hebdige, 1979, ‘Subculture: The Meaning of Style’, in K Gelder and S Thornton, Eds., 1997, *The Subcultures Reader*, London: Routledge, p. 82

⁴⁵⁵ D Hebdige, 1979, *ibid.*, in K Gelder and S Thornton, Eds., 1997, *ibid.*, p. 84

⁴⁵⁶ K Gelder, 2007, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice*, London: Routledge, p. 92

Duckie and Iona can be seen to reappropriate the fashions of the past, and so refute the imperative for conspicuous consumption associated with perpetually changing mainstream fashion. As the film's opening scenes demonstrated, Andie's clothing is comprised of thrift shop finds intermingled with her own creations and offset by copious jewellery. Although her pearls, smart jackets and dresses evoke conventionally respectable feminine dress, the clashing colours, patterns and layers of Andie's outfit create what Duckie describes as a "volcanic ensemble," marking her clothing as excessive.

Duckie's unusual combinations of smart blazers and trousers juxtaposed with the overt display of braces demonstrate a similar fondness for plunder and bricolage from past fashions. His clothing both references smart adult male attire of the past and mocks the look epitomised by Michael Douglas' performance as Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*, (Dir, Oliver Stone, 1987) associated with workers in financial services during the same period. Despite being comprised of the mainstays of smart masculine attire, Duckie's clothing is accessorised to excess, often for instance, wearing more than one watch on the same wrist. In contrast to the attempts at class passing that Skeggs describes, Andie, Duckie and Iona's invocation of respectability through fashion is clearly intended as ironic mimicry. Indeed, their retro clothing succeeds in denaturalising 'the wearer's specular identity.'⁴⁵⁸ In Butler's terms, their clothing can be seen to reveal the contingency of normative gender.⁴⁵⁹ Further, their subtle mockery of respectability reveals hegemonic gender as a classed position, as Skeggs argues.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ K Silverman, 1986, 'Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,' in T Modleski, Ed., 1986, *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 150

⁴⁵⁸ K Silverman, 1986, *ibid.*, in T Modleski, Ed., 1986, *ibid.*, p. 150

⁴⁵⁹ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 192

⁴⁶⁰ B Skeggs, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 99

Andie's oppositional positioning in relation to the mainstream is problematised by her evident aspirations to transcend her class position. Indeed, following her shift at Trax, Andie drives to the affluent suburbs, and gazes in awe at the houses, while Duckie fidgets and complains beside her. Further to foretelling her later return to the area as Blane's guest at Steff's party, Andie's quiet gaze can also be seen to prefigure the symbolic class ascension she achieves at the end of the film. Rottenberg argues that the American Dream discourse, which holds the promise of ascending the class hierarchy to any American citizen, is predicated on the individual's ability to emulate the norms of 'determination, hard work and moral uprightness.'⁴⁶¹ Andie can certainly be seen to embody these norms throughout the film. Her determination is demonstrated by her insistence on attending the prom despite lacking a date, and in creating a dress for the event. Moreover, in addition to working at Trax, Andie is frequently shown doing school work, an activity that Shary notes is particularly unusual in the portrayal of a teen girl protagonist.⁴⁶² Underscoring Andie's work ethic, she is, as discussed in the previous section, critical of her unemployed father, and later criticises Duckie's lack of effort at school. Finally, her honesty and candour throughout establishes Andie's moral uprightness. Consequently there is a distinct ambivalence in her will to transcend her class status, and her wish to mock gender and class norms.

Andie's ambivalent mockery of class and gender is echoed in the relationship between thrift shops and mainstream fashion. Although apparently refuting the endless consumption associated with mainstream fashion, thrift shops flourish only within a thriving consumer economy where the utility of clothing outlives its desirability. Consequently, the group's ample use of second-hand clothing can be seen

⁴⁶¹ C Rottenberg, 2004, op. cit., p. 69

⁴⁶² T Shary, 2002, 'The Nerdy Girl and her Beautiful Sister,' in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, op. cit., p. 236

to demonstrate a wider ambivalence towards consumer culture. In *Trax*, Andie's mildly hostile "American Express Platinum card maybe?" to Blane's record purchase, illustrates her negotiation of this paradox. While the record shop relies on wealthy teens' disposable income, Iona and Andie remain dismissive, even antagonistic towards their customers. A similar double-bind is encountered in Butler's theorisation of gender. For Butler, there is no space outside the prevailing matrix of norms from which to mount a critique. Rather, as discussed in the previous chapter, Butler states that critique of the norms can only occur on the margins of intelligibility.⁴⁶³ Although *Pretty in Pink* is unquestionably an artefact of mainstream culture, its representation of subculture enables the film to carve out a space for critique of gender and class norms from within the mainstream.

Adding to the complexity of the group's subversion of gender and class norms, Duckie is shown to take up the norms of masculine behaviour, yet perform them to excess. Early in the film, he remarks, "I'll call ahead and make reservations," as he accompanies Andie to their high-school cafeteria, parodying the conversational norms of a couple selecting a restaurant. Later, as he requests Andie's father's permission to marry her, Duckie effects an implicit mockery of Jack's patriarchal ownership of his daughter. Expressing his devotion and intent to provide for Andie so that Jack "won't have to worry," the camera rests in medium close-up on Jack's face as he earnestly stifles his bemusement at the teen's archaic formality. Duckie's hyperbolic expressions of love and angst serve to construct the scene, and the patriarchal ownership it seemingly upholds as absurd. Located outdoors, among a collection of mismatched chairs and an overturned crate, which parody comfortable living-room furnishings, the scene demonstrates that, contrary to De Vaney's view that Hughes' films seek to contain their female protagonists, that the patriarchal control invoked by

⁴⁶³ See for instance, J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, p. 74

Duckie is no longer possible.⁴⁶⁴ Reflecting Butler's argument that the citation of the norm presents the occasion for its subversion, Duckie's invocation of patriarchal ownership works to reveal its obsolescence and absurdity.⁴⁶⁵

The clear contempt Andie and Duckie inspire at their high school – and their awareness of the low esteem with which they are held – invites their invocations of “middle classness” to be perceived as efforts to distance themselves from their designation as working class, just as Skeggs observed in her research participants.⁴⁶⁶ However, given the excess of their clothing and behaviour, Butler's description of ‘parodic inhabiting of conformity’ becomes a more fitting description of their relationship to the mainstream.⁴⁶⁷ Butler's model describes how subjects appear to adhere to gender norms, yet do so to excess such that the primacy of those norms comes to be undermined.

Further elucidating the values represented by the group's subculture, Sarah Thornton takes up Bourdieu's conceptualisation of ‘capitals’ to propose ‘subcultural capital’ as a means of conceptualising how youths articulate distinctions amongst one another.⁴⁶⁸ As with Bourdieu's theorisation of cultural capital, Thornton argues that subcultural capital may be embodied by dressing in a certain manner, and objectified through the conspicuous possession of certain items. Unlike cultural capital, which is determined by mastery of ‘legitimate culture’ as defined by the most powerful classes,⁴⁶⁹ Thornton notes that subcultural capital is reliant on a peer network in which

⁴⁶⁴ A De Vaney, 2002, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, op. cit., p. 210

⁴⁶⁵ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 108

⁴⁶⁶ B Skeggs, 1997, op. cit., p. 99

⁴⁶⁷ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 121

⁴⁶⁸ S Thornton, 1995, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, London: Routledge, p. 12

⁴⁶⁹ See for instance PL Anderson and MN Hansen, 2011, ‘Class and Cultural Capital – the Case of Class Inequality in Educational Performance,’ *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 1

“hipness” is defined and distributed.⁴⁷⁰ Consequently, although Iona’s record shop demonstrates that subcultural capital can readily be converted to economic capital, Thornton argues that it is substantially less class-bound than cultural capital.⁴⁷¹ Rather, subcultural distinction obfuscates class status such that when Iona meets pet shop owner Terrence, she is surprised to discover that she likes this “yuppie,” even though, as small business owners, they appear to occupy similar class positions.

Thornton’s work on subcultural capital, and subcultures themselves, offer the potential to complicate Butler’s theorisation of gender. Butler conceives only of a single, prevailing regime of norms in which only a single form of masculinity and femininity is recognised as possible.⁴⁷² Butler retreats from describing the prevailing matrix of norms as universal, arguing that the notion of the universal is always provisional.⁴⁷³ However, in doing so, she means only that the boundaries of the prevailing matrix of norms are subject to change, not, as in the case of subcultures, to argue that there might be multiple competing sets of norms in which the subject might be recognised as intelligible. Butler argues that the matrix of norms only maintains its status as the norm on condition that no alternative appears possible.⁴⁷⁴ However, subcultural capital presents multiple sets of norms, and thus multiple possibilities of idealised gender.

Thornton argues that ‘subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder.’⁴⁷⁵ As such, when Andie attends Steff’s house party with Blane, the film can be seen to portray the other guests’ failure to recognise the

⁴⁷⁰ S Thornton, 1995, ‘The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital,’ in K Gelder and S Thornton, Eds., 1997, op. cit., p. 185

⁴⁷¹ S Thornton, 1995, *ibid.*, in K Gelder and S Thornton, Eds., 1997, *ibid.*, p. 203

⁴⁷² J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 185

⁴⁷³ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 190

⁴⁷⁴ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 31

⁴⁷⁵ S Thornton, 1995, op. cit., in K Gelder and S Thornton, Eds., 1997, op. cit., p. 186

significance of her subcultural style. As she and Blane walk through the house, the camera tracks behind them, enabling the film's spectators to observe how the pair are scrutinised by the other party guests. One girl they pass, riding piggyback on another student, accosts Andie and remarks: "Hey, aren't you the girl in my art class?" When Andie doesn't respond, the girl taunts "Nice pearls – this isn't a dinner party, honey," sneeringly highlighting Andie's reference to middle-class respectability through her choice of jewellery, while missing the subversive excess of her clothing. Indicating the importance of space for the perception of subcultural capital, patterns from Andie's paisley ensemble are echoed in the soft furnishings of Steff's home. Presumably selected by his parents, the paisley upholstery signifies middle class comfort. As such, the ironic disassociation Andie intends cannot work in this environment. Indeed, Steff's other guests are universally clad in plain off-white clothing, indicating their belonging to an entirely distinct culture of taste.

In addition to the context specificity of subcultural capital, the failure of the other party guests to read the ironic excess of Andie's clothing can be attributed to their refusal to recognise her as human. As discussed, Butler follows Hegel in her contention that recognition is essential for the subject's survival. To be recognised as culturally intelligible and thus human, she argues, an individual's sex, gender and ethnicity must be legible within a given frame of reference.⁴⁷⁶ Scenes at Steff's party can be seen to illustrate the necessity of incorporating class into Butler's conceptualisation of the human.

Attempting to escape the bacchanalian excesses of the party, Andie and Blane head to Steff's bedroom, where they are surprised to discover Steff and Benny. Clearly aghast at Blane's choice of partner, Benny performs a double-take before exclaiming

⁴⁷⁶ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, *ibid.*, p. 2

loudly “am I having a nightmare?” Soon accompanied out of the room by Steff, whose leering smirk makes clear his agreement with Benny’s invectives despite his outward solicitousness, Benny declares Blane an “asshole,” while to Andie, she simply states: “I don’t even know what you are.” Benny’s inability to locate vocabulary to describe Andie, and the other guests’ ignorance of her name despite sharing a class with her, indicate Andie’s lack of recognition as human. Later in the film, Steff refers to Andie as a “mutant” in a bid to dissuade Blane from associating with her. Although her style differs from that of Benny and Steff, Andie is nonetheless represented as normatively feminine, while her ethnicity passes uncommented throughout the film. Consequently, Andie’s lack of recognition, and thus cultural intelligibility, can be attributed to her class status.

Significantly, when Blane accompanies Andie to the Cats nightclub, a subcultural space, he is mocked for his foppish linen blazer. The rejection of Andie at Steff’s party, and Blane at Cats, indicates that no value system is absolute in the film, since interpretations of both characters’ style are shown to vary according to their audience. For Duckie and Iona, Andie’s thrift shop style may well provide an ironic reflection on the rapid changes of mainstream fashion. Steff’s party guests meanwhile merely perceive a poor imitation of the style of the older middle classes. Consequently, echoing Bailey and Hay’s observations of distinct regimes of regulation in the high-school Teen Movie, *Pretty in Pink* can be seen to indicate the significance of the context in which performative gender occurs, an area that Butler does not address.

2.2.4 – THE VALUE OF LABOUR IN *PRETTY IN PINK*

Anthony Bleach’s study of John Hughes’ films in which Molly Ringwald features takes up Angela McRobbie’s widely cited definition of post-feminism, as ‘feminism taken

into account,⁴⁷⁷ such that ‘the feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s come to be undermined.’⁴⁷⁸ Importantly, this is described not as a linear progression from feminism, but as a cyclical process in which the freedom of individual women’s choices is valorised, while their collective voice, which might lead to wider structural reforms, is undermined. For Bleach, the distinction between feminism and post-feminism is most apparent in their treatment of class. Indeed, while the former targets the social ills leading to women’s collective exclusion, Bleach argues that post-feminist culture links female liberation to individual transformation through aspiration and consumption.⁴⁷⁹ Bleach is surely right that the film’s celebration of Andie’s individual class ascension through her romance with Blane allows little scope to question the social division encountered earlier in the narrative. Likewise, when Andie encourages her father to find employment, the film leads us to believe his failure to do so is the result of Jack’s lack of motivation following his wife’s abandonment, rather than a question of social exclusion or a weak economy.

The film’s treatment of work reveals the tensions between the individualist, consumptive strategies for transformation valorised in post-feminism, and Andie’s ability to construct her gender identity through thrift and creativity. “Work” is understood as paid labour, such as that which Andie undertakes in Iona’s record shop. Further, since the film is centred on full-time high-school students, work should also be understood as the school work required by the education system. Interestingly, as Bleach points out, paid work and education have been significant areas for feminist discourse, since women have historically been excluded from both domains.⁴⁸⁰ Butler’s

⁴⁷⁷ A McRobbie, 2004, quoted in AC Bleach, 2010, op. cit., p. 27

⁴⁷⁸ AC Bleach, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 27

⁴⁷⁹ AC Bleach, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 41

⁴⁸⁰ AC Bleach, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 43

theorisation of performativity allows “work” to be considered in a third way; as the labour of perpetually approximating a model of idealised gender.

Examining paid labour in *Pretty in Pink*, Bleach firstly asserts that such work is presented only as a means of financial gain, not as an outlet for self-expression.⁴⁸¹ To illustrate, he cites a scene in the record shop, where Iona’s satisfaction in her ceiling decoration is tempered by her awareness that her customers are unlikely to notice or appreciate her efforts. When Andie disputes this, arguing that she is skilled at interior decoration, Iona responds sharply: “If I’m good in bed should I be a whore?” Iona thus views her creativity as entirely separate from her means of financial support.

The lack of personal investment in their work leads Bleach to argue that Andie’s studies and Iona’s small business are subsumed by their romantic interest in men, whose higher class position promises to lift the two women out of their lower status.⁴⁸² The importance of romance relative to work is exemplified by Blane’s “computer trick,” which interrupts Andie’s homework and replaces it with photos of the pair side by side on the screen. For Bleach, this sequence, and Iona’s new relationship with Terrence, highlights the film’s post-feminist treatment of work: *Pretty in Pink* takes feminism into account by portraying Iona as the successful owner of a record shop, a type of business often perceived to be a male domain.⁴⁸³ However, depicting work only as a temporary diversion, as Bleach puts it, a way of ‘marking time until Prince Charming comes to [the] rescue,’ *Pretty in Pink* simultaneously undermines their economic autonomy.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ AC Bleach, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 41

⁴⁸² AC Bleach, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 43

⁴⁸³ See for instance, R Shuker, 2004, ‘Beyond the “High Fidelity” Stereotype: defining the (contemporary) Record Collector,’ *Popular Music*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 311-330

⁴⁸⁴ AC Bleach, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 43

Although Andie's wages allow her to run a car that allows her freedom of movement, and so might be regarded as purely instrumental, paid and unpaid work are seen to hold potential for transformation for the film's characters. Andie's dressmaking skills allow her to go to the prom and, throughout the film, to express a distinct gender and class identity. Likewise, Jack's employment prompts him to dress in tailored shirts and trousers by the end of the film, which can be read as an index of increased status and enhanced wellbeing.

The sequence in which Andie designs and makes her dress for the prom illustrates the significance of work for the film's construction of gender. The scene begins in Iona's flat, where Iona has just given Andie her prom dress. Zooming to a close-up of Andie's face as the non-diegetic soundtrack fades in, the film conveys her sudden inspiration, such that her attentions are no longer focused on the action around her. The film next cuts to a long shot of Andie's bedroom to see her walk quickly into the frame wearing a baseball jacket over a crochet dress. Arguably, this incoherent mix underscores her sartorial freedom, which may be lost in her work to create a conventionally feminine dress. Distractedly throwing her clothes onto the bed so as to focus on the task ahead, the long shot allows us to see various styles competing for her attention in the room. The camera position, at the back of the wardrobe looking out into the room such that two items of clothing frame the shot can likewise be seen to reveal the significance of clothing to Andie's subjectivity.



FIGURE 2.2 – ANDIE MAKES HER DRESS

The film then cuts to a medium close-up of the two dresses laid out on the bed, as Andie examines their different fabrics and textures. Each dress represents a different alliance for Andie, and therefore the distinct positions she will negotiate by attending the prom. The dress supplied by her father represents her status as a daughter and with it the requirement to maintain her father's lineage through heterosexual coupling. In turn, the dress provided by Iona represents her subcultural affiliation, and consequently a tendency to parody the mores of gender and class respectability. Significantly, the scene continues with close-ups and medium close-ups of Andie's labours in creating the dress, sketching ideas on her notepad, ripping apart seams, sewing new ones and assessing the results in a full length mirror. As such, she can be seen to deconstruct and combine the two dresses to create a representation of gender and class identity that illustrates her ambivalence towards the prom as a locus of gender and class interpellation. In choosing to attend the prom Andie accepts her role in perpetuating her father's patriarchal lineage. However, the angularity of the resulting dress, which acknowledges her subcultural allegiance with Iona, undermines the primacy of the normative structures of heterosexuality in which she is implicated.

Several cross-cuts in the scene provide a reflection on how work is presented in the film, and invite comparisons between Andie and other characters as they make their preparations for the prom. The scene's first cross-cut depicts a medium close-up of Andie's dog silently watching her work. Her concerted labours provide a striking contrast with the enforced confinement and indulgence of her pet, setting the tone for the scene's later cross-cuts, which portray characters in a state of inactivity. Following two further shots depicting Andie's efforts in close-up, the film next cuts away to a medium close-up of Duckie, sitting scowling in his darkened bedroom. Contrasted with her friend's unproductive anger, Andie's labours are portrayed as an effective means of overcoming Blane's humiliating retraction of his earlier invitation to the prom. Presenting Andie's drive to create her own dress as a desirable character trait, the film recalls Rottenberg's reading of the American Dream discourse, which, as discussed, highlights the importance of hard work in narratives of social mobility.⁴⁸⁵

The final cross-cuts of the sequence depict Blane's and Steff's preparations for the prom. Throughout *Pretty in Pink*, work and consumption have been portrayed as mutually exclusive, such that those who work do not consume, while those who consume are not seen to work. The positioning of the two activities as a dichotomy is effectively demonstrated in Trax, where positions behind and in front of the counter occupied respectively by Andie and Blane portray the substantial difference in the two characters' class backgrounds. In contrast to the growing urgency of Andie's efforts, signified by increasingly shorter shot durations, Blane's preparations for the prom are considerably more languid, as the camera lingers in medium-long shot to show him lounging on a bed sipping from a mug. A subsequent shot of Steff preening himself in the mirror as he smokes reveals an alternative form of labour practiced by the film's upper-class characters. Indeed, reading the film through Butler's work allows Steff's

⁴⁸⁵ C Rottenberg, 2004, op. cit., p. 70

preening to be read as a moment of anxiety, in which he attempts to assume a posture of idealised masculinity that he is perpetually unable to fulfil.⁴⁸⁶

Contrary to Bleach's argument that *Pretty in Pink* foregrounds consumerist, acquisitive behaviour at the expense of labour, Butler's theorisation of performativity allows for a reading that demonstrates how all characters must constantly work for their gendered and classed acceptability. Certainly, Andie's work to attain idealised femininity is more obviously visible. However, what appears to be the innate gender and class status of Andie's wealthier peers, is revealed to be the result of an equal, though different, type of labour: of fraught discrimination among a vast array of consumer choice. The division constructed between work and consumerism in earlier scenes is therefore spurious, since both are revealed to be forms of labour through which subjects aspire to attain gendered and classed acceptability.

Butler's theorisation of performativity casts gender as a form of labour. Indeed, disputing gender's purported status as innate, Butler argues that iterative approximations of gender work to produce its 'appearance of substance.'⁴⁸⁷ Consequently, Butler's work allows the portrayal of Andie creating her dress for the prom, itself a prerequisite for the assumption of normative, adult heterosexuality, to be read as an allegory of gender performativity. Skeggs' contention that 'working class women are always positioned at a distance' from femininity' adds a further layer of complexity to the sequence.⁴⁸⁸ Observing her subjects preparing for an evening out together, Skeggs notes that their raucous behaviour belied the feminine appearance they sought to create. Thus, the sequence can be seen to demonstrate not only that heteronormative gender identity is always constructed through repeated labour, but

⁴⁸⁶ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 62

⁴⁸⁷ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 45

⁴⁸⁸ B Skeggs, 1997, op. cit., p. 105

also the further labour required of those who are positioned outside hegemonic classed gender identity. Consequently, in rendering so apparent the labour required to participate in the event, *Pretty in Pink* can be seen to dispute the prom's frequent reading as the location for a quasi-magical transformation.⁴⁸⁹



FIGURE 2.3 – ANDIE TENTATIVELY ENTERS THE PROM VENUE

The sequence concludes with Andie showing off her newly created dress for her father's approval. Narrow at the neck and slim-fitting to the knee, the unusual silhouette of Andie's dress shown in Figure 2.3 can be elucidated by Kearney's and Best's work describing how the prom is derived from the debutante *cotillions* of the nineteenth century, where a girl's "coming out" heralded their marriageability.⁴⁹⁰ Reflecting this legacy, prom dresses typically incorporate an "hourglass" silhouette, wide at the shoulders and tight around the waist with a full skirt, emphasising a feminine figure, and with it, female reproductive ability. The prom thus looks back to

⁴⁸⁹ See for instance, AL Best, 2005, 'The Production of Heterosexuality at the High-School Prom' in C Ingraham, Ed., 2005, *Thinking Straight: The Power, Promise and Paradox of Heterosexuality*, London: Routledge, p. 195

⁴⁹⁰ See MC Kearney, 2002, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2002, op. cit., p. 126; and AL Best, 2000, op. cit., p. 7

a system wherein, as Lévi-Strauss observes, women functioned as tokens of exchange among patrilineal clans, and further ensured the perpetuation of class status.⁴⁹¹

Both Jack and Iona gave her dresses that would have been suitable for the event without alteration. Consequently, Andie's radical transformation of the dress can be seen to reflect the ambivalence of her gender and class positioning. Although clad head to toe in pink, a traditional signifier of heteronormative femininity, the androgynous cut of Andie's dress literally reverses the traditional cut of the prom dress, demonstrating her refusal of the hereditary principles upheld by the event. Andie's ambivalent positioning can be elucidated by Tasker's work on cross-class narratives. Indeed, drawing Garber's work on cross-dressing, Tasker argues that the cross-dresser eludes traditional binaries, introducing an "in-between" space of possibility.⁴⁹² As such, Andie can be seen to have transformed herself into a gender and class positioning that remains unmapped by the film's existing frame of reference.

2.2.5 – IDEALISED ROMANCE AT THE PROM

Reflecting Best's description of the dance as a 'mere footnote' to a number of rituals that occur prior to the event, the prom is invoked from the beginning of *Pretty in Pink* as a significant and inevitable rite of passage.⁴⁹³ Indeed, in an early discussion, Iona quickly dismisses the possibility of Andie not attending, arguing that although nobody enjoys the prom, it is essential to participate in this particular high-school ritual. Interestingly, Iona makes a crucial distinction between what Andie terms a "requirement," such as the timetabled classes she reprimands Duckie for not attending, and the socially mandated, but no less essential events to which, as Iona asserts, "you have to go."

⁴⁹¹ C Lévi-Strauss, 1969, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. JH Bell, JR von Sturmer and R Needham, Boston: Beacon Press, p. 23

⁴⁹² Y Tasker, 1998, op. cit., p. 29

⁴⁹³ AL Best, 2000, op. cit., p. 12

The prom's status in the film as a privileged space of gender interpellation complicates Butler's conceptualisation of the process. Whereas Butler constructs interpellation as constantly iterative, the privileged position afforded to the prom demonstrates the existence of instances wherein gender is more rigorously policed.⁴⁹⁴ Although Andie is scrutinised throughout *Pretty in Pink*, the prom's rigid dress code and the requirement to attend with an opposite-sexed partner demonstrate the increased stringency of heteronormativity there. Since the prom also signifies the end of compulsory education, and for many, a departure from the family home to college, the event can be regarded as a gateway to adulthood. Consequently, ascension to adulthood is shown to require adherence to strict gender and class norms. Although prom attendance is not formally enforced, there remains, as Iona can be seen to observe, a confluence of power relations that demand compliance to the regulatory gender and classed ideal.

The prom's positioning as an ideological imperative that transcends subcultural affiliation is indicated by the revelation that Iona attended her prom. Indeed, affirming the defining importance of the event, she remarks that the prom was the "only time I ever looked normal." In a further effort to persuade Andie that she should go to the prom, Iona recounts the story of a friend who had not attended, and who, twenty years later still feels something missing. Filmed in medium-long shot, surrounded by the chaotic wares of her record shop, Iona mimes the actions of her friend as she "checks her keys ... counts her kids, before she realises nothing is missing." She then turns to face Andie as the camera cuts to a medium close-up of her face, which has now resumed a deadpan, sarcastic expression as she finishes with "she decided it must be side-effects of not going to her prom." Iona's affected performance indicates that her intonations are not to be taken too seriously, and that most likely this "friend"

⁴⁹⁴ See for instance, J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. x

does not exist. The message transmitted nonetheless remains intact: regardless of subcultural resistance to other sartorial and behavioural norms, the prom remains a compulsory and universal ritual.

From its very first shots, the prom is established as a timeless rite of passage. Indeed, our first view of the event is a static medium close-up of the back wall of the hall in which the dance is taking place. On that back wall is a monochrome photograph of big band musicians in identical black and white suits. As the camera zooms out and cranes over the hall, we can see another, much smaller collection of musicians at work, administering to synthesisers and a backing track. Significantly, among the crowd of teens dancing in opposite-sexed pairs, the male of the pairs are universally wearing the black and white jacket and trousers seen in the old photograph. The prom is thus established as an eternal, unchanging feature of the socialisation process of all young adults. Although music tastes and technologies may change over time, it is implied, this process of heteronormative socialisation will remain.

Occurring at the end of *Pretty in Pink*, the prom, and Andie's reunion with Blane, provides the film's narrative closure. Moseley argues that the film's ending is 'too easy, almost trite.'⁴⁹⁵ Kaveney agrees, arguing that Blane never fully repents for his earlier humiliation of Andie, making her sudden forgiveness that leads to their final reunion 'problematic.'⁴⁹⁶ The prom's function at the film's conclusion recalls Schatz's work on narrative closure. For Schatz, the conclusion of the genre of indeterminate space sees the synthesis of the two opposite-sexed protagonists at an emotive, climactic event that minimises their loss of autonomy and celebrates the heterosexual couple as an idealised social unit.⁴⁹⁷ Indeed, foreclosing the possibility of any

⁴⁹⁵ R Moseley, 2002, op. cit., p. 406

⁴⁹⁶ R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 32

⁴⁹⁷ T Schatz, 1981, op. cit., p. 32

alternative or unfulfilled desire, Duckie – with a look to the camera to indicate his surprise at this turn of events – is quickly paired off with an attractive female prom attendee. Cementing the characters in opposite-sexed pairs, the film's conclusion can be seen to reinforce the force and universality of the heterosexual matrix. The high emotion of the prom is further reinforced by the ecstatic, sweeping chords of *Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark's* "If You Leave." Consequently, the scene permits no question of the couple's suitability, nor an interrogation of the class disparities that were previously explored in the film.

Kaveney's view that 'the character whose identity is most under threat in *Pretty in Pink* ... is Blane,' provides an alternative interpretation of the scenes at the prom.⁴⁹⁸ During his short relationship with Andie, Blane reveals that his parents are considered "corporate royalty," jokingly referring to himself as the "Crown Prince of McDonnagh Electric." His invocation of "royalty" is revealing, since it constitutes a particularly rigid form of patriarchal lineage whose perpetuation depends on successful heterosexual coupling. Steff's threats to tell Blane's parents about his relationship with Andie imply both that Blane has kept Andie's lower-class position a secret from his family, and that they would react badly to this information. At the prom, Blane's rejection of Steff – and with him the expectations of his class background – to pursue Andie, suggests that he is now content to defy those expectations.

The couple are reunited in the car-park where the film ends as their kiss affirms their successful reunion. Appropriating what Marc Augé describes as a 'non-place' for action that would normally be associated with the prom, the scene invites the possibility that Andie, with her self-designed dress, and Blane, who has selected a partner of his own choosing, have coined their own value system within this non-

⁴⁹⁸ R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 32

place.⁴⁹⁹ Looking back at their date earlier in the film, their relationship is seen to flourish only in other non-places, such as on the street and alone in the stables at the hunting club. However, as the non-diegetic soundtrack associated with the prom continues to accompany this scene, the car park is presented as an extension of, rather than an alternative to, the prom. The event's status as a privileged site of interpellation is reinstated as all-pervasive, even for those who sit on its margins. Consequently, although affirming Butler's position that there is no space outside the heterosexual matrix, *Pretty in Pink* demonstrates throughout how the parodic, excessive citation of heteronormativity might open a space for critique within its boundaries.

2.3 – CASE STUDY 2: *SHE'S ALL THAT*, (DIR. ROBERT ISCOVE, 1999)

2.3.1 – INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years on from *Pretty in Pink*, Robert Iscove's adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, titled *She's All That*, was issued to a film-going public now well versed in the conventions of the high-school Teen Movie. Indeed, *She's All That* was one of many high-school Teen Movie literary adaptations released in the late 1990s at least partly as a result of the commercial and critical success of *Clueless*, a loose adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma*, which grossed \$773m at the US box office and a further \$26m in video and DVD rental.⁵⁰⁰ There followed a cycle of high-school Teen Movies adapting Shakespeare texts, such as *Ten Things I Hate About You* (Dir. Gil Junger, 1999), a reworking of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Never Been Kissed*, (Dir. Raja Gosnell, 1999), adapting *As You Like It*.⁵⁰¹ Co-opting little else than the basic plot structure, these films were not faithful transpositions of their literary sources. Rather,

⁴⁹⁹ M Augé, 1995, *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthology of Supermodernity*, Trans. John Howe, London: Verso, p. 78

⁵⁰⁰ HH Davis, 2006, op. cit., p. 56

⁵⁰¹ Robin Wood also cites *Whatever It Takes*, Dir. David Raynr, 2000, adapting *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Cruel Intentions*, Dir. Roger Kumble, 1999, adapting *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, and *Get Over It*, Dir. Tommy O'Haver, 2001, adapting *A Midsummer Nights Dream*. R Wood, 2003, op. cit., p. 319

the films' radical transformation of setting, vernacular and characterisation warrant Geoffrey Wagner's categorisation of 'analogy,' where the departure from source text to film is so significant that 'an entirely different work is created.'⁵⁰²

For Wood, the proliferation of such adaptations indicates an 'ambition to construct a resonance' that goes beyond the parameters ordinarily established for the Teen Movie.⁵⁰³ However, Davis argues that although seemingly a radical departure from the settings of the films' literary sources, the high school is in fact highly appropriate.⁵⁰⁴ For Davis, the self-contained, hierarchical environments of the films' source texts are analogous to the Teen Movie's high school setting.⁵⁰⁵ Further, serving as the texts' 'final festival,' where characters gather to celebrate the inauguration of a new order, the prom likewise features heavily in these literary adaptations.⁵⁰⁶

She's All That introduces us to Zach Siler, class president and captain of the football team. It is understood early on that he and his girlfriend, Taylor Vaughn, are destined for the titles of prom king and queen respectively. However, leaving him for laughable reality TV star, Brock Hudson, Zach makes a bet with his friend Dean that he could transform any girl into a potential prom queen. Accepting the wager, Zach's friends select Laney Boggs, a student whose art, politics and standoffish attitude mark her as "scary and inaccessible." Nonetheless, Zach gradually coaxes Laney to social events and gives her a makeover, as a result of which she becomes an unlikely prom queen candidate, even stirring romantic feelings in Zach. Complicating matters, Dean reveals Zach's bet to Laney, such that, contrary to expectation, Laney is not elected

⁵⁰² G Wagner, 1975, quoted in I Whelehan and D Cartmell, Eds., 1999, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, London: Routledge, p. 8

⁵⁰³ R Wood, 2003, op. cit., p. 319

⁵⁰⁴ HH Davis, 2006, op. cit., p. 53

⁵⁰⁵ HH Davis, 2006, *ibid.*, p. 53

⁵⁰⁶ HH Davis, 2006, *ibid.*, p. 58

prom queen. Rather, she and Zach are reunited once the statuses of prom king and queen have been undermined.

2.3.2 – CONSTRUCTING STATUS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

Laney is introduced from the very first frames of the film through quick close-ups of female hands first soaking newsprint and then painting on a large canvas, which we later learn concerns a riot in Mogadishu. These shots recall the montage in *Pretty in Pink*, which portrayed Andie making her dress for the prom. Like Andie, Laney's focus on the canvas indicates her absorption and pleasure in her creativity, untroubled by her paint-splattered clothing and face.

In a further similarity to Andie, the absence of Laney's mother is shown to require her to assume the role of second-order parent. The following scenes depict Laney waking up her brother, Simon, with the admonishment that "there are children in Mexico that have already been up for three hours making clothes for corporate America." Moving from her collage of newspaper clippings of African riots to a lament on sweatshop manufacturing, *She's All That* is at pains to convey Laney's political awareness. Certainly unusual for a female Teen Movie protagonist, Laney's interest in politics is presented as problematic, even pathological. Indeed, later at school, her art teacher scowls at the completed canvas, commenting "that's wonderful, Laney. Now tell me something: which part represents you?" The film thus sets up a transformation from Laney directing her work and creativity outside of herself, to a concentrated labour on the self.

As a *Pygmalion* adaptation, and so premised on a transformation of the female protagonist by her "betters," the audience must immediately recognise the differing social positions of the film's two principal characters. Consequently, from the domestic scene in Laney's home, the film cuts to a long crane shot of a street scene,

centred on a school bus. Heard at the beginning of the scene, the school radio DJ's voiceover situates the film temporally – as immediately following spring break, with only eight weeks remaining before high-school graduation. Furthermore, the DJ's "welcome back" music situates the space of the bus and of Laney's and Zach's respective vehicles as part of the high school's sphere of influence. The pervasive soundtrack in this sequence indicates the apparent universality of the high school, which subsumes alternative subcultures within the hegemonic mainstream.

The camera pans to follow the school bus as it stops in front of the high school. However, confounding expectations that Laney will appear from the bus, the camera cranes ever closer to spot a small van emerging from behind it, which then comes to a stop. Keeping the bus at the centre of the shot, the camera indicates Laney's rightful place as part of the school community, while the arrival in her father's car signals Laney's rejection of that community. In line with Schatz's conceptualisation of the genre of indeterminate space as a 'genre of integration,' *She's All That* will see Laney move from a rejection of the high-school community to a position at its centre – as candidate for prom queen.⁵⁰⁷ Cutting to a medium close-up of the passenger door, the film encourages the viewer to focus on the "Dr Pool" logo, which has been defaced to remove the "l," highlighting the lack of respectability of Wayne's pool cleaning business referred to at the beginning of the chapter. The camera remains in position as Laney exits the car, carrying her completed canvas and numerous other bags to create an awkward, ungainly spectacle. Briefly acknowledging her father's farewell, Laney summarily moves to close the door, after which the film cuts to Zach's ostentatious entrance.

⁵⁰⁷ T Schatz, 1981, op. cit., p. 35

While Laney's entrance emphasised her rejection of the high-school community, Zach's introduction to the film illustrates the elevated status he occupies among the students. His arrival is heralded by a medium-long shot of a large, yellow sports utility vehicle coming to a stop outside the school. Further to this evident signifier of wealth, the film demonstrates his popularity among the students as a close-up of his personalised number plate – a further signifier of wealth – reads "Mr Prez." Quickly elucidating this moniker, the film cuts to a medium-shot of the car pulling into the space marked "Student body president – reserved." Consequently, Zach's socioeconomic position is seen to intersect with his elevated position within the high school community.

Further demonstrating Zach's importance, his exit from the car is portrayed with a high-angle shot, which slowly tilts upwards to reveal his legs as he walks towards the main school building. The camera then tracks behind him, assuming the stance of a subservient high-school student. The position behind him allows the viewer to observe how Zach's desirability, as two girls walking by shyly giggle in acknowledgment of his greeting. Valerie Orpen's study of film editing enables a reading of Zach's 'delayed and fragmented' presentation as typical of a star entrance.⁵⁰⁸ Having earned a following from the teen slasher hits, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (Dir. Jim Gillespie, 1997) and its sequel *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* (Dir. Danny Cannon, 1999), the role of Zach is Freddie Prinze Jr.'s first as male lead and undeniably provides the film's strongest star presence. This introductory sequence capitalises on Prinze Jr.'s star capital and provides a further dimension to Zach's desirability and status in the film. Consequently, his entrance can be seen to reflect Bailey and Hay's observation that the high school in the Teen Movie provides a

⁵⁰⁸ V Orpen, 2003, *Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive*, London: Wallflower, p. 88

sociological microcosm of wider society.⁵⁰⁹ Indeed, Zach's position at Harrison High can be seen to reflect that of Prinze Jr. in real life.

The camera follows Zach's gaze as he notices a smiling portrait of himself on the wall. Pausing in front of this, Zach assumes the pose and expression in the photograph, before resuming his walk along the corridor. Butler's work enables a reading of Zach's pose in front of his own picture as an early indicator of his status anxiety. Indeed, the portrait represents the crystallised, but ultimately fictional, coherence of attributes that is 'desired, wished for, idealised,' but ultimately shown to be impossible to embody.⁵¹⁰ Depicting Zach as "Soccer Team Captain," and wearing the same varsity jacket in which he is seen walking into school, the photograph represents an idealised coherence of teen masculinity comprised of athleticism, class status and good looks. Tellingly, Zach's performance of the pose in this scene imitates an inauthentic pose of an artificially assumed stance, implying that the idealised masculinity to which he aspires is a fictional construction.



FIGURE 2.4 – ZACH (FREDDIE PRINZE JR) NOTICES HIS PICTURE

⁵⁰⁹ S Bailey and J Hay, 2006, op. cit., in S Neale, Ed., 2006, op. cit., p. 126

⁵¹⁰ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 185

The inevitable failure to embody idealised gender is complicated when Zach greets two female students in the corridor. Addressing one with a light-hearted “what’s happening, Connie?” the girl happily reciprocates. However, once he is out of earshot the girl’s friend reminds her that her name is Melissa. This brief exchange can be seen to illustrate Butler’s contention that subjects require recognition in order to ensure their continued survival.⁵¹¹ Significantly, recognition is articulated as a reciprocal process, wherein subjects simultaneously confer and receive recognition. In this scenario, Melissa recognises Zach as the desirable class president, while she in turn achieves status as his acquaintance. Zach’s misrecognition of Melissa as Connie can be seen to indicate that despite his awareness of not wholly embodying idealised masculinity, he is able to achieve that status in the context of the high school. Conversely, Melissa’s acceptance of Zach’s misrecognition undermines her, indicated by her friend’s bemusement at her acquiescence.

2.3.3 – IDEALISED FEMININITY AND “MAKING-UNDER” LANEY

Introduced as “the one all the girls want to be and all the guys want to nail,” Taylor is presented as Zach’s gendered opposite. Consequently, the construction of Taylor as an embodiment of idealised femininity can be seen to reflect Butler’s conceptualisation of binary sexed positions according to whether the subject appears to approximate the position of embodying, or possessing the Phallus.⁵¹² Incensed at being summarily discarded in favour of the narcissistic Brock Hudson, Zach angrily claims that Taylor’s status is little more than an illusion, a “C-GPA in a Wonderbra,” such that with his assistance, any girl could occupy that position. Zach’s contention that the idealised

⁵¹¹ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 31

⁵¹² J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 60

femininity Taylor embodies can be constructed can be seen to correspond to Butler's argument for a genealogy that would interrogate the norms of idealised gender.⁵¹³

Disputing Zach's claim, Dean maintains that Taylor is an "institution" at the school, and cannot therefore be so easily replicated. Their disagreement leads Dean to make a bet with Zach that he cannot make the girl of their choosing into a prom queen within the few remaining weeks of the term. His "let's go shopping" signals the start of their search for an undesirable woman. Appropriating the language of consumerism while in the high school indicates the dominance of Zach, Dean and Preston in this environment. The viewer too is invited to share this position as the film provides dizzying shots of female students who pass by from their collective point of view. These point-of-view shots are intercut with crane shots that circle around them, emphasising the group's homosocial cohesion.

Zach, Dean and Preston observe a number of female students, some performing unusual activities, others with high, screeching voices, and another displaying poor personal hygiene. However, Dean and Preston decide that these examples of deviant femininity are not sufficiently challenging for Zach's bet. The film then cuts to a point-of-view long shot of Laney hurriedly ascending a flight of stairs in an awkward, jerking walk. She is dressed androgynously, in paint-spattered overalls, over a lurid t-shirt. Her hair is tied up but not otherwise styled, while her small face, with no make-up, is dominated by a pair of large, unfashionably-shaped glasses. Walking speedily while carrying bulky art equipment, Laney soon falls awkwardly. Cutting back to Zach and his friends, Dean shouts "we have a winner!" indicating that Laney is by far the least attractive girl they have come across in their search for the object of Zach's makeover, and thus the least likely prom queen candidate.

⁵¹³ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 192

Sarah Gilligan describes the construction of Laney as awkward and undesirable at the beginning of the film as characteristic of the ‘make-under,’ which establishes the parameters of “wrong” femininity, and is typically signified by ‘heavy brows, no make-up and glasses.’⁵¹⁴ This appearance, Gilligan argues, is to be remedied by a makeover through which the character’s ‘real womanhood’ can find expression.⁵¹⁵ Just as Butler argues that the fictional, idealised gender works to conceal the contingency of its foundations,⁵¹⁶ so Gilligan contends that this “real” femininity is a complex construction that aims to conceal the specialist knowledge and labour that creates it, in a spectacle of effortlessness.⁵¹⁷



FIGURE 2.5 – LANEY (RACHEL LEIGH COOK) AS “MADE UNDER”

Incorporating many of the elements Gilligan lists, Laney’s appearance is signified as an example of deviant femininity. Importantly however, her undesirability is conveyed by more than her physical appearance. Indeed, Gilligan argues that her tie-dyed t-shirt and dungarees loosely reference the fashions of 1970s feminism, indicating in advance the improbability that Laney will comply with Zach’s attempts to

⁵¹⁴ S Gilligan, 2011, ‘Performing Post-Feminist Identities: Gender, Costume and Transformation in Teen Cinema,’ in M Waters, Ed., 2011, *Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. 168

⁵¹⁵ S Gilligan, 2011, *ibid.*, in M Waters, Ed., 2011, *ibid.*, p. 169

⁵¹⁶ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 182

⁵¹⁷ S Gilligan, 2011, *op. cit.*, in M Waters, Ed., 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 169

mould her into a prom queen.⁵¹⁸ As Zach, Dean and Preston watch her storm hastily through the crowds, it is significant that Laney's demeanour, described as "scary and inaccessible" is what marks her as infinitely unappealing. For Skeggs, femininity is a classed discourse, constructed with reference to delicacy and physical frailty.⁵¹⁹ Consequently, Laney's lack of elegance serves to connect her undesirability with her lower class position. Indeed, as she trips and suddenly, gracelessly, falls, Laney is shown to represent the antithesis of Taylor's confidence and poise.

2.3.4 – TRANSFORMING LANEY AND ZACH

The bet established between Zach and Dean creates an expectation that Laney will be made over. However, the scenes that follow demonstrate that Zach too requires transformation in order to make himself worthy of Laney. Approaching her shortly after agreeing the terms of the bet, Zach's smirk and confident posture makes clear that he expects his attentions to be received gratefully and reciprocated, as they were in his earlier encounter with Melissa. However, Laney is rightly suspicious of his sudden interest in her, and briskly walks away from him without explanation. Briefly undermining Zach's standing, this moment can be seen to foretell how his relationship with Laney will see him challenge the primacy of high-school status.

Having been advised by his sister, Mackenzie, to demonstrate that he and Laney share common interests, Zach finds himself at the Jester Theatre to see her perform with an experimental theatre group. Conspicuous in his plain white t-shirt and black trousers, the other attendees wear striking multi-coloured clothing and elaborate hairstyles that indicate their subcultural positioning. As such, the theatre is seen to provide an alternative social system within which Zach does not represent idealised masculinity. Instead, the flamboyant, exhibitionist, Mitch provides the locus

⁵¹⁸ S Gilligan, 2011, *ibid.*, in M Waters Ed., 2011, *ibid.*, p. 170

⁵¹⁹ B Skeggs, 1997, *op. cit.*, p. 99

of the audience's adulation. Perhaps as a consequence, Zach is portrayed as demonstrably unsure of himself during the performance. Frequent reaction shots indicate his unease, as he shifts in his seat and glances around at the other members of the audience. Further revealing his lack of experience of this type of performance, on perceiving a significant break in the action, Zach moves to applaud, before quickly realising his mistake and shifting embarrassedly in his seat.

Aiming to test Zach's apparent interest in experimental theatre, Laney sets him up to produce an improvised performance. Although initially awkward and self-conscious on stage, Zach produces a small "hacky sack" beanbag from his pocket and begins to demonstrate the skills that have earned him the captaincy of the football team. However, as he continues, the performance takes on a different tone. Talking to himself, shouting "Everyone's watching you, Zach" and "don't let the ball drop," his performance can be seen to demonstrate the pressures of the elevated status he occupies at the high school, in Butler's terms, the demands of appearing to possess the Phallus within this environment. Indeed, Zach performs the repeated compulsion to approximate the position of idealised masculinity, and, on letting the beanbag fall to the ground, its ultimate, inevitable failure. Tellingly, this performance earns the applause of the theatre attendees, including Mitch, thereby cementing Zach's position as an embodiment of idealised masculinity, and thus compelling further pressure allegorised by that very performance. His evident exhilaration at having expressed his status anxiety so publicly can be seen to mark the first step in his gradual extrication from the demands and concerns of his position at Harrison High.

Zach's gradual change in attitudes takes place over the course of the film. In contrast, the transformation to which Laney is subjected is significantly briefer, and draws from the conventions of makeover television, which came to prominence in

British and American lifestyle programming during the late 1990s.⁵²⁰ Indeed, the presence of Brock as star of reality show *The Real World*, snippets of which intermittently punctuate the narrative, clearly indicates the film's awareness of the codes of contemporary television. Informed by her conceptualisation of post-feminism as 'feminism taken into account,'⁵²¹ Angela McRobbie observes that makeover programmes, such as *What Not to Wear* (BBC 2001-2007), typically portray a lower-class woman moving 'from one state which is unacceptable to another which is a greatly improved state of good looks and well-being.'⁵²² During this process, the consenting participant is subjected to a supposedly ironic denigration of her tastes from the show's presenters, constructed as arbiters of middle-class good taste.⁵²³

Aiming to take Laney to Preston's party, Zach arrives at her house bringing with him a revealing red dress. Unlike his literary antecedent, Henry Higgins, Zach delegates the makeover to Mackenzie and enlists the junior varsity football team to clean Laney's house in order to deprive her of a reason not to attend the party. Consequently, his arrival can be seen to reflect McRobbie's account of the norms of the television makeover, where a series of upper-middle class experts appear unexpectedly to guide a woman in the processes of labour on the self.⁵²⁴ In addition to his ability to assemble a number of individuals to enact his wishes, Zach's dominance is indicated by the high regard Simon clearly has for him. While Simon's father, Wayne, is portrayed as a bumbling figure, whose answers to the television quiz show he absent-mindedly watches are corrected by the young football players around him,

⁵²⁰ Referring to British Television, Rachel Moseley describes this as a "takeover." See R Moseley, 2000, 'Makeover Takeover on British Television,' *Screen*, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 299-314

⁵²¹ A McRobbie, 2004, 'Post-feminism and Popular Culture,' *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 255

⁵²² A McRobbie, 2009, 'What Not to Wear and Post-Feminist Symbolic Violence,' in A McRobbie, 2009, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, London: Sage, p. 124

⁵²³ A McRobbie, 2009, *ibid.*, p. 145

⁵²⁴ A McRobbie, 2009, *ibid.*, p. 124

Zach is shown to represent a model of sophisticated, adult masculinity. Consequently, the film can be seen to portray how structures of recognition confer the status of idealised masculinity within a particular group.⁵²⁵

Significantly, McRobbie describes a cultural logic according to which consenting participants are transformed from a frumpy, asexual positioning, into a state of 'glamorous individuality,' a nexus of heterosexual desirability and class.⁵²⁶ Once made over, the participant is continually required to renew her appearance in accordance with the changing demands of fashion. Butler's work on gender allows us to perceive the repeated labour required to maintain this status, as the participants' continued compliance or failure is monitored through "surprise" visits twelve months following their makeover. Despite the repeated compulsion to approximate idealised gender, the makeover programme paradoxically reveals that such a position is impossible to instantiate. Indeed, McRobbie notes that even if a participant follows the advice of the show's presenters exactly, she can never assume equal status with them, as indicated by the presenters' 'continued monopoly over technical and professional vocabularies.'⁵²⁷

The continued disparity between presenters and participants can be read as an instance of Bourdieu's reading of habitus. Indeed, while the participants' labour is evident, the presenters' knowledge and expertise appears effortless, exemplifying what Bourdieu would describe as their 'instinctive feel for the game.'⁵²⁸ As a consequence, McRobbie finds few possibilities for participants to subvert the cultural logic of the makeover programme. Rather, she argues that the programmes 'show working-class

⁵²⁵ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 178

⁵²⁶ A McRobbie, 2009, op. cit., p. 125

⁵²⁷ A McRobbie, 2009, *ibid.*, p. 140

⁵²⁸ A McRobbie, 2009, *ibid.*, p. 142; P Bourdieu, 1986, op. cit., p. 33

women to be deferential and grateful to their social superiors.⁵²⁹ However, as discussed, Butler is critical of Bourdieu's account of the habitus, drawing from Foucault to argue that power is not centralised and unilateral as Bourdieu constructs it, but diffuse.⁵³⁰ As discussed previously, Butler argues that each citation of the performative provides the occasion for its subversion. Consequently, the imposition of a particular stylisation of femininity that occurs in the makeover may equally set up the possibility of subverting the primacy of this form of femininity.

Whereas Bourdieu's account of the habitus restricts interpretation of the makeover to an instance of symbolic violence, Butler's work allows Laney's transformation to be read as an illustration of ambivalence to interpellation under the heterosexual matrix. As McRobbie argues, the logic of the makeover stipulates that the participant accepts the instruction provided by the programme's cultural intermediaries such that success is understood as continuing to follow their advice without outside assistance.⁵³¹ However, the participant's continued surveillance after the initial makeover demonstrates the possibility that she might refuse to comply, or make "mistakes" with her sartorial choices such that her appearance signifies differently to the desired intention articulated in the programme. Likewise, although Butler demonstrates the inevitability of interpellation into the matrix of binary sexual difference, she also argues that this process is vulnerable to subversion.⁵³² Indeed, certain refusals of heteronormative gender interpellation hold the potential to demonstrate the spurious, imitative fiction on which all gender identity is based.⁵³³

⁵²⁹ A McRobbie, 2009, *ibid.*, p. 135

⁵³⁰ See J Butler, 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146

⁵³¹ A McRobbie, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 138

⁵³² J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p.122

⁵³³ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 122

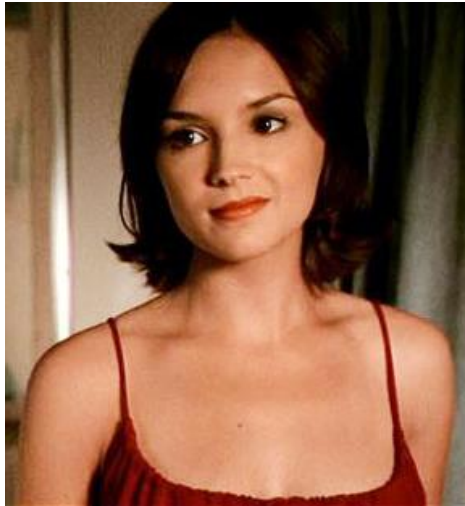


FIGURE 2.6 – LANEY IS TRANSFORMED

A fade cut to a long, (re)establishing shot of the Boggs family home in the foreground of a setting sun, serves as an ellipsis, indicating the time taken on Laney's makeover. Underscoring the passing of time, the shot undermines the myth of instantaneous, effortless transformation common to the makeover trope. Rather, it can be seen to reflect Butler's account of gender as consisting of a repeated set of acts, such that gender constitutes a form of labour.⁵³⁴ Laney's entrance is heralded by the introductory chords of *Kiss Me*, a single released concurrently with the film's exhibition in cinemas, indicating the scene's importance.⁵³⁵ The film then cuts to a long shot showing Simon and Zach on the sofa, while Mackenzie stands at the foot of the stairwell to announce Laney's entrance. Drawing on the conventions of the television makeover, Mackenzie declares, "Gentlemen, may I present the new, not improved, but different, Laney Boggs." Anticipating Laney's entrance, the soundtrack increases in volume, and the film cuts to medium shots of Simon and Zach, who stand in expectation. Zach's barely concealed yawn as he stands reminds the film's audience of his true motives for ensuring Laney is properly coiffed and dressed for Preston's party.

⁵³⁴ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 182

⁵³⁵ *Kiss Me* by Sixpence None the Richer was also used in Dawson's Creek, and parodied in Joel Gallen's *Not Another Teen Movie*, indicating the song's iconic status in the teen genre.

A close-up of a red, high-heeled shoe on the staircase as the song's vocal track kicks in signals Laney's entrance into the scene. As she walks slowly down the stairs, the camera tilts slowly up Laney's body, ensuring the audience has taken in her red dress, lack of glasses, made over face, and restyled hair. As Gilligan argues, Laney's shoes and dress newly signify her as 'an object of erotic spectacle,' the surprise of which is signalled by the open-mouthed gazes of both Zach and Simon.⁵³⁶ Positioning her as an object of the gaze, a position frequently defined in relation to the feminine, Laney's makeover can be perceived as a corrective to her formerly androgynous appearance and demeanour. Butler argues that a sexed binary is repeatedly produced and compelled within the prevailing matrix of gender norms.⁵³⁷ As a consequence, by establishing Laney as a desirable object, who willingly submits to Zach's gaze, her makeover can be seen to reinstate the gendered binary that Butler theorises.⁵³⁸

Lingering shots of Laney's body underscore this new positioning as desirable, a perception reflected by the subsequent medium close-ups of her diegetic audience's reactions to her transformation. Zach's expression in particular shows that the results of the makeover have surpassed his low expectations. Indeed, he is surprised to find that he now desires her. Cutting to Laney in medium-shot reveals her pleasure at Zach's reaction, while shots of Simon and Mackenzie show their respective surprise and satisfaction. Cutting back to a medium-shot of Laney as she continues to walk down the stairs, she soon missteps and stumbles into Zach's arms.

An abrupt change of shot scale and sudden halt to the non-diegetic soundtrack call an end to the characters' silent gaze at her transformation. In order to unpick the multiple significances of Laney's stumble for her gender and class identity, a

⁵³⁶ S Gilligan, 2011, op. cit., in M Waters, Ed., 2011, op. cit., p. 173

⁵³⁷ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 23

⁵³⁸ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 62

comparison with the earlier fall witnessed by Zach, Dean and Preston towards the beginning of the film is instructive. In that scene, Laney tripped and fell face first, before quickly assembling her belongings and walking briskly out of the shot. As discussed, the gauche movements that brought about her fall cemented her positioning as unfeminine, undesirable and thus the most unlikely prom queen candidate they could find. However following her makeover, she falls so delicately and slowly that Zach has sufficient time to move across the room to catch her.

Since Laney's fall is precipitated by her vertiginous high-heeled shoes, an evident signifier of femininity, her fall can be seen to signify her unease with her new heteronormative positioning. As such, although Laney's makeover newly casts her as sexually available and desirable, her continued maladroitness with the conventional apparatus of femininity can be seen to indicate the contingency of this status. Read through Butler's work, Laney's fall can be perceived as a failed interpellation into femininity. Indeed, Butler observes that although subjects are continually compelled to approximate idealised gender, the very iterability of this process produces the possibility that incorrect, or unauthorised approximations may also occur.⁵³⁹ Although the stumble can be seen to demonstrate Laney's unease at the sudden imposition of femininity, and thus highlight its construction, the nature of the fall itself precludes its categorisation as a consciously resistant gesture.

Read in the light of Skeggs' account of class as well as Butler's work on gender, it becomes possible to view Laney's fall as a significant example of the way in which gender and class discourses intersect. Indeed, as discussed previously, Skeggs defines femininity as consisting of the type of physical frailty and delicacy Laney

⁵³⁹ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 122

demonstrates when she falls into Zach's arms.⁵⁴⁰ For Skeggs, this conception of femininity was, and continues to be, constructed in relation to the middle classes, such that femininity should be understood as a classed discourse.⁵⁴¹ Laney's fall can be seen to demonstrate how her newly-acquired positioning as feminine and desirable brings with it an ascension in class status. Reading Laney's makeover in the light of Butler's work enabled the labour and construction of femininity to come to the fore. Demonstrating the complex relationship between class and gender, Laney's fall can be seen to demonstrate how classed gender might be established and reproduced through forms of action.

2.3.5 – ALTERNATIVE VALUES AND THE PROM

Preston's party provides an opportunity to show off Laney's new look and cement her position among Zach's social circle, both of which factors, Zach believes, will be critical in order for Laney to secure the title of prom queen. As Taylor arrives at the party accompanied by Brock in a short red dress similar to that which Zach selected for Laney, it is clear both that Taylor remains his model of an ideal female partner, and that, as the current front-runner in the contest for prom queen, she embodies the type of femininity valorised within the high-school cohort.

Affronted at the discovery that Laney is Zach's date, Taylor approaches her, opening with "isn't your father my pool man?" making clear her higher class position. Taylor's class-based invectives indicate her belief in the immutability of class status, and as such demonstrate Bourdieu's reading of habitus. The confrontation culminates with Taylor spilling her drink over Laney's dress, the significance of which is highlighted by the abrupt halt in the film's non-diegetic soundtrack. Paradoxically, while seeking to humiliate Laney, Taylor's gesture indicates the success of her

⁵⁴⁰ B Skeggs, 1997, op. cit., p. 99

⁵⁴¹ B Skeggs, 1997, ibid., p. 99

makeover. Indeed, her spiteful act Taylor performatively installs and legitimates her as a credible rival to Zach's affections and consequently as a candidate for prom queen.

Returning to school after Preston's party, Laney finds that her stock has risen substantially, such that she has received a nomination for prom queen. Bewildered by this new development, Laney herself is handed a leaflet for the campaign in her name. The film then cuts to a medium close-up of a large poster advertising Laney as "the Pro-Choice Choice," closely followed by other students campaigning for her candidacy in association with wider political concerns such as the "Gay Students Union," the "Oppressed Prisoners Club," and the "Hygiene Squad." The broad range of interests that Laney comes to represent contrasts with the views we are provided of Taylor's campaign, for which a large banner affixed to the wall simply states "Taylor Vaughn." As the camera zooms out and pans downward, we see Taylor and a friend in cheerleading costumes handing out coffees and leaflets and repeating "Have a latte - vote for Taylor."

The two campaigns are distinct in the values each girl is seen to embody. While Taylor uses her popularity as her principal marketing tool, Laney is notably absent from her candidacy for prom queen, her nomination having been instigated without her knowledge or consent. Indeed, handed a leaflet campaigning on her behalf, it is clear that very few students actually know who she is. For Butler, the feminine position of being the Phallus is constructed as a "being for" the subject occupying the male position, such that the subject approximating the position of embodying the Phallus constitutes a semantic void.⁵⁴² While Laney's absence from her own campaign can be seen to instantiate Butler's arguments, she is nonetheless seen to provide an

⁵⁴² J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 63

embodiment of causes loosely affiliated in their desire to uphold the rights of the oppressed.

Consequently, Laney's makeover and her subsequent validation and subjection by Taylor, are seen to authorise her as a site of political mobilisation. As discussed previously, Laney's political consciousness had earlier been a significant element that made her "scary and inaccessible." In contrast to McRobbie's argument that repudiation of political consciousness is necessary to 'count as a modern, sophisticated girl,' and Zach's suggestion that Laney "just lighten up" when she brings up the issue of sewage waste in the Pacific Ocean, Laney's nomination as prom queen candidate arguably constitutes a re-appropriation of discursive power.⁵⁴³ Indeed, Laney's makeover and association with the class president allows her to become a site for previously oppressed viewpoints within the insular high-school body.

Butler's work on gender allows Laney to be seen to provide a representation of gender identity signifying differently from its original intention. While Zach may have wanted to make Laney a credible candidate for prom queen by moulding her appearance to the ideals of heteronormative femininity, Laney's makeover in fact renders her an icon of counter-culture. Although acquiescent in allowing Zach to alter her appearance so dramatically, she nonetheless maintains her political beliefs. Indeed, Laney's candidacy for prom queen arguably demonstrates the type of expansion in the prevailing matrix of norms for which Butler argues in *Undoing Gender*.

Examining the prom itself, the teens are depicted universally in opposite-sexed pairs, once again cementing the event's status as a locus of heterosexual gender interpellation. A subsequent dance sequence emphasises the event's role in this process as the DJ divides the space such that girls dance in one area and the boys in

⁵⁴³ A McRobbie, 2004, op. cit., p. 258

the other. Further, the DJ cues first the girls, then the boys, to dance to a particular section of the music, thereby setting up a binary distinction that accords with Butler's conceptualisation of the heterosexual matrix. Taylor leads the girls in this sequence, foretelling the later announcement that she has indeed been elected prom queen. Wood argues that Laney's loss in this contest comes as a surprise since it 'defies the logic of the film thus far.'⁵⁴⁴ However, as Zach is crowned prom king, his acceptance speech reveals the meaninglessness of the accolade, claiming that while "for a lot of us, this is as good as it gets ... the truth is we're just getting started." As Zach constructs the titles of prom king and queen as the meaningless trivia of high school, the scene portrays the final stages of his transformation. Indeed, *She's All That* can be seen throughout to undermine the value of the positions of idealised gender instantiated by these figures, questioning, to paraphrase Butler, whether these bodies do matter.

In accordance with Schatz's conceptualisation of the genre of indeterminate space, Zach and Laney are reunited at the film's conclusion. However, further undermining the prom's position as a locus of gender and class interpellation, their reunion occurs at Laney's family home, usurping the place typically ascribed to the event. In *Pretty in Pink*, the final kiss between Andie and Blane underscored the omnipresence of the prom, even as their reunion occurred in the car park. In contrast, Laney refuses Zach's request for a "last dance," which would have placed their kiss as an extension of the prom. Instead, she proposes a "first dance," signalling her intent for a relationship with Zach that is distanced from his high-school status.

In a further distinction from *Pretty in Pink*, *She's All That* can be seen to provide a class levelling of its two protagonists. Indeed, Zach now reveals that he

⁵⁴⁴ R Wood, 2003, op. cit, p. 325

wishes to attend Art School in order to pursue a career in performance art. Of course, as well as being Laney's choice following high school, this path lacks the cultural capital of the Ivy League universities to which Zach had earlier been accepted. Nonetheless, this decision amounts to his self-actualisation, as it signals his ability to make an autonomous decision untroubled by the consequences for his social standing. Of course, having the opportunity to shun the Ivy League is a possibility available to relatively few. Consequently, Zach's ability to reject of his gendered and class expectations is itself predicated on his elevated academic and socioeconomic position, both of which contributed to his instantiation of idealised masculinity at high school.

Immediately prior to their final kiss, Laney remarks that she "feels like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*," a film that Tasker describes as a narrative of cross-class dressing.⁵⁴⁵ For Tasker, *Pretty Woman* portrays the heroine's social mobility through the progression of her heterosexual romance.⁵⁴⁶ In *Pretty Woman*, Tasker notes that Vivian's 'bodily excesses' are gradually tamed during the course of her relationship with Edward, much as Laney gradually assumes a more graceful bearing.⁵⁴⁷ As such, Laney's reference to *Pretty Woman* at the film's conclusion can be seen to indicate that her relationship with Zach has enabled a class ascension, further demonstrating the complex interrelationship between femininity, heterosexuality and class.

Significantly, Tasker argues that in addition to the transformation she undergoes, Vivian succeeds in altering Edward's behaviour.⁵⁴⁸ As such, Laney's reference to *Pretty Woman* can also be seen to indicate the mutual education of the two protagonists at the conclusion of *She's All That*. The universality and advocacy of the heterosexual couple itself at the prom reveals the high school as an apt analogy of the

⁵⁴⁵ Y Tasker, 1998, op. cit., p. 27

⁵⁴⁶ Y Tasker, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 43

⁵⁴⁷ Y Tasker, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 44

⁵⁴⁸ Y Tasker, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 44

heterosexual matrix. As such, the endorsement of the couple's resulting transformations at the high-school graduation can be seen to demonstrate the range of positions that are possible within the norm. Indeed, Laney's candidacy for prom queen was seen to reveal the various political causes, and thus a number of ways of constructing identity and value within the high school. The film can therefore be seen to reveal the complexity, and underlying competing values within the norms of idealised gender that Butler theorises.

2.4 – CONCLUSION

Close analysis of *Pretty in Pink* and *She's All That* demonstrated the complex intersection between gender and class. Since class does not feature in Butler's conceptualisation of the human, the analysis was also informed by Skeggs' research which combines Butler's work on gender with Bourdieu's sociology of class, thereby enabling the interrelationship between gender and class to be perceived. In the films themselves, class status was shown to affect the characters' experience of gender identity, and particularly in *Pretty in Pink*, impact on their recognition as human. Further, analysis of the two films reveals how class, like gender, is instantiated and consolidated through forms of action. As such, the connection established between class, gender and recognition as human complicates and augments Butler's theorisation of gender.

In *Pretty in Pink* and *She's All That*, the prom constituted a significant nexus of gender and class interpellation. As Best and Kearney observed, the prom draws on the nineteenth century debutante *cotillions*, where marriage served to perpetuate class status. Although purportedly celebrating the conclusion of high-school education, the prom continues to mandate a particularly rigid, gendered dress code, and attendance with a partner of the opposite sex. Best observes that the prom is a significant, universal and compulsory ritual, encompassing all teens regardless of subcultural

affiliation.⁵⁴⁹ Indeed, when Andie and Laney initially display resistance to attending the prom, both characters are shown the necessity of their presence. Consequently, the films can be seen to establish and consolidate the prom's status as a gendered and classed gateway to adulthood.

Undeniably a key semantic element of the Teen Movie, the prom is shown to complicate the genre's syntax as a 'sexual coming-of-age narrative.'⁵⁵⁰ While Feuer's description presupposes a gradual assumption of adult sexual identity, the role played by the prom necessitates a model in which coming-of-age is punctuated by significant events in which the imposition of gender and class norms is negotiated and tested. In turn, understanding the prom as a locus of gender and class interpellation complicates Butler's theorisation of the process. Whereas Butler argues that gender interpellation is an endlessly iterative process, the prom presents an instance in which adherence to a gendered and classed norm is more rigorously compelled and policed.

Reading both films in the light of Butler's work has enabled the labour of the assumption of heteronormative gender identity to be perceived. Significantly, both *Pretty in Pink* and *She's All That* feature makeover narratives that show normative femininity to be externally imposed, rather than a natural expression of an inner essence. Refuting the possibility that only Andie must work to take her position at the prom as a result of her lower socioeconomic standing to the majority of her high-school cohort, *Pretty in Pink* was shown to convey the labour of consumer choice in Blane, Steff and Benny's preparations for the event. The labour of gender was thus shown to transcend class status. Likewise, Laney's makeover demonstrated the labour required to assume idealised gendered and classed status. Nonetheless, both characters demonstrate a degree of resistance to their normative positioning. While Andie

⁵⁴⁹ AL Best, 2000, op. cit., p. 12

⁵⁵⁰ J Feuer, 1993, op. cit., p. 125

constructs an angular dress that refutes the prom's gender and class imperatives, Laney comes to stand for a number of formerly oppressed causes, thus refuting the compulsion to direct her energies towards a concerted labour on the self.

Close analysis of *Pretty in Pink* and *She's All That* demonstrated the significance of costume to the construction of gender and class identity. As such, both films recall the work of Rottenberg, Mintler, Skeggs and Tasker, who highlight costume as a notable factor in narratives of class mobility for women. In *Pretty in Pink* Andie's pink, yet strikingly androgynous, prom dress revealed her ambivalence towards the event's gender and class imperatives. Indeed, just as Tasker observed at the conclusion of *Working Girl*, Andie's class ascension was seen to confound the class binaries previously established in the film. Further, the chapter discussed how the collective subcultural style of Andie, Duckie and Iona performed "respectability" to excess, thereby performing a subtle parody of gender and class norms.

She's All That likewise determines the parameters of normative and deviant femininity through Laney's differing clothing before and after her makeover. However, read in the light of Skeggs' work, which discusses femininity as a classed discourse established through physical frailty, Laney's altered demeanour prior to and following the makeover revealed the significance of bodily movement to the construction of classed gender. Indeed, just as Butler argues the gender is written on the surface of the body, the difference between different ways in which Laney falls and stumbles throughout *She's All That* can be seen to demonstrate how class may likewise be constructed through the body.⁵⁵¹

The beginning of the chapter demonstrated that the School Film, the category to which both case studies belong, constituted a subgenre of indeterminate space.

⁵⁵¹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 185

Taking place in the ideologically stable setting of American suburbia, the films conclude with a prom that cements, in Schatz's terms, the fusion of two formerly opposed value systems with an emotive climax.⁵⁵² In turn, Schatz's model was shown to be compatible with Butler's theorisation of the heterosexual matrix, since the genre of indeterminate space concludes by upholding the heterosexual couple as an idealised social unit.

Pretty in Pink and, to a lesser extent, *She's All That* portray subcultures that are shown to occupy distinct spaces around the high school, and to possess alternative sets of norms and values. As such, the films' treatment of subculture can be seen to complicate the assumptions of universality apparent in Schatz's conceptualisation of the genre of indeterminate space and Butler's theorisation of a single, prevailing regime of gender norms. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that the subject requires recognition in order to persist as human.⁵⁵³ In other words, there must be a way of locating a subject within a given frame of reference in order to sustain its intelligibility. However, the portrayal of the subculture formed of Andie, Duckie and Iona in *Pretty in Pink* can be seen to demonstrate the range of possibilities within the single idealised masculinity and femininity theorised by Butler.

Similarly, Laney's candidacy for prom queen brings with her a number of alternative political causes into the mainstream. As such, *She's All That* can be seen to demonstrate Butler's contention that the prevailing matrix of norms can change only when those on the margins make a claim to intelligibility, and so call existing norms into question.

⁵⁵² T Schatz, 1981, op. cit., p. 32

⁵⁵³ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 31

3 – STAR PERFORMANCE AND FILM ACTING

3.1 – STARDOM, FILM ACTING AND THE JUVENILE DELINQUENT

The previous chapter observed how Butler's contention that the 'acts, gestures,' and other disparate phenomena that produce the illusion of a coherently gendered subject also informed the construction of class in the Teen Movie.⁵⁵⁴ This chapter focuses on these acts themselves, analysing the star image and performance styles of three male actors in their portrayals of juvenile delinquent characters: James Dean as Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause*, (Dir. Nicholas Ray, 1955), John Travolta as Danny Zuko in *Grease*, (Dir. Randall Kleiser, 1978) and Christian Slater as Jason Dean in *Heathers*, (Dir. Michael Lehmann, 1988). Close analysis of these star performances informed by Butler's work on gender promises to reveal the tensions inherent in the role of the perennial rebel figure, and to shed further light on film acting and performance, an area that remains under examined in academic film studies.

More than an actor or performer, a star presents a peculiar confluence of ideology, desire, fashion and industry. As a result of their multiple significations, Christine Gledhill argues that a single star in fact represents (at least) three distinct individuals simultaneously: 'the "real person," the "reel person," the character or roles played by the star in films, and the star's persona, which exists independently but combines elements of both real and reel person to create a distinct presence.'⁵⁵⁵ Reception of the actor's performance in a given film is informed by an audience's varying levels of awareness of these three elements. Paul McDonald's revisionist take rightly points out that academic study of stars largely obfuscates or ignores the

⁵⁵⁴ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 185

⁵⁵⁵ C Gledhill, 1991, 'Signs of Melodrama,' in C Gledhill, Ed., 1991, *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, London: Routledge, pp. 214-215

industry that produces them in favour of studying their textuality.⁵⁵⁶ Indeed it should be noted that stars serve as an object of capital value to the film in which they feature: functioning both to differentiate their film from others competing for an audience's attention, and to mitigate the substantial investment involved in film production. Nonetheless as Dyer observes, the star's 'only "value" resides in the meanings and affects' they have for an audience.⁵⁵⁷

During Hollywood's classical period, a close-knit cartel of vertically integrated studios dominated the market for popular film.⁵⁵⁸ Controlling the production, distribution and exhibition of their products, studios held considerable power and were able to employ stars on fixed term contracts for a maximum of seven years. Importantly, although stars were often critical in enabling a studio to distinguish their films from those of their rivals, the performer themselves held limited bargaining power over their salary or the productions for which they were cast.⁵⁵⁹ Worse still, studios worked to 'manufacture and take legal control of star identities,' incorporating morality clauses to ensure their performers conformed to the studio's preferred image of themselves, even when not working.⁵⁶⁰

Nonetheless, a star was always more than a commodity, employee or performer. Indeed, it is a star's ability to function as a signifier for particular 'moral, social and ideological values' that contributed to their success as a marketing tool for studios.⁵⁶¹ Discussing the textuality of stars in the studio era, Dyer argues that in addition to the films that comprise their body of work, a star image is comprised of at

⁵⁵⁶ P McDonald, 2000, *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities*, London: Wallflower, p. 2

⁵⁵⁷ R Dyer, 1979, quoted in C Gledhill, Ed., 1991, op. cit., p. 215

⁵⁵⁸ For Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, the Classical era is held to be between circa 1917 and 1960. D Bordwell, J Staiger, and K Thompson, 1985, op. cit., London: Routledge, p.vii

⁵⁵⁹ There are of course exceptions, as Martin Shingler (1995) discusses in his study of Bette Davis

⁵⁶⁰ P McDonald, 2000, op. cit. p. 43

⁵⁶¹ C Gledhill, 1991, op. cit., in C Gledhill, Ed., 1991, op. cit., p. 215

least three other types of media text. Firstly industry-led promotion showed the star in obviously staged situations in order to promote either themselves or a forthcoming film in which s/he was due to appear. Secondly, publicity, supposedly independent of studio bias, aimed to provide an impression of candidly capturing the star's everyday movements. When a star became embroiled in a scandal, this press material provided fans with access to the star's "real life." Typically however, these apparent glimpses into a star's private life off-screen, were likewise arranged by studio tip offs to produce their desired image. For instance, in a bid to sell James Dean as the emblematic rebel, Warner Brothers suppressed awareness of his love of the arts and bisexuality, but ensured Dean's interest in cars, and relationship with Italian star Pier Angelo were common knowledge.⁵⁶² Lastly, critical commentary in the mainstream media and in fan texts discussed the reception of individual performances, and was largely free from studio bias.⁵⁶³ Classical Hollywood stardom thus consisted of a confluence of audience expectation and industry creation.

In 1948, the Paramount Decree ruled that studio ownership of production, distribution and exhibition channels violated US antitrust laws, leading to a significant decline in their hold over the market and the eventual inauguration of the post-classical period. For stars, one significant consequence of the studios' decline in profitability, and resulting need to trim overheads, was their release from restrictive contracts.⁵⁶⁴ Instead, stars became freelance operators, turning to talent agents to negotiate terms for each individual project on which they worked under what Staiger terms the 'package-unit system.'⁵⁶⁵ This new-found flexibility led to rapid wage growth for stars in demand. However, since the package-unit system enabled producers to

⁵⁶² See C Springer, 2007, *James Dean Transfigured: the Many Faces of Rebel Iconography*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 28

⁵⁶³ R Dyer, 1979, *Stars*, London: BFI, pp. 60-71

⁵⁶⁴ P McDonald, 2000, op. cit., p. 74

⁵⁶⁵ J Staiger, 1985, in D Bordwell, J Staiger and K Thompson, 1985, op. cit., p. 330

select only the most profitable stars, divisions soon emerged between actors deemed sufficiently popular to guarantee a certain number of tickets sold, and those who were not. The period following the studios' demise was lucrative for many stars whose careers had been restricted by the productions offered to them under the studio system. For others however, it ended a period of stable employment and inaugurated a time of precarious financial hardship.⁵⁶⁶

The negotiations required to compose cast and crew for each production necessarily led to a sharp decline in the number of films made in a given year. To illustrate, as a contract player for MGM, James Stewart made 17 films between 1938 and 1943. Working freelance, the relatively prolific and popular Tom Hanks made only seven films between 1993 and 1998 at the height of his stardom.⁵⁶⁷ Indeed, Christine Geraghty notes that the long lead times associated with film production means that 'cinema is an inefficient way of delivering fame compared to other formats.'⁵⁶⁸ Examining the intersections between celebrity and stardom, Geraghty takes up Dyer's conceptualisation of the 'structured polysemy' of stars to observe that the number of potential media texts in which a star might feature outside of cinema has significantly increased in recent years.⁵⁶⁹ Present day stars are required to maintain their currency through advertising, press appearances and other forms of celebrity labour.

Clearly, performance within a given film shapes audience perception of the star image, just as an actor's star persona informs the productions for which they are cast. Like stardom, performance is a complex area of analysis in film since, as Cynthia

⁵⁶⁶ See P McDonald, 2000, op. cit., pp. 70-71

⁵⁶⁷ Figures accessed at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000071/> and <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000158/> on November 16th 2011

⁵⁶⁸ C Geraghty, 2000, 'Re-examining Stardom: Questions of Texts, Bodies and Performance,' in S Redmond and S Holmes, Eds. 2007, *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, London: Sage, p. 100,

⁵⁶⁹ R Dyer, 1979, op. cit., p. 3

Baron and Sharon Carnicke observe, it is not easily separable from other filmic elements determining how a character's actions are portrayed on screen.⁵⁷⁰ Dyer's lucid definition of performance as 'how the action/function is done, how the lines are said,' is therefore useful for drawing attention to the contribution a performer makes in addition to the scene's basic requirements.⁵⁷¹ Further to extra-textual knowledge garnered from other films and press coverage, particular performance codes also inform an audience's reading of a star image.

Broadly speaking, it's possible to locate performance styles on a continuum between naturalistic and non-naturalistic performance. Those trained in the former draw on Constantin Stanislavsky's work at the Moscow Arts Theatre, who instructed performers to convey the inner truth of the characters they sought to portray by invoking 'emotions from his or her subconscious and letting the role grow within him or her.'⁵⁷² Stanislavsky contrasted this with 'mechanical acting,' the learned repetition of particular "actorly" gestures, which, he claimed, are only capable of creating the appearance of meaning.⁵⁷³

In the 1950s, Lee Strasberg's psychoanalytically inflected take on Stanislavsky's ideas came to prominence through his work with influential performers such as Marlon Brando and James Dean at the Actors Studio in New York. Crucial to training in 'The Method' as Strasberg's idiosyncratic battery of dramatic exercises came to be known, were attempts to signify a character's inner life by stimulating an actor's emotion memory. Selecting a particularly resonant experience from their past, which Strasberg stipulated had to be at least seven years old to ensure its potency, the actor

⁵⁷⁰ C Baron and SM Carnicke, 2008, *Reframing Screen Performance*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 67

⁵⁷¹ R Dyer, 1979, op. cit., p. 151

⁵⁷² C Stanislavsky, 1936, 'When Acting is an Art,' in JG Butler, Ed., 1991, *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p 18

⁵⁷³ C Stanislavsky, 1936, *ibid.*, in JG Butler, Ed., 1991, *ibid.*, p. 28

was able automatically to express the emotions required of the scene, by the force of the memory recalled.⁵⁷⁴ Strasberg's notion of an authentic inner self, subsequently repressed by another, outer self owes much to the popularisation of Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1940s and 1950s. Of course, such a model of subjectivity can be seen to oppose the logic of Butler's work. For her of course, the inner self to which Strasberg ascribes naturalness and authenticity is the illusory effect of repeated acts.⁵⁷⁵ Although the extent of Strasberg's work with the performers with whom he is associated remains questionable, the Method nonetheless came to represent "good" film acting.⁵⁷⁶

Problematising the intentionality of performance style, Andrew Higson argues that despite Strasberg's intent to produce the closest approximation to realism in his performers, the Method's tendency for drawn out gesture and inwardly-turned, improvised dialogue serves to direct the audience's attention toward the performance itself, rather than the emotion of the character portrayed.⁵⁷⁷ Virginia Wexman agrees, contending that the Method actor's claim to realism through conventionalised performance tics is merely part of the rhetoric of naturalistic acting.⁵⁷⁸ The unintended distancing effect brought about by performers trained in Method acting demonstrates that even the most naturalistic of performance styles have the capacity to reveal the illusory effect of the performed identity on screen.

Rather than rely solely on the acting nomenclature, it is more instructive to note Barry King's four material sites for the production of acting signs: the facial, the gestural, the corporeal and the vocal, taking into account the performer's physical

⁵⁷⁴ JG Butler, 1991, Ed., *ibid.*, p. 43

⁵⁷⁵ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 185

⁵⁷⁶ VW Wexman, 2004, 'Masculinity in Crisis: Method Acting in Hollywood,' in PR Wojcik, Ed., 2004, *Movie Acting: The Film Reader*, London, Routledge, p. 131

⁵⁷⁷ A Higson, 1986, 'Film Acting and Independent Cinema,' *Screen*, Vol. 27, No. 3-4, p. 112

⁵⁷⁸ VW Wexman, 2004, in PR Wojcik, Ed., 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 127

type, which itself carries specific, culturally-bound connotations.⁵⁷⁹ Indeed, King reminds us that a film performance cannot be removed from the cultural economy of the body as a sign. Further, as much as the actor must work to make his or her body signify in a certain way to create the image required for the character, King observes that s/he also needs to suppress those elements of their appearance and behaviour that, were they to signify in the film, would give rise to fragmentation and dissonance in the character's construction.⁵⁸⁰ In Butler's terms, we could argue that acting effects a spurious coherence to the actor's otherwise fragmented, gendered attributes. The chapter will therefore take into account the performance tradition to which the actor or performance purportedly subscribes, but place greater importance to individual performance signs in the context of the film's narrative.

Butler's theorisation of gender is particularly suited to the analysis of star performance. Indeed *Gender Trouble* concludes by tentatively asserting that it may be possible to 'act gender in ways that draw attention to the constructedness of heterosexual identities.'⁵⁸¹ As discussed in the first chapter, the visual language and apparent agency of *Gender Trouble* has led some critics to conclude that Butler constructs gender as a performance.⁵⁸² However, clarifying her position in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler distinguishes the performative, which 'precedes and exceeds' conscious control, from performance, where a single, not necessarily repeated act remains under the subject's full command.⁵⁸³ Examining drag performances, Butler collapses the distinction between naturalistic and non-naturalistic style, arguing that reading a performance at all, even to confirm its naturalism, can only undermine that

⁵⁷⁹ B King, 1985, 'Articulating Stardom,' in JG Butler, Ed., 1991, op. cit., p. 136

⁵⁸⁰ B King, 1985, *ibid.*, in JG Butler, Ed., 1991, *ibid.*, p. 137

⁵⁸¹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 186

⁵⁸² See J Prosser, 2006, op. cit., in S Stryker and S Whittle, Eds., 2006, op. cit., p. 262

⁵⁸³ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 95

“realness.”⁵⁸⁴ Indeed, the very process of reading reveals the performer’s status as inauthentic.

Drawing on the work of Foucault and Derrida, Butler argues that the assertion of a prohibition provides the discursive occasion for its subversion.⁵⁸⁵ The role of prohibition in the construction of gender is particularly at issue in the youth delinquency film where rebellion against dominant values is bound up with a rejection, or failure of hegemonic masculinity. Reading the performance of masculinities in the youth delinquency film therefore provides the possibility of rendering incoherent the apparent coherence of normative masculinity.

Examining the inception of the juvenile delinquent figure, Jon Lewis argues that the extreme paranoia and oppressive homogeneity of 1950s America provided the conditions for rebellion.⁵⁸⁶ Growing youth culture, the resulting cultivation of youth-specific spaces and widely documented (though in fact quite isolated) instances of youth gang violence fostered an increasing generation gap between teenagers and their uncomprehending parents.⁵⁸⁷ Hollywood was not impervious to these developments, as the relaxation of the Production Code allowed for the depiction of more violent and sexual content. Further, the dissolution of the studios’ lucrative exhibition networks allowed smaller, niche producers to show their films in a larger number of venues.⁵⁸⁸ Youth delinquency films certainly appeared prior to the 1950s. However, whereas pre-war texts portrayed “typical” working-class youth criminality as the result of poverty,⁵⁸⁹ the moneyed suburbanites of the 1950s, epitomised by Jim Stark in *Rebel*

⁵⁸⁴ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 129

⁵⁸⁵ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 17

⁵⁸⁶ J Lewis, 1992, *The Road to Romance and Ruin*, London: Routledge, p. 15

⁵⁸⁷ D Biltereyst, 2007, *op. cit.*, in T Shary and A Siebel, Eds., 2007, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-11

⁵⁸⁸ T Shary, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 18

⁵⁸⁹ T Shary, 2005, ‘Bad Boys and Hollywood Hype: Gendered Conflict in Juvenile Delinquency Films,’ in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2005, *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*: Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p. 21

Without a Cause, were seen to rebel as a result of their perceived alienation and anomie.⁵⁹⁰

Although the rock and roll soundtrack of *Blackboard Jungle* undoubtedly appealed to teens, the 1950s juvenile delinquency film typically featured cautionary messages appealing to parental vigilance for signs of teen rebellion.⁵⁹¹ Even the most ordinary of families, the films claimed, could hold within them a potentially dangerous teen.⁵⁹² In chapter one, a key element of the 'Teen Movie's definition was the films' teen address. As a consequence, the intended adult audience of the 1950s juvenile delinquency film excludes it from the category. Rather, as a 'temporally brief but numerically and aesthetically significant outpouring of related films,' the 1950s juvenile delinquency films should be understood as a distinct cycle that provides an important precursor to the Teen Movie.⁵⁹³

The 1960s constituted a liminal period in the portrayal of juvenile delinquency. Indeed, Barry Shear's *Wild in the Streets* (Dir. Barry Shear, 1968) portrays precocious Max Frost, who secures the youth vote with his easy charisma and is elected president of the United States. Believing the older population to be responsible for the oppression of youth and other disenfranchised groups, Max establishes drug-fuelled concentration camps for those over thirty years of age. The film thus appeals to youth in recognising their widespread dissatisfaction, while providing a cautionary tale to their elders already gripped by a fervent fear of the young.⁵⁹⁴

Youth delinquency in the 1970s was portrayed with a degree of pathos. A key example is provided by *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1978), in which John

⁵⁹⁰ J Lewis, 1992, op. cit., p. 20

⁵⁹¹ See for instance *The Delinquents* (Dir. Robert Altman, 1955); *The Wild One* (Dir. Laslo Benedek, 1953)

⁵⁹² T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 18

⁵⁹³ J Feuer, 2010, op. cit., in S Cohan, 2010, op. cit., p. 55

⁵⁹⁴ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 40

Travolta portrays his character, Tony Manero, attempting to combat his anomie through mastery of the dance floor. By the 1980s, a number of different, teen-oriented models of youth rebellion had emerged. The ‘harmless mischief’ of *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (Dir. John Hughes, 1986), and the ‘dance rebellion’ cycle typified by *Footloose* (Dir. Herbert Ross, 1984) were far removed from the angst of previous generations.⁵⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the latter film acknowledged its lineage to earlier portrayals of juvenile delinquency by transplanting narrative elements of *Rebel Without a Cause* to a contemporary, rural setting.⁵⁹⁶ Others depicted the youth rebel as a distinctly unsympathetic figure, whose unthinking violence was shown in increasingly graphic detail. The controversial *River’s Edge* (Dir. Tim Hunter, 1986), for instance, exposed the extent of suburban youth apathy as a nonplussed group of high-school students faced with the murder of one of their friends by another of their classmates, strive initially to protect the killer and only begrudgingly report the incident to the police.

Shary rightly argues that high-school shootings in the 1990s have made the depiction of the isolated, introspective teenager considerably less palatable.⁵⁹⁷ Consequently, the late 1990s and 2000s have seen the formerly commonplace youth delinquent figure confined to offbeat psychological thrillers such as *Donnie Darko* (Dir. Richard Kelly, 2001). Nonetheless, what Shary identifies as ‘youth delinquency films’ have proved one of the Teen Movie’s more enduring subgenres.⁵⁹⁸ Shary acknowledges that rebellious characters occur in other categories of Teen Movie, such as the School Film and the Teen Horror, and as the above chronology demonstrates, in a variety of guises. He therefore proposes that the youth delinquency film is distinct

⁵⁹⁵ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 83

⁵⁹⁶ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 84

⁵⁹⁷ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., in F Gateward and M Pomerance, 2005, Eds., op. cit, p. 23

⁵⁹⁸ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 83

in its portrayal of the 'act of delinquency as defiance and empowerment within a relatively typical cultural context.'⁵⁹⁹

The disparity in attitudes, activities and environments across the youth delinquency film means that conferring the status of a distinct subgenre is problematic. Clearly, the broad historical base of the juvenile delinquent figure from the 1960s to the 2000s over a number of decades precludes the categorisation of cycle, even if the cluster of films released in the 1950s is suitably so named. Taking up Altman's conceptualisation of genre as consisting of both semantic and syntactic elements, it emerges that while the youth delinquency film contains distinct semantic elements, their syntax varies widely.⁶⁰⁰ Further, recalling Schatz's description of the maturation of genres, where its examples are first transparent, before becoming self-referential, it is possible to observe this progression in the youth delinquency film.⁶⁰¹ Indeed, analysing three youth delinquents at different stages in the development of the archetype, this chapter will observe how, through theme, costume, setting and situation, the films demonstrate an increased awareness of their antecedents. Given the limited aesthetic characteristics of the youth delinquency film, and the relatively small number of films concerned, this chapter follows Shary in classifying the films as a subgenre, acknowledging their shared aesthetic, and thematic concerns developed over a period of time.⁶⁰²

The first star performance analysed is that of James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Dir. Nicholas Ray, 1955). Despite the film's centrality in discussions of 1950s youth culture, the film remains both stylistically and thematically conservative. Lamenting the erosion of clear gender roles – and demonstrating the film's debt to the

⁵⁹⁹ T Shary, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 83

⁶⁰⁰ R Altman, 1987, *ibid* in BK Grant, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 34

⁶⁰¹ T Schatz, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 38

⁶⁰² See T Shary, 2002, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84

family melodrama – *Rebel* can be seen to place the blame for Jim’s problems with Carol’s emasculating dominance of her husband, Frank. Further, the lavish “Warner Color” in which *Rebel* is shot indicates the film’s status as a prestige production, far removed from the low-cost fare created for the teen market. Towards the end of the film, Carol remarks that “you read about things like this happening to other families but you never dream it could happen to yours,” appealing directly to the film’s intended audience of concerned parents rather than their alienated offspring. Censorship plays a role here: *The Wild One* (Dir. Laslo Benedek, 1953) and *The Delinquents* (Dir. Robert Altman, 1955) were obliged to place warning statements at their opening sequences to ensure that the unfolding narratives were perceived as cautionary tales rather than incitements to violence for suggestible youth. Similarly, even after it had been heavily edited, *Rebel Without a Cause* was accorded an ‘R’ and an ‘X’ rating in the US and UK respectively, prohibiting access to all but the oldest teens.⁶⁰³

As the film could not be legally viewed by teens at the time of its release, *Rebel Without a Cause* cannot be regarded as a Teen Movie. Nonetheless, since elements of Dean’s performance and star persona have informed many later representations of youth delinquency, his performance merits analysis as a privileged precursor to the Teen Movie. Although Dean only briefly attended Strasberg’s classes at the Actors’ Studio, he was widely known for his Method-like performance style. In *Rebel*, his volatile performance highlights the fragmentation in the formerly taken for granted category of masculinity. As a revivalist musical, the following case study, *Grease* (Dir. Randal Kleiser, 1978) displaces any claim to naturalism through highly choreographed sequences and knowing allusions to 1950s and 1960s youth culture. Consequently, John Travolta’s performance as Danny Zuko is able to highlight the layered

⁶⁰³ D Biltereyst, 2007, op. cit., in T Shary and A Seibel, Eds., 2007, op. cit., p. 18

inauthenticity of masculinity. Finally, as Jason Dean in *Heathers* (Dir. Michael Lehrmann, 1989) Christian Slater's performance is shown to take up and parody the tropes of the rebel persona. Slater's strained, nasal tones evoke the delivery and star personae of Jack Nicholson and Marlon Brando. Moreover, the indiscriminate murder perpetrated by Jason Dean takes the latent threat of earlier delinquents to an extreme that interrogates the limits of teen rebel identity.

3.2 – THE ORIGINAL REBEL: JAMES DEAN IN *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* (DIR. NICHOLAS RAY, 1955)

3.2.1 – INTRODUCTION

Dying in a car crash less than a month before the film's release on October 26th 1955,⁶⁰⁴ James Dean's fragmented, anomic performance as Jim Stark ensured his swift canonisation as an idealised embodiment of youth culture and rebellion. Interestingly, of Dean's small corpus of films, only *East of Eden* (Dir. Elia Kazan, 1955) was released while the star was still alive. The majority of Dean's fans thus came to know him only posthumously. As Graham McCann argues, his 'presence projected an absence,' since audiences watched Dean's performances in the knowledge of his prior death.⁶⁰⁵ McCann's remarks are reflected in reviews of *Rebel* and *Giant* (Dir. George Stevens, 1956), which remark on "a talent that might have reached the heights"... [and] "the blazing up of a lost light," in reference to the young star.⁶⁰⁶ Paradoxically, it would appear that Dean's stardom was at its strongest in the absence of the actor himself. His death enabled audiences to project their own desires and expectations onto the star, on whose behalf Warner Brothers was obliged to employ a dedicated mail agency

⁶⁰⁴ D Spoto, 1996, *Rebel: The Life and Legend of James Dean*, London: HarperCollins, p. 254. Dean's crash occurred on September 30th the same year cf. Spoto, p. 3

⁶⁰⁵ G McCann, 1991, *Rebel Males: Cliff, Brando and Dean*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p. 164

⁶⁰⁶ Reviews of *Giant* taken from D Spoto, 1996, *ibid.*, pp. 254-255

to respond to the high volume of letters addressed to Dean requesting signed photos and locks of hair.⁶⁰⁷

Despite – or possibly because of – his lack of commitment to any particular political cause, Dean was sold as an embodiment of rebellion.⁶⁰⁸ More of an abstract concept than specific countercultural commitment, Dean's rebellion was easily commodified to appeal to millions rather than becoming the sole preserve of a niche interest group. If not political, it's possible that Dean's rebellion occurred at the level of gender identity. Many critics noted the change in male Hollywood stardom that occurred in the 1950s.⁶⁰⁹ Whereas the on-screen virility of John Wayne or Clark Gable, for instance, was never in doubt, Naremore situates Dean alongside Montgomery Clift and Marlon Brando, whose sexuality and ostensible inarticulacy signalled a new focus on the teen market.⁶¹⁰ Springer also points out how this new breed of star revealed the 'vulnerability and confusion' within elements of masculine identity, indicating the gender's status as a construction.⁶¹¹ Indeed, these "rebel males," McCann contends, showed themselves to be torn between 'novel and traditional forms of masculinity,' demonstrating the arbitrariness of those traits typically ascribed to the masculine gender.⁶¹² Notably, McCann's comments can be seen to challenge Butler's theorisation of gender, since she posits a single term to describe the position of idealised masculinity. Analysis of Dean's star performance thus provides a way of unpacking what the position of having the Phallus might be.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁷ D Spoto, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 256. In November 1955, a month after Dean's death, Warner Brothers received 3000 letters per week. That number would double over the following two years.

⁶⁰⁸ C Springer, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 27

⁶⁰⁹ See for instance G McCann, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 139; J Naremore, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 195; VW Wexman, 2004, *op. cit.*, in PR Wojcik, Ed., 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 131

⁶¹⁰ J Naremore, 1988, *ibid.*, p. 195

⁶¹¹ C Springer, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 33

⁶¹² G McCann, 1993, *op. cit.*, p.27

⁶¹³ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 191

Rebel centres on Jim Stark, a middle-class suburban teenager presented as alienated and delinquent. New in town, he soon finds himself pitted against gang leader, Buzz, who proposes a “Chickie Run” to settle their differences. As a “matter of honour,” Jim takes up the challenge, and in winning, earns the affections of Judy, Buzz’s former girlfriend, and of Plato, another troubled teen. After the three have run away to an abandoned mansion, Plato is spooked by the remaining gang members who have tracked them down, and starts to fire shots. He is eventually killed by the police who, seeing the gun in Plato’s hand, assume that he is still armed despite Jim’s assurances. The film’s ending sees the establishment of a new order in Jim’s family as Frank promises to be a strong father, and Carol steps back from her formerly dominant position. Jim’s rebellion is thus recuperated, since he is apparently integrated back into the community, ending his alienation. Using Butler as a framework through which to view Dean’s performance promises to elucidate its complexity and indeterminacy throughout.

3.2.2 – “YOU’RE TEARING ME APART!” FRAGMENTATION AND THE FAILURE OF GENDER IDENTIFICATION

The opening scene of *Rebel* makes clear the identity of the eponymous delinquent. Filling the screen, the film’s title overlays Jim lying on the floor on his front, playing with a wind-up toy. He is soon brought into the juvenile division of the police station, for “plain drunkenness.” Although as Naremore points out, ‘no-one has proposed how we might recognise the Method on screen,’ Jim’s inebriation facilitates the instantiation of a number of the stylised gestures associated with this type of performance, such as repeated, mumbled speech and unpredictable gesture.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁴ J Naremore, 1988, op. cit., p. 197



FIGURE 3.1 JAMES DEAN'S ANTI-STAR MOMENT

Dean's performance with the small toy provides an anti-star moment. Contrasting with Orpen's observation that star entrances are 'delayed and fragmented,' as exemplified by that of Freddie Prinze Jr. in *She's All That*, Dean's entire body is shown from the very first frame, as seen in Figure 3.1 above.⁶¹⁵ Lying among discarded detritus, his physical position confirms his place among similarly ill-regarded youth culture, and yet contrasts with Dean's status as a studio employed star of some wealth. This disparity is paralleled in the juxtaposition of class signifiers: while Jim lies drunk in the gutter, his tweed jacket continues to convey middle-class respectability. The shot can thus be seen to reflect Shary's contention that the 1950s cycle of juvenile delinquency films emphasise the middle-class, suburban origins of its troubled teens, in contrast to the products of the slums seen in earlier portrayals.⁶¹⁶

Noticing a fortuitously positioned toy monkey, Jim winds it up, and briefly watches it move before quickly snatching it, clasping it between his hands and laying it on its back on the ground. Using a piece of discarded paper and a leaf, he next constructs a resemblance of a bed for the toy. Then, curling into a foetal position as much as his clothes will allow, Jim inches towards the toy on his side and gently pats

⁶¹⁵ V Orpen, 2003, op. cit., p. 88

⁶¹⁶ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 52

it, as though soothing the toy to sleep. Further to showcasing Dean's acting skills, this performance illustrates the fragmentation at the centre of Jim's identity: seemingly realising that he is no longer a child, Jim abruptly grasps the toy after he has made it move and starts instead to nurture and look after it. However, as he settles down to sleep beside the toy, Dean's performance reveals Jim's childishness.

Dean's performance demonstrates Jim's failure to embody the norms of either boyhood or manhood convincingly. His ineffective attempts to nurture the toy show Jim's attempt, and failure, to embody Phallic masculinity and so assume the symbolic role of the father. However, being constructed of tin, the toy can neither be nurtured, nor provide an effective source of companionship. Later in the film, Jim's failure to protect Plato will have more tragic results. Portraying an oscillation between childhood and adulthood, my reading of the scene complicates Butler's theorisation of gender. Although she briefly describes the initiation 'by which a certain "girling" is compelled' through consistent and repeated gender interpellation, Butler does not explore how childhood gender identities might be theorised, nor does she address the transition from child to adult identities.⁶¹⁷ Consequently, as Jim moves between the norms of boyish behaviour as well as those commonly associated with adult masculinity, my reading of Dean's performance can be seen to complicate Butler's understanding of gender performativity.

Jim's fragmented identity becomes further apparent as he is brought into the police station. The geography of the police station itself embodies fragmentation, since the station is divided into many smaller rooms. The depth of field in these shots allows the audience to see both Plato sitting scowling with his guardian on the left side of the screen, and Judy immediately behind him in one of the interview rooms. The

⁶¹⁷ J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 232

three teens' coincidental presence at the police station on the same night foretells their eventual friendship, and invites comparisons between them.

Judy's wrongdoing, like that of Jim, is portrayed as the result of a problematic relationship with her parents, as she describes her distress at her father's rejection and his attempts to police her behaviour. Although she wants continued recognition as a child at home, her bold red attire signifies her status as object of the heterosexual male gaze, emphasised as Jim unabashedly turns his head to watch her walk into the interview room. Contrasting with Judy's evident emotion, Plato's averted gaze and sullen manner demonstrate his lack of remorse for his actions. Having shot a puppy and refused the psychiatric treatment offered to him, his behaviour is depicted as discernibly more pathological than that of either Jim or Judy, whose minor infractions are dealt with largely by their parents. Tellingly, Plato is accompanied by a guardian, suggesting that his problematic behaviour may be the result of his absent parents.

Jim's impulsive behaviour at the police station signals his oddness for the assembled adults, and demonstrates his fragmented character. The shoe polish chair in which he sits is emblematic of his class position since its function requires another to labour on his feet beneath him. Further, positioned above and far from the benches occupied by the other delinquents signifies Jim's (and Dean's) higher status. Sprawled on the chair, Jim wails to imitate the siren of a police car heard outside. When called up on his strange behaviour, he sits up abruptly in a boyish pose, pretending to shoot the officer who reprimanded him. Jim's childlike position is underscored by the medium-long shot scale, which makes him appear smaller than he is. We will learn later in the scene that the police, in their symbolic and actual roles as functionaries of the law, serve as representations of idealised masculinity for the teen. Consequently,

Jim's smile as the officer chastises him can be seen to reveal his desire to be treated as a child, even as he negotiates the requirements of adult masculinity.

The arrival of Jim's parents and grandmother makes his volatile behaviour more acute. As the family reach Jim's chair, the low camera position emphasises the teen's absurd height, as he towers over his parents. Jim immediately focuses on his father, who initially appears happy to be the centre of his son's attention. Jim then stands up from the chair and puts his father in the seat. This gesture can be seen to grant Frank the position of appearing to have the Phallus. As his father emits a jocular laugh and starts to infantilise his son, addressing him as "Jimbo," Jim's behaviour becomes confrontational, asking "do you think I'm funny Dad?" Although Jim is apparently happy to be interpellated into the role of a child by the police officer earlier in the scene, he rejects Frank's attempts to do so. Both Jim's questioning of Frank, and his father's evident fear of his son serve to problematise Frank's position of appearing to have the Phallus, and provides his principal source of complaint when Jim discusses his family situation with Ray.

Echoing Jim's ineffectual attempt to nurture and protect a toy monkey, Frank is shown to be unable to protect his son from punishment. As Jim shuts himself off from the scene going on around him by humming Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* and hunching his body on the chair, his father attempts to excuse Jim's actions by highlighting his formerly good behaviour and their recent arrival in the town. Humming Wagner's opera, widely associated with the German assault in World War II, Jim reveals the differences between his generation, raised largely in peacetime, and the war in which we can assume his parents will have engaged. By connecting his father's appeal to Ray with the far grander battle fought during Jim's early childhood, Jim implicitly mocks Frank's fruitless defence of his son. Feigning earnestness, Jim

drunkenly repeats his father's words, pointing, as though attempting to assert a point saying, "tell 'em ... tell 'em how we moved here and" Jim's repetition implies that Frank has invoked this defence before, to little effect. Moreover, Butler's work allows us to view Frank's defence as a citation of fatherhood, an interpretation reinforced as he exasperatingly states: "I'm trying to protect you here ... and you're not making it easy." While Butler argues that it is possible to undermine a norm through its citation, the film makes a parallel move, in that Jim's re-appropriation of Frank's approximation of fatherhood undermines the older man's claim to authority.⁶¹⁸

Arguably, Jim's sharp rebuttal constitutes a failure to identify with his father as representation of idealised masculinity. Freud's work on 'Mourning and Melancholia' states that masculinity is consolidated through identification with the father following the loss of the mother as object of desire.⁶¹⁹ Although Butler questions the compulsory heterosexuality associated with this trajectory, Jim's failure to identify with Frank could be seen to signify his identification with the feminine position. However, his wish that Frank would "have the guts to knock mum cold" affirms his repudiation of his phallicised mother. Jim's fragmented identity can therefore be explained by his identification with neither parent, rendering his gender identity ambiguous and leading him to need to prove his adherence to masculine norms throughout the film.

Frank is further shown to perform his class incorrectly as the family leave the police station. Unaware of the content of Ray's sympathetic discussion with his son, Frank assumes that the officer has released Jim without charge owing to his earlier protestations of Jim's unfortunate circumstances. In thanks he offers Ray some cigars, which the officer flatly turns down. Positioned centrally facing each other on either side of the screen, the two are presented as adversaries, while the framing of the

⁶¹⁸ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 108

⁶¹⁹ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 81

characters in long shot undermines their stature. Frank's failed gift is rendered all the more potent by the phallic symbolism of the cigars themselves. Indeed, as a paternalist gesture of class dominance, the cigars constitute Frank's attempt to assert his status over Ray. Their refusal and Carol's stern calls for him to withdraw the offer, draw attention to Frank's failure to perform the norms of masculinity, fatherhood and class dominance that are combined in the gift.

3.2.3 – “WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU HAVE TO BE A MAN?” CONFRONTATION AND THE “CHICKIE RUN”

The film's opening scenes make clear Jim's preoccupation with what he perceives to be the requirements of masculinity, and his ability to fulfil those expectations convincingly. As a result, he is persuaded to engage in two confrontations with Buzz, a fellow high-school student and gang leader, whose status as both Judy's boyfriend and gang leader codes him as an idealised representation of masculinity for Jim and for the group he leads.

The animosity between Buzz and Jim begins at the planetarium where, as the lecturer identifies the Cancer constellation on the ceiling projection, Buzz crawls his hand along Judy's chest before pinching another companion's nose, remarking “Hey, I'm a crab.” From three rows behind, Jim observes the group's enjoyment of Buzz's joke with interest. The laughter prompted by Buzz's commentary can be seen to indicate his status as an embodiment of idealised masculinity for the gang. As such, the film's construction of Buzz can be seen to open up Butler's contention that idealised gender is always impossible to embody.⁶²⁰ The positive reaction Buzz's joke received within the auditorium prompts Jim to imitate the gang leader, so that when the lecturer introduces the constellation for “Taurus, the bull,” he emits a loud “moo” sound. Whereas Buzz's comments were met with appreciative laughter, the group

⁶²⁰ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 161

respond to Jim's interjection with a mixture of scornful derision and incomprehension, questioning the identity of their imitator and discuss how they (or rather, Buzz) should retaliate to this apparent threat to their status.

Jim's imitation of Buzz can be seen to conform to Butler's conceptualisation of the imitative structure of gender, and the reversal of power relations in structures of recognition. By imitating Buzz, Jim can be seen to consolidate the gang leader's status, precisely by constructing him as a model to be imitated. Nonetheless, Jim's unsuccessful imitation of Buzz's joke also allows him to be perceived as a credible rival to his position. As the group surround Buzz outside the planetarium demanding to know what he plans to do about the interjection from the "comedian," the film can be seen to demonstrate the dependence of the one who possesses the Phallus on others to recognise his status, which Butler observes.⁶²¹ The behaviour of the gang's leader is dictated by his followers, not vice versa. Outside the building, Jim's contorted, anguished face demonstrates both his reluctance to engage in an altercation with the gang, and his awareness of its inevitability. Consequently, the scenes that lead up to the knife fight demonstrate a pressure to fight that transcends the characters' will. Jim's swift change of posture and expression when Plato appears reveals the former pose as a private moment that reveals his true feelings about the confrontation, demonstrating Dean's multi-layered performance of masculinity.⁶²²

Continuing to avoid confrontation, Jim silently watches the group bait him as they surround his car. Cross-cutting between Jim and Plato immediately outside the Planetarium, and Buzz's gang further down the hill, the two groups watch each other in medium shot, while the editing pattern and the heightening non-diegetic music

⁶²¹ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 61

⁶²² M Pomerance, 2005, 'Stark Performance,' in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, *Rebel Without a Cause: Approaches to a Maverick Masterwork*, New York: State University of New York Press, p. 43

indicate the forthcoming altercation. Only when one of Buzz's group slashes a tyre does Jim realise he must go and engage with them. Accompanying this realisation is a deep sigh of resignation as he lowers his head and shoulders into his body, as though shrinking from the task even as he acknowledges its inevitability; once established, the status as aggressor cannot be so easily refused. Reaching the car, Jim calmly retrieves a spare tyre. However, the haste and recklessness with which he discards his jacket into the boot illustrates his anger at the situation. Presenting himself as a reluctant participant in the confrontation, Jim holds up his hands, backs away, and refuses the knife Buzz offers him, repeating: "I don't want any trouble."

As the group start to cluck, denoting his perceived cowardice, Jim's behaviour and attitude towards the fight instantly transform. Disintegrating his former composure, he turns around aggressively barking "Is that meaning me?" Recalling the dialogue in Ray's office, we know that a previous fight in another town occurred in a similar manner, when someone called him "chicken," and the same associations here are shown to have a transformative effect. Indeed, Jim's naming as "chicken" conversely leads him to prove his readiness for a fight. The knives in the scene clearly evoke the Phallus, made apparent in a point of view shot from Buzz's perspective, in which his knife dominates the foreground in silhouette. The evident reluctance of both characters can be seen to illustrate Butler's theorisation of gender as a repeated approximation that is mandated, rather than willed.⁶²³ Although their initial disinterest demonstrates the possibility of resistance, the characters are seen to acknowledge the discursive imperative to approximate idealised masculinity.

Interrupted by a security guard at the Planetarium, the two are unable to continue their fight. Buzz's proposed "Chickie Run" provides a second opportunity

⁶²³ See for instance, J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 95

for Jim to test his masculinity against that of the gang leader. Knowing that participating in the ritual will be dangerous, but nonetheless wanting to prove himself “as a matter of honour,” Jim consults his father for advice. Jim’s request for advice demonstrates his awareness both of the danger of the “Chickie Run”, and of the discursive compulsion to which he is nevertheless aware he must submit. Indeed, the conversation can be usefully compared with Andie’s discussion with Iona in *Pretty in Pink*, which makes clear that although attendance to the prom is not formally enforced, there are other forces at work demanding that “you have to go.” While Iona is portrayed as a mature, knowing figure, the scene in which Jim seeks his father’s advice follows the most vivid depiction of Frank’s emasculation, as he ineptly struggles to clear a tray of food intended for Carol before she becomes aware of it.

Wearing a floral apron over his tweed suit, Frank cuts an absurd figure, prompting Jim to laugh uproariously at the spectacle. The visual comedy and Frank’s evident inability to perform a feminine-coded task can be read as exemplifying Butler’s contention that cross-dressing can serve to cement the parameters of heteronormative gender.⁶²⁴ In accordance with the film’s conservative gender politics, Frank’s costume can be seen to uphold a heterosexual gender binary. Examining Jim’s repeated “let her see it,” referring to the mess Frank has made, Pomerance argues that Jim implores his father to ‘let [his wife] see the work she puts [him] to ... in order that it may appear that there is no work.’⁶²⁵ The desire to foreground labour that Pomerance observes in Dean’s emphatic performance of the line recalls Butler’s theorisation of performativity, which exposes gender as a ‘stylised repetition of acts’ that taken together create the appearance of a seamless, orderly gender identity.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁴ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 238

⁶²⁵ M Pomerance, 2005, op. cit., in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, op. cit., pp. 47-48 [emphasis in original]

⁶²⁶ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 45

Rejecting his father's indecision, Jim quickly changes from the tweeds worn from the beginning of the film, to a red jacket, white t-shirt and blue jeans, signalling a change of allegiance from his father to Buzz, whose dress code he now shares. Lewis argues that although the "Chickie Run" provides a test of rebellion and machismo for the teens, the event ultimately demonstrates their 'boredom and conformity.'⁶²⁷ Indeed, the "Chickie Run" is highly ritualised, as the teens' swift organisation, and mini-rituals such as Judy's signals and coin toss demonstrate. As such, although operating outside of the law, the gang are nevertheless presented as quietly efficient, orderly and rule-bound. Consequently, Pomerance speculates that rather than to cause harm, the "Chickie Run" is engineered 'to produce a circumstance where Jim can be added to the gang.'⁶²⁸ If Jim loses the "Chickie Run", amiably accepts defeat, and is allowed to fall in with the gang, his threat to Buzz is contained.

Pomerance's analysis of the exchange between Jim and Buzz reveals the bonding that can only occur between the two when they are alone. When Jim asks, "Why do we do this?" Buzz, shorn of his former swagger, can only bleakly respond "You gotta do something." For Pomerance, their dialogue highlights the performance of masculinity required of the two, without which 'social life would be unthinkable.'⁶²⁹ To rearticulate this point in Butler's terms, the exchange demonstrates how the prevailing matrix of norms requires the two teens to be seen to compete to possess the Phallus. Their interaction when in the presence of the assembled crowds is rather different and can be articulated in terms of the homosocial, as theorised by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Examining the bonds formed between men in literary love triangles, Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that homosociality and homosexuality exist on a continuum disrupted only by homophobia: "To be a "man's man" [the homosocial] is

⁶²⁷ J Lewis, 1992, op. cit., p. 25

⁶²⁸ M Pomerance, 2005, op. cit., in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, op. cit., p. 41

⁶²⁹ M Pomerance, 2005, op. cit., in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, op. cit., p. 44

separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being “interested in men” [the homosexual].⁶³⁰ Although Butler does not discuss homosociality, it is significant that Kosofsky Sedgwick too finds the existence of a discursively maintained prohibition on homosexuality in relationships between men.



FIGURE 3.2 PLATO (SAL MINEO) AND JUDY (NATALIE WOOD) DISCUSS JIM AT THE “CHICKIE RUN”

Key to Buzz’s representation as leader of his group, and indicative of the homosocial bond he briefly forges with Jim, is his relationship with Judy, the group’s representation of idealised femininity. Functioning as the archetypal conduit for male homosocial relations, Judy serves as a guarantor for Buzz’s (and later Jim’s) heterosexuality, and yet also facilitates this ritual of male bonding as she gives the cue to “hit the lights” and begin the race, a role she clearly enjoys.⁶³¹ Her change of loyalties is foretold when she sprinkles some dirt first into Buzz’s hands, then into Jim’s, further demonstrating her status as prize for the two young men. Plato’s presence at the “Chickie Run” disrupts that narrative however, as cross-cuts between Buzz and Jim preparing for their forthcoming event, and Judy and Plato discussing Jim, align Plato with the position occupied by Judy. Placing a male in the female

⁶³⁰ E Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 25

⁶³¹ E Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985, *ibid.*, p. 26

position of appearing to embody the Phallus, Plato's longing gaze can be seen to complicate the film's heteronormativity, while Jim's tacit acceptance of Plato's infatuation renders his sexuality ambiguous.

Critical readings of *Rebel* make much of Sal Mineo's performance as Plato, whom the actor himself describes as 'the first gay teenager in film.'⁶³² Indeed, his presence throughout complicates Jim's 'mythic' heteronormative coming-of-age process.⁶³³ For Dyer, Mineo and Dean are examples of the 'sad young man,'⁶³⁴ a cultural type widely seen during the 1950s and 1960s who illustrated that 'to be homosexual was to be both irredeemably sad and overwhelmingly desirable.'⁶³⁵ Owing to 1950s mores and censorship, Plato could not be expressly portrayed as homosexual. However, details of Mineo's performance, such as his gaze at a glossy photo of *Shane* (Dir. George Stevens, 1953) star, Alan Ladd stored in his locker, and his later gaze at Jim, provide indications of Plato's sexuality. In turn, Jim's gender identity is complicated by his acceptance of Plato's as well as Judy's desire, and by extra-textual knowledge of Dean's bisexuality.

During the "Chickie Run" itself, cross-cuts between the two characters watching each other, presumably to gauge when would be the most opportune moment to jump from their vehicle, can be seen to exemplify Butler's theorisation of gender's 'imitative structure.'⁶³⁶ As the two cars veer closer to the cliff edge, a cut from Buzz's face in close-up to another of the handle of his car door reveals his sleeve to be caught, preventing him from opening the door. Unaware of this development, Jim continues to watch Buzz, before finally diving out of the car, just as Buzz's car and he

⁶³² S Mineo, quoted in G McCann, 1991, op. cit., p. 151

⁶³³ G McCann, 1991, *ibid.*, p. 151

⁶³⁴ R Dyer, 2002, *The Culture of Queers*, London: Routledge, p. 115

⁶³⁵ R Dyer, 2002, *ibid.*, p. 116

⁶³⁶ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 125

within it, careers over the cliff edge. As the only remaining living participant, Jim has technically won the race. However, his victory is problematised by the clear rules Buzz had stipulated at the beginning of the race, namely that the *first* one to dive would be the “chicken.” Since Buzz never left the car, the film invites the possibility that he is in fact the victor and Jim the chicken. Buzz’s implied victory demonstrates that only in death can a subject achieve idealised masculinity, which can be seen to instantiate Butler’s assertion that no-one can ever fully embody that status.⁶³⁷

Jim is shown to aspire to the position as gang’s idealised embodiment of masculinity, a position that is shown to be instantiated in death. Dean’s stardom, which as previously discussed, is marked by tragedy and death as well as rebel cool, provides a further layer of complexity to the scene. Like Buzz, Dean too died in a car accident, colliding his Porsche Spyder into the Sedan of the improbably named Donald Turnupspeed only days before the release of *Rebel Without a Cause*.⁶³⁸ Moreover, although the film’s spectators know that Buzz was prevented from leaving the car, neither Jim nor the other teens have this knowledge. Consequently, Buzz’s apparent fearlessness continues to construct him as an embodiment of idealised masculinity for the group. Accounts of Dean’s crash similarly construct him as fearless, contributing to his instantiation of idealised masculinity in death. Indeed, his passenger Rolf Wütherich states that Dean drove at the legal limit at his request, (the implication being that the star otherwise preferred to drive much faster).⁶³⁹ Wütherich further reports that Dean accelerated into the fatal crossing, with the assurance: “that guy’s gotta see us – he’ll stop.”⁶⁴⁰ Wütherich’s narrative of Dean’s crash provides an

⁶³⁷ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 175

⁶³⁸ See D Spoto, 1996, op. cit., pp. 247-249 for a lengthy description of the crash and events leading up to it.

⁶³⁹ D Spoto, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 248

⁶⁴⁰ J Dean quoted in D Spoto, 1996, *ibid.*, p. 249

image of a fearless rebel, unafraid to break speed limits, and even emboldened by the sudden arrival of Turnupspeed's Sedan as a way to demonstrate his driving skill.

3.2.4 – ESTABLISHING AN ALTERNATIVE FAMILY

Lewis argues that the re-establishment of the family ideal that occurs at the mansion serves to rehabilitate Jim's rebellion and demonstrates his urge to 'replicate domesticity, not to flee society.'⁶⁴¹ For McCann too, *Rebel* 'affirms,' rather than undermines the vitality of the family institution.⁶⁴² Seeking refuge from the remaining gang members who suspect Jim of having told the police what occurred at the "Chickie Run", he and Judy flee to the abandoned mansion that Plato had pointed out earlier in the film. From a montage linked by dissolves of the trio's respective guardians making anguished telephone calls accompanied by non-diegetic music that conveys emotional impact, the film cuts abruptly to an establishing shot of the abandoned house, where only the sound of broken glass is heard. Although the camera is level, the house's position on a hill makes it appear as though shot at an angle. Likewise, with the shutters falling off, and in an obvious state of disrepair, the unlit house signifies disorder. The juxtaposition created between the frantic parents and the dilapidated mansion suggests that the family unit itself is no longer fit for purpose, an impression fostered by the sound of smashing glass heard off-screen, indicating further destruction taking place.

Although Judy and Jim have arrived at the mansion alone, Plato knows that Jim, being new to the area, is unlikely to be aware of many hideouts. He therefore easily guesses his likely destination and soon joins the pair. Once inside the mansion, the atmosphere is playful, as Jim light-heartedly claws and roars at Plato through the bars on the door through which he just entered. The mood is only briefly darkened by

⁶⁴¹ J Lewis, 1992, op. cit., p. 27

⁶⁴² G McCann, 1993, op. cit., p. 31

the news that the gang are pursuing Jim, prompting cross-cuts to the two youths searching for him. These cross-cuts, which occur with increasing frequency as they get ever closer to the house, highlight the precariousness of the idealised unit the three have created. Nonetheless, the teens remain largely good humoured, as Plato asks what the two think of his refuge. The question prompts Jim into a performance of adult male respectability as Jim asks Judy in a stilted voice, “Would you like to rent it or are you in the mood to buy, dear?” Following Jim’s lead, Plato and Judy assume the roles of estate agent and wife respectively, as she responds “you decide, dear, but remember our budget.”

Dean’s performance of respectable masculinity evokes Mr Magoo, the visually impaired character voiced by Jim Backus, who plays Jim’s father here.⁶⁴³ Dean’s choice to imitate a character noted for his literal and figurative blindness as an embodiment of middle-class masculinity, both provides a savage comment on his character’s feeling about his father, and lampoons the era’s norms of respectability. This role-playing can be read as an example of Butler’s ‘parodic inhabiting of conformity,’ which undermines the very authority to which it appeals.⁶⁴⁴ The absurdity of the scene is underscored when Plato gives the two a price of \$3m per month to rent the house. Calling into question the gender and class norms of adult heteronormativity, the three are seen to undermine, rather than re-affirm the validity of the family unit.

Moving further around the house, the three again assume a childlike manner, as Jim pretends to dive into the empty swimming pool while Judy throws a bucket of water on him. They eventually settle in a wooden pergola, where Jim rests his head on Judy’s lap, while Plato sits on the floor leaning on Jim. For many critics, their seated position demonstrates their replication of domesticity, as Judy and Jim appear to

⁶⁴³ J Lewis, 2005, ‘Growing up Male in Jim’s Mom’s World,’ in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, op. cit., p. 92

⁶⁴⁴ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 122

occupy the positions of parents, while Plato, seated lower, assumes the role of their child.⁶⁴⁵ Listening to and comforting Plato as he recounts his troubles, Jim and Judy initially appear to play the role of his parents effectively. Indeed, as Lewis points out, reflecting the actions of Plato's real guardians, the pair abandon Plato to explore the house leaving him to face the gang alone.⁶⁴⁶

Critical readings of the scene as a replication of domesticity serve to obfuscate the homoerotic bond forged between Jim and Plato. As at the "Chickie Run", Plato's continued infatuation with Jim complicates the scenario and Jim's positioning as a father figure. Indeed, as Springer notes, 'Jim and Plato exchange fond looks that express male tenderness.'⁶⁴⁷ Dean's and Mineo's performances undermine the apparent creation of the idealised family unit, further demonstrated by Plato's lies about his father being "a hero in the China seas."

A short scene with Jim and Judy alone illuminates the two characters' conceptualisations of masculinity. A shot frames their two faces side by side, appearing connected at the centre. Portraying a single face as a composite of male and female halves, the shot can be seen to instantiate Butler's reading of idealised binary sexual difference. The dialogue that follows between the two questions the attributes of masculinity and of heterosexual love. Judy leads the conversation as she muses on the nature of love and of the ideal masculine love object. Looking up, away from Jim and the camera, Judy asks "What kind of a person do you think a girl wants?" Jim's seemingly nonchalant response, "a man?" illustrates that for him, the attributes that define manhood are obvious and do not need to be explicitly stated. Combining Dyer's ear for 'how the line is said,' with Butler's work on gender enables Dean's

⁶⁴⁵ See T Shary, 2005, J Lewis, 1992 and G McCann, 1993

⁶⁴⁶ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., in Pomerance and Gateward, Eds., 2005, op. cit., p. 27

⁶⁴⁷ C Springer, 2007, op. cit., p. 41

hesitant, somewhat sarcastic delivery of the line to be read as questioning, rather than re-affirming the position of appearing to possess the Phallus.⁶⁴⁸ Indeed, proposing “a man” as the desired object of a woman would appear to place that male in the position of appearing to be, rather than to have, the Phallus. Jim’s evident disinterest in Judy’s heartfelt declarations of love opens a space for disrupting heteronormativity as the scene progresses.

Judy goes on to list qualities she believes denote strength, a key requirement she identifies for a masculine love object. The strong man, she says, is one who is “gentle, and sweet ... and someone who doesn’t run away when you want them, like being Plato’s friend when no-one else liked him.” Her reference to the ideal man as one who will not desert her is a clear reference to her father, recalling the difference noted earlier between young male actors such as Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift, whose masculinities were portrayed as vulnerable and conflicted, in contrast to the steadfast image presented by stars of Judy’s father’s generation. However, her description of an ideal masculine love object as one who offers Plato friendship is distinctly ironic given the latter’s obvious infatuation with Jim. Dean’s hesitant, pensive performance complicates a scene apparently engineered to cement the tentative relationship between Jim and Judy, and undermines the heterosexual imperative. Notably, the question of what constitutes idealised femininity never surfaces in the film, remaining fixed and tacitly understood.

3.2.5 – PLATO’S SHOOTING AND JIM’S REINTEGRATION

Viewing *Rebel Without a Cause* in the light of Butler’s conceptualisation of a discursive prohibition on homosexuality, Plato’s death by the end of the film appears inevitable. Mineo states as much: “You can see he has the hots for James Dean ... Ergo, I had to

⁶⁴⁸ R Dyer, 1979, op. cit., p. 151

be bumped off, out of the way.”⁶⁴⁹ Indeed, throughout the film, I have observed how Plato’s attraction to Jim, and Jim’s acceptance of that infatuation, can be seen to undermine the film’s overt narrative of the assumption of heteronormativity.

Scenes at the planetarium underscore Jim’s development during the course of the narrative. Opening scenes at the police station conveyed Jim’s simultaneous volatility and vulnerability, as he launched ineffectual, frustrated punches at Ray. In contrast, the film’s ending sees him negotiate with, and act on behalf of the police, positioning him now as upstanding and responsible. The transformation in Jim’s status is further reinforced by the invocation of icons and gestures seen earlier in the film, such as the planetarium itself, Jim offering Plato his jacket, and the reappearance of Ray. For our purposes, Plato’s death appears to herald Jim’s reintegration into society through his relationship with Judy, which in turn signifies his acceptance of the norms of heterosexual kinship. However, as this section will demonstrate, Jim’s role in Plato’s death can be seen to trouble his reintegration into the community.

Soon after Jim and Judy have sneaked into the Planetarium, Jim heads into the auditorium alone and unarmed, aiming to persuade Plato to give up his gun and thereby bring the siege to an end. Entering the main auditorium, the soft, slightly unnatural manner in which Dean delivers his lines “I’m not going to hurt you or anything like that,” heighten the sense that Jim may be lying to his friend. Indeed, as he pleads with Plato to turn on the lights, Jim is already tinkering with the light switches on the presenter’s dashboard. Having successfully lit the room, Jim is shown in medium shot standing in front of the bank of seats, as Plato emerges from behind a barrier. Asking why he and Judy “ran out on” him, Plato observes how the pair mirrored the abandonment of his real parents. Butler’s work allows us to see the

⁶⁴⁹ S Mineo quoted in G McCann, 1991, op. cit., p. 151

tensions at issue in Jim and Judy's approximations of parenthood. Plato has recognised Jim and Judy as having assumed respectively the positions of idealised adult masculinity and femininity. However, that status was consolidated by their replication of Plato's parents' abandonment of their child. That is, by echoing Plato's parents' failure, Jim and Judy demonstrate their embodiment of those positions, which, following Butler, subjects inevitably fail to perform correctly.⁶⁵⁰ Their approximations of parenthood are only recognised on condition that they reproduce failure.

In a further contrast with his status at the beginning of the film, Plato accepts Jim's offer of a jacket as the pair move to leave the planetarium. The differences between the jackets Plato accepts and rejects warrant consideration. Indeed, the tailored, tweed jacket he refuses at the police station casts Jim as a normative figure in the mould of his father. In contrast, the red jacket signifies not only rebellion, but Dean himself, and with him his ambiguous sexuality. Spoto reports that once Warner Brothers upgraded the film to colour, Dean insisted on wearing his 'trademark red windbreaker,' rather than the black leather biker's jacket initially suggested by the studio.⁶⁵¹ In addition to the strong visual impact created by the intense red of Dean's jacket, and the film's high saturation colour, the jacket's material also conveys softness and vulnerability, qualities Plato perceives as he delicately cradles and caresses the jacket. In his arms, the red windbreaker gains a further significance, as a metaphor for fragile, doomed desire.

⁶⁵⁰ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 81

⁶⁵¹ D Spoto, 1996, op. cit., p. 214



FIGURE 3.3 A JAMES DEAN STAR MOMENT AT THE PLANTARIUM

Holding his arms around his chest, with his thumb in his mouth looking up wide-eyed, Jim asks “don’t you trust me, Plato?” contradicting his status as Plato’s apparent protector. Displaying his boyish vulnerability, the pose constitutes a star moment for Dean (see Figure 3.3). It is significant that his star moment occurs only when Jim and Plato are alone, particularly given Judy’s construction of an ideal male partner as one who accepts Plato’s desire. Protected from the authorities by their knowledge that Plato is armed, the planetarium is constructed as a safe space for the two. However, complicating the apparent safety of the planetarium is Jim’s dissembling as he turns away from Plato to remove the magazine from the gun. The bank of seats effectively conceals his deception, while the film audience are provided an extreme close-up of the ammunition going into his pocket. This action presents us with two competing visions of Jim: firstly as Plato’s protector and object of desire, and secondly as agent of the community, by removing his friend’s means of retaliation against the authorities who have abandoned him.

As the two leave the auditorium to be joined by Judy, Jim is once again cast in the role of Plato’s protector. When Plato is troubled by the bright lights of the police vehicles, Jim goes out to address Ray, asking him to turn them down, affectionately

ruffling Plato's hair upon his return. Nonetheless, Jim is shown to be unable to prevent the tragic outcome to come. A low-angle close-up of the three teens portrays the claustrophobia of the scene, prompting Plato's unease at the large number of police officers stationed outside. As the police notice Plato's agitation and the gun emerging from his pocket, Jim struggles to articulate both his request not to turn on the lights and more importantly, that Plato is in fact unarmed. Increasingly fast edits between a police gun in close-up and Judy struggling to restrain Plato, are interrupted by the sound of a gunshot at which point he collapses. Jim's attempts to protect his friend are shown to fail with the worst possible results.

The scenes immediately following Plato's death portray Jim's reintegration and the establishment of a new order. As Dean's body crumples onto the floor indicating Jim's desolation at the loss of Plato, Frank approaches and attempts to comfort his son. His words acknowledge the apparent need for him to perform a strong version of masculinity, spurning the more pragmatic approach he had advocated earlier in the film. Adding to the impact of Frank's words, the camera tilts to mimic and amplify his rise to a standing position with his son. A cut to a close-up of Carol shows her watching the pair silently. In contrast to earlier scenes at the family home and at the police station, she stands silently to one side, indicating that she has relinquished her earlier dominance. Affirming his power and control, Frank now places his jacket on Jim's back, echoing his son's earlier performance of the gesture to Plato. George M Wilson finds this move particularly revealing, arguing that Frank brings about 'an exchange of "uniforms."' ⁶⁵² The red jacket of rebellion is symbolically dead, clothing Plato's body, while Jim now dons the attire of normative adult respectability.

⁶⁵² GM Wilson, 1983, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 187

Introducing Judy to his parents finally cements Jim's reintegration to the community. A medium shot of the two teens is mirrored by another, in the same scale of Carol and Frank. These shots can be seen to demonstrate Jim's absorption into the structures of heterosexual kinship. John Gibbs argues that the physical resemblance between Ann Doran, who plays Carol, and Natalie Wood's Judy, makes explicit the film's prediction that the teens will replicate the mistakes of their parents.⁶⁵³ Dean plays this scene straight, with few of the tics that have characterised his performance up to this point. The scene can therefore be said to suggest the inevitability of the heterosexual matrix, relegating all that has gone before as a trivial rite of passage.

Although the film appears to uphold the heterosexual couple as its inevitable end point, we should recall the deception that has occurred in the scenes leading to Plato's death, and moreover, of the extent of Jim's troubled behaviour earlier in the film. The film's conclusion is thus not as stable as it initially appears, resting only on a brief transformation on the part of Jim's father and a still nascent relationship between Jim and Judy. Dean's performance of alienation earlier in the film likewise reveals a fragile state of mind which is not addressed by the film's hasty conclusion. Although *Rebel Without a Cause* ends by upholding the primacy of heterosexual norms, Dean's performance can be seen to illustrate their contingency.

3.3 - CASE STUDY 3: *GREASE* (DIR. RANDAL KLEISER, 1978)

3.3.1 – INTRODUCTION

Based on the highly successful 1971 Broadway show of the same name, *Grease* (Dir. Randal Kleiser, 1978), constitutes the next case study. Unlike the other two films featured in this chapter, which have a contemporary setting, *Grease* looks back to an idealised 1950s adolescence, and draws on the conventions of the Hollywood film

⁶⁵³ J Gibbs, 2002, *Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation*, London: Wallflower, p. 8

musical. Further, the film parodies the tropes of the Beach film and more importantly the 1950s youth delinquency cycle. Indeed, the film's construction of the T-Birds and the Pink Ladies lightheartedly lampoon sensationalist, adult fears of teen pregnancy and gang violence.

Lesley Speed describes the revivalist text, understood as a collective experience where audience and industry alike participate 'in a shared recognition and manipulation of signs with reference to a particular historical period.'⁶⁵⁴ In *Grease*, the animated credit sequence, depicting popular 1950s icons, such as Elvis Presley, mediated through the *Bee Gees*' characteristically 1970s *Grease is the Word*, indicates the film's valorisation of a communal, rather than a subjective, past. Likewise, the film's concluding sequences fade into black and white photos from Rydell High's yearbook, emphasising the collective celebration of the students' time at the school. Using Speed's definition then, *Grease* should be understood as a revivalist text.

The film portrays a summer romance, which is thought to have concluded once Danny and Sandy return to their respective home towns. However, when Sandy unexpectedly enrolls at Danny's school, their relationship threatens to undermine his macho status among the gang he leads, the T-Birds. Disillusioned by his standoffish behaviour, Sandy finds an alternative partner in the baseball team and befriends the Pink Ladies, headed up by Rizzo. Danny gradually persuades Sandy that his feelings are genuine such that she enlists the help of "Beauty School Drop Out," Frenchie to transform her clean cut "Sandra Dee" image, into a more sexualised version of femininity. John Travolta's performance as Danny Zuko portrays two competing masculinities simultaneously. As leader of the T-Birds, he presents himself as aggressive, initiating a confrontation with rival gang, the Scorpions, and casually

⁶⁵⁴ L Speed, 2000, 'Together in Electric Dreams: Films Revisiting 1980s Youth,' *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 23

promiscuous. However, his relationship with Sandy shows him as an idealistic romantic. This case study will explore how John Travolta's star persona informs how Danny negotiates these competing requirements.

3.3.2 – THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX AND THE DUAL-FOCUS NARRATIVE

Rick Altman states that the American film musical does not follow the causal narrative typical of Hollywood cinema, where the actions of the central protagonist in one scene propel a set of consequences in the next. Rather, the Hollywood Musical is a 'dual-focus narrative,' constructed around a fundamental distinction between the two sexes, and reinforced by secondary characteristics such as nationality, class or values.⁶⁵⁵ Altman argues that all textual elements of the film musical are intended to contribute to the diametric opposition of the male and female protagonists, and their narrative and conceptual resolution in marriage. The use of two-shots, parallel sets, and duets, for instance, allow the spectator to perceive the eventual formation of the couple without conscious interpretation, even if the two characters have not met, or the animosity between them appears insurmountable.⁶⁵⁶ Significantly, Altman's reading of the musical can be mapped onto Butler's conceptualisation of the heterosexual matrix. Indeed, just as Altman argues that the values embodied by the male and female partner are shown to complement and complete the other,⁶⁵⁷ Butler demonstrates the primacy of a binary sexual difference that positions the norms of masculinity as diametrically opposed to those of femininity.⁶⁵⁸

The film's opening scenes construct the beach as the idyllic location of Danny and Sandy's summer romance. A slow montage of the pair kissing, holding hands, and

⁶⁵⁵ R Altman, 1987, 'The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative,' in S Cohan, Ed., 2002, *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, London: Routledge, p. 42

⁶⁵⁶ R Altman, 1987, *ibid.*, in S Cohan, Ed., 2002, *ibid.*, pp. 35-37

⁶⁵⁷ R Altman, 1987, *ibid.*, in S Cohan, Ed., 2002, *ibid.*, p. 37

⁶⁵⁸ See J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63; and J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, in J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 65

running on the beach is edited using fades, which serve as temporal ellipses. The impression of freedom and timelessness provided by these scenes corresponds with Martin's contention that the beach frequently serves to represent the liminality of adolescence.⁶⁵⁹ The liberty of these scenes constructs the beach as a "valley," where in Altman's definition, the protagonists are permitted to express a "truer" idea of themselves.⁶⁶⁰ Consequently, our perceptions of the two characters are anchored as we see them here: as two romantic, clean cut teenagers. Later in the film, this knowledge allows us to will the couple to succeed, even as Danny rejects Sandy in order to maintain his status among his group.

The film's opening sequence indicates the status of *Grease* as pastiche. In contrast to Fredric Jameson, whose discussion of pastiche will be examined in the following chapter, Dyer defines pastiche as 'a text that shows similarities with another, earlier text but with clear discrepancies and distortions.'⁶⁶¹ Further, noting its origins in the Italian *pasticcio*, Dyer argues that pastiche may present a combination of a number of disparate elements in its stylised imitation.

The scene's non-diegetic soundtrack, a choral rendition of "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing" clearly evokes the 1955 film and later soap opera of the same name. Reflecting Altman's conceptualisation of the dual-focus narrative, the central romance of *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* – between an American reporter and a Chinese doctor – portrayed the fusion of nationalities and value systems. Further, the scenes' location at the beach recalls American International Pictures' *Beach Party* series, whose star, Frankie Avalon, later makes a cameo appearance as Frenchie's guardian

⁶⁵⁹ A Martin, 2009, op. cit., p. 8

⁶⁶⁰ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 86

⁶⁶¹ R Dyer, 2007, op. cit., p. 3

angel.⁶⁶² The *pasticcio* of the intertextual references in *Grease*'s opening scenes reveal that the characters remain under the regulatory scrutiny of the heterosexual matrix even within the "valley" seemingly represented by the beach. However, the hyperbole of the sequence, with the soundtrack's sweeping strings, the slow dissolves between the scenes, and the unreality of Danny and Sandy's seemingly perfect romance create the sense of distortion, and thus, under Dyer's definition, pastiche of those narratives. Consequently, invoking the norms of the heterosexual romance narrative through parody and excess, *Grease* can be seen to offer the possibilities for subverting gender norms that Butler articulates in *Bodies that Matter* and *Undoing Gender*.



FIGURE 3.4 JOHN TRAVOLTA'S STAR ENTRANCE

At Rydell High, Danny is introduced a second time, indicating his embodiment of two distinct identities simultaneously. Whereas at the beach Danny was portrayed as Sandy's equal partner in their romance, back at Rydell he is accorded a star entrance as the film cuts to a medium close-up of his smiling face as he turns toward the camera (as shown in Figure 3.4 above). Dressed in a tight white t-shirt, dark jeans and leather jacket emblazoned with the name and insignia of the T-Birds, Danny's clothing contrasts starkly with the pastel shirts and jackets he wore in the earlier scenes at the beach, which reflected Frankie Avalon's style in the Beach Films. Instead, his clothing

⁶⁶² T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 31

now loosely references Marlon Brando's role as Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One*. Moreover, Danny's mannered, bouncing gait comically recalls Travolta's earlier performance as Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever*, whose similarly posturing, though less comical, swagger earned the actor an Oscar the previous year. The extent to which the gang jokingly monitor each other's behaviour draws immediate attention to the regulation of gender performance present even in this nominally "rebel" group who purport to reject the rules of mainstream behaviour.



FIGURE 3.5 THE T-BIRDS OCCUPY THE PERIPHERY OF A MALE SPACE

Altman's conceptualisation of the dual-focus narrative, and its relevance for Butler's theorisation of the heterosexual matrix, is illustrated by the Summer Nights sequence. While the T-Birds assemble at the athletics track, Sandy and the Pink Ladies take their positions at the school cafeteria, such that male and female characters are shown to inhabit distinct spaces. At the athletics track, the T-Birds position themselves on the bleachers at the farthest point away from the track, as shown in Figure 3.5. Consequently, the gang can be seen to correspond to Hebdige's reading of subculture as opposing the dominant mainstream.⁶⁶³ In *Grease*, the mainstream is embodied by the student athletes or "jockstraps," whose unadorned appearance and grey regulation varsity kits demonstrate their conventionality. Read through Butler's

⁶⁶³ D Hebdige, 1979, op. cit., in K Gelder and S Thornton, Eds., 1997, op. cit., p. 134

work on gender reveals the film's textually-constructed opposition to be false, as both "jockstrap" and T-Bird are equally required to adhere to the norms of masculinity.

Examining the respective positions of Sandy and Danny in their same-sex groups, Sandy's recent arrival means that her status is yet to be established. Consequently, she is depicted in medium shot, at an even angle, providing a notional point of view shot for another of the girls at the table. In contrast, low-angle shots emphasise Danny's position on the highest point on the bleachers, and indicate his elevated status in the gang. Indeed, as the apparent authority on heterosexual romance, he arguably embodies the group's closest approximation of idealised masculinity. The gaze into the distance, seen in Figure 3.5, and which concludes the sequence, can be seen to illustrate the isolation and pressure of appearing to possess the Phallus, as previously observed of Buzz, in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Altman's later revision of the dual-focus model cites the same-sex spaces in the Summer Nights sequence as evidence of the musical's tendency to begin with homosocial groups, before the protagonists later find appropriate heterosexual partners.⁶⁶⁴ For Altman, the progression from homosocial to heterosexual relationships foregrounds the absence of homosexuality from the musical.⁶⁶⁵ Kenickie and Danny's hasty retreat from their embrace following the latter's agreement to be his "second" at Thunder Road, Altman argues, demonstrates the pair's awareness of the continuum between homosociality and homosexuality.⁶⁶⁶ Altman's observation echoes Butler's reading of the discursive prohibition that places homosexuality as

⁶⁶⁴ R Altman, 2010, 'From Homosocial to Heterosexual: The Musical's Two Projects,' in S Cohan. Ed., 2010, op. cit., p. 25

⁶⁶⁵ R Altman, 2010, *ibid.*, in S Cohan, Ed., 2010, *ibid.*, p. 28

⁶⁶⁶ R Altman, 2010, *ibid.*, in S Cohan, Ed., 2010, *ibid.*, p. 26

intelligible, and yet maintained only the on the margins of culture, as Butler puts it, ‘at once fully within culture and excluded by dominant culture.’⁶⁶⁷

As the film cuts with increasing rapidity between the T-Birds and the Pink Ladies, we are able to compare the two groups’ interest in the summer romance. While Danny’s friends are concerned solely with his sexual conquest, the girls clamour for a narrative of lost romance. Reflecting Altman’s dual-focus model, textual elements in the sequence reinforce the surface distinctions among the protagonists, while parallel sequences foretell their eventual unity. Distinctions are emphasised by the colour palette and costumes associated with each group. While Danny’s T-Birds are clad largely in black, set off by the light grey bleachers, the girls are surrounded by pastel shades, their long, full skirts providing a further contrast to the T-Birds’ tight trousers. The call-response form of “Summer Nights,” where Danny and Sandy – with few exceptions – each sing a line in turn, likewise draws attention to the couple’s compatibility. Butler’s work allows the sequence to be conceptualised as a representation of gendered dichotomy structured around the Phallus. Showing masculinity and femininity as distinct, yet in need of the other, the sequence can further be seen to illustrate Butler’s theorisation of the heterosexual matrix.

Much of the song’s comedy lies in the sheer disparity of the events recounted by the two protagonists. While Danny claims “we made out under the dock,” Sandy states only that they “stayed out ‘til ten o’clock.” Similarly, Danny maintains “she got friendly down in the sand,” whereas Sandy’s beau “got friendly, holding my hand.” Importantly, Sandy’s account is entirely consistent with her presentation as naïve and innocent. When Rizzo toys with her, asking “how are things down under?” Sandy

⁶⁶⁷ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 105

takes the bait and answers ignorant of the double entendre the Pink Ladies so obviously intend, confirming their suspicion that Sandy is “too pure to be pink.”

If Sandy is telling the truth, Danny is almost certainly lying. His fabricated recollection can be seen to demonstrate the pressures of approximating idealised masculinity. Although the audience can infer from the earlier beach scenes that his relationship with Sandy was as chaste and romantic as she describes, Danny understands that his role as gang leader requires him to maintain the appearance of sexual promiscuity, and so provides a narrative that fits that image. Of course, Danny’s representation as a sexually voracious gang leader directly contradicts his earlier, romantic portrayal and so reveals this later identity to be a performance.

However, Danny also shows himself to be willing and proficient at embodying idealised masculinity for the T-birds, such that it remains unclear which identity is the “truer” reflection of his personality. Discussing his performance, Travolta acknowledges Danny’s multiple identities in the film, stating that ““Zuko has feelings, feelings he’s afraid to show for fear of losing his macho cool.””⁶⁶⁸ Although the portrayal of Danny and Sandy in the beach scenes demonstrated their shared romantic idealism, Danny’s macho dissembling, contrasted with Sandy’s earnest truth-telling, can be seen to instantiate Altman’s dual-focus model, where sexual duality is expressed through the conflicting values embodied by each protagonist.⁶⁶⁹

Moving away from the central couple, Rizzo’s portrayal is notable for providing an alternative representation of femininity in the sequence. On the periphery for the first half of the song, a quick cut from Danny in medium shot shows Rizzo in the same shot scale lying on her side wearing a black dress. Her sexual pose

⁶⁶⁸ J Travolta, quoted in M Reeves, 1978, *Travolta! A Photo Bio*, New York: Jove Books, p. 233

⁶⁶⁹ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., in S Cohan, Ed., 2002, op. cit., p. 37

and dark dress, which echoes the palette of the T-Birds, provides a visual clue to Rizzo's shared past with Danny, to which she alluded in an earlier scene. Putting on sunglasses, an action that denies intimacy by prohibiting eye contact, she then kicks the other girls off the bench, signalling her rejection of Sandy's romance narrative. Indeed, to the chorus' repeated "Tell me more," Rizzo flatly responds "cos he sounds like a drag," in a deep, monotone voice, distinguishing her from the girlish voices of Sandy and the chorus, and marking her as a knowing, contemporary figure sceptical of the vision of idyllic romance seemingly endorsed by the scene.

Throughout *Grease* Rizzo is shown to transgress the boundaries clearly demarcated for femininity. Indeed, in *Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee*, and *There are Worse Things I could Do*, she rejects the teasing coquetry of 1950s sexual mores, advocating instead a direct expression of sexuality. Leading the Pink Ladies gang, and unquestionably heterosexual, Rizzo does not represent a challenge to heteronormativity. Nonetheless, she is seen to adopt the sexual behaviour associated with the film's male characters. Her simultaneous belonging to both groups, and thus transgression of the conventional bounds of acceptable femininity is made clear by her command of space, as she nimbly climbs out of the girls' sleepover to see the T-Birds in their car. Demonstrating the contradictions in Rizzo's construction of femininity, her pursuit of Kenickie shows her to be a desiring agent, while her pose outside the gym as she and Marty aim to find dates for the dance competition illustrates her status as an object of male desire. Read through Butler's theorisation of gender, the film's representation of Rizzo can be seen to challenge the regulatory gender binary that defines masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive opposites.⁶⁷⁰ Indeed, Rizzo's key solo numbers portray her awareness of and challenge to the imposition of a

⁶⁷⁰ See for instance, J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 30; J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 176

gender norm. Further, Rizzo's pregnancy scare casts her briefly as an expectant mother, an identity that remains unmapped in Butler's theorisation of gender.

3.3.3 – ALTERNATIVE PERFORMANCES OF MASCULINITY

Analysing Travolta's performance in the "Grease Lightnin'" sequence and at the gym, this section examines the distinction between rebel and normative masculinities. Although both are located on school premises, the garage is constructed as a subcultural space, where the T-Birds' car "Greased Lightnin'" is shown to be key to the group's collective sense of identity. Conversely, the gym, like the athletics track in the "Summer Nights" sequence, is understood as a mainstream space, whose rules Danny struggles to assimilate as he attempts to impress Sandy with his athleticism.

At the Rydell Auto Shop, Danny and the T-Birds examine their car, whose engine and bodywork have been severely damaged following Kenickie's encounter with rival gang, the Scorpions. In a set-piece typical of the Folk Musical, which, Altman argues, is characterised by spontaneous, rather than performance-bound, singing and dancing, Danny inspires the others to repair and enhance their car through the song, "Grease Lightnin'."⁶⁷¹ Once again leading the group's singing and choreography, Danny's as the embodiment of idealised masculinity for the gang is consolidated. As the lyrics demonstrate, the car symbolises the T-Birds' group identity, linking improvements they intend to make to the car to enhanced sexual desirability:

"With new pistons, plugs and shocks

I can get off my rocks

You know that I ain't braggin'

She's a real pussy wagon

Greased Lightnin'"

⁶⁷¹ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 319

Despite the overt heterosexuality of the choreography and lyrics, the group's easy collaboration demonstrates their preference for the homosocial environment of the garage, illustrating Kosofsky-Sedgwick's argument that 'homosociality is fully embodied within heterosexuality.'⁶⁷²



FIGURE 3.6 THE T-BIRDS AND THEIR CAR ARE TEMPORARILY TRANSFORMED

The comical impossibility of the group's vision of themselves is made clear when the drab garage is transformed into a fantastical non-space, where all furnishings other than the car are whitewashed and the T-Birds are accorded new, matching grey leather jackets as shown in Figure 3.6 above. Formerly a wreck, the car is transformed, with a fresh paint job and transparent bonnet. Applying motor oil first to the engine, then to his hair, before passing the can over his head to another member of the group, Kenickie makes ridiculous the connection forged between the group's collective sexual identity and the improvements they make to the car.

Reading the scene through Butler's work enables the sudden transformation of the garage into a fantasy space to be seen as an example of an aspiration to occupy the impossible, but nonetheless idealised phantasmatic position of having the Phallus.⁶⁷³ Indeed, the gang's perfectly-co-ordinated outfits and car which consolidates their

⁶⁷² E Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985, op. cit., p.6

⁶⁷³ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 62

group identity can be seen to reflect Butler's theorisation of the gendered coherence that is 'desired, wished for, idealised,' but ultimately impossible to embody.⁶⁷⁴ The choreography of the sequence emphasises the comedy of the gang's aspirations, as they leap and thrust all over the car. Sending up their masculine posturing, the sequence chimes with Butler's assertion that the endless endeavours to approximate the norm – an impossible feat – is an 'occasion for laughter.'⁶⁷⁵ As the song concludes by abruptly bringing the T-Birds back to the reality of the Rydell Auto Shop and their dilapidated car, their fantasy of idealised masculinity is shown to fail on screen.

If the "Greased Lightnin'" sequence can be read as portraying the T-Birds' impossible attempt to possess the Phallus, then Danny's scenes at the gym with Coach Calhoun might be constructed as an alternative method of achieving that same goal. Indeed, the school athletes have throughout provided the mainstream counterpoint to the subcultural model of masculinity represented by the T-Birds. However, since Sandy goads Danny that he could never better the athleticism of her oafish boyfriend Tom, we know that his foray into school sports is propelled by the desire to become a desirable partner for her. His attempts at sport thus provide a representation of a male attempting to embody the Phallus, the position Butler ascribes to the female.⁶⁷⁶

At the gym, Danny's appearance makes him immediately incongruous. Following rapid cuts between medium shots of students on the gym horse and rings, the camera settles in a three-quarter shot from behind to foreground the distinctive silhouette created by Danny's greased hair, sunglasses, cigarette and black leather jacket – the antithesis of the grey functionality of the Rydell High sports kit. The stark contrast in appearance and manner between Danny and the other students at the gym

⁶⁷⁴ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 185

⁶⁷⁵ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 178

⁶⁷⁶ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 62

foregrounds Travolta's characteristic bouncing swagger after he is told to change into appropriate gym clothes. As the scene progresses, this swagger will punctuate Danny's attempts to adhere to the rules of each sport he attempts.

On the basketball court, he is shown in medium-long shot standing at a slight distance from the other players. The space between Danny and the other players shows how he has customised the uniform, having rolled up the short sleeves of his T-shirt, restyled his hair, and tucked a comb into the waistband of his shorts, in order to create a close approximation of the 'T-birds style. Despite his will to become the romantic partner to Sandy, Danny's appearance on the basketball court shows his reluctance to give up his role in the 'T-Birds. Leaking through the boundaries of the prescribed dress and regulation of sport, his role as rebel gang leader asserts itself despite Danny's apparent wish to improve his ability at sport.

Danny's T-Bird identity manifests itself in excessive aggression, such that all the sports he attempts end in a physical altercation with another student. When handed the ball on the basketball court, he breaks through his opponents by waving the fist of one hand at the other players, while holding the ball in the other. Further, when another player gains possession of the ball, rather than attempting to out-manoeuvre him, Danny instead punches the player in the stomach. In medium-long shot, the camera's distance from the action invites a comparison between his gestures and those of the other players. Whereas the other students appear already well versed in the rules of sportsmanship – the codification of which equates them with normative gender – Danny's aggression shows him as an embodiment of excessive masculinity. His attempt at basketball reinforces his status as a rebel, since a key part of the 'T-Birds' group identity is centred on breaking school rules and mocking those who obey them. Consequently, by ignoring the rules of basketball, Danny is continuing to follow

the unwritten codes of his subculture. Travolta's performance demonstrates Danny's difficulty in giving up his identity as a gang leader, even if he is likely to gain a relationship with Sandy in doing so.

Observing Danny's aggression, Coach Calhoun invites him to try wrestling, where stating "I give" simultaneously stops the fight and declares the opponent the winner. Once again, Travolta's performance is significant as Danny's agitated pacing illustrates his continued adherence to the norms of street fighting rather than the regulated sparring advocated in Calhoun's gym. Consequently Danny declares only to catch his opponent off-guard and punch him in the stomach, even after the fight has nominally been won. The misuse of the performative "I give" is particularly significant, since in Butler's terms, the gesture can be seen to demonstrate how the citation of the law opens up a space for the articulation of disobedience.⁶⁷⁷ As before though, his disobedience is entirely consistent with his earlier presentation as a rebel. Butler's work allows Danny's performance to be read as a parodic citation of the masculine norms to which he purports to adhere.

3.3.4 – THE DANCE COMPETITION

Signposted from the very beginning of *Grease*, and set to be broadcast on television, the National Bandstand dance competition is presented as a key event for the film's characters. Initially, the dance competition seems analogous to the prom, since students are required to attend as opposite-sexed pairs according to a predefined dress code. However, clearly intended as a singular, unique event, the competition does not possess the ritual function of the prom that is central to its positioning as a gendered and classed gateway to adulthood. More significantly, providing over twenty minutes of screen time, the dance scenes provide a star moment for Travolta, whose dance-led

⁶⁷⁷ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 108

performance in *Saturday Night Fever* earned him an Academy Award. Indeed, the oversize lapels and unbuttoned shirt of Danny's black and pink ensemble can be seen to echo Tony Manero's fashion sense in the earlier film, as shown in Figure 3.7 below.



FIGURE 3.7 TRAVOLTA'S COSTUME REFLECTS THE 1970S PRODUCTION CONTEXT

A key element of Travolta's stardom consists in how he negotiates other characters' competing visions of masculinity to which he attempts to aspire. In *Saturday Night Fever*, Tony's inability to refuse the expectations of his male peers led him to lose Stephanie as a potential romantic partner. In *Grease* too, Danny must traverse his two audiences' expectations of him as his leadership of the T-birds clashes with his role as Sandy's romantic partner. Importantly, in *Grease* this negotiation occurs primarily through movement. Earlier in the film, Rizzo orchestrated Danny and Sandy's reunion, aiming simultaneously to embarrass Danny and to disabuse Sandy of the romanticism she found so grating in the "Summer Nights" sequence. Seeing Sandy, Danny's wide-eyed surprise conveys his evident pleasure at this unexpected reunion. However, observing Kenickie's sharp stare as the T-Birds step forward to surround him, Danny's head rolls back on his neck, his body bounces slightly and his voice assumes a deeper tone as he attempts to appear nonchalant, speaking in casual platitudes that deny his depth of feeling. Grinning and sniggering

behind him, the T-Birds clearly approve of Danny's later performance, just as Sandy angrily rejects it and walks away. The control exerted by the T-Birds over Danny's behaviour can be seen to correspond with the power relations between Buzz and the group he leads in *Rebel*. As a consequence of the gang leader's dependence on those he leads in order to ensure their continued mastery, the T-Birds are able to exert considerable influence on Danny.

The expectations of Sandy and the T-Birds are also seen to come into conflict at the dance competition. When Sandy compliments him on his singing voice, Danny immediately starts screeching out of tune as they pass two of the T-birds on the dance floor. Further as Cha-Cha is introduced, Danny's quick, awkward pacing prompts Sandy to infer a prior relationship between the two. The character can thus be seen to demonstrate the possibility of inhabiting disparate masculinities simultaneously. However, observing that Danny cannot fulfil the requirements of both audiences, the film demonstrates the necessity for Danny to select only one of them.

Butler echoes Foucault and Derrida in their belief that the citation of the law sets in motion the potential for its disobedience.⁶⁷⁸ At the dance competition, the parameters of regulation are explicitly stated as the Principal stipulates three revealing "Game Rules." Firstly, "all couples must be boy/girl," then "any couple tapped on the shoulder must leave the floor," and finally "anyone displaying tasteless or vulgar movements will be disqualified." In specifically forbidding same-sex couples, the rules can be seen to correspond to the heteronormative mores of the film's period setting. Further, these rules imply the subjective judgement of others, specifically the vain Vince Fonteyn, whose authority is conferred through his daily appearances on TV network KZAZ. Frequent cuts between the principal's anxious face and high-angle

⁶⁷⁸ See for instance, J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, pp. 95-97

medium shots of the raucous students indicate the difficulty of regulating the group, and her awareness of the potential for the subversion of the rules she had so carefully specified. The Principal's fears are realised as the T-Birds moon at the TV camera to celebrate Danny's success. *Grease* can thus be seen to demonstrate Butler's contention that the invocation of the law creates the occasion for its subversion.⁶⁷⁹

Turning to the competition itself, Danny's and Sandy's apparently easy coordination are contrasted with the spectacle of more ridiculous couples, where girls are dragged across the floor, couples are paralysed into rigidly counting dance steps, and fights break out between some of the male students. Frequent cutaways to the growing crowd on the sidelines – those whom Vince has removed from the competition – serve as ellipses and demonstrate the difficulty of assuming the idealised, heterosexual – but not sexual – couple upheld by the contest. Dancing the hand jive, Danny and Sandy are shown facing the camera rather than each other. Although their effortless dancing proficiency indicates their emotional compatibility, they are shown touching very little. Cross-cuts to the Frosty Palace waitresses cooing over how “adorable” they look on TV, confirm Danny and Sandy as an ideal, young heterosexual couple.

Danny is forced into a choice between his competing masculine identities when Sonny drags Sandy off the dance floor to replace her with Cha-Cha, whose dark hair and Latino looks provide a strong contrast to Sandy's blonde, virginal pallor and girlish white dress. Slightly startled by the sudden change, Danny nonetheless continues dancing with his new partner. The apparent interchangeability of the female partners not only acknowledges John Travolta's dancing ability and star status, but demonstrates that more than one variety of femininity is sanctioned under the

⁶⁷⁹ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 108; J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, in J Butler, 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 52

prevailing regime of gender norms. This new couple's dancing style is notably more sexual, as the music's tempo increases and Cha-Cha makes use of her multi-layered flamenco-inspired dress to reveal or hide more of her legs. A close-up of the principal's anxious face provides an index of the sexuality of their dance. Importantly, although Danny and Sandy are constructed as ideal earlier in the sequence, it is this later couple who wins the competition, implying a valorisation of sexuality that Danny needs and which Sandy comes later to accept.

3.3.5 – PERSONALITY DISSOLVE AND THE CARNIVAL

Grease concludes with a carnival that constitutes Rydell High's commencement, and consequently celebrates the students' completion of their high-school education. Further, the carnival provides the site for Danny and Sandy's final reunion. In line with Altman's work on the dual-focus narrative, the carnival constitutes the space for the idealised reconciliation of opposites, which, in turn, is seen to allow for the establishment of a new community.⁶⁸⁰ Accordingly, "You're the One that I Want," which cements the relationship between Danny and Sandy, is closely followed by "We Go Together," confirming the enduring friendship between the assembled characters.

Reflecting Speed's earlier comments on the revivalist text,⁶⁸¹ the carnival inaugurates the characters into a cohesive, heterosexually-coupled community. The event thus also permanently dissolves the school-based subcultures that previously divided them. At the carnival, the life size cardboard cut-outs, through which various members of the cast put their heads, highlight the lack of importance accorded to surface appearance. At first, the shot of Jan and Putzie behind a cut-out of a man proposing to a woman – both of whom dressed in Victorian costume – appears to show the likely future for Danny and Sandy following their reunion. However, the

⁶⁸⁰ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 86

⁶⁸¹ L Speed, 2000, op. cit., p. 23

latter two comically surreal cut-outs provide an alternative interpretation: as Sonny is shown posing as a King Kong figure saving Marty, and Doody stands behind a cowboy picture while a pug poses as his shapely partner. These three shots effectively dissolve the different value systems of the previously divided students.

In Altman's model, Personality Dissolve provides the narrative resolution to the Hollywood musical.⁶⁸² The term refers to the synthesis between the two opposite-sexed protagonists such that 'each partner must give up his/her own surface desires and become the other.'⁶⁸³ Although many critics focus only on Sandy's dramatic costume change at the film's conclusion,⁶⁸⁴ *Grease* does in fact respect this convention as both Danny and Sandy engage in some degree of physical transformation in order to secure the affections of their respective partners. Read through Butler's work, the film's conclusion can be seen to uphold the requirements of the heterosexual matrix. In each case, the transformation appears instantaneous to the spectator as the work involved is not shown on screen.

Examining Danny's image change, Sonny's call "There's Zuko" echoes Danny's first appearance in the film. The quick pan, intended to mimic a character turning their head, shows Danny walking towards the group in medium shot wearing a Rydell High sports team jacket. As the camera spins around the group, reinforcing their cohesiveness, the remaining T-birds pull at the jacket and tease its wearer, as Danny explains that he "lettered in track." As observed in the gym scenes, Danny's attempts at sport were part of his strategy to become an ideal object of desire for Sandy – a wish born of the romantic tendencies he demonstrated at the very beginning of the film.

⁶⁸² R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 86

⁶⁸³ R Altman, 1987, *ibid.*, p. 86

⁶⁸⁴ See for instance G Scheiner, 2001, "'Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee:' Beyond a White Teen Icon,' *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 102, and T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 48



FIGURE 3.8 DANNY (JOHN TRAVOLTA) SHOWS OFF HIS NEW JACKET

The gym scenes also showed Danny's inability to renounce completely his T-Birds identity, and even here, his varsity jacket provides an addition to, rather than a substitute for, his usual tight black t-shirt and trousers. The identity represented by the jacket is then seen to be cast off at will, as it is when Sandy's transformation is revealed. Although the group's mockery indicates a sense of having "dressed up," Danny's selection for the school running team demonstrates the extent to which he has successfully approximated normative masculinity. In accordance with the carnival's status as a fantasy space, Danny's transformation presents him as a delinquent figure that is also loving and monogamous, thus presenting an idealised resolution of conflicting traits within a single figure. Moreover, Danny's costume change can be seen to indicate the "graduation" from homosocial to heterosexual relationships that Altman describes in the Hollywood Film Musical.⁶⁸⁵ As such, Danny provides a corrective of Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever*, who was not able to resolve these conflicts.

In turn, following the 'T-birds' triumph at Thunder Road, Sandy decides that it is time to say "goodbye to Sandra Dee" and to transform herself into an image that will sustain Danny's attention. The point in the narrative at which she makes this

⁶⁸⁵ R Altman, 2010, op. cit., in S Cohan, 2010, Ed., op. cit., p. 28

realisation is revealing, since it follows both Cha-Cha's interjection in the dance competition and her reappearance at Thunder Road. For Sandy then, Cha-Cha represents a feminine ideal that is acceptable to Danny's peers, and therefore one she seeks to emulate. Consequently, the tight, yellow Capri trousers and grey, scoop-neck T-shirt Cha-Cha wore at Thunder Road is echoed in the silhouette of Sandy's off-shoulder, black catsuit. Similarly, Sandy's newly permed hair resembles Cha-Cha's dark curls. Nonetheless, while Cha-Cha's "reputation" reveals her clothing to be the uniform of promiscuous femininity, Sandy's transformation is clearly intended only to secure Danny's affections, marking a continued distinction between the two.

Indicating her new status as a sexually available, desirable woman, Sandy's arrival at the carnival is noted firstly by the T-birds, who on seeing her, gaze open-mouthed, and silently alert their friends to the spectacle. As the film cuts to allow the spectator the same view, non-diegetic music accompanies the camera's slow tilt up her body. Settled on a medium close-up of Sandy's face, apart from her newly made-up face and permed hair, we immediately notice that she is smoking, and has pierced her ears – actions that she had previously rejected as dangerous. The effect of Sandy's image change on Danny is immediate, as he gazes at her in surprise and desire, quickly casting his varsity jacket aside. Sandy's transformation into a version of femininity accepted by his gang effectively resolves Danny's problem of wanting neither to lose Sandy, nor his status as leader of the T-Birds.

Butler's theorisation of gender allows for a reading that highlights elements that problematise the apparently effortless transformation and resulting romance between the two protagonists. Neither Danny's nor Sandy's transformation is shown on screen, thus providing the illusion of instantaneous achievement. Nonetheless, certain actions demonstrate the labour of their image changes. In Danny's case, his

position on the running team will have required considerable, repeated effort. As for Sandy, her breathy, Americanised “tell me about it, stud” and her hasty glances to the Pink Ladies when unsure what to do with her cigarette, can be seen to exemplify an aspect of Butler’s theories: namely, that the approximation of idealised femininity is never fully finalised.⁶⁸⁶ The scene thus makes clear that Sandy’s performance of a particular role, demonstrating her continued innocence and loyalty. Indeed, in positioning femininity as relatively stable and fixed throughout, and masculinity as fragmented and in a state of flux, *Grease* can be seen to echo the construction of gender in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Dyer’s analysis of Marilyn Monroe provides a further layer of interest to Sandy’s gesture. Just as the highly sexualised, yet innocently naive representations of Monroe led her to be cast as the ‘ideal playmate’ in 1950s *Playboy* magazine, so too Sandy is required to appear at once seemingly sexually available, but also, as we have seen throughout the film, virginal and monogamous.⁶⁸⁷ Sandy can thus be seen to provide an ideal embodiment of the Phallus for Danny, who is able both to fulfil his role as a romantic, and to maintain credibility with the T-Birds. That Sandy’s transformation may be a temporary one is further suggested by the reappearance of the fantasy car from the “Greased Lightnin’” sequence, where the car represented an idealised masculinity that the teens could never fully embody.

The fantasy space of the carnival allows Danny to reconcile his competing masculine identities since, as discussed, Sandy is shown to embody virginity and monogamy, while her costume suggests sexual availability. Reflecting the requirements of the heterosexual matrix and the Hollywood film musical, the sequence dissolves subcultural difference in favour of conformity and acceptance across the high-school

⁶⁸⁶ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 185

⁶⁸⁷ R Dyer, 1986, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, London: BFI, p. 32

cohort. However, the transformations of the two protagonists can be seen to demonstrate the film's ideological preference for subcultural identity even as it provides a further example of the idealised heterosexual romance narrative of the Hollywood film musical. The context of the carnival and the level of performance apparent in Sandy's transformation serve to question whether the final union will prove lasting. Consequently, while positioning the couple as the apotheosis of the community celebrated in "We Go Together," *Grease* can nonetheless be seen to question the viability of the heterosexual couple that is so central to the structure of the Hollywood Film Musical.

3.4 – CASE STUDY 4: *HEATHERS* (DIR. MICHAEL LEHMAN, 1988)

3.4.1 – INTRODUCTION

Grease presented a lighthearted, revivalist pastiche of both the Hollywood Film Musical and the conventions of the Teen Movie, culminating in a utopian sequence at the carnival where the characters' newly formed relationships are apparently cemented for life. Although *Heathers* also capitalises on audience awareness of previous incarnations of the rebel, the later film is distinctly bleaker in tone, seemingly aiming to purge the genre of the 'cosy pieties' of John Hughes' recently released work.⁶⁸⁸ In terms of the film's contribution to the rebel subgenre, Jason Dean or "JD" constitutes both a further iteration of the teen rebel trope and, as James McKelly observes, 'a synecdoche of the rebel genre as a whole.'⁶⁸⁹ Indeed, his name brings to mind the teen rebel as a cultural threat, and James Dean himself, as the iconic youth delinquent. Further, his peripatetic upbringing and motorcycle recalls Marlon Brando's nomadic Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One*. Plotting to bomb the school in a nihilistic fantasy that will, he

⁶⁸⁸ R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 50

⁶⁸⁹ JC McKelly, 2005, 'Youth Cinema and the Culture of Rebellion: *Heathers* and the Rebel Archetype,' in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, op. cit., p. 213

claims, rid high schools everywhere of their ubiquitous social divisions, JD exposes the latent menace of previous representations of the teen rebel, and questions the limits of rebel identity.

The status of *Heathers* as a parody of the juvenile delinquency film makes it particularly apposite for an analysis informed by Butler's work on gender. Butler of course describes gender as a tragicomic parody, whose humour derives from a universal inability to embody idealised masculinity or femininity.⁶⁹⁰ As discussed previously, Butler argues that the primacy of gender norms may be undermined through their parodic citation.⁶⁹¹ Further, she argues that distance from the prevailing matrix of gender norms is crucial to the possibility of their subversion.⁶⁹² Consequently, the sense of distance conveyed between Slater's performance and his role can be seen to present the possibility of destabilising normative gender. Further, the films' conclusion rejects the Teen Movie's conventional denouement, which typically culminates in a heterosexual romance.

Heathers introduces us to Veronica Sawyer who, although part of the "most popular clique in the school," a group of girls named Heather, is clearly exasperated with the ritual social humiliation with which her friends regularly treat other students at their high school. She is soon attracted to Jason Dean, who appears to hold himself outside of the school's social structures. With him, she kills first Heather Chandler, then the boorish Ram and Kurt, forging suicide notes to conjure elaborate backstories to explain their intention to take their own lives. As Veronica becomes aware of his plot to blow up the school, she realises that JD is more than the harmless

⁶⁹⁰ See J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 189

⁶⁹¹ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 122

⁶⁹² See for instance, J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 72

“rebel” figure he initially appears. The film ends with JD blowing himself up after Veronica has disabled the explosives intended for the school.

Christian Slater’s performance as JD extends the film’s parody and sense of revisionism. Indeed, both Nick Burns and Kaveney identify Slater’s performance as an echo of Jack Nicholson’s performance style with his ‘tilted head, arched eyebrows and nasal vocal quality.’⁶⁹³ JD’s clothing and steady gaze also reference the “Man With No Name” figure portrayed by Clint Eastwood in the 1960s and 1970s, who was identified with the decline of morality in the Western genre.⁶⁹⁴ As a result, although Slater’s career was only just beginning in 1988, and so cannot be regarded as a star in his own right, his evocation of the performance styles of earlier stars in *Heathers* can nonetheless be analysed as a type of star performance.

3.4.2 – CHRISTIAN SLATER, JACK NICHOLSON AND JASON DEAN

The initial dream sequence establishes the film as unfolding from Veronica’s subjective, retrospective point of view. It’s certainly true that, as McKelly points out, there are really two rebels at work in *Heathers*: Veronica as well as JD.⁶⁹⁵ For McKelly, Veronica’s narrative perspective is a significant contrast to previous incarnations of the juvenile delinquent figure, particularly *Rebel Without a Cause*. Whereas Jim Stark is ‘an outsider seeking affiliation,’ Veronica is an insider who wants to free herself from her elevated social position.⁶⁹⁶ Consequently, *Heathers* can be seen to provide a reflection on the negotiation of normative gender, considerations that Butler’s theorisation of gender does not address.

⁶⁹³ N Burns, 1991, ‘Heathers: Scent of Dominance,’ *Jump Cut*, No. 36, p. 36

⁶⁹⁴ See for instance C Frayling, 2006, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*, London: IB Tauris, p. 61; D Bingham, 1994, *Acting Male: Masculinities in the Films of James Stewart, Jack Nicholson and Clint Eastwood*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p. 172

⁶⁹⁵ JC McKelly, 2005, op. cit., in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, op. cit., p. 213

⁶⁹⁶ JC McKelly, 2005, ibid., in JD Slocum, Ed., 2005, ibid., p. 213



FIGURE 3.9 JD (CHRISTIAN SLATER) REFERENCES JACK NICHOLSON WITH HIS ARCHED EYEBROWS AND WRY EXPRESSION

Key to reading Slater's performance in the cafeteria scene, which introduces us to the film's cast of (mostly unpleasant) characters, is the manner in which Slater invokes Jack Nicholson's acting style. Importantly, Dennis Bingham notes how Nicholson's early roles portray him as a liminal figure, participating in, but not fully part of 1960s counterculture.⁶⁹⁷ Consequently, Nicholson's characters can be said to recall the alienation embodied by Brando and Dean, yet suffer a further alienation as they find themselves out of step with the norms of counterculture. In *Easy Rider* (Dir. Dennis Hopper, 1969) for instance, Nicholson's role as alcoholic lawyer George Hanson shows him participating in Wyatt and Billy's journey to New Orleans, even as his age and profession prevent him from wholly embracing their biking subculture.

Nicholson's even, reedy voice, which ought to convey calm placidity, instead provides an impression of suppressed rage. In *Five Easy Pieces* (Dir. Bob Rafelson, 1970) for instance, Bobby's request for a "plain omelette, no potatoes – tomatoes instead – cup of coffee and toast" is delivered quietly in a level tone. Having provided a reasonable response to the diner's policies – no substitutions, no side orders of toast – through gritted teeth, Bobby abruptly explodes, swiping all the glasses off the table. As Nicholson's stardom develops, his wide flashing eyes, arching eyebrows and a wide

⁶⁹⁷ D Bingham, 1994, op. cit., p. 110

leering grin, add to the sense of latent anger and poorly concealed psychosis, epitomised by his performance in *The Shining* (Dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1980).

Further to the sense of distance between himself and others that Nicholson's characters suffer, Bingham asserts that his performance style itself creates a distancing effect between character, actor and audience. In contrast to the Method performers that preceded him, Bingham argues, and in spite of his training at the Actors Studio, Nicholson brings 'a sense of the role that is itself simulated.'⁶⁹⁸ To illustrate, Bingham cites a moment in Nicholson's performance as 'The Joker' in *Batman* (Dir. Tim Burton, 1989), where, having picked up his gun from the floor, he turns to find Batman has disappeared. At this point, Nicholson's eyes 'move deliberately and precisely ... in facial expressions that describe rather than portray surprise and suspicion.'⁶⁹⁹ The echoes of Jack Nicholson's style in Slater's performance as JD can be seen to reflect Butler's conceptualisation of performativity as a 'citational practice.'⁷⁰⁰ Slater's play on Nicholson's performance style, which itself portrays a distance between himself and the role he plays thus has the potential to undermine the illusion of coherent, idealised masculinity on screen.

In the cafeteria scene, Slater portrays JD as settled, fully aware of, and controlling his surroundings, as he steadily observes the action unfolding around him. Sitting alone, accompanied by one other student asleep, JD's positioning in the far corner of the cafeteria indicates his position as an outsider. His clothing – an austere, long black duster coat – further provides an impression of other-worldliness, apparently untouched by other students' more prosaic concerns. Despite Veronica's status as part of "the most powerful clique in the school," she is seen to lack control

⁶⁹⁸ D Bingham, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 101

⁶⁹⁹ D Bingham, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 103

⁷⁰⁰ J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 3

as she silently follows Heather Chandler asking her inane poll questions and is rigorously policed in her choice of friends. In contrast to Butler, who contends that only those on the margins of intelligibility suffer a lack of social belonging, Veronica's representation in these scenes demonstrates how normative characters negotiate a position under the prevailing matrix of norms.⁷⁰¹

Veronica and JD's romance is foretold by the shot/reverse shot pattern showing the two characters gazing at each other. This conventional heterosexual romance narrative is intercut with the Heathers' plot to humiliate Martha, a girl whose physical size makes her a social outcast and object of comedy. Arching his eyebrows and continuing to stare at the girls, JD's questioning gaze piques Veronica's conscience, tacitly reminding her of the unpleasantness of her actions. Importantly, although JD's wry expression and later shrug of the shoulders apparently convey surprise and incomprehension, Slater's performance is controlled such that only the impression of surprise or incomprehension is portrayed, echoing Bingham's remarks on Nicholson creating distance between himself and his roles.

The similarity between the positions occupied by Martha and JD invites a reflection on the respective status of the male and female outsider. Like JD, Martha sits alone in a far side of the cafeteria. However, while JD is depicted as desirable, the Heathers' prank makes clear that Martha is to be perceived as laughably unattractive. Her near-identical positioning to Slater's character provides a commentary on the gendered construction of the rebel figure: whereas a male outsider figure can be cool, a female outsider is considered an embarrassment.⁷⁰² Indeed, it is Veronica's awareness

⁷⁰¹ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 3

⁷⁰² Shary (2002) notes a number of female-led youth delinquency films, but these were all released far later than 1989.

of what Butler might term the “unreality” of the female outsider that compels her to comply with Heather Chandler’s requests.

The difference between the two characters can be elucidated by Dick Pountain and David Robins’ study, which defines cool as ‘a permanent state of private rebellion.’⁷⁰³ Significantly, the opposition represented by cool cannot be regarded as a collective, political response, but as a stance of individual defiance lying behind a mask of ironic passivity.⁷⁰⁴ Significantly, Pountain and Robins associate cool with the juvenile delinquent character, describing James Dean as both a ‘cool original’⁷⁰⁵ and ‘cool’s first martyr.’⁷⁰⁶ Examining Slater’s performance, the ironic distance JD places between himself and the emotions he appears to convey can be read as instantiating the oppositional attitude Pountain and Robins describe as cool.⁷⁰⁷

JD’s cool is first tested when Ram and Kurt attempt to give the new student “a good scare.” JD is reproached here for his other-worldliness and obvious appeal for Veronica, paradoxically coded here as homosexuality. To the accusation of homosexuality, JD’s calm, evenly delivered reply, “they certainly have an open door policy for assholes though, don’t they” disconcerts the two jocks not used to such displays of verbal fluency when faced with their blunt aggression. JD’s cocked head and the careful, measured pace in which his response is uttered, recall Nicholson’s performance in *Five Easy Pieces* where an initially calm response had an unexpected dramatic consequence. Likewise here, JD pulls out a handgun and fires at the two at point blank range. His response is shocking not only because of its disproportionate force but also because of its disruption to the audience’s expectations of a teen rebel’s

⁷⁰³ D Pountain and D Robins, 2000, *Cool Rules: An Anatomy of an Attitude*, London: Reaktion Books, p. 19

⁷⁰⁴ D Pountain and D Robins, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 19

⁷⁰⁵ D Pountain and D Robins, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 70

⁷⁰⁶ D Pountain and D Robins, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 70

⁷⁰⁷ D Pountain and D Robins, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 19

reaction to such an encounter. Indeed, JD's actions disrupt the quietly oppositional force of the rebel Pountain and Robins stipulate in their conceptualisation of cool, shifting instead to the psychotic.

3.4.3 – HEATHER CHANDLER'S DEATH AND THE "CHICKIE RUN"

Scenes immediately prior to, and during Heather Chandler's murder itself most strongly demonstrate the tension between the youth delinquency subgenre and the more sinister occurrences associated with other types of film. In particular, *Heathers* alludes to the "Chickie Run" from *Rebel* and implicitly contrasts JD's participation in Heather's death with Jim Stark's involvement with that of Buzz in the earlier film.

Turning firstly to the legacy of the "Chickie Run," *Rebel* was seen to portray the ritual primarily as an inescapable test of masculinity. Although his father provides a pragmatic response as to why the confrontation is unnecessary, Jim understands its necessity as "a matter of honour." The "Chickie Run" also constitutes a sociological aside illustrating the potential danger of widespread youth apathy, as Buzz's shrugging "you gotta do something," hints that boredom led him to plummet to his death. *Grease* also takes up the "Chickie Run", as the contest at Thunder Road between the T-Birds and the Scorpions provides a similar test of masculinity. The contest initially appears to focus on the efforts of Danny and Leo, as representatives of the T-Birds and Scorpions respectively. However, the interchangeability between the drivers – demonstrated when Danny replaces Kenickie at the wheel – and the group's collective investment in their car, suggests that the ritual concerns the strength of the two gangs' group identities. Likewise, despite the Scorpions' efforts to sabotage their rivals' car, the film's light-hearted tone precludes the tragedy of the type seen in *Rebel*.

In *Rebel*, the "Chickie Run" provides the basis for a relationship between Jim and Judy to develop, culminating in scenes at the mansion, where after abandoning

Plato, the two characters lie together and contemplate their love.⁷⁰⁸ In *Heathers* the narrative occurs in the opposite fashion, since the relationship between JD and Veronica is cemented before their “Chickie Run” occurs. In scenes that appear to mirror those of Jim and Judy at the mansion, the camera pans slowly left to show abandoned underwear on croquet mallets before alighting on JD and Veronica, apparently naked but covered by a coat, discussing their hatred for Heather Chandler. The night time setting, the apparently deserted house and the upper class associations of croquet itself, strongly reflect the mansion setting of *Rebel*. The filmmakers’ interest in confronting generic expectation is apparent in another reversal in *Heathers*: the relationship between JD and his father. In the few brief scenes at their home, the roles conventionally expected for each character are reversed. For instance, JD’s father, is heard off-screen shouting “hey aren’t you going to help me with my homework?” to which his son responds, in a typically fatherly way, “can’t, tiger I’m busy.” This uncanny reversal denaturalises their respective positions, exposing the roles of father and son as a type of performance. In a similar manner, the film’s invocation of the “Chickie Run” plays out in reverse order to that seen in *Rebel*.

The close shot scale, and the two teens’ positions within it, strongly recall those of Jim and Judy in the earlier film and the latter’s musings about an ideal masculine love object. Importantly, while Jim responded only occasionally and distractedly to Judy’s words, JD too remains largely quiet, only his eyebrows and smirk registering a reaction to Veronica. JD’s expression of seasoned, weary scepticism contrasts with Jim’s hesitancy in the equivalent scene in *Rebel*. Whereas Jim’s tentative mannerisms conveyed his bewilderment at, and the novelty of, his romance with Judy, JD’s demeanour indicates that for him, such liaisons are routine. Indeed, his remark that in “seven schools in seven states the only thing different is my locker

⁷⁰⁸ M Pomerance, 2005, op. cit., in JD Slocum, 2005, op. cit., p. 44

combination,” can be seen to indicate that Veronica is merely the latest of a series of partners.

Butler theorises gender as a ‘stylised repetition of acts,’ underscoring its status as an endlessly iterative process.⁷⁰⁹ She later positions gender as citational, arguing not only that the gendered subject approximates a norm, but that such approximations re-create that norm through its citation.⁷¹⁰ Norms are therefore vulnerable to their citation.⁷¹¹ In *Heathers*, the positioning of JD in a mirrored situation to that of Jim Stark invites a reflection on Dean’s character as a norm of juvenile delinquency. In retrospect, *Heathers* presents the mansion scene in *Rebel* as an idealised, romantic moment, which it knowingly parodies. However, the analysis earlier in the chapter demonstrated that these scenes were beset with gender anxiety for Jim. In citing the youth delinquency film’s generic past, its earlier films come to be reconstructed as innocent and uncomplicated. Consequently, in its citation of *Rebel*, *Heathers* can be seen to enact the mechanisms Butler identifies for the rearticulation of the norm.

As JD and Veronica discuss Heather Chandler, Slater’s performance evokes the conventions of teen rebellion alongside Nicholson’s psychotic malevolence, pointing to the limits of the delinquent identity. When he remarks “Heather Chandler is a bitch that deserves to die,” Veronica simply smiles, perceiving this statement as teen hyperbole, rather than a statement of intent. Instead, she suggests they make her vomit, just as Veronica had done at the party. JD’s statement tells Veronica exactly his attitude to Heather Chandler and clearly signals his plan when the two concoct a drink for her. Nonetheless, reading JD as part of the youth rebel tradition allows Veronica to dismiss his words as merely humorous. Slater performs the line in a level – even

⁷⁰⁹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 191

⁷¹⁰ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., pp. 12-13

⁷¹¹ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, pp. 107-8; J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 52

cool – manner, typical of the teen rebel. Consequently, although JD reveals his nihilism early on, his positioning as a teen rebel distracts from his behaviour, allowing his words to pass unremarked.

The “Chickie Run” in *Heathers* occurs in two stages. In the first, Veronica and JD prepare the drink that will have Heather “puke up her guts.” Filmed in long shot, we are able to observe their actions in parallel. However, JD is placed in the foreground, encouraging the film audience to grant more importance to his actions than those of Veronica, who remains in the back of the frame often obscured by the fridge door. As the two begin their search for unpleasant concoctions, JD alights on drain cleaning fluid and suggests this to Veronica, who dismisses the idea. Kaveney notes that the film is ambivalent on the issue of her complicity in the deaths in which she participates.⁷¹² Although Veronica identifies the drink’s fatal properties, she also facilitates JD’s plan, by pointing out that Heather “would never drink anything that colour,” which prompts him to place the drink in a container that obscures its lurid blue hue. A bird’s eye view shot of the kitchen work surface shows two drinks being prepared: one containing orange juice and milk, the other, draining fluid. The contrasting content of the two cups can be seen to reflect the variation of the portrayals of the teen rebel by the late 1980s. Unpleasant, but certainly not poisonous, the orange juice and milk concoction can be seen to evoke the ‘harmless mischief’ rebel, whose deviations from school or parental rules nonetheless remained within the boundaries of the law.⁷¹³ In contrast, the draining fluid represents the total rejection of societal norms.

Once the two drinks have been prepared, JD begins to goad Veronica with taunts of “chicken.” This is not uttered confrontationally as it is between Buzz and

⁷¹² R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 53

⁷¹³ For a description of the ‘harmless mischief’ rebel, see T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 84

Jim in *Rebel*. Rather, Slater's performance jokingly insinuates Veronica's cowardice. In *Rebel*, it appears that Buzz wants Jim to participate in the "Chickie Run", to lose, and fall in as one of his gang. That scenario would have seen Buzz add to the number of those who recognise him as an idealised embodiment of masculinity and consolidate that status for the gang's existing members. Similarly, JD seeks to recruit Veronica as an accomplice. Consequently, his goading is also a moment for the two characters to bond as JD whispers "are you afraid" before kissing Veronica, encouraging her to take the poison-filled cup to Heather. In contrast to *Rebel* which portrays Buzz as an insider figure coaxing an outsider rebel, in *Heathers* however, it is the outsider who nudges an already popular member of the community to rebel, indicating JD's more dangerous form of rebellion. Watching Veronica leave with the draining fluid, JD's sleepy shrug indicates his lack of concern with the harm they are likely to cause, further demonstrating his nihilism.

The second part of the *Heathers* "Chickie Run" occurs when JD encourages Heather Chandler to drink the fatal concoction he has prepared for her. In a further parallel with *Rebel*, just as Jim's impertinence prompted Buzz to reassert his dominance, so here Heather is compelled to undertake JD's challenge when she perceives a threat to her status. The gender difference of the two dominant individuals under threat is significant since Heather's apparent phallicism can be seen to complicate Butler's conceptualisation of the Phallus. Throughout *Heathers*, Heather Chandler's dominance is signalled by her association with the colour red, to the extent that her red scrunchie becomes a talisman of her power. Heather also constructs herself as an embodiment of the Phallus, as she remarks "they all want me as a friend or a fuck" indicating her desirability as a sexual object. Butler argues for an 'aggressive

re-territorialisation' of the Phallus away from masculine subjects.⁷¹⁴ However, her proposed lesbian phallus, which 'crosses the borders of having and being' the Phallus houses such a possibility within only lesbian sexuality thus limiting its exploration in characters such as Heather Chandler.⁷¹⁵ The character can thus be seen to reveal how a single individual may approximate the positions of both embodying and possessing the Phallus simultaneously, a possibility that Butler does not explore.

As Veronica and JD enter the room, Heather is posed perfectly in pink nightdress and full makeup despite her hangover. JD offers her the drink, described as "an old family recipe," invoking his rebel antecedents. Initially refusing his offer, Heather's phallicism is briefly undermined by the scene's framing, which sees her dominated by JD and Veronica standing on either side of her as she sits diminutively in the centre. Her refusal prompts JD to turn to Veronica, stating, "I knew it would be too intense for her." Although he never calls her chicken, Heather correctly identifies the implication of cowardice, taking the cup and defiantly drinking its contents, regardless of her apparent awareness of the potential harm it might pose. As with Buzz in *Rebel*, Heather knows that she must accept such challenges if she is to be seen to possess the Phallus. However, quickly swallowing the drink, she removes the red scrunchie, and screams "corn nuts!" clutching her throat as she collapses into a glass coffee table. In *Rebel*, the position of possessing the Phallus was associated with the mastery of death, illustrating Butler's contention that this idealised position is impossible to instantiate. Here, removing the scrunchie immediately prior to death indicates Heather's loss of power and reveals its potential transference elsewhere. Although JD wishes to "wipe the slate clean" and remove the rigid social hierarchies

⁷¹⁴ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 86

⁷¹⁵ J Butler, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 84

Heather represented, the continued presence of the scrunchie demonstrates that the social structure he so detests will nevertheless remain in place.

The scenes of Heather Chandler's death provide a reflection on the film's place in the youth delinquency subgenre. *Heathers* reverses the chronological order of the *Rebel* "Chickie Run", transforming with it the protagonist's relation to the law. Analysis of the rites of masculinity in *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Grease* demonstrated that the characters were bound by well-established subcultural ritual. In contrast, Veronica and JD completely discard societal norms. However, as will become further apparent in later scenes, JD does possess a warped morality, constructed around the eradication of social divisions, and bullying.

3.4.4 – KURT AND RAM: FROM HOMOSOCIALITY TO HOMOSEXUALITY

Kaveney argues that in *Heathers*, 'social policing, through enforcement of heterosexual norms, is shown to be linked to homosociality.'⁷¹⁶ The film portrays both female homosociality, as exemplified by the hegemonic rule of the Heathers themselves, and male, embodied by insecure jock twosome Kurt and Ram. Discussions of homosociality earlier in the chapter observed Kosofsky-Sedgwick's assertion of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual relations that is disrupted only by homophobia.⁷¹⁷ Important to the analysis of Kurt and Ram, Kosofsky-Sedgwick asserts that 'male homosocial bonds are infused with entitlement.'⁷¹⁸ Indeed, when the two encounter a perceived threat to their dominance, Kurt is quick to highlight that they're "seniors, man," suggesting that their status alone should be sufficiently intimidating as to prevent their needing to engage in a physical fight.

⁷¹⁶ R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 57

⁷¹⁷ E Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985, op. cit., p. 25

⁷¹⁸ E Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1985, ibid., p. 1

Examining the relationships between teen boys in ‘Contemporary Dude Cinema,’ John Troyer and Chani Marchiselli look back to Freud’s analysis of heroism, according to which a ‘primal horde ... enraged by the patriarch’s unlimited access to women, murder him then devour his body,’ in order to locate the entitlement of male homosocial relationships.⁷¹⁹ As previously discussed, Butler critiques Freud’s account of gender assumption, noting that a ‘taboo on homosexuality’ occurs prior to what Freud describes as the “primary” incest taboo.⁷²⁰ Butler’s interpretation of Freud’s account elucidates Troyer and Marchiselli’s argument that female love interests are shoehorned into films such as *Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure* (Dir. Stephen Herek, 1989) to ward off the possibility of homosexual desire between the two eponymous leads.⁷²¹

The prohibition on homosexuality that provides an undercurrent to male on-screen friendships elucidates the significance of Kurt and Ram’s homophobic bullying. The first such instance was observed in the cafeteria scene, where JD’s obvious attraction for Veronica led to taunts of “faggot” from the pair. Further, immediately following Heather Chandler’s funeral, another student stumbles into Ram, prompting the two to repeat that they’re “seniors, man,” and thus above physical confrontation. Instead, they simply warn him to “watch where you’re going, geek.” When the younger student doesn’t appear to acknowledge their status – as athletes, the Teen Movie’s marker of idealised masculinity – and instead retaliates, the two are quickly angered, placing him in a head lock and force him to say that he is a homosexual.

⁷¹⁹ J Troyer and C Marchiselli, 2005, ‘Slack, Slacker, Slackest: Homosocial Bonding Practices in Contemporary Dude Cinema,’ in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Ed., 2005, op. cit., p. 266

⁷²⁰ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 87

⁷²¹ J Troyer and C Marchiselli, 2005, op. cit., in M Pomerance and F Gateward, Eds., 2005, op. cit., p. 271

There is no homosocial – or for that matter, social – element to JD. On the few occasions when he does engage with his peers, his motive is manipulation, as in the case of Veronica, or blackmail, as with Heather Duke, never expressly social. In the scene where Ram has the geek in a headlock, the film cuts to a medium long shot of JD riding past on his motorbike. The camera pans to follow the bike, as shown in Figure 3.10 below, and JD's level stare at the scene unfolding in front of him. A further cut to a point of view shot of the scene from JD's perspective demonstrates the clear threat of his gaze, as the scene's participants briefly pause, staring blankly back at JD as if frozen by fear. The motorbike itself is strongly reminiscent of that used by Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One*, particularly in its size and baggage attached to it. Clearly a cruiser designed to travel long distances, the motorbike is far from the simple, affordable mode of transport a suburban teenager might use. Instead, JD's motorbike recalls Johnny's rootless travels interstate with his gang.



FIGURE 3.10 JD NEUTRALLY OBSERVES KURT AND RAM'S HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

In the cafeteria, JD's gaze at Veronica piqued her conscience. Here too, Ram and Kurt briefly pause as JD watches intently. In both instances, the outsider's gaze is perceived to be imbued with a moral weight: while Veronica is made to recognise the

cruelty of her prank on Martha, Ram and Kurt stop their actions, because they sense JD's silent moral judgement. Although his lack of intervention could be seen to indicate his amorality, Kaveney argues that JD in fact provides the film's 'moral centre as much as its villain.'⁷²² Indeed, as Kaveney notes, JD perceives the hypocrisy of other characters' unabashed outpourings of grief at funerals of their widely-loathed peers, and rails against the school's hierarchical social structures, seemingly advocating a more equitable form of community. However, JD is often equally insincere, while his method of imposing a more harmonious student body is mass murder. Consequently, his morality can be elucidated with reference to Clint Eastwood, whose image and persona JD clearly evokes.

The single harmonica note heard as JD rides past and long black duster coat he wears throughout provide clear references to the Western genre. Further, the shot/reverse shot pattern strongly recalls the opening scenes of *High Plains Drifter* (Dir. Clint Eastwood, 1973), where the townspeople stare at the unknown man riding into Lago. Bingham notes how Eastwood's 'Man With No Name' persona, who debuted in *A Fistful of Dollars* (Dir. Sergio Leone, 1964), stripped the Western hero of his morality.⁷²³ Indeed, in *High Plains Drifter*, Eastwood's character is seen to commit rape and murder apparently without feeling or motive (although one is later supplied). For Bingham, Eastwood's persona provides a 'deadpan, ironic recuperation of the Western hero,' playing on the disjunction between his gentlemanly manners and his brutality.⁷²⁴ Likewise, by committing acts that go beyond the parameters typically allocated for youth delinquency, Slater's character can be seen to portray the limits of rebel identity.

⁷²² R Kaveney, 2006, op. cit., p. 67

⁷²³ D Bingham, 1994, op. cit., p. 168

⁷²⁴ D Bingham, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 172

Following the humiliating rumour Ram and Kurt propagate about Veronica, she and JD resolve to take revenge on the pair. The sequence in which they plan their vengeance shows them dissembling; both with each other and with the two they plan to deceive. Veronica is first shown in medium shot talking flirtatiously on the phone with Kurt. Her overtly feminine, sexual voice is revealed as a performance, as Kurt asks if he might “write to Penthouse Forum,” prompting Veronica to stifle her own and JD’s giggles by throwing a pillow across the bed. Kurt’s request to write about the encounter suggests his recognition that Veronica’s proposal presents an idealised sexual fantasy, one that, in line with his homosocial tendencies, he wishes to share with other men.

JD’s plan for revenge requires Veronica to lure Kurt and Ram to the woods behind the school with the promise of sex, before she and JD shoot the pair with what JD revealingly calls *Ich Lüge* (I lie) bullets, which will disorient and stun, but not kill them. In order to secure Veronica’s assistance, JD must make her believe that Kurt and Ram, although thoroughly humiliated, will not be seriously harmed. JD’s clothing provides a key means through which he is able to convince Veronica to participate. Notably this scene provides the only occasion that he is seen without his long duster coat, which, associates him with the exoticism and amorality of Clint Eastwood’s “Man With no Name” figure. Instead, JD wears pale jeans with a checked shirt over a grey vest that together recall not Eastwood but the clothing worn by Kevin Bacon as Ren McCormack in *Footloose* (Dir. Herbert Ross, 1984). Although such clothing is typical of the fashion of the time, the film’s intertextual play with other youth delinquency texts, along with Slater’s physical resemblance to Bacon, invites Veronica, and arguably the film’s audience with her, to read his plan as a comical teen caper. However while Ren earnestly attends town hall meetings to present his case for

holding a school dance, JD deceives his girlfriend, and kills two fellow high-school students, indicating his total rejection of societal norms.



FIGURE 3.11 JD SHOWS VERONICA THE BOTTLE OF MINERAL WATER CENTRAL TO HIS PLAN

Key to their plan is the imposition of a “hidden” homosexual relationship between Kurt and Ram. Although Veronica has once again penned a convincing suicide note describing a secret relationship, more persuasive still is JD’s assortment of artefacts that he believes will convince anyone finding the pair of their “true” sexuality. Pulling these items out of a large shopping bag he plans to leave at the scene, JD assembles an issue of ‘Stud Puppy,’ a box of chocolates, a Joan Crawford postcard, mascara, and “the one perfect thing,” a bottle of mineral water. Notably, some of these items are seen only to signify to a particular audience. Despite Veronica’s assertion that mineral water has lost its association with homosexuality, JD maintains that in Ohio, signified here as a provincial backwater, that meaning still holds. Importantly, JD’s invocation of the correct audience for his artefacts can be seen to correspond to Butler’s theorisation of the importance of recognition to an individual’s status as human.⁷²⁵ The police officer who first encounters the bodies of Kurt and

⁷²⁵ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 3

Ram correctly decodes JD's artefacts of homosexuality, indicating that JD has correctly understood the frame of reference for the identification of male homosexuality in Ohio.

3.4.5 – “GOING TO PROM OR GOING TO HELL”: REFUSING THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX

The conclusion of *Heathers* sees the death of JD and the inauguration of a new order presided over by Veronica as the “new sheriff in town.” Throughout *Heathers*, JD has been characterised by a gift for linguistic invention and articulacy that contrasted him with the mumbling, improvisatory style of the early Method performers. It is thus fitting that his increasing weakness is signified by lack of mastery over language. Remarking that he “knew that loose was too noose,” when Veronica surprises JD in the boiler room, he swiftly corrects himself, turning from her and brushing the back of his head with one hand as he does so, conveying his embarrassment and irritation at the slip. However, recognising Veronica's nervousness, he quickly regains composure, remarking “you didn't say Simon says” to her request to shut off the explosive. JD's comment can be seen to signify his perception of the confrontation and the explosives he plans to set off as a game. Her hesitation is enough to allow him to disarm and stun her while he sets up the bomb.

The pair's violent confrontation is frequently interrupted by cross-cuts of the cheerleading rally taking place immediately above them. The frequent cross-cuts undoubtedly augment the scene's sense of suspense. More significantly, the school cohort are seen to grow more enthusiastic and animated as the balance of power shifts from JD to Veronica. Interestingly, this rally starkly contrasts with the cafeteria, the only other communal space shown in the school. There, students were divided into smaller groups, seated in inwardly-facing tables. In contrast, the gym portrays their

collective investment in the cheerleading rally that reaffirms and celebrates the school's communal identity. As Veronica struggles to stop the bomb, and save the school, her defence of the high school community is emphasised through costume, as the blue-tinted lighting of the basement is reflected in her blue blazer.

As Veronica gains in strength during the fight, JD gradually becomes increasingly manic, even psychotic. This progression is evidenced by Veronica's retort, "to think I thought you were cool." Pountain and Robins' definition of cool, as a 'permanent state of private rebellion,' makes clear that cool is embodied by attitude and performance, rather than action.⁷²⁶ JD's lone exoticism and ability to lampoon other students' hypocrisy signalled his cool status for Veronica. It was in the context of cool, the condition that his transgressions remained passive, that she found him desirable.⁷²⁷



FIGURE 3.12 JD NOW FULLY PSYCHOTIC, A DIMINUTIVE FIGURE

JD's plan to blow up the school in a nihilist vision to "wipe the slate clean" thus goes against the attitudinal opposition represented by cool. After Veronica shoots

⁷²⁶ D Pountain and D Robins, 2000, op. cit., p. 19

⁷²⁷ D Pountain and D Robins, 2000, ibid., p. 70

his hand, his crouched position shot in high-angle shot further emphasises his loss of stature. Growling that “the only place different social groups can genuinely get along is in heaven” a cross-cut to the rally quickly demonstrates the contrary. As long shots portray the students’ collective enjoyment of the cheerleaders’ performance, quick medium close-ups of characters embodying different social types – Peter, the eager Ivy League applicant, Veronica’s nervous childhood friend, Betty Finn, and the geek Ram and Kurt had bullied – are all shown cheering and smiling. The slow-motion shots of the cheerleaders and the resulting lingering shots on the spectators’ smiling faces invite the school to be perceived as a utopian space. Consequently, the scene can be perceived as an ironic commentary on the conclusion of *Grease* where the carnival unites the previously disparate student body into an idealised community of heterosexual couples. JD and Veronica’s fight occurring immediately underneath the gym can be seen to represent that which is quietly repressed by such utopian spaces.

Strapping a bomb to his body and looking towards the sky, JD’s dramatic death at the end of the film strongly recalls Plato’s murder in its re-establishment of the dominant order and rejection of the rebel. However, although earlier cross-cuts during the fight scenes aligned Veronica with the school community, her performance as she watches JD prepare to blow himself up illustrates the extent to which she has come to embody many of his traits and beliefs. To JD’s typically enigmatic question “what are you going to do now that you’re dead,” Veronica silently takes a cigarette from her jacket and places it in her mouth, eyebrows raised as though daring him to explode. Likewise, her slow, jerking movements and cock of the head recall JD’s world-weary gait, and wry facial expression, while her defiant posture expresses her self-sufficiency, contrasting with her position as the beginning of the film as a diminished figure beholden to Heather Chandler. The explosion indicating JD’s death

is followed by a cut to a smoke-filled frame, through which Veronica's face emerges in close-up. Her still, stoic expression as she removes the (now lit) cigarette from her mouth contrasts with her soot-covered face, and indicates the inauguration of a new order in JD's vision that, ironically, can only occur in his absence.

As Veronica walks back into the school, she quickly relieves Heather Duke of the red scrunchie, remarking "there's a new sheriff in town," providing further confirmation of the scrunchie's symbolic properties. Veronica then approaches Martha and asks if she would like to spend prom night with her. Her rejection of JD, as well as the prom refutes the heteronormative imperative of the Teen Movie. The conclusion of *Heathers* sees Martha in neck brace and wheelchair accompanied by a bruised and bloody Veronica walking despondently down a dimly lit school corridor in long shot, providing a direct retort to the more conventional endings of *Grease* and *Rebel*. Contrasting with the vibrant utopianism of *Grease* and the mournful hopefulness at the very end of *Rebel*, *Heathers* concludes by refusing her rightful position within the prevailing matrix of gender norms. However, it is perhaps only as a result of her recently acquired dominance within the high school, that Veronica can refuse these expectations.

It is significant that despite refusing the narrative conclusion typically provided by the Teen Movie, the school nonetheless continues to be constructed as an idealised space. Indeed, as we saw during her altercation with JD, Veronica is shown fighting both for herself and on behalf of the high-school cohort. Her victory sees her symbolically take charge of the high school, liberating it of the divisive elitism that characterised the Heathers' reign. Nonetheless, the film audience is aware that Veronica has participated in the murder of three other students, for which she is not punished. These prior actions question the extent to which Veronica can be regarded

as upholding the values of the high school. That she is permitted to be at once the champion of the community and unknown murderer at large can be seen to parody the “clean” endings of the other two films in this chapter, where any underlying complication or ambiguity that might have emerged earlier in the films are swiftly removed from view. In contrast, the conclusion of *Heathers* questions and brings to the surface the rebel subgenre’s latent uncertainties and tensions.

3.5 – CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the performance styles of three stars each bearing a distinctive style, across the youth delinquency subgenre. Although Teen Movies are rarely considered star texts, the analyses have demonstrated that the juvenile delinquent figure has provided a significant arena for star performance. Further, the analysis of *Grease* elucidates a film which, although exceedingly popular, has never been the subject of extended close analysis.

The three films analysed in this chapter demonstrate distinct ways of portraying the juvenile delinquent character, and the legacy of the memorable performances of Marlon Brando and James Dean. Looking back to an idealised 1950s adolescence, the lighthearted tone of *Grease* allows the film to provide a knowing pastiche of contemporary adult perceptions of teen culture. In that context, John Travolta’s excessively swaggering performance as Danny Zuko became a means of mocking the threat purportedly represented by the juvenile delinquent figure. Indeed, Danny’s multi-layered performance of masculinity reveals the sense of obligation that compels him to approximate “rebel” masculinity. In turn, Christian Slater’s role in *Heathers* does precisely the opposite, revealing the latent threat represented by the teen rebel figure and interrogating the permissible limits of this identity.

Examining the performance styles of the three juvenile delinquents, James Dean's mumbling, oscillating performance in *Rebel Without a Cause* was seen to indicate Jim Stark's fragmented identity. Interestingly, despite the film's sexual ambiguity and violence that prompted fervent censorship upon its release, the analysis demonstrated how Jim is retrospectively constructed as an "innocent" teen rebel. *Grease* presented a lighthearted pastiche of a number of the 1950s juvenile delinquency film within the framework of the Hollywood Film Musical. The comical physicality of John Travolta's performance playfully referenced both his own more troubled role in *Saturday Night Fever* and the posturing of the 1950s rebels. *Heathers* provided a considerably bleaker reflection on the teen rebel subgenre. In both cases, Butler's conceptualisation of the citationality of performativity elucidated the mechanisms through which early youth delinquency films come to be later constructed as innocent.

Turning to the implications of the films for Butler's work, all three films provide examples of characters that are recognised as representations of idealised masculinity in a particular context. In *Rebel*, Buzz was presented as an embodiment of idealised masculinity, who must fend off or diffuse, the threat represented by Jim's interjection at the planetarium. In turn, *Grease* makes clear Danny's elevated status among the T-Birds. Likewise in *Heathers*, the athletic ability of boorish Ram and Kurt marks them as the masculine equivalent of the idealised status enjoyed by the eponymous female clique. These instances of assuming idealised gender for a particular group can be seen to open up Butler's contention that such positions are impossible to embody. Although individuals cannot occupy the (regularised, fictitious) positions of embodying or possessing the Phallus, characters can appear to do so within a defined context.

These contexts also help conceptualise the origin of the compulsion to cite idealised gender to which Butler refers. Indeed, the peer groups observed in the films all hold the spectre of ostracism from that group, should they perceive the approximation of idealised gender not to measure up. As such, these gangs were seen to embody the reversal of power relations that Butler discusses, namely that the position of possessing the Phallus is paradoxically dependent on others to uphold that status, such that power is wielded by the latter position. Consequently, the gangs can be seen to monitor and police the gender identities of their leaders.

4 – CONSTRUCTING THE PAST IN THE TEEN MOVIE

4.1 – INTRODUCTION: THE TEEN MOVIE AND HISTORY

Assessing the star personae evoked by Christian Slater's performance in *Heathers*, earlier iterations of the rebel figure were seen retrospectively to be idealised in the light of JD's indiscriminate violence. The iterative structure of performativity provided the mechanism through which earlier examples of juvenile delinquent characters, such as Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One*, came to be seen as significantly less problematic than at the time of the film's release. Developing this line of enquiry, this chapter examines the reconstruction of history in two teen movies that look back to the past: *American Graffiti* (Dir. George Lucas, 1973), and *Dirty Dancing* (Dir. Emile Ardolino, 1987).

Casting an eye over the genre's relationship to the past, Timothy Shary observes that the Teen Movie is trapped in a peculiar double-bind; although the films aggressively target a youth audience, young people themselves largely lack the means or experience to direct a mass-market Hollywood film. Teen investment in the film-making process is limited to performing the roles adults design for them, and paying to see the resulting refracted versions of their lives and concerns at the box office. Representations of youth being necessarily 'filtered through an adult lens,' Shary argues that a reflection on the past is built into the Teen Movie.⁷²⁸

Lesley Speed likewise observes the contradiction in the Teen Movie's claim to represent current adolescent experience, while the films that comprise the genre are produced by adults.⁷²⁹ However for Speed, this conflict is most apparent – and problematic – in a specific category of the genre, termed the 'nostalgic' or 'rite-of-

⁷²⁸ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 2

⁷²⁹ L Speed, 1998, op. cit., p. 28

passage' Teen Movie,⁷³⁰ which is 'set in the past and structured around the protagonists' acquisition of maturity.'⁷³¹ Speed argues that specific narrative devices, such as the retrospective voiceover in *Stand By Me*, (Dir. Rob Reiner, 1986) and the coda that concludes *American Graffiti*, create the sense of an adult reflection on past experiences. In granting retrospective significance to apparently inconsequential actions of youth, she maintains, adolescence is contained within an adult narrative perspective.⁷³²

Examining the mechanics of this narrative containment, Speed takes up Martin's definition of the Teen Movie, which in turn recalls Altman's semantic/syntactic conceptualisation of genre. As discussed previously, Altman divides a genre's semantic elements, its 'common traits, characters, locations, sets,'⁷³³ from its syntax, understood as 'certain constitutive relationships' that structure those building blocks.⁷³⁴ For Martin, the Teen Movie possesses a 'rich semantic level,'⁷³⁵ incorporating 'snatched conversations by the school lockers, cheerleaders, the prom, [and] the juvenile delinquent gang.'⁷³⁶ Conversely, the genre's syntax is said to be borrowed from elsewhere.⁷³⁷ For Speed, the nostalgic teen movie reveals the tension between the excess of the semantic, and the genre's containment in derivative narrative structures. Youth activities are restricted to the semantic, while the nostalgic syntax contains adolescent experience to privilege an adult reflection on the past.⁷³⁸ In *Stand by Me* for instance, the adult voiceover foregrounds the retrospective significance

⁷³⁰ Speed uses nostalgic teen movie and rite-of-passage teen movie interchangeably. I will refer to the category as the nostalgic teen movie.

⁷³¹ L Speed, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 25

⁷³² L Speed, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 27

⁷³³ R Altman, 1987, *op. cit.*, in BK Grant, Ed., 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 31

⁷³⁴ R Altman, 1987, *ibid.*, in BK Grant, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 31

⁷³⁵ A Martin, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 66

⁷³⁶ A Martin, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 66

⁷³⁷ A Martin, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 66

⁷³⁸ L Speed, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 26

of the unfolding narrative, thereby detracting from the boys' immediate experience. Consequently, Speed contends that the nostalgic teen movie is problematic since it contains the immediacy, spontaneity and fun of youth experience within a soberly adult perspective.⁷³⁹

Speed's and Shary's work raises questions about the role of representations of the past in the Teen Movie, both within the diegesis and in their appeal to the viewer. Interestingly, although Speed is quick to characterise the adult perspective she locates in certain examples of the genre as nostalgic, that choice of terminology is never discussed in her work. Indeed, as Linda Hutcheon points out, 'there are many ways to look backward. You can look back and reject. Or you can look and linger longingly.'⁷⁴⁰ Since these differing perspectives cannot be solely equated with nostalgia, an exploration of how the past may be considered is required.

Speed's focus on certain 'Teen Movies' relationship to the past as nostalgic necessitates firstly an examination of nostalgia itself. Derived from the Greek *nostos* (to return home) and *algos* (pain), Hutcheon notes that nostalgia was initially considered a particularly acute form of homesickness that would be relieved upon the patient's return home.⁷⁴¹ However, from the eighteenth century, when developments in medical knowledge started to indicate the bacterial origins of disease, nostalgia became thought of as an incurable psychological condition.⁷⁴² Nostalgia's changing conceptualisation from curable disease to incurable psychological affliction was accompanied by a shift in site, as Kant observes that the nostalgic patient 'did not wish to return to a place,

⁷³⁹ L Speed, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 25

⁷⁴⁰ L Hutcheon, 1998, 'Irony, Postmodernism and Nostalgia,' accessed at <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html> on March 28th 2012, p. 4

⁷⁴¹ L Hutcheon, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 4

⁷⁴² L Hutcheon, 1998, *ibid.*, p. 4

but to a time, a time of youth.⁷⁴³ Rather than the (usually) possible wish to return to a particular place, the nostalgic was now seen to suffer from an evidently impossible urge to return to a lost time.

Paul Grainge usefully distinguishes between the nostalgia mood, an emotional state he terms as a 'yearning for the past,' and the nostalgia mode, its cultural manifestations that will be discussed shortly.⁷⁴⁴ For Grainge, the nostalgia mood constitutes a form of 'idealised remembrance,' such that the longing experienced by the nostalgia sufferer both results from, and further contributes to, their idealisation of the past.⁷⁴⁵ Echoing Grainge, Hutcheon speculates whether it is the impossibility of recovering the past that creates nostalgia's emotional impact.⁷⁴⁶ Knowing that the past will always remain inaccessible, the nostalgic is drawn to the impossible fantasy of these idealised representations of the past. Complicating matters, Susan Stewart argues that since the subject must know that the object they seek is irretrievably lost, 'the nostalgic is enamoured of distance, not of the referent itself.'⁷⁴⁷ For Stewart, it is the loss of the past, rather than its idealisation, that sustains the nostalgia mood.

Echoing the perception of nostalgia as a state of idealised fantasy, Pam Cook places history, memory and nostalgia on a continuum corresponding to their apparent relationship with reality. The seeming objectivity of history sits at the opposing pole to the fantastical nostalgia, while memory sits between the two.⁷⁴⁸ Cook's continuum has the advantage of recognising how all three produce knowledge in distinct ways, avoiding the latent hierarchy that often subordinates nostalgia to the more "authentic"

⁷⁴³ I Kant, 1798, quoted in L Hutcheon, 1988, *ibid.*, p. 4

⁷⁴⁴ P Grainge, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 28

⁷⁴⁵ P Grainge, 2000, *ibid.*, p. 28

⁷⁴⁶ L Hutcheon, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 5

⁷⁴⁷ S Stewart, 1993, quoted in A Holdsworth, 2011, *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 97

⁷⁴⁸ P Cook, 2005, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*, London: Routledge, p. 3

forms of memory and history. Despite Cook's revalorisation of the category, traces of nostalgia's former status as a pathology remain as critics debate whether the yearning for an idealised past is particularly acute at times of significant sociocultural change. For instance, writing in 1979, Fred Davis describes the "nostalgia boom" of the 1970s as a retrenchment from the social upheaval of the previous decade.⁷⁴⁹ In contrast, Hutcheon takes up Bakhtin's argument that nostalgia constructs the present more than it does the past, with the result that the idealised golden age represented in nostalgia texts could relate to any period. When the past is represented as 'simple, easy, beautiful and harmonious,'⁷⁵⁰ the present – of any era – comes to appear 'complicated, contaminated, anarchic and difficult' by comparison.⁷⁵¹

Fredric Jameson's work marks a departure from discussing nostalgia in emotive, psychological terms. Instead, he proposes the nostalgia mode, a cultural form that both contributes to, and results from, the collapse of history. In his influential work on postmodernism, Jameson is careful to point out that for him, the term is a 'periodising concept,'⁷⁵² conflating postmodernism, the cultural style, with postmodernity, the era in which it appears.⁷⁵³ Further, Jameson associates cultural styles with different forms of social life and successive developments of capitalism. Drawing on Ernest Mandel's typology, he connects realism with the growing industrialisation of market capitalism, and modernism with monopoly capitalism.⁷⁵⁴ Finally postmodernism emerges as the cultural dominant of multinational, or late, capitalism.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁴⁹ F Davis, 1979 in P Grainge, 2000, op. cit., p. 28

⁷⁵⁰ L Hutcheon, 1998, op. cit., p. 4

⁷⁵¹ L Hutcheon, 1998, *ibid.*, p.4

⁷⁵² F Jameson, 1988, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society,' in EA Kaplan, Ed., 1988, *Postmodernism and its Discontents*, London: Verso, p. 15

⁷⁵³ L Hutcheon, 2010, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd Ed., London: Routledge, p. 24

⁷⁵⁴ F Jameson, 1991, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London: Verso, p. 35

⁷⁵⁵ F Jameson, 1988, op. cit., in EA Kaplan, Ed., 1988, op. cit., p. 15

Jameson's articulation of "late capitalism" appears to connect his theorisation of the postmodern with Marx's account of capitalism's final overthrow by the proletariat. Certainly, the Marxist understanding of history as a gradual progression toward a utopian society is evident in Jameson's conceptualisation of the term. Differing from Marx however, Jameson describes late capitalism as a decisive change within the economic order that marks a widespread transformation in economic and social life.⁷⁵⁶ Rather than concluding the process of overthrowing capitalism, Jameson argues that late capitalism 'constitutes the purest form of capital yet to have emerged,' since it allowed the commodification of areas formerly exempt from the exigencies of the market.⁷⁵⁷

Postmodernism's supposed complicity with commodity culture is central to Jameson's critique of this new era and cultural style. Whereas modernism presents an oppositional cultural form, Jameson argues that postmodernism emerged from a rejection of its elitist tendencies and the resulting domestication of modernist work as "classic."⁷⁵⁸ Now that the avant-garde work of Pablo Picasso and James Joyce is no longer considered so daring, Jameson argues that there is little scope for any contemporary artist to create work as defiantly original as Picasso or Joyce today.⁷⁵⁹ While Jameson argues that modernism critiques commodification, he contends that postmodernism is engaged in 'the consumption of commodification as process.'⁷⁶⁰ The postmodern rejection of elitism and its complicity with consumer culture find voice in some of the more striking formal features of postmodern culture, most notably in the erasure of the boundaries between mass and high culture.⁷⁶¹ One way in which this is

⁷⁵⁶ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. xxi

⁷⁵⁷ F Jameson, 1991, *ibid.*, p. 36

⁷⁵⁸ F Jameson, 1988, op. cit., in EA Kaplan, Ed., 1988, p. 13

⁷⁵⁹ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 27

⁷⁶⁰ F Jameson, 1991, *ibid.*, p. x

⁷⁶¹ F Jameson, 1988, op. cit., in EA Kaplan, Ed., 1988, p. 14

achieved is through the incorporation of mass cultural forms into high art and vice versa, such that the border between the two becomes increasingly difficult to trace.⁷⁶²

It is postmodernism's perceived alliance with capitalism and commodity culture that lies at the heart of Jameson's critique of the nostalgia film.

For Jameson, the advent of postmodernism has brought with it the demise of the bourgeois ego as a unique self, and with it, the death of the artist. This has specific consequences for postmodern culture, namely the replacement of parody with pastiche. Although both are essentially forms of mimicry, the differences Jameson highlights between the two are instructive. Flourishing under modernism, parody's comic and satirical power rested on three related assumptions:⁷⁶³ firstly, parody requires the ability to imitate an artist's unique style, such as William Faulkner's use of long sentences or DH Lawrence's nature imagery, in an exaggerated manner.⁷⁶⁴ Secondly, mimicking these individual styles necessitates the belief in the conception of a 'unique self' that has the ability to create its vision of the world in its own, particular way.⁷⁶⁵ Thirdly, parody requires the existence of norms in relation to which the artist's style is judged to be unique. The resulting parody thus implicitly calls up a number of related texts: the original work, whose distinction is upheld, the parodic text that imitates its style to comic effect, and the backdrop of ordinary artwork against which the work of the great artist is upheld.

However, postmodernism has engendered 'a linguistic fragmentation of social life to the point where the norm itself is eclipsed.'⁷⁶⁶ The heterogeneity of postmodern

⁷⁶² F Jameson, 1988, *ibid.*, in EA Kaplan, Ed., 1988, *ibid.*, p. 14

⁷⁶³ F Jameson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 16

⁷⁶⁴ F Jameson, 1991, *ibid.*, p. 16. Jameson provides further examples: 'Wallace Stevens' inveterate hypostasis of nonsubstantive parts of speech ("the intricate evasions of as"); the fateful (but finally predictable) swoops in Mahler from high orchestral pathos into village accordion sentiment; Heidegger's meditative-solemn practice of the false etymology of "proof" 1991, p. 16

⁷⁶⁵ F Jameson, 1988, *op. cit.*, in EA Kaplan, Ed., 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 17

⁷⁶⁶ F Jameson, 1991, *ibid.*, p. 17

culture incurs a loss of a generally understood norm to which an individual style can be compared and with it, a shared understanding of the great artist. Under such conditions, parody is no longer possible and pastiche emerges in its place. Unlike Dyer, who perceives the invocation of affect in the borrowing and distortive imitations of pastiche, for Jameson, pastiche is 'blank parody.'⁷⁶⁷ In the absence of any norm compared to which an imitation could provoke laughter, Jameson argues that pastiche lacks parody's comic, subversive potential. Since Jameson artistic innovation is no longer possible under postmodernism, Jameson describes the omnipresence of pastiche as inevitable.

Jameson's belief that postmodernism heralds the end of history leads him to propose an alternative definition of nostalgia. Distinct from the emotive yearning for the past discussed earlier, which he would deem characteristic of modernist anxiety, Jameson describes nostalgia as a cultural mode.⁷⁶⁸ The collapse of history, he argues, has paradoxically engendered an overwhelming interest in attempting to represent the past, culminating in the 'nostalgia film,' which represents the past 'through stylistic connotation, conveying "pastness" by the glossy qualities of image.'⁷⁶⁹

Anne Friedberg observes that Jameson places nostalgia films into three distinct categories: those such as *Chinatown* (Dir. Roman Polanski, 1974), which are about the past and set in the past; films that reinvent the past, such as *Star Wars* (Dir. George Lucas, 1977); and those that are set in the present but evoke the past as allegory, as Jameson describes *Blue Velvet* (Dir. David Lynch, 1986).⁷⁷⁰ *Star Wars* is described as metonymically a nostalgia film, since it does not attempt to represent the past, but

⁷⁶⁷ F Jameson, 1991, *ibid.*, p. 17

⁷⁶⁸ F Jameson, 1984, 'Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,' *New Left Review*, No. 146, p. 66

⁷⁶⁹ F Jameson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 19

⁷⁷⁰ A Friedberg, 1991, 'Les Flâneurs du Mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,' *PMLA*, Vol. 106, No. 3, p. 427

evokes – for adult spectators – the experience of watching the Saturday night serials of their youth.⁷⁷¹ Rather than granting cinema audiences a representation of the past, these films provide a glossy representation of “pastness,” where pop images and aesthetic style displace and deny the representation of “true” history.⁷⁷² Since Jameson notes that this cultural mode only becomes possible because of ‘the waning of history’ under postmodernism, the nostalgia film comes to be constructed as the defining symptom and leading cause of history’s demise.⁷⁷³

Significantly, Jameson describes one of this chapter’s case studies, *American Graffiti* (Dir. George Lucas, 1973), as the inaugural nostalgia film.⁷⁷⁴ Initiating a widespread cultural revival of the 1950s in the 1970s, Lucas’ film attempts to recapture the growing prosperity and insularity of the Eisenhower era. Observing this resurgent interest in the 1950s, Jameson examines why the era’s counterculture is sidelined in favour of its popular culture. In the 1950s themselves, Jameson argues that oppositional forms, such as Beat poetry and early rock and roll, had the requisite critical distance to represent the concerns of the period.⁷⁷⁵ However, it is mass culture, in the form of bestsellers and television series, from which the bulk of the cultural artefacts represented in *American Graffiti* are derived. These cultural forms, Jameson contends, lack the critical distance necessary to appraise the time in which they were produced. Rather than re-create the 1950s as it was really lived and felt, the film instead produces ‘the fifties,’ a simulacrum of pop cultural representations of an era that never truly existed.⁷⁷⁶ Mass culture’s lack of critical distance allows the nostalgia

⁷⁷¹ F Jameson, 1997, ‘The Nostalgia Mode and Nostalgia for the Present,’ in P Brooker and W Brooker, Eds., 1997, *Postmodern After-Images: A Reader in Film, Television and Video*, London: Arnold, p. 24

⁷⁷² F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., pp. 19-20

⁷⁷³ F Jameson, 1991, ibid., p. 21

⁷⁷⁴ F Jameson, 1988, op. cit., in EA Kaplan, Ed., 1988, op. cit., p. 18

⁷⁷⁵ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 280

⁷⁷⁶ F Jameson, 1991, ibid., p. 281

mode to provide an idealised representation of the past that covers over the period's flaws and injustices.

Films that purport to be set in the present while evoking the past are even more problematic for Jameson. The noirish *Body Heat* (Dir. Lawrence Kasdan, 1981) for instance, alludes to *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Dir. Tay Garnett, 1946) and *Double Indemnity* (Dir. Billy Wilder, 1944).⁷⁷⁷ Although *Body Heat* claims to be set in the present, the credits' art deco script prepares the spectator for a representation of the past.⁷⁷⁸ Further, given that there are no longer any individual styles – nor consequently stars – under postmodernism, William Hurt's performance evokes the style of classical Hollywood stars such as Clark Gable.⁷⁷⁹ Finally, the film's small town location lends itself more easily as a representation of the past, since it allows the director to avoid depicting high rise urban landscapes that might betray the film's modern setting.⁷⁸⁰ Representing the present through a pastiche of past texts, the contemporary era gains the glossy qualities Jameson associates with the nostalgia mode. Consequently, he asserts that the demise of history results in the loss of the timeline necessary to conceptualise the present, as well as the past, as a specific era.⁷⁸¹

Jameson's work has certainly been central to the theorisation of the postmodern. Nonetheless, his rejection of the nostalgia mode and the corresponding belief that historical perspective is no longer possible has been subject to widespread criticism. Jameson's detractors have centred firstly on his lack of engagement with the cinematic medium in which the nostalgia mode is apparently so dominant, while others, such as Grainge and Hutcheon, have formulated alternative conceptualisations

⁷⁷⁷ F Jameson, 1984, op. cit., p. 67

⁷⁷⁸ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 20

⁷⁷⁹ F Jameson, 1991, ibid., p. 20

⁷⁸⁰ F Jameson, 1991, ibid., p. 20

⁷⁸¹ F Jameson, 1984, op. cit., p. 68

of the past in order to locate the potential for subversion within postmodern art.⁷⁸² An example of the former strand of criticism comes from Vera Dika who, while not disputing Jameson's analysis of the films' *mise-en-scène*, questions how the representation of "pastness" might occur through the sensual qualities of the image itself.⁷⁸³ For instance, Dika highlights how the films' lighting, colour and texture may be manipulated to connote filmmaking styles of the past.⁷⁸⁴

Grainge meanwhile takes up Silverman's reading of retro fashion to propose the 'retro mode,' which, unlike Jameson's conceptualisation of the nostalgia mode, reflects on our access to representations of the past.⁷⁸⁵ Silverman describes how styles that borrow or quote from the past, in the manner that Jameson argues is characteristic of postmodern culture may not signal the end of history, but acknowledge how representations of the past exist only through textual traces in the present.⁷⁸⁶ Rather than resulting in pastiche, Silverman argues that the wearer of retro fashion complicates the division between old and new, inserting themselves into a series of cultural and historical references that are invoked ironically, in quotation marks. The contrast (and often affinity) between fashions across time has implications for understanding the relationship between past and present.⁷⁸⁷ 'Shaped by decades of representational activity,' the present is always constructed of past forms, and therefore never simply given or natural.⁷⁸⁸ Further, retro makes clear that the past is only available through textual forms, and even then, only as mediated through the

⁷⁸² For examples of the former, see V Dika, 2003; for examples of the latter, see Hutcheon, 2010.

⁷⁸³ V Dika, 2003, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 10

⁷⁸⁴ V Dika, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 10

⁷⁸⁵ Not to be confused with '*la mode retro*,' as Jameson describes the nostalgia mode.

⁷⁸⁶ K Silverman, 1986, in P Grainge, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 30

⁷⁸⁷ Silverman cites the interesting contrasts and similarities between 'fashions of the forties and the feminism of the eighties, or between fashions of the twenties and the "unisex look" of the late sixties,' in T Modleski, Ed., 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 151

⁷⁸⁸ K Silverman, 1986, *ibid.*, in T Modleski, Ed., 1986, *ibid.*, p. 151

present.⁷⁸⁹ The subversive potential of retro fashion was observed in the analysis of *Pretty in Pink*, which noted how Andie and Duckie wore fashions of the past to excess, so as to effect an implicit mockery of the conservative values typically associated with the wearers of such clothing. The retro thus indicates how critical distance might be re-introduced within postmodern culture.

Linda Hutcheon has been particularly vocal among critics who have challenged Jameson's theorisation of postmodernism. Rather than signalling the death of history, Hutcheon argues that postmodern reflections on its construction expose how historical meaning has always been textual and consequently 'unstable, contextual, relational and provisional.'⁷⁹⁰ Her work contrasts with Cook's view that history, unlike memory and nostalgia, provides an objective account of the past.⁷⁹¹ Rather, arguing that postmodern culture reveals how the past only becomes known through 'textual traces available in the present,'⁷⁹² Hutcheon contends that no objective, transparent access to the past is possible.

Hutcheon's re-conceptualisation of the possibilities of history stems from her alternative theorisation of the postmodern. Indeed for her, postmodern art 'at once inscribes and subverts dominant culture.'⁷⁹³ Hutcheon thus observes a doubled perspective in postmodern art that allows the producer or critic of such work to remain inside dominant culture, both enjoying and critiquing its wares. Hutcheon terms this doubled perspective 'complicitous critique,' observing the ability of postmodern culture to uphold and subvert culture from within its own boundaries.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁸⁹ K Silverman, 1986, *ibid.*, in T Modleski, Ed., 1986, *ibid.*, p. 150

⁷⁹⁰ L Hutcheon, 2010, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd Ed., London: Routledge, p. 64

⁷⁹¹ P Cook, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 2

⁷⁹² L Hutcheon, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 78

⁷⁹³ L Hutcheon, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 11

⁷⁹⁴ L Hutcheon, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 11

Disputing Jameson's argument that postmodernism can generate only pastiche, a 'value-free, decorative, de-historicised quotation of past forms,' Hutcheon asserts that parody remains possible and is significant in postmodern representations of history.⁷⁹⁵ Hutcheon does not deny the existence of pastiche, which she conceptualises as an uncritical search for a nostalgic, neoconservative recovery of the past.⁷⁹⁶ In this regard, she is particularly critical of television as a medium, which she sees as 'pure commodified complicity,' without the capacity for critique.⁷⁹⁷ In contrast, Hutcheon argues that postmodern parodic representations of the past always have a critical dimension.

For Hutcheon, an example of the possibilities offered by postmodern parodic representations of history is found in *Zelig* (Dir. Woody Allen, 1983). Allen's film parodically reifies the conventions of the documentary film, interspersing his fictional world with genuine historical footage and intertextual references to other works. Using the conventions of, and operating within, the economic paradigm of Hollywood cinema, *Zelig* can be seen to illustrate Hutcheon's theorisation of postmodernism's complicitous critique wherein subversion of postmodern culture occurs within its bounds. The audience's extra-textual knowledge of the Jewish persecution lends irony and pathos to Allen's portrayal of Zelig as a "human chameleon" who is pathologically compelled to assimilate those in his immediate surroundings.⁷⁹⁸ As a critique of the formation of subjectivity that occurs in the construction of stardom, whilst itself adding to the work of Allen as a distinctive *auteur*, *Zelig* provides an example of the reflection on the past that remains possible under postmodernism.

⁷⁹⁵ L Hutcheon, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 90

⁷⁹⁶ L Hutcheon, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 94

⁷⁹⁷ L Hutcheon, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 15

⁷⁹⁸ L Hutcheon, 2010, *ibid.*, p. 104

While Hutcheon asserts that any subversion of culture must occur from within that culture, Butler is likewise dismissive of the possibility of pure spaces outside of the prevailing matrix of norms from which to critique and undermine the primacy of those norms. Consequently, like Hutcheon, Butler also turns to parody as a means of enacting subversion from within. Butler's echo of Hutcheon's complicitous critique is most apparent in *Bodies that Matter* in which she proposes that 'parodic inhabiting of conformity,' that is, appearing to uphold the conventions of the law while subtly undermining them, might be an effective means of evading the interpellative structures of the heterosexual matrix.⁷⁹⁹

Four alternative ways of conceptualising the past have so far been identified:

- The nostalgia mood was described as an emotive longing for an irretrievably lost past. Although Stewart argues that it is its loss that increases its appeal, the nostalgia mood is generally understood to idealise the past.
- Fredric Jameson conceptualises nostalgia as a pervasive cultural mode that signals and embodies the collapse of history. The nostalgia mode is characterised by the obsessive attention to representing period details, which paradoxically only serves to demonstrate the subject's entrapment in the perpetual present, and the omnipresence of pastiche.

Both the nostalgia mood and the nostalgia mode superficially idealise the past, as either a lost "golden age" or in glossy pastiche that covers over the less palatable aspects of the period represented.

- Grainge's retro mode takes up Silverman's work on retro fashion, which claims that the wearers of such clothing evoke the past ironically, acknowledging that it

⁷⁹⁹ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 121

remains inaccessible except through the textual traces available in the present. The wearer thus becomes implicated in a complex web of signifiers that explore the relationship between past and present through double-coded irony.

- Linda Hutcheon's theorisation of postmodernism as complicitous critique enables her to reinstate parody within postmodern culture. Representing the past through postmodern parody, the subject's relationship to it is problematised, revealing that no transparent access to one true past exists.

In contrast to the nostalgia mood and the nostalgia mode, Grainge and Hutcheon indicate the possibility of looking critically back to the past. Their interventions propose ways of reflecting on the construction of the past in the present, and problematise our access to the past.

Adding a further layer of complexity, Barbara Creed observes Jameson's lack of attention to the representation of gender in the nostalgia film. For instance, she points out that despite his observation that *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 1981) evoke the experiences of watching the serials of the (adult) spectator's youth, and as such are metonymically nostalgia films, Jameson does not analyse the object of these spectators' nostalgia.⁸⁰⁰ In response, Creed proposes that it is the 'true heroes and distressed heroines,' the illusion of stable, clearly defined gender roles in these narratives that viewers desire to recapture.⁸⁰¹ Interestingly, she argues that *Raiders of the Lost Ark* both 'romanticises and parodies' the roles of hero and heroine, indicating the potential for representations of the past to subvert the expectation of clearly defined gender roles.⁸⁰² Indeed, arguing that nostalgia films can

⁸⁰⁰ B Creed, 1987, 'From Here to Modernity: Feminism and Postmodernism,' *Screen*, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 54

⁸⁰¹ B Creed, 1987, *ibid.*, p. 54

⁸⁰² B Creed, 1987, *ibid.*, p. 54

both inscribe and undermine the idealisation of gender relations of the past, Creed can be seen to echo Hutcheon's argument that postmodern art engages in a complicitous critique that both upholds and subverts dominant culture.

Creed's analysis of spectators' nostalgia for stable gender roles opens a space for the discussion of the role of time in articulating idealised gender in Butler's terms. Indeed, her work implies that differing models of idealised gender become idealised or undesirable as a result of the passing of time. In other words, ideals of gender roles alter according to the historical era in which they appear. Significant to the analysis of the Teen Movie, the age of the gendered subject can likewise be seen to transform the models of idealised gender that become available for approximation.

Constructions of the past hold an ambivalent position in Butler's work on gender. Indeed, her scepticism of a tendency for some feminists to look back for a time when gender relations were more equitable in a manner arguably similar to the nostalgia mood is clearly signalled in *Gender Trouble*.⁸⁰³ Butler acknowledges the lure of these endeavours, since if the origins of the heterosexual matrix could be established, then it might be equally possible to envisage its demise.⁸⁰⁴

Butler understands the quest for a pre-patriarchal past as an attempt to locate 'an alternative epistemic point of departure for a critical assessment of existing gender relations.'⁸⁰⁵ For Butler then, the search into the past represents an attempt to engineer critical distance on the present from a position outside the law. Ultimately however, she argues these attempts are deeply problematic, not least because the construction of a past prior to the heterosexual matrix ends by installing that very construct as its

⁸⁰³ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 47

⁸⁰⁴ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 48

⁸⁰⁵ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 51

inevitable result, further legitimising, rather than undermining its primacy.⁸⁰⁶ For Butler there is no space outside or prior to the prevailing matrix of norms. Rather, such a possibility is in fact the discursive effect of the matrix itself.

This chapter aims to assess how, and with what results, the four ways of relating to the past listed above are instantiated in two Teen Movies. Further, taking note of Creed's observations, I will explore how representations of the past inform the construction of gender. The chapter will proceed to engage in four interrelated tasks: to explore how characters within each film look back to the past, how the past itself is constructed and how the films represent the gender relations of the past. Finally, I examine how the films encourage the spectator to engage with their representation of the past.

4.2 – CASE STUDY 5: *AMERICAN GRAFFITI* (DIR. GEORGE LUCAS, 1973)

4.2.1 – INTRODUCTION

For Jameson, *American Graffiti* inaugurated the 'nostalgia film' as a new aesthetic discourse.⁸⁰⁷ The paradigmatic example of what Speed describes as the nostalgic teen movie, *American Graffiti* appealed to popular and critical tastes alike, earning four Oscar nominations and grossing \$115m at the box office.⁸⁰⁸ Indeed, Jeffrey Dennis notes that the success of *American Graffiti* led the way for multiple examples of film, television and popular music to construct the period after McCarthy and before Vietnam as a 'golden age' of youth culture.⁸⁰⁹ Although set only eleven years prior to its release in 1973, the film portrayed the early 1960s as an historical period, whose practices, ideals and culture were confined to the past.⁸¹⁰ Asking "Where were you in

⁸⁰⁶ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 48

⁸⁰⁷ F Jameson, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 19

⁸⁰⁸ JP Dennis, 2006, *Queering Teen Culture: All-American Boys and Same-Sex Desire in Film and Television*, London: Routledge, p. 126

⁸⁰⁹ JP Dennis, 2006, *ibid.*, p. 126

⁸¹⁰ T Shary, 2005, *op. cit.*, p. 46

'62?' the film's tagline amplifies the sense of a distant age long ago concluded. Further, the film's release itself followed shortly after the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam and congressional hearings on the Watergate scandal, reinforcing the perceived innocence of the period it portrays.⁸¹¹

American Graffiti depicts the last night of summer in 1962 as experienced by a disparate group of Californian teens. Although characters of both genders are given roughly equal screen time, the film's narrative coda reveals the fates of only the male teens featured, encouraging a greater focus on the four boys. The film's timeframe is mythic, as loosely structured vignettes portray the experiences of Steve, John, Terry and Curt, played by Ron Howard, Paul Le Mat, Charles Martin Smith and Richard Dreyfuss respectively, over the course of a single evening. On the point of leaving home and assuming the responsibilities of adulthood, the film's teens thematically embody the period as a liminal space between the perceived innocence of the 1950s and the political upheaval of the later 1960s.

Jameson's reading of *American Graffiti* as the paradigmatic nostalgia film sees the film constructs the past through a series of pop-cultural stereotypes.⁸¹² Nonetheless, Jameson does not analyse the film in close detail, nor as we have seen, does he consider how *American Graffiti* may provide a reflection on our access to the past. Addressing these points, this case study provides a close textual analysis of *American Graffiti*, and explores whether Lucas' film can solely be regarded as nostalgic or indeed as depthless pastiche.

⁸¹¹ D Marcus, 2004, *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p. 22

⁸¹² F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 16

4.2.2 – CONSTRUCTING THE PAST AT MEL’S DRIVE-IN

American Graffiti opens to indistinct snatches of voice and music – the sounds of a radio being tuned in – before finding and settling on “Rock Around the Clock” by Bill Haley and the Comets. As such, the radio can be seen to function as a framing device, placing the narrative that follows in quotation marks. David Shumway argues that, released seven years prior to the year in which the film was set, “Rock Around the Clock” was unlikely to be heard on a popular radio station in 1962.⁸¹³ Bill Haley’s song thus appears to be an arbitrary selection, intended merely to provide a general sense of the past. Shumway’s remarks echo Jameson’s discussion of the indiscriminate plunder of popular culture that characterises the nostalgia mode, which he argues merely conveys “‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion,’ thereby preventing possibility of creating an accurate account of the past.”⁸¹⁴

Vera Dika observes the many hard, reflective surfaces in the film’s initial shots, such as the large window surrounding the dining area of the drive-in and the cars’ ‘hard shine paint,’ further enhanced by the light that bounces off those surfaces.⁸¹⁵ Returning further distorted images in the lacquer of the car paint, Dika argues that these reflective surfaces demonstrate the film’s representation of the past as simulacral.⁸¹⁶ Consequently, this opening sequence can be seen to indicate the films’ intention to demonstrate the impossibility of accessing the truth of the past.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹³ DR Shumway, 1999, ‘Rock ‘n’ Roll Soundtracks and the Production of Nostalgia,’ *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 41

⁸¹⁴ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 19

⁸¹⁵ V Dika, 2003, op. cit., p. 90

⁸¹⁶ V Dika, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 90

⁸¹⁷ V Dika, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 90



FIGURE 4.1: MEL'S DRIVE-IN

Echoing Dika's assertion that the opening sequence destabilises our access to the past, the representation of tuning into a radio station marks "Rock Around the Clock" as a definitive choice. Rather than constituting an arbitrary use of music to convey a general sense of the past, the scene creates a sense of a wide array of possible songs on the radio's spectrum from which an unseen hand selects one. Consequently, the film reveals that the narrative that follows represents only one version of events. The demonstration of Haley's song as a choice can be seen to reflect Hutcheon's contention that postmodern culture succeeds in exposing history's pretence to a single, universal meaning and its reality as 'unstable, contextual, relational and provisional.'⁸¹⁸ The film's opening already suggests the impossibility of accessing a single, objective account of the past, and implicitly questions what alternative histories are sidelined when we tune into "Rock Around the Clock."

Haley's song is itself by no means a neutral choice for the film's opening. Widely heralded as the 'first rock and roll song,' it immediately evokes the inauguration of a particular generation and its counterculture.⁸¹⁹ However, the long shot of Mel's Drive-In, backlit only by the setting sun, provides a counterpoint between sound and image. While Bill Haley urges movement, to "rock around the clock," the image his song purportedly illustrates is morosely still, defying the song's

⁸¹⁸ L Hutcheon, 2010, op. cit., p. 64

⁸¹⁹ D Shumway, 1999, op. cit., p. 42

energy. Although the film has barely begun, the sun setting behind the drive-in on the last day of summer invites the impression that the countercultural era represented by rock and roll is drawing to a close. The contrast between sound that suggests the installation of a new era, and image, which indicates its demise, diegetically evokes the irretrievable loss associated with the nostalgia mood.

The presence of “Rock Around the Clock” at the opening of *Blackboard Jungle* (Dir. Richard Brooks, 1955) has implications for the decline of the glamorous teen rebel that is explored through the character of John Millner. The violent content of *Blackboard Jungle* combined with Bill Haley’s call to a collective youth culture were said to have provoked riots following the film’s initial screening. However, the setting sun that opens *American Graffiti* can be seen to indicate that the kind of mass youth rebellion portrayed in Brooks’ film and elsewhere may no longer be possible. Representing the demise of teen rebellion during the very period in which counterculture was said to have been thriving, the film echoes Creed’s question of whether audiences have always looked back to a time of ‘true heroes and distressed heroines,’ in this case exemplified by the figure of the glamorised teen rebel male.⁸²⁰ Consequently, the film’s reflection on the era’s counterculture is seen to question whether the teen rebel male ever truly existed.

The camera undeniably lingers on the cars’ primary colours and lavish chrome detailing. However, the connotations of the cars and the manner in which the characters arrive provide an efficient means of presenting information on the film’s key personalities. For example, Steve’s all-American wholesomeness and success are conveyed by his smooth entrance in a Cadillac. In contrast, as Terry bumbles into the drive-in on a white Vespa, he almost falling off and crashing into a bin, foretelling his

⁸²⁰ B Creed, 1987, op. cit., p. 54

later haplessness. Laurie's Cadillac indicates her equal status with Steve, confirmed by her position as Head Cheerleader to his Class President. Meanwhile, Curt's arrival in his Citroen 2CV illustrates his outsider status, and John's brash, yellow drag-racing car reveals his prioritisation of speed, and respect from other potential challengers over comfort and practicality. In contrast to Jameson's view that the representation of the commodity empties out meaning, *American Graffiti* presents the characters' vehicles as part of the film's expressive content.⁸²¹ Reflecting on the way in which the past comes to be represented, the film's opening scenes at Mel's Drive-In demonstrate the possibility of a reading that goes beyond the limitations of the nostalgia film, which it is said to exemplify.

4.2.3 – JOHN AND THE DEMISE OF THE TEEN REBEL

Voicing a desire to return to the past within the film itself, John provides a diegetic representation of the nostalgia mood. His tight white t-shirt, blue jeans and ostentatious car reflect the look of the 1950s juvenile delinquent. Indeed, the film's use of high saturation colour, exemplified by the bright yellow of John's prized car, recalls the lavish Warner Color of *Rebel Without a Cause*. Significantly, John is seen not only to represent the nostalgia mood, but to embody its more problematic consequences, as his entrance to the drive-in is overlaid by Steve's warning to Curt that staying in Modesto could cause him to "end up like John." For Steve, John's adherence to a model of teen rebel masculinity inspires pity, rather than the idealised status Buzz and Jim enjoyed in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Rather, *American Graffiti* presents John as approximating a model of masculinity that is no longer viable.

⁸²¹ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 9



FIGURE 4.2: JOHN MILLNER (PAUL LE MAT)

John's nostalgia for the recent past distinguishes him from the film's other characters. Indeed, reminiscing about better times cruising, he remarks to Curt that "it would have taken two hours, a whole tank of gas just to make one circuit." Dating this idyllic period as occurring five years previously, John reveals his age relative to the other characters, the majority of whom have only just left high school. Looking wistfully out of frame, John's nostalgia is enhanced by his awareness of being trapped in a role that no longer suits him. While Curt and Steve plan to reminisce at the freshman hop before leaving for college the following day, John shouts, "I'm going to be here, *having fun*, as usual." The anger in which this line is uttered suggests his frustration and entrapment in activities that no longer provide the enjoyment they once did.

The modifications to his car and the casual attitude with which he regards potential challengers reveal that over time, John has come to acquire the driving skill and mechanical knowledge to ensure that he is never beaten in a race. To put it another way, within a prescribed domain, John has come to assume the position of possessing the Phallus.⁸²² John's approximation of idealised masculinity, and his evident dissatisfaction, can be elucidated by Butler's argument that the gendered

⁸²² J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 59

subject is compelled repeatedly to produce approximations of idealised gender, which that subject is never able to instantiate.⁸²³ Notably, Butler's theorisation notes the duress under which gender is approximated. Indeed, it is clear that John is equally aware of, and frustrated by, his entrapment in "having fun as usual" – to continue to cite the norms of teen rebellion – but knows he cannot do otherwise.

John's age relative to the other characters has further implications for his approximation of idealised masculinity. As Steve's remarks on the threat of "staying seventeen forever" suggest, being like John is to be wedded to an ideal that is no longer appropriate. Complicating Butler's contention that idealised gender can never be fully instantiated, the spectre represented by John indicates how attributes of gender identity can become more or less idealised according to the age of the subject who embodies them. Both John's car and his reputation attest to the time it has taken him to instantiate the norms of idealised teen rebel masculinity. However, now too old to be regarded as a glamorous teen rebel, that status has become increasingly tenuous.

Indications of John's problematic identity are compounded by Carol, a precocious younger teen who John is duped into taking with him in his car. Too young yet to be a viable partner for John, she is treated as an undesirable pest. Carol's youth provides an interesting counterpoint to John's own age, and his ability to embody the norms of teen rebellion. When Carol plays with the radio, John objects strongly to her selection of a Beach Boys song, stating that "rock and roll has been going downhill ever since Buddy Holly died." John's remark reveals his nostalgia for the subversive counterculture embodied by early rock and roll, which differs from the carefree lyrics and close harmonies of the Beach Boys' music. Once again, the film's appropriation of the pop culture of the past has consequences beyond the creation of

⁸²³ J Butler, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 139

‘pervasive pastiche.’⁸²⁴ Rather, John’s objection to further developments in rock and roll indicates his recognition, and mourning, of the demise of rebel youth culture.

When a police officer warns John about one of his tail lights, their conversation reveals that he has become a familiar figure to the police. Highlighting his many earlier transgressions, the camera shows several other traffic citations screwed up in a compartment in the passenger door, leading Carol to remark “you’re a real JD!” Carol’s declaration indicates the way in which understanding of the juvenile delinquent had developed by 1962. Rather than the unknowable, dangerous figure Jim Stark presented in *Rebel Without a Cause*, the routine manner with which the police officer deals with John, and the facility with which Carol can identify him as conforming to a particular type, reveal that by this point the teen rebel has become known, documented and therefore no longer exotic or glamorous.

Carol’s classification of John as “a real JD” has consequences for Butler’s theorisation of recognition. As discussed, Butler follows Hegel’s contention that ‘recognition is the condition for a continuing and viable life.’⁸²⁵ The subject’s recognition is thus contingent on the existence of norms that create and govern the frame of reference of the human. Where there are no norms by which a subject can be recognised, Butler argues that ‘it is not possible to persist in one’s own being.’⁸²⁶ However, Carol’s recognition of John as “a real JD” only serves to indicate the decline of this character type. Indeed, as discussed in *Rebel Without a Cause*, part of the teen rebel’s potency was his volatility and unpredictability. In contrast, Carol’s recognition indicates John’s approximation of a particular set of conventions that have since come to be widely known and understood. Teen rebel identity is seen to necessitate the

⁸²⁴ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 19

⁸²⁵ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 236

⁸²⁶ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, ibid., p. 33

absence of a normative frame of reference by which it might be recognised. As a consequence, far from securing John's status, Carol's identification of him instead indicates the demise of the teen rebel as a viable identity.

The demise of the glamorous teen rebel is further illustrated when John and Carol take a walk around the scrap yard where he describes his past triumphs. As the camera tracks slowly backward, the pair are shown walking in long shot, allowing the spectator to take in the large number of cars piled up around them, each of which represents the death of a teen rebel. In the light of James Dean's glamorised road death, there is a stark knowingness to John's description of the scrap yard as "the graveyard." Pointing out cars from crashes that have featured in safety films, the film both robs drag racing of its former glamour and illustrates how genuine rebellion, rather than that staged to demonstrate its dangers, is no longer possible. Nonetheless, although the glamour of rebellion has declined, the piled-up cars signify that the danger of rebellion remains. Indeed, when Carol asks whether John has ever had an accident, he casts an eye around the assembled wreckages, before looking down, stating merely, "you have to be careful." Whereas Butler's theorisation of the subject's repeated approximations of gender underscored the compulsion of the process, and the dark comedy in its inevitable failure, there is pathos in John's apparent acceptance that drag racing may bring about his early death.⁸²⁷

Despite his awareness of the dangers racing involves, John recognises the inevitability of continuing to perform the norms of teen rebel identity. He therefore accepts Stetson-clad outsider Bob Falfa's challenge to race him at Paradise Road. Revving their car engines, the close-ups of the two drivers' faces watching each other, along with a clearly terrified Laurie alongside Falfa, can be seen to reference the looks

⁸²⁷ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 189

exchanged between Buzz and Jim in the *Rebel Without a Cause* “Chickie Run.” Further, starting the race with a flash of his torch, Terry takes the place of Judy in the earlier film. As the two cars speed away, the camera keeps its distance, such that it becomes difficult to tell which driver is winning. However, Falfa’s car veers off the road, flips over and finally bursts into flames in an adjacent field, such that John wins the race by default. Whereas the Chickie Run culminated in Buzz’s death, Falfa and Laurie walk away from the burning car unharmed. Nonetheless, the race is not without significance, as the dramatic crash reunites Laurie and Steve, compelling him to stay.

Playing at the beginning of the scene, Booker T and the MGs’ “Green Onions” resumes following the crash, apparently without interruption. The song’s steady, constant rhythm and repeated bass refrain convey John’s undiminished compulsion to cite the norms of teen rebel masculinity. However, there are consequences for John’s reputation as a drag racer. The camera tracks alongside John and Terry discussing the race as they walk back to the car. While John argues that he was losing the race prior to the crash, Terry remains convinced that he “will always be number one ... the greatest.” Although he initially disputes Terry’s version of events, John eventually accepts the victory accorded to him. Situated far behind the two cars on the side of the road, the camera position during the race made the victor unclear before Falfa’s car veered off the track. In the absence of a flashback, the film audience cannot therefore verify whose interpretation is correct. As John begins to take on Terry’s view, the film can be seen to provide a reflection on how one particular view of the past comes to be privileged.

Positioned closer to the camera during his discussion with John, the tracking shot can be seen to accord greater importance to Terry even as he affirms John to be “the greatest.” This discontinuity can be elucidated by Butler’s work which argues that

the masculine position – that of possessing the Phallus – is critically dependent on the subject who embodies the Phallus to ‘reflect its power.’⁸²⁸ While earlier incarnations of the teen rebel trope, such as Buzz in *Rebel Without a Cause* or Danny in *Grease*, were seen to be dependent on a gang to uphold their status, John has only Terry, marked throughout the film as an embodiment of weakness. As the other characters quickly disperse after the crash, the wide plains in the background emphasise the pair’s vulnerability and aloneness. Consequently, the scene indicates the significance of the identity and status of the subject who upholds the authority of the subject occupying the masculine position. Concluding the conversation with “we’ll take them all,” John’s reliance on Terry to secure his reputation in the drag races in which he is to participate in the future finally confirms his diminished status.

4.2.4 – IDEALISED ROMANCE IN *AMERICAN GRAFFITI*

American Graffiti appears to present Steve and Laurie as an idealised teen couple. However, throughout the film it is clear that the two characters have different expectations of their relationship, which in turn reflect the changing social and sexual mores between the pre-political 1960s and the forthcoming social upheaval of the latter part of the decade.⁸²⁹

At the beginning of the film, a medium close-up inside Steve’s car brings us into his attempt to break up with Laurie. When he struggles to articulate his wishes, Laurie confidently relays the conversation so far, reminding him that “you were leading up to something kind of big.” Smiling and looking into Steve’s eyes, it is clear both that Laurie expects Steve to ask her to marry him, and that were he to do so, she

⁸²⁸ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 59

⁸²⁹ V Dika, 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 90 describes the early years of the 1960s as ‘pre-political’ in order to distinguish this period, which she argues is strongly evocative of the 1950s, from the ‘1960s-proper,’ which she deems a period of substantial political disruption. The threshold between these two periods, she argues, is the assassination of President Kennedy on November 23 1963 (p. 62).

would accept. His remark that she makes it appear as though he were “giving dictation” reveals the perceived inevitability of marriage as the next logical step for their relationship. However, dashing Laurie’s expectations, Steve ineptly proceeds to state his wish to date other people while he is at college, reassuring her that upon his return, their relationship will resume. Read through Butler’s work, the pair’s competing wishes – one for marriage, the other for multiple partners – can be seen as symptomatic of the constancy of the heterosexual matrix, even as the conventions through which it is expressed transform over time.

Later at the hop, Laurie and Steve respectively discuss plans for the future of their relationship in the female and male bathrooms. That the characters are only able to discuss their feelings in a single sex environment, typically understood as a private space, is revealing of the limited expectations of the heterosexual relationship. In the female toilets, a medium shot portrays Laurie and Peg preening themselves in the mirror as they discuss Steve’s departure. Peg reassures Laurie that her status as senior prom queen means that a number of boyfriends will be available to her, demonstrating Peg’s considerably more casual attitude to relationships. Laurie’s continued wish to be regarded as belonging to Steve is signalled by putting on the necklace she had calmly discarded earlier in the car. She then muses wistfully “I just wish I could go with him or something.” Peg’s dismissive “jeez, Laurie, come on” indicates that even in 1962, Laurie’s yearning for marriage was considered retrograde. The portrayal of the girls’ stark difference in attitude denies the stability and clarity of gender roles that Creed argues audiences seek in the past.⁸³⁰ Moreover, Butler’s theorisation of gender as an approximation of a regularised fantasy allows the scene to be viewed as indicating that

⁸³⁰ B Creed, 1987, op. cit., p. 54

the idealised positions sought in representations of the past, have always been fantastical and thus impossible to embody.⁸³¹

The position of the camera allows us to take in the spectacle of other girls preening themselves in preparation for the hop. The disparate perspectives embodied by Laurie and Peg are thus further pluralised by the other girls, whose presence indicates the potential for still more ways of thinking. However, as Head Cheerleader, the film presents Laurie as an embodiment of idealised femininity and consequently privileges her stance.⁸³² Presenting multiple examples of femininity, while making clear that only one of those models is idealised, the film can be seen to reveal the mechanisms Hutcheon identifies through which historians ‘suppress, repeat, subordinate, highlight and order’ the various texts of history in order to produce a single, coherent account of the past.⁸³³ In foregrounding this very process, Hutcheon argues that postmodern representations of the past critique and destabilise the purportedly totalising accounts of history. Refuting the belief that gender roles were ever stable and clearly defined, *American Graffiti* instead presents multiple examples of femininity of the past.

The layout of the boys’ toilets is diametrically opposed to that used by Laurie and Peg. Whereas the mirrors in the girls’ toilets were located on the right of the screen, the one in the boys’ toilets is found on the left. Equally, just as Laurie was accompanied by Peg, so Steve discusses his plans with Peg’s boyfriend. The *mise-en-scène* can thus be seen to correspond to Butler’s theorisation of discursively-produced sexual difference, which constructs gender as oppositional binary.⁸³⁴ When asked how Steve’s plans to leave for college will affect his relationship with Laurie, that is, does he

⁸³¹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 192

⁸³² Roz Kaveney discusses the cheerleader as part of a social elite, 2006, op. cit., p. 85

⁸³³ L Hutcheon, 2010, op. cit., p. 64

⁸³⁴ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 31

plan to marry her, Steve discloses the plan to date other people while he is away. The wry smile and playful gesture with which Steve meets his friend's response "you mean screwing around?" reveals that this is the true nature of his plan, rather than the insincere ramblings to which Laurie was subjected. Shary's assertion that many teen films of the 1970s hinged on a 'nostalgia for the early post-war era where young men still felt a sense of superiority over women,' provides one answer to Creed's question of what it is that spectators seek from the nostalgia film.⁸³⁵ Significantly, the wholesome appearance created by Steve's boyish freckles, ginger hair and gingham shirt, jar with his disregard for Laurie, suggesting that the era itself is likewise not as innocent as it initially appears, and not to be mourned.

Laurie spends much of the hop huffily appearing to ignore Steve, going as far as dancing with his friend, aiming both to attract his attention and to indicate her nonchalance at his departure. Nonetheless, the two characters are required to appear together for one final slow waltz. Announced as "former class president" and "current head cheerleader," Steve and Laurie are constructed as representations of idealised masculinity and femininity for the assembled crowd. As a spotlight shines on the pair, Laurie whispers to Steve to "smile for God's sake," aware that her position as embodiment of the Phallus requires the crowd's acknowledgement.

Other teens make space to accommodate the pair and, as the music starts to play, Laurie and Steve begin their dance. Both the ritual of the slow waltz itself and the music to which they dance evokes idealised heterosexual romance. Although the version of "Smoke gets in Your Eyes" heard in *American Graffiti* is a 1958 cover by The Platters, the song recalls the seemingly effortless dance, and easy compatibility between Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in *Roberta* (Dir. William A Seiter, 1935). For

⁸³⁵ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 45

Butler, 'a citation is at once an interpretation of the norm and an occasion to expose the norm itself as a privileged interpretation.'⁸³⁶ Consequently, Laurie and Steve's dance can be seen as a further example of a romantic slow dance and an opportunity to undermine the very convention of the romantic slow dance. Exploring how Laurie and Steve's citation of idealised romance fails to live up to the ideal, the slow dance provides the occasion to expose the contingency of the heterosexual matrix.

The music, vocal quality and rhythm create the conditions for a romantic slow dance. Indeed, demonstrating the continued power of romantic ritual, the couple's citation of the slow dance succeeds in reuniting them despite their earlier disagreement. However, the lyrics of "Smoke gets in your Eyes" claim that "all who love are blind," establishing romance as a state of self-deception and inevitable disillusionment. A medium close-up of Laurie clutching Steve in a close embrace illustrates the scene's ambiguity. As she is revealed to be silently crying at his imminent departure, the film's representation of the slow dance is seen to foreground the power of romantic rituals, even as they are undermined. Further, in so clearly highlighting the contrast between the promise of romance and its approximation, *American Graffiti* can be seen to reflect Butler's contention that the norms of idealised gender are impossible to instantiate.

As they dance, Laurie and Steve reminisce about the past and dispute who instigated their relationship. While Steve claims he asked Laurie out and that their first kiss occurred at the canyon, Laurie reminds him that it was she who initiated their relationship on "backwards day" and that their first kiss occurred at the lake. While Laurie corrects Steve's account of events, she continues to smile at members of the

⁸³⁶ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 108

assembled crowd, indicating her understanding of the importance of maintaining the appearance of idealised romance.

Steve's poor memory is referenced throughout the film. Indeed, during their earlier conversation in the car, we saw how Laurie had to remind Steve of the content of their discussion as he repeatedly asked himself "where was I?" Later, putting pressure on Laurie to have sex with him before his departure, Steve's method of persuasion centres on the idea of creating a souvenir of their relationship, as he puts it, "something to remember you by." The fragility of personal memory and the consequences for the construction of the past are made apparent in the slow dance scene, as the film cuts from a medium shot of the couple dancing, to a long shot from the perspective of the assembled crowd. While the film audience's privileged, closer position allows us to see that Laurie is crying, the diegetic audience see only a romantic couple in a loving embrace. The potential for distortion is further conveyed by the dance's *mise-en-scène*, as the spotlight frequently shines directly into the camera dazzling the spectator and obscuring their view of the dance. Representing how perception of the past might be altered by different perspectives on the same event, the film can be seen to trouble our access to the past, and reflect on how constructions of the past may be distorted. Once again, rather than blocking our access to the past as Jameson argues, *American Graffiti* exposes the numerous perspectives from which history might be produced and reveals how one prevailing version comes to prominence.

4.2.5 – TERRY, DEBBIE AND IDEALISTIC YOUTH

When Steve lends his Cadillac to Terry at the beginning of the film, Terry's response that he will "love and protect and cherish" this "superfine machine" makes immediately clear that the car represents more to him than a means of transport. The film's opening scenes at the drive-in make much of the centrality of automobiles to

the era's youth culture. Car ownership is also shown to be significant to the construction of teen masculinity. Indeed, when Terry asks the waitress out to the drive-in cinema, her scoffing rejection: "you've got to be kidding me!" is as much directed at his Vespa and its unsuitability for a date at a drive-in, as it is for the hapless teen himself. Consequently, Steve's Cadillac can be seen to provide a gateway for a whole arena of youth experience previously foreclosed to him. In contrast to John who acknowledges his entrapment in the past, or Curt and Steve, who attend the Hop in order to recapture their high school days, the film portrays Terry as naïvely optimistic about the possibilities afforded by the future.

Dika and Dennis both identify Terry as a representation of working-class youth.⁸³⁷ Arguably then, the film's reference to experiences from which he is excluded provides a reflection on the construction of class in the early 1960s. Dika argues that the film's audience is all too aware of class divisions that ensured 'middle class kids went to college ... [while] working class kids went to war.'⁸³⁸ As such, while Jameson decries what he perceives as the film's needless display of the era's commodity culture that lacks the critical distance to provide a representation of the past, Terry's idealisation of the car and its likely impact on his life can be seen to provide a reflection on the class divisions of the period.⁸³⁹

The representation of cruising as a new opportunity for Terry paradoxically allows the film to portray the activity in the manner associated with the nostalgia mood – as both idealised and irretrievably lost. In an interview with Steve Farber, director George Lucas states his intent to represent cruising as a practice particular to

⁸³⁷ See V Dika, 2003, op. cit., p. 92; and JP Dennis, 2006, op. cit., p. 127

⁸³⁸ V Dika, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 92

⁸³⁹ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 19

those who grew up in 1950s and 1960s America.⁸⁴⁰ Indeed, as a short montage depicts cars driving up and down a wide, darkened street, the street lights allow the camera to linger on and highlight the cars' chrome detailing. Overlaid with the sounds of laughter and the periodising detail of Del Shannon's song "Runaway," shots of the cars themselves are intercut with brief shots of teens kissing in a car in silhouette, and others talking to each other from within their cars. Together, these images create an impression of an idealised, carefree youth that is irretrievably lost, providing a nostalgic representation of cruising.

Indicating John's centrality to the town's cruising culture, the camera tracks alongside his distinctive car before the film cuts to a medium shot portraying his relaxed, comfortable pose within. After a brief dialogue between John and another driver, the film portrays Terry in the same way: tracking alongside his car, before a medium shot shows him smirking with one arm on the steering wheel in a pose that aims to project confidence and ease. Echoing the manner in which John was portrayed, the film reveals the aspirations that Terry hopes will accrue from cruising. Of course, given the earlier discussion of John as problematically rooted to an identity of the past, there is irony in Terry's desire to emulate a model which has already been shown to be demonstrably flawed. The scene thus both exemplifies Butler's argument of the impossibility of embodying idealised masculinity, while also making clear that the ideal to which Terry aspires is itself an imperfect approximation.⁸⁴¹

This mimicry has further implications for the portrayal of cruising as nostalgic. Despite Terry's belief that cruising will change his life for the better, a series of encounters with other drivers soon disabuses him of this naïve impression. To

⁸⁴⁰ S Farber, 1974, 'George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time,' *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3, p.

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⁸⁴¹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 182

illustrate, after Terry is taunted by another driver who remarks that the “beautiful car” is “a waste of machinery” when driven by him, a group of girls jeer at and mock him. Terry attempts to regain a measure of control as he waits alongside another male driver at a traffic light. A close-up of Terry as he revs the car highlights his effort to be perceived as a potential racer. However, his claim to dominance is soon negated by his obvious inexperience, as he mistakes the traffic signals and reverses meekly back to his spot, before abruptly backing into the car behind. The contrast between Terry’s impression that Steve’s car holds the potential to allow him to embody idealised masculinity and the reality he experiences, can be seen both to reflect on and dispel the illusion of an idyllic, uncomplicated past. Rather, by demonstrating Terry’s continued clumsiness as a driver, *American Graffiti* can be seen to echo Butler’s view that idealised gender was never possible.

Terry’s fortunes change when he sees Debbie walking alongside the road. As the camera tracks to follow her pace, she is seen to walk through a large group of men who shout and whistle at her, indicating her desirability and vulnerability. Intrigued by Terry’s claim that she closely resembles actor Connie Stevens, Debbie accepts his invitation for a ride in his car. As she gets into the Cadillac, Debbie starts to stipulate her expectations for any prospective male partner: to have a reasonable looking – and well upholstered – car, to drive aggressively, and to pay for all food and alcohol.

Much like his attempts at cruising, Terry’s efforts to meet those expectations prove comically inept. At the off-license, he is quickly identified as under-age, and his request to another customer to buy alcohol on his behalf ends with the older man absconding with his cash, leading to a further humiliation: asking Debbie for money. Aghast at this tampering with the natural order of things, she states emphatically, “girls don’t pay, *guys* pay.” Debbie’s statement, uttered as though citing a known

universal law, can be seen to speak to the audience's belief that the past provided clearly defined gender roles that have subsequently been undermined.⁸⁴² Despite her stated views, Debbie hands over her money, disputing the fixity of those gendered positions even as their stability is seemingly assured. By invoking and immediately undermining the clarity of gender roles of the past, *American Graffiti* represents the lure of nostalgia, while questioning whether gender roles of the past were as stable as is often assumed.

Gender roles are further destabilised as the evening progresses. Indeed, it is Debbie, rather than Terry, who revels in the possibility of seeing the mythical "goat killer" by the lake that evening, and Terry whose intolerance to alcohol causes him to vomit. His attempts to live up to Debbie's expectations become ever more ridiculous when, upon hearing that a former boyfriend enjoyed hunting, he claims to have owned several "hunting ponies," which he subsequently sold for the Cadillac, and currently possesses a Jeep he occasionally "plays around in." The absurdity of Terry's lies contributes to the sense that the masculine ideals of the past are being lampooned. In parodically representing Debbie's expectations of a male partner and Terry's equally ridiculous attempts to fulfil those requirements, *American Graffiti* can be seen to parody, and undermine, the nostalgic desire Creed identifies for the supposedly stable gender roles of the past.⁸⁴³

Terry and Debbie's evening together continues in a series of misadventures, including the theft of Steve's car, and Terry getting into a fight from which John has to rescue the pair. Their misfortune is emphasised by their position in the gutter of the drive-in, as feet of other customers pass in the back of the shot, as seen in Figure 4.3. Despondent Terry finally reveals that he drives only a Vespa, and that the collection of

⁸⁴² B Creed, 1987, op. cit., p. 54

⁸⁴³ B Creed, 1987, *ibid.*, p. 54

cars he claimed to earlier was a fabrication. Nonetheless, Debbie remains positive about their relationship, stating that, “a scooter is almost a motorcycle and I just love motorcycles.” As Debbie rewrites her expectations to make Terry a viable partner in spite of his failure to fulfil the parameters she initially established, the film can be seen to demonstrate the arbitrary and contingent construction of gender.⁸⁴⁴



FIGURE 4.3: DEBBIE (CANDY CLARK) AND TERRY (CHARLES MARTIN-SMITH) REFLECT ON THEIR EVENING

Debbie muses that she had a “great time” with Terry, contradicting the audience’s knowledge of her reaction to the evening’s events as they were taking place. Although many characters reminisce about the past in *American Graffiti*, only the events of Debbie’s recollection are seen to unfold on screen. On this occasion alone, then, the film’s audience is able to judge the accuracy of a personal memory. Listing their misadventures, Debbie remarks that they “saw a hold-up ... got your car stolen, and then we got into this really bitchin’ fight. I really had a good time.” Jameson’s conceptualisation of the nostalgia film would position Debbie’s positive spin on an evening in which we saw her frequently fearful and bored as a demonstration of the ‘flattening of history’ that occurs under postmodernism.⁸⁴⁵ However, since we see how Debbie’s idyllic recollection follows an apparently calamitous evening, the scene

⁸⁴⁴ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 185

⁸⁴⁵ F Jameson, 1984, op. cit., p. 34

should be understood to foreground – and parody to comic effect – the process through which an idealised past comes to be constructed. Indeed, seeing how Debbie distorts the account of the evening spent with Terry invites the viewer to question the accuracy of other characters' reminiscences in the film.

4.2.6 – CURT, MYTH AND THE SEARCH FOR THE PHALLUS

Unlike Steve, who is resolute in his decision to leave until the film's final scenes, Curt wavers between leaving and staying and discusses the options available to him with many of the characters he encounters. Those who urge Curt to leave, refer to the possibilities of experience and adventure that his departure would certainly offer. However, Curt dismisses the lure of novelty, musing that there is little merit to "leaving old friends to make new ones." The centrality of Curt's decision is signalled early in the film. As the characters part ways at the drive-in, the film cuts between a medium shot of Laurie, Steve and John, another of Terry and one more of Curt. Whereas the shots of the other characters are level, that of Curt is shot at a low angle, indicating his importance to the film. The narrative that follows thus portrays the experiences that ultimately contribute to his decision to leave.



FIGURE 4.4: "A GODDESS IN A T-BIRD"

For Sodowsky, Sodowsky and White, Curt's encounter with a mysterious blonde woman exemplifies the epic, mythical qualities of *American Graffiti*.⁸⁴⁶ Shortly after reminiscing with John, asking "where's the dazzling beauty I've been searching for my whole life," Curt spots a woman driving a white Thunderbird while travelling to the Hop with Steve and Laurie. Cutting between Curt and the white car in a shot/reverse shot pattern, the film depicts his growing interest, while the woman is backlit by the light of a shop window behind her, emphasising her long, white-blond hair. As she turns off the road shortly after appearing to state "I love you" to Curt, he excitably declares the woman as "the most perfect, dazzling creature" he ever saw, an embodiment of idealised femininity who, read through Butler's terms, appears to occupy the position of embodying the Phallus.⁸⁴⁷ Tellingly, it is the mystery of the encounter that allows Curt to construct her as the superlative embodiment of idealised femininity, for whom he spends the remainder of the film searching.

Curt's search for the mysterious Thunderbird driver leads him to Laurie's friends, rebel gang the Pharaohs, and finally to solicit the assistance of DJ Wolfman Jack. Interestingly, his investigation yields no firm knowledge of the woman, rumoured variously to be a local prostitute, or predatory married woman. Her status as a semantic void that can be occupied by any identity can be seen to correspond to Butler's conceptualisation of the embodiment of the Phallus. Indeed, for Butler to "be" the Phallus is to provide a 'site of masculine self-elaboration ... to signify the Phallus through "being" its Other, its absence, its lack.'⁸⁴⁸ Consequently, the mystery of the woman's identity only serves to confirm her status as the idealised embodiment of the Phallus.

⁸⁴⁶ A Sodowsky, R Sodowsky, S White, 1975, 'The Epic World of *American Graffiti*,' *Journal of Popular Film*, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 48

⁸⁴⁷ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 56

⁸⁴⁸ J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 59

A mythic quality likewise attaches to the DJ Wolfman Jack, whose distinctive, rasping voice is heard both within individual cars, and pervades much of the film's extra-diegetic soundtrack to create a 'nostalgic sonic space.'⁸⁴⁹ The transgressive qualities of the era's nascent youth culture are amplified by rumours about the Wolfman, and his method of broadcasting. Discussing the DJ with John, Carol mentions that her mother won't allow her to listen to the Wolfman's programme at home, "because he's a negro." This brief dialogue can be seen to illustrate Dika's contention that, in highlighting the contrast in mores between the time of the film's setting, and that of its release, *American Graffiti* reveals, rather than effaces, history.⁸⁵⁰ Further, in casually noting the racial prejudice of the period, the film can be seen to warn the contemporary audience against yearning for this period, when the civil rights movement had yet to gain the momentum that by 1964 would result in legislation prohibiting racial segregation and discrimination in voting rights, in turn making the term "negro" considerably more taboo.



FIGURE 4.5: WOLFMAN AS MYTH



FIGURE 4.6: WOLFMAN IN REALITY

The mythic status of the Wolfman and his programme is further enhanced by Carol's claim that he "broadcasts from a plane that flies around and around in circles." Diminishing the possibility that Carol's speculation is merely the product of childish fantasy, the Pharaohs likewise debate the Wolfman's whereabouts in similarly fanciful terms. While one claims that the DJ broadcasts from the Mexican border, another

⁸⁴⁹ DR Shumway, 1999, op. cit., p. 28

⁸⁵⁰ V Dika, 2003, op. cit., p. 90

argues (correctly) that his studio is located just outside town. Dismissing this prosaic explanation, the first Pharaoh argues this is merely a clearing station “to fool the cops.” Once again, the representation of popular culture allows *American Graffiti* to reflect on the transgressive quality of the era’s youth culture.

Knowing that the youth of Modesto all listen to the Wolfman’s programme, Curt heads to the small, isolated radio station at the edge of town to request a dedication that will enable him to track down the mysterious Thunderbird driver. As he enters the studio, a glass wall divides him from the DJ, obscuring his face to create the emblematic silhouette seen in Figure 4.5. Beckoned into the studio, Curt discovers that this man is not in fact the Wolfman, but an employee of the studio who plays his recorded voice, such that, as he puts it, “the Wolfman is everywhere.” Keen to build up his employer’s status, the man remarks on “the places he talks about that he’s been, the things he’s seen.” Rather than diminish his status, or imply that the youth culture he symbolises is based on little more than a derivative recording, the Wolfman’s lack of tangible presence only serves to bolster his status, much as the mystery of the Thunderbird driver increases her allure. Indeed, the Wolfman’s lack of physical presence serves to grant him an omnipresence and power that his corporeality could never permit.

Of course, as Curt leaves the studio, he turns to see the man speaking into the microphone in the Wolfman’s distinctive voice, demonstrating the DJ’s awareness of the necessity of appearing to possess the Phallus for his youth audience, a position which the sight of him eating rapidly defrosting popsicles alone in an isolated studio would soon dispel. The revelation of the Wolfman’s true identity problematises the promise of a “big wonderful world out there” to which he had referred in the studio, and with it, the potential of experience. Indeed, pausing briefly outside the studio,

Curt appears to note that the edge of town is in darkness, such that only a void lies beyond. The collapse of the myth of the Wolfman comes at a point in the film when a number of events puncture the teens' idealism; when Debbie discovers Terry's deception, and Bob Falfa challenges John's status as the town's lead racer. These disappointments arguably prefigure the collapse of idealism portrayed by the film's epilogue.

Despite these disillusionments, the Thunderbird driver retains her mystery when she calls the payphone Curt specified in the dedication delivered by the Wolfman. Although confirming her love for Curt, the woman nevertheless continues to prove evasive, proposing only that should he cruise Third Street, he might find her there again. When she abruptly hangs up, a medium shot of Curt's face reveals his acceptance both of his decision to leave that morning, and, since her vague rendezvous will occur the evening after his departure, that he will never discover the woman's identity. Read through Butler's theorisation of gender, Curt's contentment never to meet the woman can be perceived as a need to maintain the illusion that the embodiment of the Phallus exists somewhere, and as such that it may be possible to instantiate idealised masculinity. In contrast to the Wolfman, the unknown woman maintains her position as an embodiment of idealised femininity, if only as an impossible fantasy.

An abrupt juxtaposition is created by the cut between a medium close-up of Curt's resolute expression as he realises that he will never be able to discover the identity of the elusive Thunderbird driver, and a crane shot showing his friends and family assembled at an airfield the following day. The contrast between the darkness in which the majority of the film takes place and the bright blue skies of the airfield creates the impression of the inauguration of a new era. Whereas Steve spent much of

the film persuading Curt of the benefits of leaving, this new order sees him bidding Curt farewell, with shrugging, evasive reassurances that he will join his friend the following year. The unlikelihood of Steve doing so is indicated through costume, as his yellow shirt can be seen to echo the hue of Laurie's dress and Terry's shirt, indicating his affiliation with the characters that will permanently remain in the town. The camera follows Curt onto the plane as he takes his seat, such that the film can be seen to place greater importance on his departure than on the other characters he leaves behind. Looking from the plane window, he spots a white car, not dissimilar to that driven by the woman for whom he was searching a few hours earlier, tracking the path of the plane. Watching the car, Curt's gaze can be seen to signal that, rather than renouncing his search to possess the Phallus as the film had earlier indicated, his departure from the town perpetuates that quest.

The film dissolves to a shot of the plane in the distance moving across a cloudless blue sky. With only the gentle whirr of the engines in the background, the futures of the four lead characters are slowly listed in sequence. For *Speed*, the epilogue shows the teens' apparently inconsequential actions to have lasting significance, and as such reveals the film's fundamental conservatism.⁸⁵¹ Certainly, John's adherence to the norms of teen rebel identity arguably leads to his death the following year by a drunk driver, while Terry's comical clumsiness becomes ominous in the light of his disappearance in *An Loc*. Steve's decision to postpone college that year means, predictably, that he will never leave the town, and instead becomes an insurance agent. Equally, having departed, Curt never returns, forging a career as a writer in Canada.

⁸⁵¹ L Speed, 1998, op. cit., p. 27

The dispersal of all four leads can be seen to indicate that the era and qualities embodied by those characters are irretrievably lost. Dika goes further, arguing that the film's epilogue portrays the characters' literal or symbolic death as the result of the Vietnam War.⁸⁵² The potential represented by Steve and Curt suffers a 'symbolic' and 'cultural' death respectively, as the former class president settles down in the very town the film portrayed him so keen to escape.⁸⁵³ Likewise, Curt's assumed political exile in Canada as a result of his refusal of the draft shows the dimming of the bravery and judgement he displayed in his exploits with the Pharaohs. Further, the idealism embodied by Terry and his hopes for a future with Debbie, are tragically curtailed by the war. Finally, the inevitable death of the teen rebel stands in for the demise of counterculture and its ability to provide lasting subversion.

The demise of the film's main characters, and the values they embody, encourages the era to be viewed in terms of the nostalgia mood – the yearning for an idealised past that is irretrievably lost. However, the film's destabilisation of its apparently idealised representation of the early 1960s invites the impression that it may be the loss of the past that invites its interpretation as an idyllic "golden age." Pointing to the difficulty in regarding *American Graffiti* as nostalgic, the exclusive focus on the male characters emphasises the loss of male potential, inviting the idealisation of the period for male spectators. Conversely, never questioning what the future holds for Laurie, Debbie or Carol, *American Graffiti* implicitly concludes that the female characters never had any potential that could be lost.

The case study opened with Jameson's view that *American Graffiti* provided the inaugural, paradigmatic nostalgia film.⁸⁵⁴ However, my reading has demonstrated that

⁸⁵² V Dika, 2003, op. cit., p. 94

⁸⁵³ V Dika, 2003, ibid., p. 94

⁸⁵⁴ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 16

Lucas' film does not merely recreate the past through pastiche. Rather, by manipulating historical signifiers, *American Graffiti* can be seen to reflect on how the past comes to be constructed as idealised. In contrast to Jameson's view that the film effaces history by burying the viewer in a series of disparate pop cultural images of the past, we have seen that by inviting the viewer to consider the transformation of mores that has occurred between the contemporary era and that of the film's setting, *American Graffiti* reasserts the place of history. Further, reading the film through Butler's work enabled the construction of gender in the past to be elucidated, an area which, as Creed observes, remains unexamined in Jameson's reading.⁸⁵⁵

4.3 – CASE STUDY 6: *DIRTY DANCING* (DIR. EMILE ARDOLINO, 1987)

4.3.1 – INTRODUCTION

Like *American Graffiti*, *Dirty Dancing* provides a representation of the early 1960s. However, while Lucas' film followed a number of characters over the course of a single evening in order to create a collective idea of the past, *Dirty Dancing* presents a personal recollection of the period through the eyes of a single protagonist. More strikingly, *Dirty Dancing* differs from *American Graffiti* in its adherence to the structure and aesthetic of the musical genre. For Dyer, the 'utopian structures of feeling' that characterise the musical make the genre perfect escapist entertainment.⁸⁵⁶ Examining the construction of the past in *Dirty Dancing*, it will be important to consider whether, and if so, how, film's status as a musical contribute to the portrayal of the early 1960s as a utopian space.

Significantly, many of the terms through which Dyer articulates utopia overlap with those used to conceptualise the nostalgia mood. However, although both utopia

⁸⁵⁵ B Creed, 1987, op. cit., p. 51

⁸⁵⁶ R Dyer, 1977, 'Entertainment and Utopia,' in R Dyer, 2002, *Only Entertainment*, London: Routledge, p. 21

and the nostalgia mood are constructed as emotive and escapist, there nonetheless remain important differences between the two. While the utopia of the Hollywood film musical presents a world that we are aware has never existed, but which may be accessed through film, the idealisation of the nostalgia mood, can be seen to occur as a result of the perceived irretrievable loss of an era. Utopia likewise bears notable similarities and differences to Jameson's nostalgia mode. Indeed, for Jameson, the nostalgia mode obscures and disrupts any sense of an era's place on a timeline.⁸⁵⁷ Similarly, Dyer reads utopia as bearing a distortive relationship to reality, arguing that this sensibility specifically delimits the problems to which it may provide a solution, thereby glossing over other societal difficulties whose resolution may require a more drastic response.⁸⁵⁸

Following a number of films released in the 1980s that centred on teens yet incorporated several music and dance numbers, *Dirty Dancing* forms part of what Shary describes as the 'youth dance film,'⁸⁵⁹ and Feuer, simply as 'the teen musical.'⁸⁶⁰ While Shary's terminology underscores the films' distinction from the musical, not least in the absence of diegetic singing, Feuer argues that the films 'created new conventions for the musical genre under the influence of music videos' and so constitute a further development of, rather than divergence from, the musical genre.⁸⁶¹ Nonetheless, both critics agree in categorising the films as a cycle, recalling Feuer's theorisation of a 'temporally brief but numerically and aesthetically significant' outpouring of similar films.⁸⁶² As the case study will demonstrate, *Dirty Dancing* possesses the dual-focus

⁸⁵⁷ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 19

⁸⁵⁸ R Dyer, 1977, op. cit., in R Dyer, 2002, op. cit., p. 27

⁸⁵⁹ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 90

⁸⁶⁰ J Feuer, 2010, op. cit., in S Cohan, Ed., 2010, op. cit., p. 54

⁸⁶¹ J Feuer, 2010, ibid., in S Cohan, Ed., 2010, ibid., pp. 54-55

⁸⁶² J Feuer, 2010, ibid., in S Cohan, Ed., 2010, ibid., p. 55

narrative that Altman argues is characteristic of the musical.⁸⁶³ I will therefore describe the cycle as the teen dance musical, reflecting the focus on dance, and their adherence to the conventions of the wider musical genre.

Feuer's conceptualisation of the teen dance musical as a postmodern development of the musical implicitly recalls Schatz's understanding of genre, according to which, genres gradually develop increasing levels of self-reflexivity.⁸⁶⁴ In the case of *Dirty Dancing*, Feuer argues that the three musical subgenres proposed by Altman – the folk musical, the fairy-tale musical and the show musical – are all present in pastiche form.⁸⁶⁵ Indeed, the emphasis on family and amateur performance reflects the semantic of the folk musical, while the cross-class romance indicates the film's adherence to the syntax of the fairy-tale musical.⁸⁶⁶ Further, ending with a musical performance that unites the central couple, *Dirty Dancing* draws on the syntax of the show musical.⁸⁶⁷ Consequently, this analysis will examine how the film's reflection on the tropes of the musical contributes to its construction of the past.

Of the 1980s teen dance musical cycle, *Dirty Dancing* achieved unrivalled box office success and earned reluctant critical praise.⁸⁶⁸ Initially intended for a single week of cinema exhibition before being released to video, the film grossed \$170m worldwide in 1987 and launched Patrick Swayze's career as a leading man.⁸⁶⁹ By 2009, following a sequel, Broadway and West End stage shows and two platinum-selling

⁸⁶³ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 28

⁸⁶⁴ T Schatz, 1981, op. cit., p. 41

⁸⁶⁵ J Feuer, 1993, op. cit., p. 130

⁸⁶⁶ J Feuer, 1993, ibid., p. 130

⁸⁶⁷ J Feuer, 1993, ibid., p. 130

⁸⁶⁸ For an example of begrudging, reluctant praise, see R Schickel, 1987, 'Cinema: Teenage Turmoil,' *Time*, 14th September 1987, accessed at

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,965450,00.html> on July 24th 2012

⁸⁶⁹ Data taken from Box Office Mojo, accessed at

<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=dirtydancing.htm> July 24th 2012

soundtrack albums, the film had generated sales of \$214m – far in excess of its modest \$6m production budget.

Told from the retrospective point of view of its female protagonist, *Dirty Dancing* portrays the cross-class romance between Frances “Baby” Houseman and dance instructor Johnny Castle. On holiday with her parents in the Catskills, Baby becomes frustrated by the staid entertainment on offer at Kellerman’s resort and chances upon the more lively dances practised by its staff. Befriending the dancers, Baby offers to stand in for Penny, who must procure an illegal abortion on the night she is due to perform. Under Johnny’s tutelage, Baby learns the dance and a romance forms between the two. The film ends with Johnny and Baby performing at the resort’s end of season show, portraying both the couple’s reunion and affirming a new type of community among the assembled crowd. Taking up Butler’s work, this case study will observe the effect of the film’s adherence to the musical genre on its representation of the early 1960s, and the construction of gender.

4.3.2 – DANCE AND THE DUAL-FOCUS NARRATIVE

As discussed in the analysis of *Grease*, Altman argues that musicals are structured around the division and ultimate unity of two opposite-sexed protagonists in a structure he terms the dual-focus narrative.⁸⁷⁰ This central opposition is further reinforced by other secondary characteristics, such as class, values or nationality.⁸⁷¹ Altman’s work can be mapped onto Butler’s conceptualisation of the heterosexual matrix, which theorises the ideological compulsion to produce diametrically opposed gender identities according to whether the subject appears to embody, or to possess the Phallus.⁸⁷² Indeed, arguing that the musical suggests that ‘the natural state of the

⁸⁷⁰ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 48

⁸⁷¹ R Altman, 1987, *ibid.*, p. 48

⁸⁷² J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 62

adult human being is in the arms of an adult human being of the opposite sex' Altman suggests that the musical naturalises heterosexual romance.⁸⁷³

In *Dirty Dancing*, the opposite-sexed pairing of Baby and Johnny is reinforced by their class disparity. The film's opening scenes do much to emphasise the contrast between the respective worlds inhabited by each protagonist, which in turn can be mapped onto different dance cultures. The first such opposition occurs between the credit sequence, which opens with a vertical wipe to portray dancers moving slowly to the Ronettes' hit "Be My Baby," and the beginning of the film itself. Medium close-ups of the dancers' faces dissolve to show parts of their bodies as they writhe together in pairs, while the slow-motion in which the footage is shown emphasises the sexual suggestiveness of their dance. Significantly, the grainy image and black and white film stock suggests the position of a contemporary viewer looking back to the past through archive, recalling Hutcheon's comments on the textuality of history.⁸⁷⁴

The sense of looking into the past is disrupted by the pink, slanted scrawl in which the film's title is displayed across the screen. Echoing the similar scripts used in the promotional materials of other teen dance musicals, such as *Fame* (Dir. Alan Parker, 1980) and *Flashdance* (Dir. Adrian Lyne, 1983), *Dirty Dancing* can be seen to signal its status as part of the cycle. Further, for Chris Jordan, the careful co-ordination of music and image creates a 'spectacle of visual excess traceable to music video.'⁸⁷⁵ Consequently, the credit sequence is seen to create a contrast between the type of spectacle characteristic of the 1980s music video, and the grainy black and white images and vertical wipe, which reflect the aesthetic norms of the past.

⁸⁷³ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 32

⁸⁷⁴ L Hutcheon, 2010, op. cit., p. 78

⁸⁷⁵ C Jordan, 2003, *Movies and the Reagan Presidency: Success and Ethics*, Westport: Praeger, p. 111



FIGURE 4.7 – “DIRTY DANCING” OVERLAID OVER BLACK AND WHITE SLOW-MOTION IMAGES

Jameson might argue that the mix of aesthetic styles from different periods in the film’s credit sequence indicates the availability of all styles in the present, entailing a loss of a timeline that would enable the present to be conceptualised as a particular era.⁸⁷⁶ However, reading the sequence through Silverman’s consideration of retro enables a dialogue to be perceived between the Ronettes’ music and the teen dance musical. Consequently, the 1980s can be seen to be constructed as a specific era in dialogue with a particular moment in the past. The connection between the two eras is further illuminated by Susan Douglas who argues that the girl-group music of the 1960s, such as that of the Ronettes, enabled girls to value and accept their own sexuality.⁸⁷⁷ The focus on the lives of young women is likewise found in *Fame* and *Flashdance* – the two teen dance musicals whose aesthetic is reflected in the scene. Consequently, the contrast between aesthetic styles in the credit sequence can be seen to foretell the narrative’s female, adolescent point of view.

The contrast between the credit sequence and the first images of the film itself could hardly be more striking. Whereas the images of the credit sequence were dark, grainy and claustrophobic, the film’s opening shots portray a saloon car driving on a

⁸⁷⁶ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 16

⁸⁷⁷ S Douglas, 1994, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, New York: Crown, p. 85

wide, near-deserted highway during the day. This construction of the past is framed by a voiceover that confirms the period in which the film is set as “the summer of 1963.” Spoken in Baby’s voice, this voiceover indicates that the narrative to follow will be a retrospective, personal recollection told from her point of view. The infantilising name by which she was known at the time, and Baby’s evident devotion to her father constructs the period recollected as innocent. For Tamar Jeffers McDonald, the film’s periodisation in the summer of 1963 is significant in placing the narrative in a liminal space in the feminist movement before the wide availability of female birth control, yet following the publication in February that year of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*.⁸⁷⁸ Further, as Baby situates her personal recollection prior to significant events in popular culture, namely, “the Beatles” and “the assassination of President Kennedy,” she can be seen to construct the period as poised between the mores of the 1950s and the ‘radical action’ of the later 1960s.⁸⁷⁹

The period’s liminality is underscored by the contrast in the soundtrack. Whereas in the credit sequence, the Ronettes conveyed the possibility of adult heterosexual romance, the Housemans’ journey is accompanied by the more innocent refrains of the Four Seasons’ “Big Girls Don’t Cry.” Although released in October 1962, the Four Seasons’ music recalls the sound of the 1950s, since lead singer Frankie Valli had enjoyed success throughout the latter half of the decade. Only ten months later, the “wall of sound” effect created by Phil Spector’s production of “Be My Baby”

⁸⁷⁸ T. Jeffers McDonald, 2013, ‘Bringing Up Baby: Generic Hybridity in *Dirty Dancing*,’ in Y. Tzioumakis, and S. Lincoln, Eds., 2013, *The Time of Our Lives: Dirty Dancing and Popular Culture*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p. 45

⁸⁷⁹ In an interview with the New York Times, screenwriter Eleanor Bergstein describes why *Dirty Dancing* had to be specifically set in the summer of 1963: “The film couldn’t have been set two months earlier or later, because two months after the movie is over, Kennedy is assassinated, then the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan, and after that it’s radical action,” in S.G. Freedman, 1987, ‘*Dirty Dancing* rocks to an innocent beat,’ *The New York Times*, August 16 1987, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/16/movies/film-dirty-dancing-rocks-to-an-innocent-beat.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> [June 18th 2013] unpaginated

can be seen to prefigure later experimental work in pop music during the 1960s. Consequently, Baby, her family and Kellerman's resort can be seen to embody the values of the 1950s, while characters associated with the environment portrayed in the credit sequence are associated with the emerging values of the 1960s.

At the resort itself, the dual-focus narrative model constructs the opposition between the two protagonists through the different dance spaces inhabited respectively by Baby and Johnny. Shary notes the development in social dancing in the 1960s from 'controlled, formal styles to unrestrained, suggestive gyrations.'⁸⁸⁰ Accordingly, the comparison between the styles of dance that characterise each space can likewise be seen to underscore the period's liminality.

The rules of middle-class social dancing are established in the group dance lesson Baby's family attend shortly after arriving at the resort. Instructing the dancers that "on the dance floor, he's the boss," Penny, the "former Rockette" leading the class can be seen to demonstrate how the prescribed roles for male and female partners instantiate and reinforce an oppositional gender binary. Promising that dance will provide a way of meeting and impressing a future opposite-sexed partner, Penny calls, "when I say stop, you'll find the man of your dreams." Despite her efforts, the *mise-en-scène* works to undermine the potential of dance to fulfil that promise. The summer house in which the class takes place is so cramped that the participants are unable to move freely, while the sound of the dancers' collective stomp almost completely obscures the deft, Latino music to which they are supposed to be dancing. Jammed in a line formation between two older dancers, this model of dance denies rather than facilitates the opportunity for Baby to encounter a viable partner. As a

⁸⁸⁰ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 90

result, the model of heterosexual courtship advocated by the dance class is portrayed as defunct.

That evening at the resort's dance, Baby has the opportunity to practice the steps she learned in Penny's class. Accompanied by Neil, Max's unpleasant, ambitious grandson, they exemplify one of Altman's paradigmatic 'wrong couples' which the narrative works to rectify.⁸⁸¹ This being a musical, their incompatibility is most visibly signalled by their poor dancing technique. With their arms locked rigidly in position, Baby and Neil's small, tentative steps are blocked by other dancers. Shot in medium close-up, depicting their bodies only from the chest upwards, the shot scale further underscores their limited range of movement and the couple's lack of sexual potential.

Baby and Neil's woeful performance is sharply contrasted by Johnny and Penny's dramatic entrance. Dominating the dance-floor, the pair are portrayed in low-angle long shots, conveying the respect their skill commands from the audience, and allowing their larger, more expressive movements to be seen. As Baby's absorption in the spectacle is shown in close-up, her interest is reflected by the resort's other guests, who stop dancing and make space for Johnny and Penny.

Despite the obvious adulation their performance commands, the reaction of the dancers' employers makes clear that the two have overstepped their bounds. A close-up of Max depicts his anger at the spectacle, while Neil comments "that's not going to sell dance lessons." As the resort's owners, Max and Neil ought to be pleased that their customers are enjoying the entertainment. Their annoyance therefore demonstrates awareness that the dancers' performance elevates them from their positions as lowly entertainment staff. Indeed, as Neil's comment makes apparent, their primary function is to provide ancillary revenue through individual dance tuition

⁸⁸¹ R Altman, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 31

for the resort's customers. As such, Johnny and Penny should confine themselves to performances that the guests might aspire to learn within the short time they are resident there. The manipulated attainability of these dancing skills has implications for a reading the scene though Butler's work. While Penny's class was seen to portray how dance both creates and reinforces hyperbolised binary gender roles, the resort can be seen to encourage the belief that these roles might be easily attainable in a short space of time.⁸⁸² Penny and Johnny's performance, and their employer's dim view of it, reveal both the impossibility of achieving idealised gender, and the resort's economic imperative to maintain their customers' belief in its attainability.

Having made her escape from Neil, the following scenes portray Baby's infiltration into the working class leisure space at the resort's staff quarters. Backing into the double doors of the dance hall, Billy abruptly reveals the cramped, smoky space, recalling the film's opening credit sequence. The dancing style, environment and music differ completely from that of the resort's main ballroom, reinforcing the opposition between the two spaces. Eschewing the wooden courtesies of the resort's customers, here the dancers clasp their partners' bodies tightly, as they writhe and thrust to the music. Using recorded tracks, rather than a live band, The Contours urge the resort's employees to dance "The Mashed Potato" and "The Twist," styles that were new at the time and notably criticised for their sexuality.⁸⁸³ Further, the room's dim lighting with tones of pink and orange, contributes to the suggestiveness of the dancing. When Johnny and Penny enter the room, it is clear from the other dancers' cheers that the pair occupies an elevated position among them. Viewed in the light of Altman's dual-focus model, Johnny is expressly aligned with the resort's working-class dance culture.

⁸⁸² J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 189

⁸⁸³ D Shumway, 1999, op. cit., p. 45

A shot/reverse shot pattern between medium close-ups of Baby's face and shots of individual parts of the dancers' bodies portrays her surprise and astonishment at the sexual spectacle. Clearly, the music and the dancing style of the resort's staff are unfamiliar to her, and as Shumway argues, 'felt to be subversive.'⁸⁸⁴ The scene's representation of the novelty of rock and roll music and the dance cultures it inspired can be seen to portray the music and culture of the 1960s superseding that of the previous decade. As a consequence, while Jameson argues that under postmodernism, culture previously perceived to be transgressive has since become domesticated, *Dirty Dancing* firmly positions rock and roll as part of a counterculture that is yet to be subsumed into dominant culture.

When Baby asks Billy where the assembled dancers acquired their dancing skill, she can be seen to reveal her class privilege. Indeed, she appears to assume that dance is simply a leisure pursuit, rather than an accessible means of making a living and form of expression that is not otherwise possible. More significantly, Baby's question can be seen to echo the assumptions underpinning Butler's theorisation of gender. Indeed, Butler disputes the purported naturalness of gender and sexuality, to theorise them as performative.⁸⁸⁵ Consequently, dance, presented here as the expression of sexuality, is likewise constructed as a form of labour, and so learned. However, when John invites Baby to dance, his instructions, to "feel the movement" and to watch his eyes, indicate his belief that the outward movements of dance emerge from an inner, natural sexuality. Further to gender, social class, dancing ability and dance culture, the opposition between Baby and Johnny is finally confirmed by their divergent beliefs about the construction of gender.

⁸⁸⁴ D Shumway, 1999, *ibid.*, p. 46

⁸⁸⁵ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 26

4.3.3 – QUESTIONING UTOPIA IN *DIRTY DANCING*

As outlined in the introduction to this case study, Dyer argues that the musical genre presents the audience with the idea of utopia, understood as the ‘promise of something better in which to escape.’⁸⁸⁶ Dyer is keen to point out that the musical does not present in concrete terms how a utopian world might look or be organised. Rather, the audience is given to understand how utopia might feel. He thus proposes five categories of utopian sensibility, each of which resolves a real life societal inadequacy. To the problem of scarcity, the musical promises abundance. Exhaustion is countered by energy, where work and play are seen to be synonymous. Dreariness is countered by intensity, the ‘uncomplicated, direct and vivid experience of feeling,’ while transparency eclipses manipulation.⁸⁸⁷ Finally, community is seen to overcome fragmentation.⁸⁸⁸ Significantly, Dyer notes that although the musical responds to genuine needs, the genre also specifically delimits those needs, such that, questions of race, gender or class, for instance, are nowhere addressed in the above typology.⁸⁸⁹

The representation of Kellerman’s resort indicates how Dyer’s conceptualisation of utopia might intersect with the nostalgia mood. Situated away from the demands of everyday life, the resort holds the promise of a utopian location, within which the class barriers between Baby and Johnny, and by extension, between the resort’s customers and its staff, might be eroded. Such a place would correspond with Altman’s notion of the “valley,” as discussed in the analysis of *Grease*, where life is said to be “truer,” and which provides a space in which the otherwise disparate couple can be united.⁸⁹⁰ Located within the Catskills, the resort’s well-maintained grounds certainly contain the signifiers of an idealised space. Its utopian promise is

⁸⁸⁶ R Dyer, 1977, op. cit., in R Dyer, 2002, op. cit., p. 20

⁸⁸⁷ R Dyer, 1977, ibid., in R Dyer, 2002, ibid., p. 25

⁸⁸⁸ R Dyer, 1977, ibid., in R Dyer, 2002, ibid., p. 26

⁸⁸⁹ R Dyer, 1977, ibid., in R Dyer, 2002, ibid., p. 26

⁸⁹⁰ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 86

made further apparent upon the Housemans' arrival when, on hearing that Dr Houseman hasn't had a holiday in five years, Max claims (somewhat ironically) that "three weeks here, it'll feel like a year." Arguably, the resort's detachment from day-to-day life can be seen to address the urge underlying the nostalgia mood, where the 'complicated, contaminated' present leads to a yearning to return to a 'simple ... beautiful,' past.⁸⁹¹

The mechanics that work to maintain this apparently idealised space come to the fore in an interaction between Max and his male employees. Exploring the resort on the family's first night, Baby watches him divide the workers according to the role they perform, and by extension, their social class. Observing unseen through an open door, the interaction presents a "backstage" moment that would be undesirable for customers to see. The male employees are divided into two camps: waiters and entertainment staff. The Ivy League-educated, and by implication, upper-class, waiters are instructed to make pleasant conversation, even flirt, with the resort's young, female clientele. Conversely, Max warns the entertainment staff from having any contact with customers other than that required to provide dance lessons for which they are expressly paid.

The scene illustrates the clear class divisions among the resort's labour force, and specifically articulates a prohibition on the very type of cross-class romance that constitutes the film's narrative. By highlighting the unpleasant management practices that go on behind the scenes at the resort, the scene destabilises its claim to constitute an idealised space, or valley. Indeed, rather than providing a space in which a "truer" sense of the characters might emerge, medium close-ups of Baby convey, in addition

⁸⁹¹ L Hutcheon, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 4

to the affront to her sense of social justice, her surprise at the contrast between Max's brusque manner here and his oleaginous demeanour with her father.

It would appear that the scene undermines two categories of utopian sensibility. In dividing the permissible interactions of the male work force, Max exacerbates the divide between the resort's staff and its customers. Thus the resort is seen to be characterised by fragmentation, rather than community. Further, Max's differing behaviours demonstrates his insincerity, thereby disputing the transparency promised by the resort's utopian qualities. However, since its dystopian elements are shown to be embodied by an individual, the film also reveals that these aspects might be overcome. Indeed, establishing Baby's opposition to Max's behaviour, Kellerman's is shown to contain within it the seeds of utopia.

The resort's status as a utopian space is more drastically undermined by the film's representation of Penny's unwanted pregnancy, and her resulting abortion. Presenting the procedure as a costly and dangerous one, *Dirty Dancing* makes clear that abortion was illegal in 1963.⁸⁹² As a result, its presence does most to assert the position of history in the film, further distancing the resort from the timeless utopia associated with the Hollywood musical. Further, having disclosed her pregnancy and the identity of the father, a medium close-up of a distraught Penny shows the demise of utopia. Still clad in the dance attire that connotes the glamour of show business, her posture is hunched and despondent, while her makeup is smeared by tears. The utopian promise

⁸⁹² Abortion was legalised in 1973 in Supreme Court decision *Roe v Wade*. The court ruled that existing state legislation banning the procedure was unconstitutional since it denied women their 'fundamental right to privacy.' See PS Boyer, 2006, *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 3

In New York State, where *Dirty Dancing* is set, the state legislature granted access to abortion on request three years earlier, in 1970. See R Perez-Pena, '70 Abortion Law: New York Said Yes, Stunning the Nation,' *The New York Times*, April 9th 2000, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/09/nyregion/70-abortion-law-new-york-said-yes-stunning-the-nation.html?pagewanted=all&sr=pm> on July 29th 2012

of achievement through song and dance ordinarily established by the Hollywood musical is consequently shown no longer to be possible.

Bruce Babington and Peter Evans elucidate how *Dirty Dancing* troubles the musical as an arbiter of utopian sensibility. Indeed, noting how the contemporary musical – considered here as the post-studio era musical – works with ‘harsher’ narrative material, Babington and Evans argue that this new incarnation of the genre sees the meeting of two competing narrative thrusts: between an urge for utopia, and a less ideal reality.⁸⁹³ Importantly, it is not simply that utopia is undermined, but rather that utopia and reality must come to terms with one another.⁸⁹⁴

The contrast between Penny’s bereft defeatism and Baby’s optimistic persistence would appear to illustrate Babington and Evans’ argument. Penny’s withering call for Baby to “go back to [her] playpen,” indicates her belief that Baby inhabits an idealistic fantasy world entirely divorced from reality. Nonetheless, Baby confronts Robbie about his behaviour. Undoubtedly, the class differences between Baby and Penny inform the women’s differing attitudes, since Baby’s belief in her own agency is at least partly predicated on her contention that, as Robbie’s equal, she will be able to reason with him. Assisting Robbie as he lays place settings in the dining room, their similarities in age and class are reflected through costume, as Baby’s blue and white striped shirt echoes Robbie’s white jacket and shirt. The film confounds the urge for utopia embodied by Baby, as the waiter pulls out a copy of Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead*, vehemently asserting the ideology of self-interest and individualism over community, as he concludes “some people count, and some people don’t.”

⁸⁹³ B Babington and PW Evans, 1985, *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 225

⁸⁹⁴ B Babington and PW Evans, 1985, *ibid.*, p. 226

The rejection of community articulated by Robbie, and earlier, in Max's division of the resort's labour force, complicates the reconceptualisation of utopia as an encounter with reality. Rather, the way in which *Dirty Dancing* undermines utopia in fact calls attention to its already existing inadequacies. Dyer acknowledges that the utopia offered by the musical is limited to needs that society is already able to meet, ignoring those such as class, race and gender which might require a more radical transformation of social life.⁸⁹⁵ By revealing the unequal treatment of women, and of the resort's working-class employees, the film exposes the shortcomings of the utopia articulated by the Hollywood musical.

The film's evocation of the Hollywood musical's utopian structures of feeling has consequences for its construction of the past. Certainly, the positioning of illegal abortion as a pivotal narrative point does much to assert the place of history in the film. As a result, Baby's continued persistence in attempting to help Penny can be seen to reflect the film's awareness that its adherence to the musical genre will compel the audience to long for, and expect, a utopian solution. However, since that urge for utopia is located in the past, utopia must come to terms with the reality of the past, just as Babington and Evans argue.⁸⁹⁶ The resulting clash between the audience's will for utopia and the reality of the period serves not to undermine utopia, but the possibility of yearning for an idealised past. Indeed, although it is never explicitly stated in *Dirty Dancing*, the audience is invited to appreciate the considerable advantages women possess in the present, compared to the position they occupied in the past. As such, the film makes clear that the early 1960s cannot be longed for, preventing the film audience from idealising the past in the manner characteristic of the nostalgia mood.

⁸⁹⁵ R Dyer, 1977, op. cit., in R Dyer, 2002, op. cit., p. 26

⁸⁹⁶ B Babington and PW Evans, 1985, op. cit., p. 226

4.3.4 – FANTASIES OF ACHIEVEMENT AND THE HOLLYWOOD FILM MUSICAL

Scenes in which Baby trains with Johnny in order to take Penny's place in her performance at the Sheldrake hotel can be seen to indicate the film's adherence to what McRobbie describes as the dance narrative.⁸⁹⁷ Examining *Fame* and *Flashdance*, both of which predate *Dirty Dancing*, McRobbie argues that the teen dance narrative provides fantasies of achievement for young women.⁸⁹⁸ For her, the popularity of such films stems from their portrayal of female roles with greater agency than those found in other forms of popular culture, such as magazine stories and teenage fiction.⁸⁹⁹ Complicating their characterisation as part of the musical genre, McRobbie proposes that since the protagonists are portrayed as solely focused on the work that goes into becoming an excellent dancer, dance narratives postpone and resolve the difficulties of assuming sexualised womanhood.⁹⁰⁰ Romance, she argues, is either disregarded entirely, or occurs as an unexpected bonus of the characters' focus on dance.⁹⁰¹ Whereas the musical's dual-focus structure sees the eventual union between two opposite-sexed protagonists as its natural conclusion, McRobbie argues that work and sacrifice are central to the dance narrative.

Baby's first lessons with Johnny are characterised by the tropes of the dance narrative. From the crowded dance floor where the arrangement is agreed, the film cuts to a medium close-up of two pairs of legs belonging to Johnny and Baby. Showing only their lower legs and feet, the shot evokes the opening credit sequence of *Footloose*, where a similar shot scale conveyed the binding power of dance for teens. In *Dirty Dancing*, the choice to display only the characters' feet effectively distances their

⁸⁹⁷ A McRobbie, 1991, 'Dance Narratives and Fantasies of Achievement,' in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Durham: Duke University Press, p. 213

⁸⁹⁸ A McRobbie, 1991, *ibid.*, in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, *ibid.*, p. 217

⁸⁹⁹ A McRobbie, 1991, *ibid.*, in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, *ibid.*, p. 217

⁹⁰⁰ A McRobbie, 1991, *ibid.*, in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, *ibid.*, p. 217

⁹⁰¹ A McRobbie, 1991, *ibid.*, in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, *ibid.*, p. 217

dance, and by extension, the relationship between the two, from the sexuality previously portrayed in the staff quarters. Rather, these shots can be seen to concentrate on the labour of dance, illustrating McRobbie's reading of the dance narrative as centred on work and sacrifice.⁹⁰²

Aspects of the *mise-en-scène* undermine the film's categorisation as a dance narrative. The contrast between Johnny's black shoes and trousers, and Baby's white jeans and plimsolls, recalls Altman's theorisation of the secondary oppositions that foreground the central, gendered opposition between the two protagonists.⁹⁰³ Dyer's analysis of whiteness further elucidates the oppositions between the characters in the scene. Indeed, the distinction between Johnny's tanned muscularity and Baby's pallor can be seen to reinforce their class disparity since the acquisition of a tan is traditionally associated with outdoor, and thus physical, labour.⁹⁰⁴ Further, Dyer observes a longstanding tradition in representation that portrays racially white women in a lighter hue than their male counterparts.⁹⁰⁵ For Dyer, this tradition of representation has a moral dimension, since the pallor of the female indicates her innocence while the male's darker skin is a signifier of virility.⁹⁰⁶ In *Dirty Dancing*, then, Johnny's tanned body is aligned with sexuality, while Baby's paleness serves as a further indicator of her innocence.

The many binaries portrayed in the training scenes ensure that despite Johnny's abrupt, off-hand manner, and Baby's inability to dance, the audience remains persuaded that the couple will be united by the end of the film. Further, although Baby is keen to help Penny, and take her place in the show competently, she harbours

⁹⁰² A McRobbie, 1991, *ibid.*, in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, *ibid.*, p. 217

⁹⁰³ R Altman, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 31

⁹⁰⁴ R Dyer, 1997, *White*, London: Routledge, p. 57

⁹⁰⁵ R Dyer, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 57

⁹⁰⁶ R Dyer, 1997, *ibid.*, p. 59

no desire to become a professional dancer, a goal that dominates the characters' ambitions in the dance narrative. Further, rather than sublimate her adult femininity, the dance skills Baby learns with Johnny become a catalyst for her acquisition of feminine sexuality. In turn of course, Baby is able to educate Johnny, by bolstering his self-esteem, and equipping him with a sense of social justice.

The labour of dance is made apparent in a series of long shots showing Baby practicing the dance steps she has just learned. Wearing a loose shirt and white jeans, the first of these shows her taking only small steps with her arms locked in position. Evidently frustrated by her lack of mastery of the dance steps, she stamps her foot in silent fury. An ellipsis is created by Baby's change of costume to a pink leotard under denim shorts. Utilising the wooden bridge to improvise steps of her own, this scene illustrates her gradual assumption of adult femininity. Baby's progress is further indicated by another shot of the dancers' feet. While the steps taken in the white plimsolls are inept and clumsy, a quick cut to Baby's feet now clad in silver dancing shoes demonstrates an increase in skill. Foregrounding the labour of Baby's transformation – and aligning this transformation with the acquisition of adult, feminine sexuality – the film can be seen to illustrate Butler's argument that gender constitutes the performative effect of repeated actions.⁹⁰⁷ Indeed, rather than an innate property, femininity and sexuality are portrayed as a set of behaviours that must be actively learned. Her performance at the Sheldrake will thus reveal whether Baby has succeeded in fully embodying the norms of adult femininity.

Following the montage of Baby practicing alone, the film returns to the cabin where Johnny and Baby are training. In contrast to his formerly terse manner, Johnny's instructions now assume a softer tone. Reflecting this cooling of hostilities

⁹⁰⁷ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 185

and as a result, a renewal of romantic possibility between the pair, the camera cranes around them and Eric Carmen's "Hungry Eyes" fades in. For Shumway, the use of 1980s songs, such as Carmen's, disrupts the 1960s frame of reference, and stretches the film's claim to historical realism.⁹⁰⁸ Arguably, the jarring anachronism created by the song's distinctly 1980s production style illustrates Jameson's belief that postmodern entrapment in the perpetual present means that it is no longer possible to conceptualise a timeline of distinct eras.⁹⁰⁹ However, read through Silverman's work, the contrast between the soundtrack of the 1980s and a visual representation of the early 1960s can be read as a reflection on the film's adherence to the conventions of the musical genre, as well as those of the contemporary teen dance narrative. Consequently, rather than locating the audience in a temporal wilderness, the dialogue between the 1980s soundtrack and 1960s visual content reminds us that the narrative with which we are presented is Baby's memory articulated from a 1980s perspective.

Further to problematising the film's representation of the past, "Hungry Eyes" recalls the erotic qualities of the gaze. Sung by Eric Carmen, the song indicates that the bearer of this gaze is male, recalling Laura Mulvey's claim that all Hollywood films assume a male viewer in their construction, while women, as the object of that gaze, disrupt the narrative because they are constructed as spectacle.⁹¹⁰ However, *Dirty Dancing* can be seen to challenge Mulvey's model. Indeed, throughout the film it is Johnny who is presented as a sexual spectacle, while Baby looks on. Emphasising the alignment of the gaze with Baby, the camera zooms in on her face looking up at Johnny when the first refrains of "Hungry Eyes" are heard.

⁹⁰⁸ DR Shumway, 1999, op. cit., p. 47

⁹⁰⁹ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 19

⁹¹⁰ See L Mulvey, 1975, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 6-18

The construction of Johnny as a sexual spectacle can be elucidated by Steve Cohan's work on masculinity in the musical. Noting how Steve Neale opens up the possibilities raised by Mulvey's essay to explore how Hollywood cinema constructs masculinity as spectacle, Cohan takes up Neale's comment that 'only the musical puts male bodies on display in any consistent way.'⁹¹¹ However, Cohan disputes Neale's argument that the musical feminises the male body as a result. Using Fred Astaire as his exemplar, Cohan asserts that when performing a dance number, Astaire can be said to connote the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' that Mulvey associates with the female object of the gaze and its disruption of the narrative.⁹¹² Conversely, Cohan claims that the relative extra-diegetic autonomy of Astaire's dance numbers destabilises the spectatorial distance that Mulvey argues is necessary for a voyeuristic, objectifying gaze.⁹¹³ Since Astaire is able to acknowledge the audience, and often, return the spectator's look, Cohan argues that he is able to disrupt the conventional, gendered viewing relations such that the male musical star is not feminised.⁹¹⁴ Rather, his status as spectacle enables him to assume a position of mastery.



FIGURE 4.8 – BABY (JENNIFER GREY) AND PENNY (CYNTHIA RHODES) GAZE AT JOHNNY (PATRICK SWAYZE)

⁹¹¹ S Neale, 1983, 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men in Mainstream Cinema,' *Screen*, Vol. 24, No. 6, p. 16

⁹¹² S Cohan, 1993, 'Feminising the Song-and-Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the Spectacle of Masculinity in the Hollywood Musical,' in S Cohan and IR Hark, Eds., 1993, *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema*, London: Routledge, p. 47

⁹¹³ S Cohan, 1993, *ibid.*, in S Cohan and IR Hark, Eds., 1993, p. 47; S Neale, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 12

⁹¹⁴ S Cohan, 1993, *ibid.*, in S Cohan and IR Hark, Eds., 1993, p. 48

Johnny's presentation in the film can be seen to reflect Cohan's arguments on the ambivalent gendered position occupied by the male musical star. Certainly, he provides an object of sexual spectacle for Baby, who gazes at him longingly throughout. However, Baby typically watches Johnny dancing, an activity at which he is skilled, and which enables him to accrue a level of status on the dance floor. Indeed, as previously discussed, at the root of Max and Neil's earlier dismay at Johnny's and Penny's exuberant dance in the ballroom was their concern that the demonstration of their skill might cause them to overstep their positions as entertainment staff. Likewise, although Johnny is the object of the gazes of two women as in Figure 4.8 above, his position as an authority on dance allows him to maintain a level of mastery.

Johnny's ambivalent status as spectacle can be seen to complicate Butler's account of an oppositional sexed binary structured around the Phallus. Indeed, although Johnny is portrayed as a desiring agent, particularly in his performances, he is also positioned throughout the film an object of desire, and of the gaze. Consequently, whereas Butler argues that attempts to occupy either the position of having, or of being the Phallus inevitably result in comedic failure, Johnny can be seen to illustrate the possibility for a single figure to occupy both positions.⁹¹⁵

At the Sheldrake hotel, Baby's performance with Johnny provides the ultimate test of her training. Of course, the final show that portrays the results of the protagonist's dedication and sacrifice is a familiar staple of the dance narrative.⁹¹⁶ Revealing its distance from the cycle however, *Dirty Dancing* exposes the areas in which their dance fails to measure up to a notional ideal. The film cuts between the diegetic audience's point of view, and a closer position, from which the film audience can see Baby's unease, and hear Johnny's whispered directions and reproaches. This privileged

⁹¹⁵ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 62

⁹¹⁶ A McRobbie, 1991, op. cit., in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, op. cit., p. 218

position allows us to see the flaws in the performance, where certain steps are performed incorrectly and others are simply omitted. Despite the mistakes that are readily apparent to the film's spectator, their dance nonetheless earns the applause of the hotel's audience. Connecting Baby's acquisition of dance skills with that of adult, sexual femininity, the exposure of the performance's many failings, which might otherwise have passed unnoticed, can be seen to foreground the impossibility of embodying idealised gender.⁹¹⁷ Analysing the film's concluding sequences will explore whether Baby is able to produce a final, effortless performance consistent with the unifying impetus of the musical.

4.3.5 – “THE TIME OF MY LIFE?” PROBLEMATISING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST

The resort's show marks the end of the season, and in turn the end of summer. It begins with a group of singers led by Neil, singing “Kellerman's theme” accompanied by piano. The song's slow pace and melancholic key belie the claim that “joy, laughter, voices, hearts” characterise the Kellerman's experience. Watching the show off-stage, Max discusses the history of the resort with Tito, the band's conductor. Despite having overcome the hardships of the war and the depression, Max senses an incoming cultural change that he believes will shortly signal the demise of his resort. Consequently, the show can be said not only to indicate the end of summer, but to mark the conclusion of the era represented by the resort, namely, the 1950s. Whereas the beginning of the film demonstrated the liminality of the period, its concluding scenes portray the wholehearted embrace of the forthcoming social change represented by the 1960s.

Neil's mournful voice indicates the aspiring manager's nostalgia both for the preceding summer, and for the era in which the resort was in step with popular

⁹¹⁷ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 155

desires. The choral ensemble accompanying him with their curiously regimented, linear choreography clearly corresponds to an idea of collective enjoyment for the resort's management. However, cutting to a medium shot portraying the yawning disinterest of the diegetic audience, the film can be seen to demonstrate the failure of this idea of community. A further cutaway to the dance staff standing at the periphery of the hall shows their pointed exclusion from the proceedings, inviting the film audience to consider what other groups might be sidelined by the resort's community. As Baby's sister Lisa sings a solo with the group, the ideal of femininity that she represents is similarly shown to be confined to the past. While indicating the resort's imminent, inevitable demise, *Dirty Dancing* clearly conveys that the era it represents is not to be mourned.

Following his dismissal from the resort, Johnny's reappearance at the show is somewhat unexpected. However, the film's adherence to the conventions of the musical leads us to anticipate the reconciliation of opposites embodied by the central, opposite-sexed couple, which in turn leads to the establishment of a new sort of community.⁹¹⁸ Locating Baby among the audience, Johnny brings her onto the stage in order to tell the audience that "she taught me about the kind of person that I want to be." His speech reveals the extent to which Johnny has assimilated Baby's values. Previously, he had justified his poor treatment at the resort by stating "people treat me like I'm nothing 'cos I'm nothing," meekly accepting Neil's condescending interference in his plans for the show. Now speaking publicly to reclaim the last dance as his own, Johnny's speech can be seen to provide an instance where the 'unreal makes a claim to reality.'⁹¹⁹ For Butler, the claim of the unreal jars the prevailing matrix of norms and opens them up for resignification. Consequently, portraying the

⁹¹⁸ R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 31

⁹¹⁹ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 27

community's acceptance of Johnny's reunion with Baby, the final dance can be seen to depict the destabilisation of the prevailing matrix of norms.

As the pair begin to dance, Baby effortlessly follows Johnny's lead, demonstrating her mastery of dance, and of sexual expression. Immediately following Johnny's speech, the dance demonstrates the synthesis of opposites Altman describes as 'personality dissolve.'⁹²⁰ Presenting the couple as a fusion of diametrically opposed characteristics, each of which is shown to be incomplete and in need of the other, the final dance can be seen to echo Butler's theorisation of a discursively-produced sexed binary.⁹²¹ Interestingly however, Baby's position as Johnny's educator cannot be mapped onto Butler's theorisation of binary sexual difference. Earlier in the film, we observed how Johnny status as an object of spectacle nonetheless allowed him to demonstrate mastery. Likewise, Baby's role opens up the possibilities that accrue from approximating the position of embodying the Phallus.



FIGURE 4.9 – BABY (JENNIFER GREY) HERALDS A NEW FORM OF COMMUNITY

The pair's performance at the Sheldrake was deemed sufficiently acceptable to gain the approval of their diegetic audience. Nonetheless, the camera's position close

⁹²⁰ R Altman, 1987, *ibid.*, pp. 52-3

⁹²¹ J Butler, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 61

to the couple allowed the film audience to see Baby's evident unease, and to hear Johnny's whispered instructions, thereby exposing flaws that might otherwise have passed unnoticed. In contrast, although the camera is positioned even closer to the pair in the final dance, no instructions are heard, nor any hesitation or unease displayed. Rather, the performance appears effortless. The final dance that demonstrates the result of the protagonist's labours, and as such, her self-actualisation, is a familiar feature of the dance narrative. However, the smiling ease with which Baby dances, and the emphasis placed on the romance between the central couple, demonstrates the film's adherence to the utopian conventions of the Hollywood musical.⁹²²

There is certainly a fantastical quality to the film's conclusion, as Johnny holds Baby over the audience, arguably illustrating her attainment of idealised femininity. Providing a symbolic bridge between the resort's formerly divided guests and staff, Baby's successful performance of the lift creates a new type of community, and in so doing, heralds the inauguration of the 1960s. Jordan's reading of the scene reflects its utopian qualities, arguing that Dr Houseman's apology to Johnny, and apparent endorsement of their relationship, can be seen to portray a synthesis between classes.⁹²³ Indeed, Jordan argues that Dr Houseman's blessing, acknowledging Johnny as Baby's future husband, allows him to effect a class ascension.⁹²⁴

Reading the concluding scenes of *Dirty Dancing* as utopian is complicated by the film's soundtrack. Once again signalling Johnny's association with a wider youth culture outside the resort, Billy decides to play a record, rather than requesting the band to play a particular song. Performed by former "Righteous Brother" Bill Medley,

⁹²² A McRobbie, 1991, op. cit., in JC Desmond, Ed., 1997, op. cit., p. 218

⁹²³ C Jordan, 2003, op. cit., p. 112

⁹²⁴ C Jordan, 2003, *ibid.*, p. 112

and Jennifer Warnes, the song, “(I’ve Had) The Time of My Life” was written and sung in the 1980s, yet incorporates a 1960s production style and vocal quality. Medley and Warnes’ song provides the concluding portion to Baby’s voiceover that initiated her recollection of the holiday at the beginning of the film. Tellingly, while the voiceover was a sole voice overlaying an image of Baby reading, and so socially removed from her family in the car, Baby’s memory concludes with a duet that sees her fully integrated within the community.

Contrasting with Altman’s view that the musical ‘permits no doubt’ of the longevity of the couple and synthesis of cultural values they represent,’ Medley and Warnes’ song constructs the scene as a formative, idealised but ultimately finite memory.⁹²⁵ Indeed, the voiceover in the film’s opening scenes recalled the holiday at Kellerman’s occurring immediately before Baby joined the Peace Corps, where it seems unlikely Johnny would join her. Having demonstrated the impossibility of idealising the past throughout, the ecstatic installation of a new, progressive order indicates that the era that preceded it is not to be mourned. Unlike in *American Graffiti*, then, the era’s loss does not lead to its idealisation. Further, knowledge that the central couple must surely part company soon after the dance brings a bittersweet quality to the film’s conclusion. *Dirty Dancing* can thus be seen to provide the audience with a satisfying, utopian finale, while also demonstrating the impossibility of an idealised past.

4.4 – CONCLUSION

The chapter began with Shary’s argument that all Teen Movies look back to the past to some degree.⁹²⁶ No less problematically, Speed countered Shary’s view with the argument that only a specific category of the genre – the nostalgic teen movie – deals

⁹²⁵ DR Shumway, 1998, op. cit., p. 52; R Altman, 1987, op. cit., p. 51

⁹²⁶ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 2

with the construction of the past, and does so in a manner that prioritises adult reflection over youth experience.⁹²⁷ The critics' shared distaste for Teen Movies set in the past disregarded the possibility that such films contained the potential to articulate a more complex negotiation with the past than reactionary idealisation.

However, textual analysis of *American Graffiti*, Jameson's paradigmatic nostalgia film, demonstrated how the film questioned both the construction of history and in turn, how certain eras come to be idealised.⁹²⁸ Consequently, *American Graffiti* was shown to move beyond the uncomplicated idealisation of the past, or the flattening of history associated respectively with the nostalgia mood and mode respectively. Using the syntax of the Hollywood film musical, *Dirty Dancing* questions, and undermines, the idealisation of the past associated with the nostalgia mood. Indeed, the film's brutal treatment of Penny reveals the class divisions and gender disparity of the era. The resort's end of season show, which metonymically invokes the end of the resort itself, is thus an occasion for celebration. Defying the logic of the nostalgic Teen Movie, the conclusion of *Dirty Dancing* can be seen to reject the past and look towards the future in hope.

Common to both films is the use of a pre-recorded soundtrack as a means of conveying a period setting through that era's popular culture. These pre-recorded soundtracks serve other, secondary, functions. In *American Graffiti*, the often jarring disjunction between the soundtrack, and the image it supposedly illustrates, conveys how the past has been constructed as the result of particular choices made by an unseen hand. In foregrounding the division between the visual and audio tracks, Lucas' film demonstrates the impossibility of pure, transparent access to the past. In *Dirty Dancing* meanwhile, the intermingling of older tracks with those produced at the

⁹²⁷ L Speed, 1998, op. cit., p. 27

⁹²⁸ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 16

time of the film's release demonstrates the affinity and contrast between the present and past eras. The chapter's two case studies thus reveal the greater complexity of Teen Movies set in the past than has previously been acknowledged.

Butler's work on citationality emerged as critical to the analysis of gender relations in the past. In *American Graffiti*, the characters articulate how gender roles *ought* to be, but demonstrably aren't, thereby questioning the purported stability of gender roles of the past. In turn, *Dirty Dancing* cited the musical genre, illustrating the marginalisation created by its utopian structures of feeling. Evoking, while demonstrating the impossibility of, utopia, the film was seen to illustrate the pleasures of the nostalgia mood, while simultaneously not allowing the past to be idealised.

Equally however, the chapter's case studies were shown to have implications for Butler's work. In exploring the relationship between present and past representations of gender and class, the films reveal how hegemonic gender norms do not occur naturally, but rather, are constructions that have a history. As a consequence, the films respond effectively to the theorist's call for a critical genealogy of the naturalisation of certain gender norms.⁹²⁹ Further, in *Dirty Dancing*, the representation of Johnny as an object of sexual spectacle, who nonetheless acquired a position of mastery demonstrated the possibility of approximating the position of embodying and possessing the Phallus simultaneously.

⁹²⁹ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 202

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the observation that few considered the Teen Movie worthy of serious analysis. However, I have demonstrated that the genre amply rewards closer attention. Textual analyses of seven central examples of the Teen Movie were chiefly informed by Judith Butler's work on gender. Other theorists were also featured: while the work of Beverley Skeggs and Pierre Bourdieu elucidated the Teen Movie's construction of class and its intersection with gender, the work of Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon informed the Teen Movie's construction of the past. Further, the discussion of the genre itself drew on the work of key genre theorists such as Thomas Schatz, Rick Altman, and Jane Feuer. The thesis significantly augments existing literature on the Teen Movie, while developing and further complicating Butler's theorisation of gender.

The thesis set out to examine the construction of gender in the Teen Movie and to determine how the films' characters negotiate the heteronormative sexual coming-of-age narrative that constitutes the genre's syntax.⁹³⁰ Arguably as a result of the teenager's status as an object of adult concern and surveillance, much of the existing literature focused on the genre's representation of American adolescence in Hollywood cinema. Consequently, the films' construction of gender had seen limited critical attention. The Teen Movie's origins as an exploitation genre, which targeted the lucrative youth market seemingly without regard for cinematic style or innovation, led to a critical disdain that still lingers today. The combination of a sociological concern for the representation of adolescents, and a general perception that the genre held limited artistic or narrative interest, resulted in scant discussion of the Teen

⁹³⁰ J Feuer, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 125

Movie in those terms. Nonetheless, the thesis demonstrates that the genre rewards close textual analysis.

Examining Butler's theorisation of gender revealed her contention that the only possibilities for critiquing and subverting heteronormativity emerge from the margins of intelligibility. As she notes in *Undoing Gender*, 'the capacity to develop a critical relation to these norms presupposes a distance from them.'⁹³¹ Further, that critical distance was only deemed possible on the very fringes of the prevailing matrix of norms. In contrast, drawing from the tradition established by other film scholars who have used Butler's work on gender to offer a critical analysis of mainstream culture, this thesis has sought to examine the Teen Movie – an example of the normative – through her work. Butler's concepts supplied the distance needed to critique the heteronormative assumption of gender portrayed in the Teen Movie through the coming of age narrative that is at its centre. Informed by Butler's work on gender, close readings of the Teen Movie were able to denaturalise, and so draw out the complexity and precariousness of the assumption of heteronormativity.

Close textual analysis of the Teen Movie informed by Butler's work on gender highlighted the labour incurred in the 'sexual coming-of-age narrative.'⁹³² The frequent use of the makeover in the case studies was shown to foreground the status of gender as situated and imposed on the surface of the body, as Butler argues. Perhaps the most overt expression of the labour of gender occurs in *Pretty in Pink*, when Andie makes her dress for the prom. Andie's work ethic is underscored throughout as she urges her father to find employment, chastises Duckie for his poor school attendance, and balances the demands of her own school work with her job at Trax. Creating her outfit for the prom from dresses supplied by her father and Iona, Andie demonstrates

⁹³¹ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 3

⁹³² J Feuer, 1993, op. cit., p. 125

the possibility of constructing a gender identity that demonstrates her ambivalent relationship towards the event's gendered and class imperatives. Similarly, addressing *Dirty Dancing* through Butler's work enables us to see the labour of Baby's gradual acquisition of dancing skills, and by proxy, adult sexual femininity. The Teen Movie was shown to foreground gender as a perpetually repeated construction, and the distinct possibility of failure to live up to its ideal.

The readings of the makeovers of Laney and Sandy in *She's All That* and *Grease* respectively, likewise drew out the labour of the assumption of gender. While both films seemingly portrayed these characters' successful ascension into a new state of desirable femininity, utilising Butler's work on gender brought out the indeterminacy of the resulting transformed identities. Laney's stumble following her makeover demonstrated her ambivalent positioning in gender and class terms. While her unease in high-heeled shoes illustrated a partially failed interpellation into heteronormative femininity, the delicacy with which she falls was seen to signify her new positioning within middle-class femininity. A similar moment occurs at the end of *Grease* as traces of Sandy's former innocent identity were seen to leak through in telling glances at the Pink Ladies when unsure of how to dispose of her cigarette. A reading informed by Butler's work revealed her continued innocence despite a newly sexualised image.

Notably, these transformations made clear the significance of clothing to the construction of gender and class identity. In *Pretty in Pink*, costume provides the medium through which Andie negotiates her position between hostility towards the "richies" Steff and Benny, and the desire to transcend her lower class status. Read through the work of Butler and Skeggs, the distinctive, retro clothing worn by Andie, Duckie and Iona was seen to constitute an ironic mockery of the construction of respectable gender identity. Further, Andie's ambivalent class and gender identity was

illustrated by the dress she constructs for the prom. Deconstructing and reassembling dresses donated by her father and Iona, Andie both adheres to and subtly transgresses the prom's gendered and classed imperatives. Similarly, in *She's All That*, Laney's paint-splattered overalls were seen loosely to evoke the ideals of 1970s feminism, and consequently, the character's political consciousness. As such, Laney's nomination for prom queen was seen to bring with her a number of marginal political causes into the mainstream.

Since Butler argues that masculinity and femininity are equally constructed, her work is well-placed to examine the transformations of male characters that occur during the course of the films. In *She's All That*, Zach comes to realise the insignificance of his elevated position at high school. Indeed, he was seen to reach the conclusion that contrary to the promise inherent in the title of prom king, the position of idealised masculinity is impossible to embody. In *Grease*, Danny's reunion with Sandy allows him to resolve the conflicting demands posed to his masculinity, dramatically discarding his varsity kit as he does so. Likewise, *Rebel Without a Cause* concludes with Jim introducing Judy to his parents, seemingly cementing his reintegration into the community from which he was previously alienated, while the final scenes of *Dirty Dancing* portray Johnny's newly acquired sense of self-worth.

Significantly, all of these transformations contribute to the realisation of a heterosexual romance. Having exposed the indeterminacies of the characters' transformations, an analysis informed by Butler's work was also able to reveal the precariousness of these relationships. Elements of the carnival's *mise-en-scène* at the conclusion of *Grease* conjoin with my Butlerian reading of Danny's and Sandy's transformations, enabling the audience to question whether their romance will prove lasting. Indeed, the T-Birds and Pink Ladies pose behind cardboard cut-outs that

highlight the absurdity of the heterosexual couplings the film purportedly upholds. Further, as Danny pursues Sandy through a fun house, the pair disregard the “wrong way” signs to perform their final dance on the “shake shack,” in which their footing, and with it, their reunion, appears distinctly unstable. Consequently, while seemingly providing an example of the musical’s idealised, utopian conclusion in which the two opposite-sexed partners and their respective value systems are integrated and synthesised, my reading of the scene undermined the promise of such a conclusion.

Reading *Rebel Without a Cause* in the light of Butler’s work on gender was seen to undermine Jim’s apparent reform, and nascent romance, at the film’s conclusion. Indeed, the film was punctuated throughout by moments in which Jim appears to acknowledge Plato’s evident desire for him. Awareness of James Dean’s bisexuality and details of Sal Mineo’s performance added further layers of complexity to the narrative. Read through Butler’s work, the film could be seen to demonstrate both the discursive prohibition on homosexuality and the ‘gaps and fissures’ that she argues open up in the construction of compulsory heterosexuality.⁹³³ Consequently, close analysis of the transformations that frequently conclude the Teen Movie revealed the instability and precariousness of the resulting transformed identities.

The thesis explored the vulnerability of seemingly dominant characters. For Butler, recognition as culturally intelligible is essential to survival, to ‘persist in one’s own being.’⁹³⁴ She further argues that the masculine position, equated with that of possessing the Phallus, is actually dependent on the subject who appears to embody the Phallus to recognise his status.⁹³⁵ My readings of the films’ representations of the relationships between gang leaders and those they lead demonstrated this reversal of

⁹³³ J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 10

⁹³⁴ J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 32

⁹³⁵ J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 61

power relations. In *Grease*, the presence of the T-Birds hampers Danny's delight at his unexpected reunion with Sandy, while in *Rebel Without a Cause*, Buzz's gang forced him into an altercation with Jim at the Planetarium. The vulnerability and precariousness of these dominant characters was encapsulated by Danny's wistful gaze out of frame alone at the top of the bleachers at the conclusion of the "Summer Nights" sequence.

This thesis sought to investigate whether, and if so, how, characters in the Teen Movie resist normative gender roles. The analysis has demonstrated that many films portrayed a degree of resistance towards the heteronormative assumption of gender. For instance, Andie's angular dress was seen to perform a subtle critique of the gendered and classed imperatives of the prom. Nonetheless Andie's resistance did not preclude her from attending the event, nor from her 'trite' reunion with Blane.⁹³⁶ Only in *Heathers* is the heteronormative project completely undermined. While a more conventional ending might have allowed JD to see the error of his ways and be united with Veronica, *Heathers* concludes with JD's suicide while Veronica resumes her friendship with Martha. Further, Veronica remains unpunished for her earlier transgressions, problematising her status as champion of the high school cohort.

For Shary, the Teen Movie is always necessarily a relation to the past, since teenagers do not generally possess the means to produce and release a mainstream film that represents their current experience.⁹³⁷ In *Heathers*, Christian Slater's performance was seen to evoke a number of earlier star performances. In addition to the rebel antecedents referenced through his name, costumes and mannerisms, JD's gestures also alluded to the performance style of Jack Nicholson and Clint Eastwood, both of whom have played characters with far more dangerous characteristics than those typically attributed to the teen juvenile delinquent. Slater's performance was thus

⁹³⁶ R Moseley, 2002, op. cit., p. 406

⁹³⁷ T Shary, 2002, op. cit., p. 2

seen to reflect on the limits of rebel identity, and interrogate the constituent elements of “cool,” the currency of the teen rebel. Further, Butler’s work allowed Slater’s performance to be perceived as an example of the way in which history comes to be reworked through its citation. Although Dean’s and Brando’s rebellions were perceived as shocking at the time of their films’ release, *Heathers* retrospectively reconstructs them as innocent in comparison to JD’s murderous nihilism.

The passing of time is invoked in the theorisation of gender as a perpetually iterative process. However, Butler does not expressly deal with the effect of time on the construction of gender. Consequently, the chapter examining the Teen Movie’s constructions of the past took up the work of Fredric Jameson, for whom one of the chapter’s case studies, *American Graffiti*, constitutes the paradigmatic ‘nostalgia film.’⁹³⁸ The chapter was also informed by Linda Hutcheon’s work which, contrary to Jameson, revives the possibility of postmodern parody, and by Barbara Creed’s interrogation of the status of gender in the nostalgia film. The chapter was consequently able to complicate the widespread reading of *American Graffiti* and *Dirty Dancing* as purely nostalgic. Both films were seen to portray how history itself is constructed, and as a result, how certain eras come to be idealised.

Dyer’s theorisation of utopia elucidated the construction of the past in *Dirty Dancing* and its relation to the musical genre. Indeed, in its portrayal of the marginalisation and exploitation of working-class, and female, characters the film could be seen to interrogate Dyer’s conceptualisation of utopia. While he acknowledges that utopia does not promise to resolve issues that might require a more drastic transformation of social life, such as race or gender discrimination, *Dirty*

⁹³⁸ See F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 18-19

Dancing was seen to bring out these inadequacies within the musical genre itself.⁹³⁹ Consequently, rather than idealising, or glossing over the past, the two films analysed in the final chapter demonstrate how the 'Teen Movie' can be seen to reflect on, and question, the retrospective idealisation of these eras.

The case studies' findings make significant contributions to the current literature on the 'Teen Movie'. Much of the existing work on the genre discussed the films in terms of the cinematic representation of adolescence. However, through textual analysis of key case studies, the thesis has demonstrated that elements of the films' style and narrative reward detailed scrutiny. Illustrating the paucity of material on the genre, this thesis provides the first ever extended analysis of two of its most popular and critically acclaimed examples: *Grease* and *American Graffiti*. In both cases, a critical consensus had emerged that deemed them 'regressive',⁹⁴⁰ and 'depthless, value-free pastiche' respectively.⁹⁴¹ However, close textual analysis revealed the reflexive references to the youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s in *Grease* and the complexity of *American Graffiti's* engagement with the past.

Reading key examples of the 'Teen Movie' through Butler's work on gender develops Feuer's conceptualisation of the 'Teen Movie's' syntax. Within the films, as in American culture, the prom constitutes a significant, compulsory ritual. In turn, Martin identifies the prom as one of the 'Teen Movie's' defining semantic elements.⁹⁴² The prom's role in the films exemplifies the type of emotional narrative climax that concludes films of the genre of indeterminate space. For Schatz, such conclusions portray the integration of two formerly conflicted sets of values respectively embodied

⁹³⁹ See R Dyer, 1977, op. cit., in R Dyer, Ed., 2002, op. cit., p. 27

⁹⁴⁰ T Shary, 2005, op. cit., p. 47

⁹⁴¹ F Jameson, 1991, op. cit., p. 18

⁹⁴² A Martin, 1994, op. cit., p. 67

by two opposite-sexed protagonists.⁹⁴³ Viewed in the light of Butler's work, the integration and synthesis of values through the heterosexual couple can be seen to uphold and idealise heteronormativity. In the Teen Movie, the prom often provides the site of the union between two characters, as it does for Andie and Blane in *Pretty in Pink*. As a consequence, the event can be seen to provide the culmination of the genre's 'sexual coming-of-age' syntax.⁹⁴⁴

The importance of the prom is underscored throughout both *Pretty in Pink* and *She's All That*. When characters display reluctance to attend the event, they are given to understand that attendance is compulsory, even if not specifically mandated by the high school's formal attendance processes.⁹⁴⁵ Reading the prom's importance in the light of Butler's work reveals its status as a locus of gender interpellation. The event's claim to celebrate the completion of high-school education and thus the inauguration of adulthood constructs the prom as a gendered gateway to adulthood.

The importance accorded to the prom in these films can be seen to disrupt the model of sexual coming-of-age assumed by Feuer's theorisation of the Teen Movie's syntax. Rather than a gradual progression from childhood and adulthood, the prom demonstrates how the coming-of-age process may be heralded by significant moments over time. The prom also has consequences for Butler's theorisation of interpellation. While Butler constructs gender as a constantly iterative process, repeatedly compelled and produced under the prevailing matrix of gender norms,⁹⁴⁶ the importance accorded to the prom demonstrates how those constant, repeated interpellations are

⁹⁴³ T Schatz, 1981, op. cit., p. 23

⁹⁴⁴ J Feuer, 1993, op. cit., p. 125

⁹⁴⁵ The distinction between the two is made clear in *Pretty in Pink* when Andie discusses the possibility of not attending her prom.

⁹⁴⁶ See J Butler, 1990, op. cit., p. 192

punctuated by significant moments in which adherence to an idealised model of gender is more rigorously policed.

The encounter between Butler's work and the Teen Movie has likewise had consequences for the theorist's model of gender assumption. Butler does discuss the moment at which a doctor declares "it's a girl" at the birth of an infant, which she argues heralds a series of ideological interpellations – a 'process of girling' – that call on the infant to cite the norms of girlhood.⁹⁴⁷ The announcement is thus performative since the doctor does not merely report a pre-existing fact, but constructs the infant as a "girl." However, despite this fleeting invocation of the imposition of girlhood, Butler does not address the transition between childhood and adulthood that constitutes adolescence. The analysis of the Teen Movie, and its construction of this period of 'storm and stress,' demonstrates how Butler's work may be developed to consider the progression from child to adult gender identities.⁹⁴⁸

Close analysis of key examples of the Teen Movie has complicated Butler's contention that the instantiation of idealised gender is always impossible.⁹⁴⁹ Juvenile delinquent gangs, and the subcultures they engender, constitute one of the distinctive semantic elements that Martin identifies in the Teen Movie.⁹⁵⁰ Analysing the films' construction of gangs and subcultures in the light of Butler's work revealed how certain figures, such as Buzz in *Rebel Without a Cause*, and Danny in *Grease* were seen to embody the position of idealised masculinity within the confines of their gangs. These characters can thus be seen to open up Butler's theorisation of the inevitable failure to instantiate idealised gender. Tellingly, the films also demonstrated the vulnerability of these characters, since they were required constantly to reassert their authority, often

⁹⁴⁷ See J Butler, 1993, op. cit., p. 24

⁹⁴⁸ GS Hall, 1904, op. cit., p. 78

⁹⁴⁹ See in particular J Butler, 1990, *ibid.*, p. 60

⁹⁵⁰ A Martin, 1994, op. cit., p. 67

by staging dangerous rituals, such as the “Chickie Run” that caused Buzz to plummet to his death. Consequently, the films reveal that these characters do not occupy idealised masculinity, but only appear to do so within specific contexts.

The Teen Movie’s construction of subculture opens up the possibility of multiple masculinities and femininities, complicating Butler’s theorisation of a single idealised gender. While Butler argues that legibility as a subject becomes less possible at the margins of intelligibility, the construction of subculture in the Teen Movie demonstrates the continued possibility of recognition at the margins. Further, while located on the margins of intelligibility, subcultures are always defined in relation to the norm, even if, as Hebdige argues, they construct themselves in opposition to the mainstream.⁹⁵¹ The continued intelligibility of subcultures demonstrates the range of identities contained within the norm of a single idealised masculinity and femininity, such that the construction of subcultures in the Teen Movie can be seen to disaggregate the symbolic positions of having and being the Phallus.

Butler’s account of recognition elucidated the vulnerability of dominant characters in the Teen Movie. However, the relationship between John and Terry at the conclusion of *American Graffiti* has further implications for Butler’s account of the process. As John walks away from the site of the crash that caused him to win the drag race by default, his despondency is lifted by Terry who, proclaiming John to be “the greatest,” pledges to assist him in all such future events. However, as it is only Terry, the film’s weakest character, who continues to uphold John as an embodiment of teen rebel masculinity, the film indicates John’s diminished position. The scene was thus seen to complicate Butler’s contention that the masculine subject merely requires

⁹⁵¹ D Hebdige, 1979, op. cit., in K Gelder and S Thornton, Eds., 1979, op. cit., p. 82

another to acknowledge his power. Rather, my analysis of *American Graffiti* revealed the significance of the status of the person who reflects that power.

Teen Movies that took up the tropes of the musical presented examples of characters who occupied the position of both embodying and possessing the Phallus, a possibility that Butler does not explore. In *Grease*, while Danny is seen to possess the Phallus within the T-Birds, his involvement with school athletics indicates his wish to make himself desirable for Sandy, and as such to occupy the position of embodying the Phallus. Similarly, *Dirty Dancing* frequently portrayed Baby gazing longingly at Johnny, appearing to construct him too as an embodiment of the Phallus. Drawing on Cohan's study of Fred Astaire, the analysis demonstrated how Johnny is simultaneously constructed as an object of spectacle, and as occupying a position of mastery. In contrast to Butler, who theorises a sexed binary, structured according to whether the subject appears to embody or to possess the Phallus, the construction of masculinity in the teen musical was shown to demonstrate the possibility of approximating both positions simultaneously.

The case studies demonstrated notable absences from Butler's theorisation of gender. Although Butler observes the influence of intersecting vectors of identity in her conceptualisation of the human, namely race, morphology, sex, gender and ethnicity, she does not account for the influence of class.⁹⁵² Nonetheless, analysis of *Pretty in Pink* in particular revealed the importance of class to gender identity. Indeed, it is Andie's class status that leads her to be constructed as an unintelligible "mutant." The analysis of *Pretty in Pink* informed by Skeggs' understanding of femininity as a classed discourse thus revealed the necessity of including class in any conceptualisation of the human.

⁹⁵² J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 2

The chapter examining the Teen Movie's construction of the past demonstrated how the passing of time might be incorporated in Butler's theorisation of gender. Analysing the representation of John in *American Graffiti* revealed how certain models of idealised gender fall in and out of favour according to the age of the subject approximating those models, and the era in which that subject appears. Indeed, the film makes clear that John is both too old to instantiate the norms of teen rebel masculinity, and equally that the era in which such counterculture was seen to flourish is long ago concluded.

One source of weakness in the thesis is the regrettable lack of attention to the construction of race and ethnicity in the Teen Movie. Within the films analysed, and indeed, the majority of the genre, characters are almost uniformly white. Wood notes the 'genteel hypocrisy' of the 1990s Teen Movie, wherein black characters are included, yet remain sidelined from the film's primary narrative.⁹⁵³ There is clearly potential for further research examining the construction of race and ethnicity, and their intersections with gender and class in the Teen Movie.

The encounter between the Teen Movie and Butler's work on gender succeeds in rethinking this 'norm of contemporary commercial cinema,' augmenting existing work on the genre, and developing Butler's concepts.⁹⁵⁴ Close analysis of the Hollywood Teen Movie has challenged the theorist's contention that critique and subversion of the prevailing regime of gender norms only occurs when those situated on the margins make a claim to intelligibility.⁹⁵⁵ Indeed, the analysis has demonstrated the complexity and precariousness of the heteronormative sexual coming-of-age narratives portrayed in the Hollywood mainstream. Within the films too, the thesis

⁹⁵³ R Wood, 2003, op. cit., p. 317

⁹⁵⁴ A Martin, 1989, op. cit., p. 11

⁹⁵⁵ See for instance, J Butler, 2004, op. cit., in J Butler, 2004, op. cit., p. 3

Conclusion

discussed how “insider” characters such as Zach in *She’s All That*, Danny in *Grease* and Veronica in *Heathers* negotiate their position under the prevailing matrix of gender norms. In turn, analysis of key case studies has succeeded in bringing into play a number of concrete examples that suggest ways in which Butler’s work on gender might be developed in relation to class, the passing of time, and the analysis of normativity itself. The thesis thus demonstrates ample reasons to bother with the Teen Movie.

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The Postman Always Rings Twice, Dir. Tay Garnett, MGM, 1946

The Quick and the Dead, Dir. Sam Raimi, Tristar Pictures, USA, Japan, 1995

The Servant, Dir. Joseph Losey, Elstree Distributors, UK, 1963

The Shining, Dir. Stanley Kubrick, Warner Brothers, USA, 1980

The Trip, Dir. Roger Corman, American International Pictures, USA, 1967

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The Wild One, Dir. Laslo Benedek, Columbia Pictures, USA, 1953

Tootsie, Dir. Sydney Pollack, Columbia Pictures Corporation, USA, 1982

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Wall Street, Dir. Oliver Stone, Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1987

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Whatever It Takes, Dir. David Raynr, Columbia Pictures, USA, 2000

When Harry Met Sally, Dir. Rob Reiner, Castle Rock Entertainment, USA, 1989

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Working Girl, Dir. Mike Nichols, Twentieth Century Fox, USA, 1988

Young Man with a Horn, Dir. Michael Curtiz, Warner Bros, USA, 1950

Youth in Revolt, Dir. Miguel Arteta, Dimension Films, USA, 2009

Zelig, Dir. Woody Allen, Orion Pictures Corporation, USA, 1983