Investigating the 1980s Hollywood Teen Genre: Adolescence, Character, Space

By

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Abstract

The 1980s Hollywood teen genre is a topic which has not attracted significant academic interest in the context of doctoral research. Only recently have writers focused on this period in wider scholarly texts, often positioned in relation to other periods of the teen genre, but not extensively concentrating on the 1980s. This research will address what is a lack of detailed analysis of this cinematic era and offer a contribution to knowledge in terms of Hollywood genre cinema.

The aim of this thesis is to argue that teen films produced during the 1980s effectively represent youth concerns and the coming-of-age process, for example, in terms of adolescent identity, the different 'roles' the characters play, sexuality, gender, relationships, class issues and the generational divide. These concerns will often resonate with the wider sociopolitical and economic landscape of the Reagan era. The research will investigate these themes in individual films and then go on to analyse them using several films across the generic spectrum to show how the genre achieves a unity and synergy, despite differences in tone and attitude of the films under scrutiny. The films covered herein will be a selection from the subgenres of the 1980s teen films: the teen sex comedies examined were produced during the first half of the decade; the more romantic comedies and dramas were generally made from the mid-1980s onwards. Also scrutinised will be several delinquent teen films.

One of the methodologies used to underpin the central argument is related to the structuralist theories and their binary oppositional factors. This will attempt to make sense of the portrayal of a youth culture by exposing its contradictions. This approach will be merged with film genre theories, for instance, in relation to a film's semantic/syntactic axis and the symbolic use of generic sites and iconography. Ideas relating to adolescence and its phases will also form part of the analysis.

The principal conclusions from this debate will be that the 1980s teen genre is a topic worthy of rigorous academic interrogation, despite often being critically neglected and sometimes maligned. The genre has the potential to represent and articulate youth cultural concerns and wider societal implications, and the films therein should be considered important media documents.

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on the so-called golden age of popular teen movies in 1980s mainstream Hollywood cinema. These are films about teenagers, from their point of view and played by teenage actors that were produced in the Hollywood studio system between 1978 and 1990. Much of the following debate will revolve around the teen sex comedies made in the first half of the decade and the teen romantic comedies and dramas that followed, which were generally made between the mid-1980s and the end of that decade. The delinquent drama, a subgeneric category of the teen drama, also forms part of this discussion, playing a lesser but still significant role. The thesis will argue that this cycle of films effectively engages with, and represents, adolescent concerns while at the same time embracing wider issues relating to the changing sociopolitical and ideological landscape of the Reagan era, which spanned his time in office from 1981-1989, under which the majority of the films focused on here were produced.

While the study of individual films is a key part of this work, the research will identify and interrogate the differences and similarities between the adolescent themes and their societal implications in terms of tone and attitude across a wider corpus of films. The challenge here will be to address these issues within both the single film and the subgenres to reveal how the 1980s teen genre gave voice to, and articulated, youth culture, its contradictions and broader societal concerns. This will provide a coherent link throughout the films, their stories and characters, resulting in the contention that the genre ultimately works as a unified whole, in expressing these main themes and issues. Jon Lewis (1992: 2-4) shares similar views on this approach when he writes about the teen genre, noting that the films, 'narrativize [and] give order to...the otherwise fragmentary and fleeting, transitional and transitory...chaotic and contradictory experience of youth.' This method of study will be reinforced by a binary oppositional approach, drawing on the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss on structuralism and myth. It will be merged with film genre theory, ideas concerning space and its symbolic values, and research relating to adolescence and the coming-of-age process. This interplay within the films will demonstrate the value of the genre in terms of its representational qualities.

Writing about the 1980s teen film will address a gap in the literature concerning Hollywood genre. It is a topic that has been neglected in major scholarly works on Hollywood film history, books such as Maltby's *Hollywood Cinema* (2003) and Bordwell & Thompson's *Film History* (2010) contain only cursory references. Similarly, key books on Hollywood film genre have few references to 1980s teen films, for example, Altman (1999) and Langford (2005). Books specifically on 1980s Hollywood cinema, such as Prince (ed. 2007), only make a brief comment on the teen film. Steve Neale (2007: 369) questions this lack of attention, arguing that the genre has a 'complexity [and] for many years been important to Hollywood, but more rarely it seems, to genre critics, theorists and historians.' Scott Long (1990: 156) notes in a broader context that the 'teenager is an orphan among cultural representation.' More recently, however, as the below literature review outlines, individual authors such as Shary (2002) have focused critically on the 1980s genre, while others have devoted noteworthy entries in books which concern broader approaches to the teen genre, like Driscoll (2011) and Bulman (2004). From a more popular perspective, the films still resonate with a certain generation today, including myself, who were teenagers during the 1980s. Several books have been written from a more journalistic and personal perspective, for example, Bernstein (1997), Gora (2010) and, most recently, Freeman (2015), all of which discuss the nostalgic values of the films.

This thesis will be an extensive examination of a specific decade reinforced by a particular set of methodological approaches, resulting in an investigation into how teen culture and its broader connotations are portrayed through cinematic representation. Focusing largely on one decade will enable an in-depth analysis of a concentrated time period, where a distinctive pattern and style of film emerged. The films have the potential to offer a broader canvas to work with than previous periods, as one of the key elements of the thesis is the treatment of adolescent sexuality and relationships. The films under discussion portray a more candid and graphic depiction of these issues than was permitted in the 1950s teen genre, for example. Reinforcing this is Lisa Borders (2007: 25), when writing about John Hughes' 1980s teen films, who states: 'Though his 1980s movies were billed as comedies, they portrayed teens with a degree of nuance and an understanding of their complex social strata that were largely missing from the films that had come before.' Thomas Doherty writes that, while the 1980s films were targeted at, and were about teens, the

marketing and reinvention were 'emphatically adult' (2002: 196). They were written and directed by adults, who often based the stories on their own youthful experiences, making their teen characters more multi-layered, sophisticated and ambivalent than ever before. Timothy Shary (1997: 40) points out the distinctiveness of the 1980s films: 'The teen film genre is a unique genre, in that the members of the culture for which it is intended are not the people actually making the films that are supposed to depict their reality.'

Moreover, from the 1960s onwards, adolescence was a topic about which scholars from a more psychological and sociological background began to scrutinize, and the thesis will argue how research of this nature resonates within the drama of the films, when related to issues surrounding the coming-of-age process. What is also significant is that, whereas in the 1950s, James Dean was 24 in the teen drama, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), playing a high school teenager, and Marlon Brando was 30 in the teen delinquent tale, *The Wild One* (1953), in the 1980s, many of the actors playing the characters were teenagers themselves, imbuing a more authentic representation of youth and reinforcing the distinctiveness of the genre; using Grant's (2007: 5) definition, the films under investigation here are 'expressions of the contemporary zeitgeist...genre movies are always about the time and place in which they are made.'

The structure and content of this introduction will follow a logical and coherent progression. The first section will establish the key themes and issues of the research; this is followed by the methodology section and the chapter overview.

Themes and Issues

As already noted, part of the investigation of this thesis will be how the films represent the coming-of-age process of adolescence, a stage when the transition from youth to adulthood is fraught with many emotional, physical and sexual changes, which take place during a short time period. Edgar Z. Friedenberg (1963: 3) defines this process: 'Human life is a continuous thread which each of us spins to its own patterns, rich and complex in meaning. There are no natural knots in it. Yet, knots form nearly always in adolescence.' In the case of this study, adolescence refers to the age group between 14 and 20: from the junior high school years in films like *Lucas* (1986), through to high school films such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982,

hereafter referred to as *Fast Times*), and college films like *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984). The terms 'teen', 'youth' and 'adolescent' will be used interchangeably throughout. Shary (2003: 492) explains in the context of adolescence and the 1980s teen genre that they contain a 'cultural significance unique to the genre: they question our evolving identities from youth to adulthood while simultaneously shaping and maintaining those identities.' Part of this process, which is depicted in the films discussed, sees some of the protagonists experience change and conflict during the course of the film and, by the end, some kind of transformation — John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club* (1985) being a prime example.

The adolescent behavioural conflicts and struggles portrayed by the cinematic teens in the 1980s can be traced back to G. Stanley Hall, whose writing on adolescence was ground-breaking at the time: *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (1904). Hall outlined three key issues and developments which characterised adolescent life: 'conflict with parents', 'mood disruptions' and 'risk-taking'. These phases occurring within what he referred to as the 'storm and stress' period. This is the English translation of 'Sturm und Drang', a German phrase which has its roots in German literary history of the 18th century, which meant extremes of emotion in an individual in the face of perceived rationalist thought; issues which become thematic features which surface in the genre, providing a framework throughout the thesis in terms of defining different types of teenage behaviour. Adolescent 'storm and stress' will also be a thematic example of how the genre becomes synergised across the different subgenres.

Sex and relationships are recurring themes throughout the genre and, of course, are key elements in the coming-of-age process. Their portrayal ranges from comic to serious and, at times, the protagonists are seen to suffer emotionally from their experiences. Timothy Shary explains the significance of these two thematic threads: 'Romantic longing and sexual curiosity take on heightened intensity and profundity for youth in the adolescent years [and teens] struggle to recognise and cope with the emotional and psychological changes' (2002: 209-210). The characters and stories of the sex comedy are linked to sexual initiation and loss of virginity, which are ever-present topics in the narrative and often determine how it affects the protagonists and shapes teen identity, as well as providing a commentary on wider connotations. For instance, the aggressive sexual exploits of the teen male in sex

comedies like *The Last American Virgin* (1982) resonate with a renewed sense of masculine strength in the Reagan era. From a gendered perspective, whether sex is depicted as comic, like in *Porky's* (1981), or more serious, as in *Little Darlings* (1980), the films will be used to investigate representations of this type of teen behaviour and how the male and female characters negotiate their feelings and emotions, which often have negative or adverse consequences.

When it was discovered that the AIDS/HIV virus could be transmitted through heterosexual sex in the mid-1980s, society's attitude towards casual sex and promiscuous behaviour changed almost overnight and, consequently, the image of a more sensitive and celibate youth began to feature in romantic comedies and dramas. More teen films concerning romance and love were made, most notably in the John Hughes' cycle of films, which included *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987). The emphasis here is not on the physical aspect of sex and its ramifications, but more on how the protagonists react emotionally when, for example, they are confronted with issues of socioeconomic and cultural difference. However, this debate will not be about class warfare using a Marxist approach or any other specific political philosophy; it will be more concerned with how the relationships and stories are portrayed in terms of adolescent experience, the social and economic status of the characters and the condescension that the more affluent characters display — all set against a backdrop of Reagan-era social mobility and aspiration. Hadley Freeman (2015: 55-56) points out that, in 1980s Hollywood films, wealthy people are frequently cast as 'disgusting, shallow, and even murderous', examples from the teen genre being the above three Hughes' films but also *Heathers* (1989)*,* which involves a rich kid committing several murders. Freeman asserts that 'working-class people are noble and well intentioned', as in *All the Right Moves* (1983) and *Vision Quest* (1985). But, as this thesis will show, rich characters can be congenial, like Joel in *Risky Business* (1983) and Ferris in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). Blue-collar teens are also seen to be malevolent, *River's Edge* (1987) being a notable example.

The integration of sexuality and relationships in this thesis is often associated with other key adolescent factors concerning the coming-of-age process, and the films and characters will be used to illustrate this kind of teenage behaviour. For instance, the dramatization of the role of the teen stereotype and its hierarchical nature is a theme which is consistent throughout the genre, especially from the mid-

1980s onwards: the jock, the popular girl, the delinquent, the rebel and the nerd all pervade the films in various forms and manifestations, with *The Breakfast Club* being emblematic of this. Deconstructing these simplistic definitions and analysing the differences and similarities between them will achieve a more three-dimensional and deeper representation of this aspect of adolescent character, and again act as a unifying feature of the genre. A lengthy discussion about *The Breakfast Club* and its structuralist oppositions will reveal contradictions within the teen stereotype: one example being that unlikely romantic relationships result despite these oppositions. Other films investigated and which concern the problematic definition of the teen stereotype include *Revenge of the Nerds,* which takes a comic view, and *Lucas*, which adopts a more tender and emotional tone. Made towards the end of the decade, the aforementioned *Heathers* is a dark comic teen drama which adds a postmodern twist to the teen film and its stereotypes.

Considered analysis of the 'role' of the teen stereotype will lead to an examination of the protagonists using different approaches in terms of character roles and their functions and meanings. A discussion in relation to the gender divide will concern the concept of the active 'ideal male' and his passive 'ideal female' counterpart; aligned to this is the 'shadow' characters who make an impact in this context. This approach will draw on Robin Wood (2003b), who wrote about Alfred Hitchcock's films from such a perspective, but Wood's arguments are just as relevant to the teen genre. It will produce contradictory messages which point to issues related to modern capitalism, patriarchy and the nuclear family.

Further teen roles are explored as the context shifts away from a stereotypical depiction to a more archetypical one, when characters in the genre are portrayed in the context of Vladimir Propp's notion of tale roles (the villain, princess) and narrative functions. This method of study has been appropriated by film scholars in the past, for example, John Fell (1977), but not in relation to the teen film. The thesis will expand the debate into the genre's characters and how they operate in terms of oppositional values and relationship with each other, and will further develop the teen genre's representational qualities.

Other adolescent themes related to sex and relationships are examined; they include peer pressure, conformity, the teenage clique and teen angst. The protagonists in the sex comedies *Little Darlings*, *Fast Times* and *Porky's* are subjected to peer pressure into losing their virginity; the oppressive nature of the

teen clique and conforming to its values is evident in the romantic comedy *Valley Girl* (1983) and, to a more extreme level, in *Heathers.* In *Valley Girl*, the female protagonist starts a relationship with someone from a different cultural background, much to the disapproval of her peer group who urge her to conform to their ways.

Teen angst involving puberty and bodily change are portrayed in the genre. Characters experience conflicting and confusing emotions as their sexual body parts become the focus of attention. From a more vulgar but comic perspective, the opening of the sex comedy *Porky's* sees the character of Pee Wee express disappointment when measuring his penis and realising it is not getting any longer. In a much more sensitive scene, from the romantic comedy *Sixteen Candles,* Molly Ringwald looks in the mirror and is dissatisfied because her breasts are not getting any bigger. These are examples of how the genre becomes unified: despite the obvious differences in tone and attitude, the similarities are of more significance as the characters both share adolescent concerns relating to puberty, and the scenes take place in the same teen generic site: the bedroom, and an examination of the significance of this space will also form part of this thesis. Nicholas Good's (2004: 91) description of adolescence not only echoes the experience of the two protagonists in these scenes and the genre as a whole, but also adolescence in the real world: 'An overwhelming onslaught of awkward physical developments [which] assault young people overnight...adolescents must grapple with social changes, noticeably increased emphasis on peer groups and potential romantic partners.' These adolescent thematic threads are consistent throughout the subgenres and are often depicted differently but nonetheless, are features which connect the characters and stories, defining this cycle of films as the '1980s teen genre'.

It is important to note early on in this thesis the challenges faced when writing about a major theme like sexual identity, which could be a separate doctoral study concerning teen film in itself. While sexuality in this work is a key part of the adolescent and coming-of-age experience, other issues such as the teens' relationship with the adult world and the high school stereotypes are also important aspects. Often, these themes are linked, sometimes they are not, but the aim of the research is to examine adolescence more holistically, not just using one major theme like sexuality. Furthermore, when discussions of female and male 'desire' are referred to, this is not from any psychoanalytical perspective — it is expressed by the characters' actions and how they communicate with each other. It is not hidden or latent; desire

is visible and often expressed through the mise-en-scène, for example, in the beach scene in *Valley Girl* (described in the final chapter).

Another unifying topic which surfaces again and again during the 1980s teen genre is the generational divide and teens rebelling against adult authority. This will be an important aspect throughout the thesis and provide another connection between the films and their stories. Adults are often portrayed in a negative light in both comical and serious ways: teachers are depicted as corrupt and arrogant (*The Breakfast Club* and *All the Right Moves*); as inept caricatures or figures of fun (*Fast Times* and *Heathers*). Parents are often unseen, distant and emotionally detached (*Risky Business* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*); they are violent and abusive, *The Outsiders* (1983) *and River's Edge*. They are contradictory figures in films like *Private School* (1983), where on the one hand, teachers are seen to be setting the moral code; on the other, they behave just as badly as the teens.

Geographically and spatially, teen sites and their iconography play a vital role in the development and argument of this thesis. The shopping mall, the high school/college, the family home and teen bedroom; all places associated with the teen genre which offer a commentary on the coming-of-age process, sexuality, relationship issues and affluence in the 1980s. Other spaces featured in the genre, less frequently but still of significance, are the city and other outdoor locales away from the probing eye of suburbia. All these sites become active and imbued with symbolism within a wider sociopolitical and cultural discourse when the characters interact and congregate within these spaces. This examination draws on what Henri Lefebvre (1974), cited in Childs (2006: 2), discussed in the context of 'social space', which overturns the traditional notion of space being 'empty'. Furthermore, issues such as the notion of private, public and liminal space are significant when related to adolescent issues in spaces like the shopping mall in *Valley Girl* and the teen bedroom in *Sixteen Candles*. Themes such as power, control, liberation and freedom are investigated when analysing the emblematic qualities of the family home and the city.

The symbolic nature of the spaces and iconography in this research also offers a commentary concerning the depiction of the social and economic status of the genre's affluent characters. The huge mansions where the characters live and the expensive cars they drive are highly visible aspects of the genre's mise-en-scène, especially in the John Hughes cycle of romantic comedies and dramas. Barry Keith

Grant (2007: 80) reinforces this when he states that the standard way of representing issues of race and class in genre cinema in the 1980s was 'almost exclusively the cultural property of a white male consciousness'. Less frequent in the 1980s teen genre was a focus on blue-collar communities, but the youth films of the period still offer significant statements on attitudes towards respecting the value of money, privilege, education and the importance of a work ethic. The characters in films like *All the Right Moves* and *Vision Quest* occupy contrasting spaces to their wealthier counterparts, such as industrial environments far removed from mansions, fast cars and other trappings of wealth.

Teen rituals are illustrated in the genre and represent another noteworthy aspect of the coming-of-age process, serving to unite the genre. The out-of-control party when parents are away is one such ritual which leads to an oppositional debate concerning space and its metaphorical qualities in relation to the family home, power and liberation of teens from parental control. *Risky Business* is an example of how this concept is expressed. Displays of 'gross-out' humour and trashing of property are teen rituals where affluent teens misbehave and suffer no consequences. These acts are examined in the context of their broader connotations associated with white privilege in the Reagan era.

Sporting rituals in films like *Lucas* demonstrate the blurred boundaries between the teen stereotypes. The ritual of the high school prom in *Pretty in Pink* is an American rites-of-passage into adulthood for every teenage life and comments on the issue of romance and class divisions. The shopping fantasy is a female teen ritual and, in *Valley Girl*, it raises issues relating to consumerism and conspicuous consumption in the 1980s. As well as being part of the 'storm and stress' phase of adolescence, risk taking is a ritualistic feature in the teen films of the 1980s. For example, two of the teen characters in *Reckless* (1984) break into their high school and run amok.

One of the methods that will allow the themes to develop and evolve will be to position them in relation to the teen genre of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, parental and adult culture during these earlier periods was very much foregrounded, whereas this is not the case in the 1980s. Combining structuralism and history will be challenging as the structuralist ideas of Lévi-Strauss were ahistorical; therefore, to overcome this difficulty and to justify the argument's inclusion, it is necessary to treat this method of study in a modified form, which will be explained in greater

detail in the methodology section below. However, genre and its history will not be a main debate throughout the thesis; it will serve as more of a footnote to the key debates on the 1980s, which will indicate how the genre's codes and conventions have changed over a short time period.

This research will argue that the teen genre is an important media form as it offers its characters a site for articulation and identity formation. As Grant (2007: 6) points out, a film genre,

> can expose the ideology of its artefacts...can offer empowerment to various cultural groups and are sites of ideological struggle...existing on a continuum between invention and convention [and allowing] for a greater appreciation and understanding of genre texts and how they work, [which are] intimately imbricated within larger cultural discourses as well as political ones.

Put simply, what emerges from the comic frivolity, vulgar humour, sexual antics, romantic encounters and generational divides in the genre is a deeper understanding of the coming-of-age experience and the culture and society in which the films are set, as represented by the characters and stories of the genre. Harold M. Foster (1987: 87) supports this claim when he writes about John Hughes' *Sixteen Candles*, noting that the film 'transcends the formula...and on the surface...seems to advocate drinking, sex, and drugs, but the spirit of this film is really about the tenderness of growing.'

Methodology

The introduction has already touched on the methodology that will be applied across the thesis, and more in-depth detail here will bring the issues into sharper focus. This section will explain how the different approaches and theories merge with the themes, narratives and characters in order to effectively represent youth concerns and wider social discourses. The research will view the issues through a prism of film genre, narrative, and structuralist theories, allied to methods relating to the study of adolescence and the coming-of-age process. This section will also focus briefly on the historical and marketing aspects of the 1980s genre.

In terms of narrative theory, reference to the classic three-act Hollywood structure will provide the framework for the analysis of the scenes and methods of

study. Thomas Schatz's (1981: 30) model will operate as a framing device throughout this thesis:

> [Act 1, Introduction] *establishment* (via various narrative and iconographic cues) of the generic community with its inherent dramatic conflicts;
>
> [Act 2, Conflict] *animation* of these conflicts through the actions and attitudes of the genre's constellation of characters; *intensification* of the conflict by means of conventional situations and dramatic confrontations until the conflict reaches crisis proportions;
>
> [Act 3, Resolution] *resolution* of the crisis in a fashion which eliminates the physical and/or ideological threat and thereby celebrates the (temporarily) well-ordered community.

For the most part in this study, theories surrounding film genre will refer to what happens within the films, their thematic structure and what gives the genre its distinctive characteristics. This relates to what Stam, et al, discuss in terms of the 'intratextual' approach, 'a process by which films refer to themselves through mirroring, microcosmic...structures' (1992: 207). In other words, the content of the films in terms of character types, themes and stories, objects, spaces, iconography, attitude, emotional tone and the wider social implications produced from this. These are Altman's (2004) 'building blocks' of a film — more specifically their 'semantic' features — a term which will be used throughout this thesis. Altman also focuses on the 'syntactic' approach concerning how these semantic features are organised within a film; for example, relationship issues between the characters or the visual components of a film concerning their oppositional characteristics and arrangement in the plot, issues which are often implicit within the film. Altman dubs this association, the 'semantic/syntactic' approach. The semantic features of a teen film include: the shopping mall, prom night, cheerleaders, the jock, the hero and the villain. The syntactic elements will examine how these semantic units work together, or against each other, i.e. their oppositional values, during the course of the film's narrative. For example, the generational divide in *The Breakfast Club*, or conflicts between the different stereotypes in films like *Revenge of the Nerds*. Repetition and difference within this semantic/syntactic axis are also integral to the genre debate, for instance, in the romantic comedies: couples from different cultural and social

backgrounds start a relationship, overcome the obstacles and a happy ending ensues. This pattern is repeated in several films under discussion here: *Pretty in Pink* and *Valley Girl* are two examples. As Grant notes (2003: xv): 'Genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations.' It is also important to note that the boundaries between the semantic/syntactic elements of films are often blurred, which Altman himself acknowledges. For example, the shopping mall in *Fast Times* is a semantic element, a visual signifier of the teen genre, but it can also have a syntactic purpose in terms of it being a narrative framing device: a space in which the characters can be introduced, and also a space where the teens congregate to resolve their conflicts at the end. Therefore, the semantic has entered the syntactic field and, despite the ambiguity, it does not alter the effectiveness of this approach; on the contrary, it offers a richer generic reading of a text.

Altman (1999: 17) points out that one of the ways genre can be defined is when an individual film contains a 'recognizably generic blueprint [containing] the basic structures commonly identified with the genre.' This refers back to what was mentioned previously concerning the study of both the individual film and several films across the teen generic spectrum. For example, the 1980s teen sex comedy *Porky's,* acts as a generic blueprint with its theme of teen males pursuing sex, which is repeated in other films within this subgenre such as *Losin' It* (1983) and *The Last American Virgin.* This idea of the paradigmatic individual film can be traced back to the 1950s teen genre and will develop what has been touched upon thus far in terms of the historical insight of the thesis, by examining how the 1980s teen genre has evolved since the post-war period.

The 1950s witnessed an economic boom with teenagers being central to this. The financial burdens of the Depression and WWII were easing, and families began to prosper – more bought homes, cars and moved out to the suburbs – living the American Dream. For the first time, young people had steady jobs, disposable income and increased leisure time, making them a powerful economic group. The car gave teenagers a more mobile way of life and independence never experienced before. The Hollywood Studio System began to evolve and fragment; more independent companies emerged, which meant the content of films were depicting a wider range of moral issues. Moreover, the growing medium of television was also a factor in the 1950s. Fewer adults were going to the cinema; they were staying at

home and watching TV, but one group – teenagers – were still going to the cinema in large numbers. Consequently, Hollywood began to cater for the growing teenage market; more distinctive films featuring young people at the centre of the narrative were produced, and a new genre was making its presence felt within the Hollywood generic canon – the 'Teenpic' (Doherty, 2002). *Rock Around the Clock* (1956), as Doherty points out, was the 'first hugely successful film marketed to teenagers to the pointed exclusion of their elders. By showing that teenagers alone could sustain a box office hit [which] provided a model to be imitated' (2002: 57). It also, along with Elvis Presley, introduced Rock 'n' Roll to teenagers in the form of Bill Haley and the Comets, and the fusion of youth, films and popular music would serve as a generic model, later resonating in 1980s teen films, like *The Breakfast Club* and *Pretty in Pink* (1986). In the former, the Simple Minds song, 'Don't You Forget about Me', plays over the opening credits and is synonymous with the film and the 1980s.

Teen Films produced by the major studios in the 1950s included, *The Wild One* (1953), *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle* (both 1955), all examples of what was called at the time, 'the social problem film', stories about juvenile delinquency, to use the 1950s term of expression. James Dean in *Rebel* became an icon of the era whose rebellious and alienated persona represented a new teenage identity in post-war America, an image which was a source of antagonism to the conservative, adult generation. *Rebel* was also the first film to argue that juvenile delinquency was not just rooted in poverty like in previous cinematic depictions of young people, for example, the 1930s Dead End Kids films, but existed within a broader social context, i.e. white collar suburban America. Timothy Shary explains that, 'culpability [was] placed not only on poverty but also on schools, parents, courts, urbanisation, suburbanisation, and increasingly, on the teens themselves' (2005: 19). In the 1980s, an updated version of rich kids behaving badly in terms of drug use is in *Less than Zero*, based on a Brett Easton Ellis' debut novel. Other films such as *Class of 1984* (1983) *The Outsiders* and *River's Edge* are films which feature criminality and delinquent behaviour, but are set in blue-collar communities. Although it is important to note that despite Hollywood cinema during the 1950s addressing more diverse subjects as alluded to above, it was under the regulation of the Hays Code, so anything too provocative or controversial was not permitted. Therefore, *Rebel* and the other delinquent films of the period were more conservative in these terms compared to their 1980s counterparts – *Less Than Zero*, *Class of 1984*

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and *Rivers Edge* all contain scenes of rape, graphic violence, murder and drug taking. However, in *Rivers Edge*, ironically, a more ideologically conservative resolution is played out as the forces of law and order take control. This compares to the endings of *Rebel* and *The Wild One* where in the former, patriarchy and in the latter, law and order are the dominant forces. Jon Lewis writes, 'in effect, the restoration of the adult culture [in *Rebel* and *The Wild One*] is informed rather than radicalised by youth' (1992: 3).

Adolescent 'storm and stress' are main thematic threads of *Rebel* and the other two above 1950s films, themes which resonate with the 1980s genre. Although not categorised as a teen delinquent film, the rebel character, Bender (Judd Nelson), in *The Breakfast Club* compares and contrasts to the protagonist in *Rebel,* Jim Stark (James Dean). A more in depth study will follow of *The Breakfast Club*, but a brief paradigmatic and historical comparison here is useful in order to forge a link between the 1950s and 1980s teen genres. Timothy Shary (2005c: 220) writes that teens in both films 'have their failed parents to blame for most of their problems.' But by 1985, the cinematic teen had evolved emotionally and was more aware and articulate about their anomie than their predecessors. Bender becomes an 'authority father figure' and 'their therapist' (ibid.) who urges the diverse group of teens who he is on detention with to confront and deal with their problems and frustrations. Also, 'Bender has elevated the gesticulating pain of Jim to a more potentially violent realm. Where Jim tried to resist fighting, Bender seeks it out' (ibid.). Both Jim and Bender are literally crying out for attention, but where in *Rebel* the teens were part of the post-war economic boom of the 1950s, the blue-collar Bender and his better off classmates represented the growing class divided in Reagan's America. Also, the more conservative *Rebel* in terms of the restoration of patriarchy and the nuclear family at the film's ending, differs from Bender's final scene. Unlike the other protagonists in *The Breakfast Club*, he does not return to his parents (who are never seen). Shary notes in this respect, 'that youth rebellion by the mid-1980s had jettisoned the reform of family from its agenda and set out on a newly independent course' (ibid: 221).

Similarity, the dark teen comedy *Heathers*, is a 1980s film whose thematic origins are evident in *Rebel* and others from the 1950s. *Heathers* villain, Jason Dean, goes by his initials, J.D., which is a satirical homage to James Dean. It is also short for juvenile delinquent. Another similarity between the two films is that both lead

protagonists – Jim Stark and J.D. – are the new kid in school who attracts unwanted attention from the jock characters. The parents in the films are also portrayed as ineffective and in a negative light. However, in terms of the recurring themes of rebellious behaviour and adolescent risk taking, *Heathers* takes it to the extreme. Where in *Rebel,* the 'Chickie' run leads to a teen's accidental death, in *Heathers*, J.D. goes on a murder spree, implicating another student Veronica, and frames the deaths as suicides. The differences extend to the tone of the films; where Rebel and others of that period adopted a serious tone, *Heathers* is ironic and darkly comic. Shary argues that the reason behind this is that,

> by 1989, teenagers had witnessed so much manipulation of their images in the media that even the depiction of an issue as serious as suicide had become ironic…*Heathers* suggests that teens truly have vitiated their means of rebellion, leaving only homicide as a form of protest. (ibid: 222)

Therefore, where threats to family values and social unrest were present in the 1950s teen films, and even in the more hyperbolic ones like *High School Confidential* (1958) and *Untamed Heart* (1957), these threats were always resolved as a conservative and reactionary ending ensued. But, as Shary continues, 'by the end of the 1980s, American families had lost the illusion of order, and teens had gained the air of cynicism about these institutions that *Heathers* so vividly celebrated' (ibid.)

It is also worth noting that several of the 1980s teen films were set in the 1950s (*Porky's*), and 1960s (*Losin' It*, *The Outsiders*), forging further links between the past and the 1980s teen genre, adding a nostalgic tone to the more contemporary films. The director of *Porky's*, Bob Clark, spoke of the film from this perspective: 'High schools in North America…developed mythologies…in the sense of the old troubadours passing a story down from generation to generation…They tell us about ourselves. If you understand Pee Wee and the boys [in Porky's], then you understand Ronald Reagan and the boys because they are the same boys', quoted in Speed (2010: 826).

Summing up the similarities between 1950s and 1980s teen genres, the two so-called 'Golden Eras' (Bernstein, 1997) of teen film can be viewed from a production and reception perspective: Hollywood made a popular type of film about teenage characters from their point of view, that attracted a youthful audience. How

the films from the two decades contrast is how their stories and characters are depicted, and the ideologies which arise from this. Doherty (2002) dubbed the 1980s films as the 'post-classical teen pic'.

The success of the teen genre in the 1950s spawned a whole cycle of teen movies and subgenres – many of them were cheaply made with B-movie credentials, produced by small independent companies like American International Pictures (AIP) – Roger Corman being the most famous producer working there. Teen-gang and biker movies such as *Dragship Girl*, *Motorcycle Gang* (both 1957) and *Wild Angels* (1966), catered for an ever-growing young affluent audience, many of them watching films in the new 'drive in' cinemas. They were part of exploitation method of making films, mentioned below in relation to *Porky's,* but of course, without any nude bodies or penis jokes.

Another subgenre of the teen film which emerged in the 1960s was the innocuous cycle of 'beach movies', where youths were very much under the control of the adult community, which differed dramatically from the 1980s film, where parents and adults where largely absent. Doherty (2002) described these movies as 'clean teenpics' and they starred young, fresh-faced and wholesome actors like Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello. Although they demonstrated a slightly more sexualised image of youth than previously seen, with mildly suggestive titles such as *Muscle Beach Party, Bikini Beach* (both 1964), *Beach Blanket Bingo* and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (both 1965), the teens still lived in a safe universe, 'with an emphasis on fun and frolics, not discussions of troubles or conflict' (Shary, 2002: 33). These films were more about the repression and replacement of sex and, as Doherty (2002: 159) notes,

> there was little in this portrait of teenage life that would disturb a worried father. Adults were usually absent, but their values were always present. Fulfilling the best hope of the older generation, the clean teenpics featured an aggressively normal, traditionally good-looking crew of fresh young faces, 'good kids' who preferred dates to drugs and crushes to crime.

It shares similar qualities in terms of the absence of any physical sex with the John Hughes teen films in the 1980s, but the beach movies did not address any serious issues concerning adolescence, like the candid discussion between the teens about

sex and the generational divide in *The Breakfast Club.* Even when a film like *Splendour in the Grass* (1961), made by the acclaimed director Elia Kazan, adopted a more serious and dramatic tone, adults were ultimately the dominant influence. The film concerned two teenagers, played by Warren Beatty and Natalie Wood, trying and failing to form a relationship in the face of parental disproval.

As the 1960s progressed, the so-called sexual revolution took place and the new liberal attitudes towards sex and relationships began to challenge more conservative and normative values. The drug-fuelled, hippie counterculture was redefining youth in Western society; feminist and gay liberation groups began to emerge and youth began to become politicised, protesting against the Vietnam War and supporting civil rights movements. In 1968, a new ratings board – the Motion Picture of Association of America (MPAA) – replaced the old Hays code of censorship. This allowed films to be more provocative in terms of its themes and images. Shary (2005: 35) writes: 'For teen films, this meant more movies dealing with sex, drugs, violence and the honest expression of distain for adults.' Two youth oriented films which were examples of this were the counter-cultural *Easy Rider* (1969), and *Last Summer* (1969). The latter, a dark and violent film involving three teenagers playing deadly, sexual games which was given the new 'X' rating. This marked a significant shift in the depiction of the cinematic teen. The adult values which was largely present in the teen films from the 1950s up to this period, were becoming less apparent, paving the way for a more complex and sophisticated image of youth. At the same time, the previous generations of the teen film were still informing the 1980s genre in terms of certain paradigmatic structures like rebellion and teen angst. However, any countercultural impulses or political radicalism which were present in youth films and culture in the 1960s and 70s, were not part of the themes of 1980s teen films – an issue which is explored later.

Summing up this historical insight, Thomas A. Christie (2009: 83) writes that the evolving teen cultures in post-war society adapted to the 'rapidly changing customs and fashions of subsequent generations', and teen movies of each decade reflected this change. From the alienated, 1950s rebellious youths portrayed by Marlon Brando and James Dean, to the social problem teen films like *Blackboard Jungle* (1955); the stoner, countercultural hippies in *Easy Rider* (1968), through to the politically satirical overtones of *Animal House* (1978). From sexually liberated

teens in 1980s films *Porky's*, through to affluent, apolitical and desexualised youth in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*:

> [Youth] has long been an interesting barometer of the period in which each particular entry in the genre has been produced. By the time of the eighties, teenagers had become sophisticated, savvy consumers, highly attuned to the commoditised, market-driven society in which they were growing up. (Ibid.)

Altman (1999) refers to the 'extratextual' in relation to film genre theory. This is concerned with features that are relevant outside of a film's narrative and visual content, most notably the marketing, promotion and audience reception aspects. These issues have already been touched upon and an enquiry here relating to the 1980s teen genre, will develop the argument and examine issues more related to the industrial side of teen cinema.

Firstly, some of the teen films position themselves within the 'high concept' method of film promotion, which emerged in the 1980s and is relevant in terms of the genre's association with the Reagan era and capitalist America. The high concept method refers to mainstream, commercially-driven films that 'are differentiated within the marketplace through an emphasis on style and through integration with their marketing' (Wyatt, 1994: 23). A film's essence can be summed up in a couple of sentences, which goes on to influence its marketing campaign and box-office receipts. To attract a teen audience, the text and image on the advertising poster for *Porky's* is simple and sums up the sexual nature of the film: words emblazoned over an image of the peephole shower scene, revealing a male teen's eye staring at an obscured naked female body. Goes the tagline: 'Keep an eye out for the funniest movie ever made about growing up! You'll be glad you came!' As Wyatt notes (ibid: 120): 'The simplicity of the narrative permits its reproduction to a single image.' In this case, the ad is specifically targeted at teenage boys. Also, from an advertising standpoint, a *Variety* article by Fred Goldberg (1983), concluded that young people would rely less on reviews and newspapers articles about films, and more on advertisements like the aforementioned *Porky's* poster. Furthermore, as Murray Smith quoted in Neale and Smith (eds. 1998) explains, many high concept films rely on pop music to promote both the film and the artist/band; for example, the famous

scene from *Risky Business* when Tom Cruise is dancing naked in the family home, is accompanied by Bob Seger's 'Old Time Rock and Roll', a popular hit of the period.

If the sexual and hedonistic content of the teen sex comedies proved problematic and ambiguous set against the conservative morality of the 1980s, in an economic context, films such as *Porky's, Fast Times* and *Risky Business* were successful products that prospered under the capitalist system in relation to the high concept approach of marketing movies. It was the period of the modern blockbuster from the likes of Spielberg and Lucas, and films such as *Flashdance* (1983), *Beverley Hills Cop* (1984) and *Top Gun* (1986), from producers Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer, were made using this method of marketing. Simpson's words were unequivocal in his approach to making films: 'We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. Our obligation is to make money', quoted in Thompson (2007: 91-92). Justin Wyatt (1994) regards several of the 1980s teen films as falling under the high concept label: *Endless Love* (1981)*, Porky's, Risky Business, Footloose* (1984)*, Reckless*, *Weird Science* (1985), *Pretty in Pink*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Some Kind of Wonderful.* This attitude typified the 'greed is good' philosophy of the 1980s and the new ancillary markets (VHS, cable TV) that were emerging at this time, provided additional platforms for teen films to reach an audience and increase profits.

Star power in attracting an audience is another element in the high concept marketing of films, although this does not necessarily apply to the sex comedies of the early to mid-eighties, but can be associated with the so-called 'Brat Pack', a short lived but popular troupe of actors which included: Molly Ringwald, Emilio Estevez, Andrew McCarthy, Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson and Ally Sheedy. During the mid-eighties, they appeared in the more romantic and dramatic films of the genre like *The Breakfast Club* and *St Elmo's Fire* (1985) (with the latter being concerned with college graduates in their early twenties). Their good looks and charisma were becoming increasingly popular with young audiences, on and off screen. Molly Ringwald was arguably the biggest box office attraction of all the teen actors in the 1980s through her work with John Hughes. She became a household name during this period for a teen market that had bestowed upon her the title of the 'model modern teen' (Lee: 2010: 43). From more of an audience reception and fandom context, her fame and position as the 'poster child for teenage angst' (ibid.) became something of a social phenomenon, albeit short-lived, as her 'three-year reign at the

multiplex, instigated a media feeding frenzy that spilled onto the streets, with devoted fans – the Ringlets – imitating Ringwald's punk-flapper fashion and flaming mop top' (ibid.). John Hughes himself became a marketing product and a brand name due to the popularity of his teen films. Even today, nearly thirty years after his last teen film, he is arguably the director most associated with the genre.

Viewing the issues from a broader media standpoint, movie consumption was experiencing dramatic shifts during the 1980s and the emergence of the multiplex and the demise of one screen cinemas in urban areas, were factors which contributed to resurgence of the teen film. Many of them were situated in and around large retail centres such as shopping malls, open spaces that served as sites of teen congregation. Timothy Shary (2002: 6) explains that Hollywood was now offering,

> moviegoers greater variety and convenience [and] the need to cater to the young audiences who frequented those malls became apparent…and those audiences formed the first generation of multiplex moviegoers. The clearest result of the multiplex movement was a voluminous outpouring of films directed to and featuring teens.

The introduction of the video recorder was another key example of the changes in movie consumption. Oliver Jones (2003: 8) observes that the commercial success of the teen film alerted the studios to their box office potential, and the youth audience was 'the one movie-going demographic willing not only to see a movie several times while it was in the multiplex, but then to follow that by renting the video.' Hollywood's 'diversification into VCR, video games, cable television, publishing and various forms of product merchandising provided increasingly important streams of revenue for the industry' (Thompson, 2007: 91). For Doherty, the teen market in the 1980s who were more affluent than ever before, were 'part of the reason that the entertainment industry ran a more ruthlessly efficient machine for teenage exploitation, a fusillade of transmedia synergy fixing Hollywood's most desirable audience dead centre in it crosshairs' (2002: 194). Also, the studios were now releasing films on VCR while they were still on general release in the cinema and the teen romantic-musical drama *Footloose,* saw its profits increase through this method of film distribution. Moreover, when teen films did not fare so well at the box office, some of them like *Heathers* and *Some Kind of Wonderful,* did much better through their VCR rentals.

In terms of cinema attendance, by the end of the 1960s, the 16-24 year old age group was responsible for approximately 40% of box office receipts (Doherty, 2002). This increased and 'by 1979 at the start of the 80s teen genre, every other ticket was bought by someone aged between 12 and 20, and another 30 per cent of ticket sales were to people in their twenties' (Maltby, 2003: 24). With the rise of the multiplex, teenagers were becoming a powerful economic and social group and films targeted at teenagers (and adults) began to dominate the Hollywood landscape; for instance, blockbusters like *Star Wars* (1977) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). Friedman (2007: pp. 2-3) comments of the changing demographics of the period, 'emphasizing how the population shifts from the cities to the suburbs and the maturation of the Baby Boom generation permanently altered movie going habits and ultimately defined a new culture.' Consequently, Hollywood studios were now catering more for the youth market as Doherty notes, from the 1970s onwards in America, 'theatrical movies cater primarily to one segment of the audience: teenagers. [Without their support], few theatrical movies break even' (2002: 1).

By the late 1970s, the commercially successful teen comedies *Animal House* (1978) and *Meatballs* (1979), with raucous 'gross-out' scenes of hormonally-charged teens chasing girls and trashing property, became a generic and commercial blueprint for the 1980s teen sex comedy. In addition, the teen horror genre was profitable as the 'youth in peril' theme saw teens punished by death for engaging in sex. For example, *Halloween* (1978) led to several sequels and the *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) teen horrors and their follow-ups were profitable products for the Hollywood studios. *Animal House* and *Meatballs* were followed by the cycle of teen sex comedies – the focus in Chapter Two – that started in 1980 and ended in 1985. Some of those listed below have already been mentioned, but it is useful to include them on a list for which 'provocative titles were indicative of the increasingly direct sexual marketing of youth films' (Shary, 2002: 229): *Little Darlings* (1980); *Private Lessons* (1981); *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*; *Goin' all the Way; The Last American Virgin, Porky's* (all 1982); *Losin' It; Getting It On; My Tutor*; *The First Turn-On!; Screwballs; Risky Business; Spring Break* (all 1983); *The Joy of Sex; Where the Boys Are* (both 1984); *Just One of the Guys* and *Fraternity Vacation* (both 1985).

Young people were also bombarded with more images of a sexual nature in the form of advertisements, TV and raunchy pop videos on the new music channel MTV,

which started in 1982. Indeed, MTV became part of the marketing strategy for teen films in the 1980s as Doherty explains, citing the aforementioned *Footloose*: 'Since the MTV-fueled success of...*Footloose* (1984)*,* rock videos tie-ins have been instrumental publicity shills' (2002: 5). This emphasis on popular music, as noted above in relation to *Risky Business*, is integral to the marketing of some of the teen films referred to in this thesis. Wyatt (1994: pp. 57-58) explains the use of music, soundtracks and other forms of media in films becomes part of the high concept marketing strategy, 'working against character development [in becoming] a system of referencing...identified as intertextuality.' The spectator will share a common knowledge of the music and other media forms, which operates 'from an economic standpoint due to the audience's point of recognition' (ibid.) Wyatt highlights one John Hughes' film that is part of the research, which relies heavily on this high concept strategy: *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (the same can be applied to all of Hughes' 1980s teen films). The lead character played by Matthew Broderick is characterised partly by his taste in popular music such as The Beatles, MTV, New Order, and his references to other films like *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Alien* (1979). Hughes extends this intertextuality by using themes tunes from popular films to enhance the dramatic aspects of the films, for example, the *Star Wars* and *Pink Panther* scores. This use of intertextuality, as Wyatt continues, helps to negate the more nuanced motivations and characteristics of the protagonists, resulting in a 'levelling of the psychology of the characters'; this process foregrounds the film's style and surface values like music, enhancing its commercial potential to a young audience. Indeed, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* was a success, making over $70 million at the box office. It also spawned a short-lived TV series, *Ferris Bueller*, from 1990-91, another medium which was becoming increasingly targeted at the youth market. Other teen films which became TV shows were *Fast Times* (1986), and *Dirty Dancing* (1988-89).

Another form of revenue which was becoming more commonplace during this era was the movie sequel. *Porky's* commercial success enabled two sequels to be made: *Porky's II: The Next Day* (1983), and *Porky's Revenge* (1985). Similarly, there were several sequels to *Revenge of the Nerds*. Although these follow-ups were not on the same financial scale as those from the action-adventure genre, for example, the *Rocky* films, they did position the 1980s teen genre within the movie franchise business, creating more profits for the Hollywood studios. As Prince (2007: pp. 2-3) notes, 'the eighties showcased the status of film as pure product merchandising.

Sequels were like brand labels, and the studios sought to brand audience loyalty by developing characters and film properties that could be manufactured in perpetuity.' *Porky's* was also significant from a marketing perspective as it was a success in terms of audience testing. This is when a film is previewed before its general release to an audience, to determine an initial critical response.

Thomas Doherty goes further (2002: 2) as he regards the promotion and marketing of teen films as being part of the 'exploitation' method – 'controversial content, bottom-line book keeping and demographic targeting.' This meant a film's low budget (in *Porky's* case, $4 million), promoting to a target-intended demographic (teenagers) and an advertising poster campaign whose content 'caters to its target audience by serving up appetizing or exotic subject matter'; for example, nude bodies and penis jokes. All this proved very successful as *Porky's* went on to make over $100 million at the box office. Lesley Speed (2010: 824) observes that the success of the film was down to the marketing of 'vulgarity overtly for profit'. Robin Wood (2002: 174-192) explains that the teen sex comedies form an uneasy yet necessary alliance with the morally conservative, yet aggressively capitalist society of 1980s America:

> The films are once a significant product and reinforcement of the commodification of sex in contemporary capitalist culture, most of the consumer products of which must be advertised and sold on their sexual appeal, blatant or subtle. [It is] behaviour that consumer capitalism in its present phase simultaneously permits and morally disapproves of.

Echoing this ambiguity and tension is William Paul (1994: 83), who points out that the youth culture depicted in these films was 'concerned with expanding acceptable public discourse...but flourished through the early part of...the conservatism of the Reagan Revolution.' Whatever the wider social-political and cultural implications, one thing was for definite in the 1980s as Shary notes, 'youth had been reconfigured as a specialized and crucial age group for American commercial marketing (2004: 22).

Shifting the focus to oppositional forces within the genre, leads on to the subject of structuralism and its relationship with this thesis. The approach will aim to make sense of the representation of 1980s teen culture by exposing its

contradictions, which will result in a deeper understanding of the group and their wider concerns. Schatz (1981: 31) explains that 'a genre's basic cultural oppositions or inherent dramatic conflicts represent its most basic determining feature.' In the teen genre's case, as already noted, oppositions exist between adults and teens, different stereotypes, social and cultural issues and generic sites. Altman's notion of 'dual-focus texts' (1999: 24) develops this oppositional approach and is a generic property which all Hollywood genre films share. For example, this concept is highlighted in *The Breakfast Club*, although Altman never refers to teen movies. He explains: 'Constantly opposing cultural values to counter-cultural values, genre films regularly depend on dual protagonists and dualistic structures (producing what I have called dual-focus texts).' He gives an example from the Western genre: the shoot-out between the sheriff and outlaw which often happens at the end of the film. In *The Breakfast Club,* there's a confrontation between the white-collar jock and the blue-collar delinquent. In *Pretty in Pink,* the rich kid and the poor girl try to start a relationship. The cultural oppositions in terms of the teen stereotype are evident in the teen sex comedies, for example, the popular girl in *Little Darlings,* Cinder, and her counterpart, the outsider Ferris. This subject comes into sharper focus from the mid-1980s films onwards, providing more material for a structuralist debate. Differences and similarities emerge and are often viewed in socioeconomic terms; for instance, the conflicts between the characters in *Some Kind of Wonderful* is a key semantic/syntactic aspect of the film.

Positioning these binaries within a structuralist framework will enable the argument to evolve and advance by drawing on the writings of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1968) on the oppositional structures and their contradictions inherent in ancient myths. By using this method, a structuralist reading of the themes, characters and space of the teen genre is not viewed in individual terms, but examined in the contexts of their relationships and differences to each other. The analysis will be organic as opposed to autonomic and will focus on relationships as opposed to individual things. Petra Kuppers explains further:

> Structuralism is a method of grasping culture as a set of rules akin to language. It points to the relationship aspects of culture: all cultural representations gain meaning and value in relation to each other, not by themselves (2001: 427).

Altman (1999: 26) writes that these structuralist concepts, when merged with film genre and their stories, 'can serve as a form of a societal self-expression, directly addressing the societies constitutive contradictions...offering imaginative solutions to a society's real problems.' In this context, Hollywood genre films can be viewed as modern day myths: Lévi-Strauss (1968: 418) defines myths as stories retold through the ages in order to convey a deeper understanding of a culture and highlight their ideological contradictions, which are 'repressed from the surface of society, but come back in their stories.' Susan Hayward (2000: 255) contends that a dilemma or contradiction stands at the heart of every living myth: 'The impulse to construct the myth arises from the desire to resolve the dilemma.' In the teen genre, myths surrounding status and the teen stereotype will be explored in relation to *The Breakfast Club* and *Revenge of the Nerds.* As Schatz (1981) explains when outlining the three-act structure of film genre, resolution is only temporary, as the contradictions still remain in the real world. Therefore, the mythic function of genre films means that they are repeated in a ritualistic sense until a series of related stories within the genre is formed, which continue to expose conflicts and fissures. For example, the loss of virginity theme in the sex comedies of the 1980s, and the romantic stories of John Hughes concerning social and cultural divides, are repeated over a cycle of films. Barry Langford (2005: 21) explains that this 'scheme implies that underlying social contradictions are less resolved away than repeatedly re-enacted and thus — at least in principle — exposed by their mythic articulations.' Hayward's (2013: 214) comments also support this when she writes that,

> generic convention is quite distinct from the social reality that it purports to reflect. Social reality does not present easy solutions. Life is not 'order/disorder/order restored' as the classic narrative system would have us believe...which produces seamlessness...which is why generic repetition works so well and we go back again and again to the movies.

Therefore, one of the functions of genre, as Jim Kitses (1969) cited in Altman (1999: 15) explains, is that it offers a 'vital structure in which flow a myriad of themes and concepts.'

The structuralism of Lévi-Strauss treats myths as ahistorical (synchronic), presenting a challenge when viewing a genre which is time-specific (diachronic) and

set in a particular place — 1980s America. This model of structuralism would also encounter difficulties when issues of sexuality and gender surface, where a psychoanalytical study may be more responsive. It also does not take into account issues of representation — a key concern of this thesis. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss was not concerned with narrative causality but more with the paradigmatic (binary) study, 'that looks for the patterns of oppositions hidden in texts and tells us what texts 'mean'' (Berger, 1992: 15), as opposed to a syntagmatic study, which is relevant to a film narrative and signifies 'what happens in texts' (ibid). Lévi-Strauss focused more on a phenomenological approach when analysing ancient myth and how it operated within the unconscious. Despite these limitations, structuralism in its modified form in this thesis is valuable; when allied with film genre in terms of its cultural oppositions and the contradictions arising from this, it will foreground how genre operates formally, narratively and thematically. The approach in this work will use a similar method to Will Wright (1975), who analysis the Western genre. He discusses the oppositions between cowboy/Indians, garden/wilderness, nature/culture, East/West, outlaw/homesteader. In this research, oppositions between, the teen stereotypes, generic sites, rich/poor, hero/villain, for example, will provide the material for the debate. Wright uses the binary oppositional structure inherent in Lévi-Strauss analysis and takes it a stage further. His concern,

> is not to reveal a mental structure but to show how the myths of a society, through their structure, communicate a conceptual order to the members of that society [and to] exhibit the structure of a myth in order to discover its social meaning (1975: 17).

Wright extends the Lévi-Strauss paradigm in his analysis, and the same strategy is applied here when exploring the teen movie in the context of a mythic narrative. This also shares qualities with Altman's (2004) semantic/syntactic approach:

> In order to understand the social meaning of a myth, it is necessary to analyse not only its binary structure but also its narrative structure — the progression of events and the resolution of conflicts. (ibid: 24)

Schatz admits that 'in the final analysis of genre filmmaking, cultural myth-making seems to me to be significant and direct' (1981: 32).

Another branch of structuralism applied to the genre is the theories of Vladimir Propp's narratology (1968). His study of 'tale roles' and 'narrative functions' in a story are relevant to the stories in the teen genre. For example, Propp discusses the notion of the hero and villain, their oppositional characteristics and their 'spheres of action', an approach which relates to *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Heathers*. This line of thinking offers a more archetypal interpretation of the depiction of youth culture and its relationship aspects, as opposed to the study of the teen stereotype, which is more culturally specific to the teen culture.

Methods used in this thesis for the study of adolescence need justification for their inclusion. It would be a bold claim to propose that the 1980s Hollywood teen genre, with its works of popular escapist fantasy, could form a direct relationship with disciplines outside of the arts, which often rely on empirical evidence and statistical data for some of their methodological tools. Thus, when applying a methodology concerning adolescence in cinema, the aim is to adapt and modify the research to suit the approach of the thesis and demonstrate how it resonates with the films and creates meaning. One of the ways to achieve this is to assimilate issues into a structuralist framework like the 'gift'/'stigma' notion (more on this below). In order to realise this, it is necessary to circumvent any empirical data and be selective as to what is relevant to the concerns here. Timothy Shary's (2002: 22) comments go some way to support this: 'The cinema, with its limited range of products with unlimited ranges of meaning, is a system of representation that provides a useful index of issues about various conditions'. In the case of this study, the adolescent condition is dramatised throughout the cycle of teen films.

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the examples of how the coming-of-age process is depicted in the 1980s teen film is through the characters' sexual behaviour. Irrespective of the comic tone of these encounters, closer analysis will reveal that the image of adolescent sexuality is often fraught with problems and contradictions. For the purposes of this thesis, sexual initiation and loss of virginity become part of the 'risk-taking' phase of adolescence which Hall (1904) outlined in his 'storm and stress' writings. One of the methods that will be applied to teen sexuality, and which embraces the structuralist oppositional approach, is the gift/stigma notion, as discussed by Carpenter (2002). This relates to sex and virginity loss from a gendered perspective and highlights the concerns and attitudes of teens when confronted with the 'do I?, don't I?' dilemma. The experiences of the

protagonists over several of the films correlate with this notion, offering an interpretation of teen sex and its emotional consequences, some of which (abortion, teen parenthood) are explored in films like *Little Darlings*, *Fast Times* and *For Keeps* (1988). Addressing the challenge of combining research of this nature with a narrative form like film, one of the methods of integrating the gift/stigma method of study is to position it on the semantic/syntactic axis. For example, the sexual exploits (semantic) of the character Stacy in *Fast Times* and her relationship with other characters related to this (syntactic) are viewed in this context. In a similar vein, other adolescent themes — such as peer pressure, the teen clique and group conformity — are examined from more of a psychological and sociological angle. So again the aim is to ensure that the research from these sources, which generally do not refer to cinema, correlate with the image of teens and their behaviour in the films.

The methodology applied when integrating the unique sites and spaces of the genre will embrace the ongoing structuralism debate of this research. Michel Foucault's writings offer an alternative interpretation of space. It should be pointed out, however, that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer more in relation to a figure like Foucault, whose research encompasses many subjects, but the oppositional concerns in his writings on space are compatible with this research. His concept of heterotopia and space is linked to the shopping mall in the teen films and offers an unorthodox reading when positioning it within the debates surrounding consumerism. Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, which is concerned with the relationship between time and place, reveals a symbolic explanation of youth culture in terms of sex, romance, consumerism and teen employment. Bakhtin's theories on the carnivalesque and the family home are debated in terms of the generational divide and opposing forces between youth and adults, power and freedom — an approach which is also relevant to the space of the city.

These methods of enquiry into the opposing forces within the spaces of the teen film are sustained when issues relating to gender in terms of public and private space are investigated, especially concerning the space of the teen bedroom. Ideas on feminine and masculine space are also examined in relation to sexuality and its development, friendship, group dynamics, peer relationships and the teen clique.

In the high school, the methodology used to investigate this particular site will reveal it as an ambiguous space in terms of the attitudes of the protagonists towards

learning and education. Beyond the school gates, social and economic divides are examined when the teens travel away from their suburban environments into other outdoor spaces and come into conflict with different communities (*Porky's* and *Losin' It'*).

Finally, it has to be pointed out that the focus of this thesis will be on what happens in the films with the methodology underpinning, informing and shaping the argument. These methods of study and theoretical debates will be operating at the service of the films, and not the other way round.

Chapter Overview

The thesis will consist of five chapters. Chapter One will be the literature review, which will be organised by theme and will include a selection of the key sources that cover these themes.

Chapter Two, 'Coming-of-Age: The Teen Sex Comedies', will work chronologically and focus on the subgenre of the teen sex comedies of the early to mid-1980s and, as the title suggests, virginity loss and sexual initiation will be key discussion points. To contextualise this portrayal of teen sexuality and the teen film, a brief enquiry into the history of the subject and its relationship with the teen genre will bring the issues into sharper focus. The chapter will also debate how the sex comedy reacts against the moral conservatism of the Reagan era, while at the same time how it reflects this ideology in terms of masculinity and its link to the teen image on the screen. The key recurring themes relating to genre theory, like the semantic/synaptic approach, will be introduced in this chapter and also the structuralist method of analysis relating to how the oppositional features create meaning. This chapter will also begin the enquiry into other features of adolescence and the coming-of-age process, most notably the 'storm and stress' phase: peer pressure, cliques and the teen stereotype. In the latter part of the chapter, the tone shifts and the sex comedies are examined within their marketing context. What then follows is a discussion on how the image of youth in 1980s films is more concerned with hedonistic behaviour than political rebellion of previous generations. Finally, the reasons behind the demise of the sex comedy in the 1980s are expounded.

Chapter Three, 'Stereotypes and Other Roles in the Romantic Comedies and Dramas', will carry on with the chronological structure and work from the mid-1980s

until the end of the decade. The films here will mark a shift in tone and attitude as the teen genre evolves. Some of the semantic features introduced in Chapter Two are continued: the oppositional forces and contradictions associated with the role of the teen stereotype and its hierarchical structures, and the generational divide, are given much greater exposure here, *The Breakfast Club* being a key example. One of the major shifts is that generic definition of the 1980s genre changes from sex comedy to teen romantic comedy and drama. Images of physical sex become less frequent as a more romantic and sensitive version of teen relationships emerges, conveying the morally conservative message and attitude which Reagan and his Republican Party were attempting to promote. Also, as alluded to in the introduction, the impact of the AIDS virus in the mid-1980s forced the film industry to reconsider its depiction of sex. Crossover or transitional films like *The Sure Thing* (1985), which contain elements of both the sex and romantic comedy but lean more towards the romance, will reveal further insights into the generic hybridity of the 1980s teen genre. Following on from the teen stereotype is the different 'roles' — the 'active' male and 'passive' female — as the protagonists are defined by gender and notions relating to the family within patriarchal capitalist society. *Vision Quest* will give an insight into this.

Chapter Four, 'Propp's Tale Roles and Narrative Functions in the Teen Romantic Comedies and Dramas', will stay within the same period and subgenres of films as Chapter Three and develop the idea of the different roles the teen protagonists act out. This idea will be positioned within more of a narratology context by drawing on the ideas of Vladimir Propp and his tale roles and narrative functions. In *Some Kind of Wonderful*, the jock/rich kid is the 'villain', the blue-collar character is the 'hero' and the popular girl is the 'princess'. Propp's methodology serves the oppositional structural concerns of the thesis and will therefore continue to link the stories and characters of this work.

Chapter Five, 'The Teen Generic Teen Sites and Their Spaces' will focus on the teen genre's symbolic use of space. The former will concentrate on the more familiar sites to the genre like the shopping mall and the high school. The latter will examine spaces less familiar to the teen genre, like the city, and spaces beyond their suburban environment. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how teens function both as individuals and in groups within these public and private spaces. It will investigate the subject of teens at work and consumerism, which relates to the space of the mall

and its associations with broader debates on culture and society. Space and its alternative connotations are debated in the context of high school and the teen bedroom, and insights are offered into how these spaces become liminal and ambiguous. Power and freedom are discussed in relation to the family home. The Chapter will then go on to discuss themes concerning liberation and freedom, with examples cited such as when the protagonists travel to the city. Also under scrutiny is the idea of space becoming more dangerous and threatening when films are set in locations beyond the safe parameters of suburbia. This chapter will not follow a specific chronological order, and will focus on films across the generic spectrum, unlike in the previous chapters. One reason for this approach is to facilitate films such as *The Outsiders* and *Valley Girl* (both 1983), which were produced during the sex comedy period but were different subgenerically, the former being a delinquent drama and the latter being a romantic comedy. Focusing on films regardless of chronology or generic category through the prism of their spatial values will strengthen the claim that the 1980s teen genre can be considered more of a unified body of films, as opposed to viewing them from a certain period of time or genre-specific position.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Some of the writers and their ideas referred to here have already been mentioned briefly, but it is important to refer to their work again in order to identify the strengths and limitations of the literature. This section will be structured by theme and the aim is to synthesise the different sources cited in the thesis so that a more coherent review of the literature can emerge.

First, the existing literature on the teen film will be reviewed, which offers a wide-ranging, survey-like investigation of the genre, written from a historical perspective and covering the post-war period of teen films to the present day. These texts are not supported by any particular theory but they do offer critical commentary in terms of the representation of teenagers in cinema and generally focus on the development of the adolescent and the coming-of-age process in terms of teen sexuality and identity, stereotypes and the generational divide. The key texts are: Shary (2005); Doherty (2002); Bulman (2004) and Driscoll (2011). Only the entries on 1980s teen films are of significance in these books, although they are useful when the thesis does briefly refer to the history of the genre.

Timothy Shary's *Generation Multiplex* (2002) is more focused on the 1980s and is a main source of reference here. He writes on a broad range of examples from the teen films of this period and organises his research around the different subgenres and character types that make up the contemporary teen genre. He illustrates how youth is represented on screen in its different guises, how teenagers change and evolve, and he comments on the different trends and characteristics of the subgenres. Furthermore, Shary provides an overview of relationships in teen films characterised by tensions and conflicts related to social and cultural status, which are set against the growing economic divide in Reagan's America. His recent article, 'Buying me Love: 1980s Class-Clash Teen Romances' (2011), focuses more in depth on this topic and will prove particularly useful when writing about the John Hughes' romances, as well as *Valley Girl* and *Lucas*.

Thomas Doherty (2002) focuses on the history of the teen film, in particular the 1950s, and how teen movies were made with a youth audience in mind. However,

his book does devote the last chapter to 1980s genre and he refers to the AIDS virus and its impact on films, the relevance of which is reflected in how the tone and sexual behaviour of the protagonists changed in the mid-1980s.

Robert C. Bulman (2004) narrows down the genre to the modern American high school films from the 1950s onwards and links them to American culture at large in terms of education, social status and relationship with adults. There are substantial entries on the 1980s films; however, his work is limited in the context of this research as it does not refer to the Reagan era and its ideology.

Catherine Driscoll (2011), like Bulman, writes from a sociological and cultural viewpoint and analyses teen film in a global context. Where it is relevant is in terms of the discussion of sexual and gender identity in relation to the 1980s films. There are key debates surrounding John Hughes' films and virginity loss but, like Bulman, Driscoll does not position the 1980s films within the context of Reagan's America.

Jon Lewis (1992) focuses on youth culture in its broader contexts and refers not only to film but other youth cultures like musical trends, which is not really of concern to this work. He discusses teen films from the post-war period to the end of the 1980s in a variety of thematic contexts, some of which are relevant (sex, gender, rebellion and class, for example). He argues that teen films are ultimately concerned with the breakdown of authority in the form of family and education, which is one of the themes of this work.

Overall, the literature offers critical commentary on the 1980s genre in terms of adolescent representation and broader societal issues. They are vital in terms of identifying the key films, trends, character types and adolescent themes of the period, and they establish the foundational structures for the texts, which are more concerned with methodology, structuralism and other theories which are relevant to this research.

Books on teen cinema which are more subjective, humorous and nostalgic offer limited critical commentary but are nonetheless insightful in terms of outlining the genre's main themes and characters. They include Jon Bernstein's *Pretty in Pink: The Golden Age of Teenage Movies* (1997), the first book to be written solely on 1980s teen films. It is more of a personal and, at times, sentimental tribute to the films and avoids any serious academic inquiry. However, it is useful as a reference point, its thematic concerns are relevant and it devotes a chapter to the sex comedies and John Hughes' films. Stephen Tropiano (2006) writes from a historical point of

view and devotes one chapter to the 1980s. Like Bernstein's, his is a work generally written in a humorous and light-hearted tone, although he does refer to sociopolitical issues and the Reagan era, which is applicable here.

Books with a focus exclusively on John Hughes' films also tend to be more personal. In Clarke (ed. 2007), writers and novelists discuss his films nostalgically and comment on the effect they had on their own lives during the 1980s. The book contains heartfelt passages about the coming-of-age process and the anxieties about being a teenager. In a similar vein, journalist Susannah Gora (2010) focuses on John Hughes' films and interviews key figures from this period — actors, directors, technicians — getting their views on how this series of films shaped the American teen identity in the 1980s in terms of love, romance, relationships, peer pressure, etc., issues which all link into the thematic nature of this work.

Thomas A. Christie (2009) writes about all of Hughes' teen film output. He devotes a section to each of the films and adds a plot synopsis, useful to this work when referring to the narrative structure and comments on issues of adolescence without offering too much critical insight. Roz Kaveney (2006) charts the recent history of teen TV and film and, like others, focuses on John Hughes. Her work is more journalistic than academic.

Most recently, journalist Hadley Freeman (2015) writes about 1980s Hollywood and two of the chapters in her book concern John Hughes' films. She writes from a more feminist point of view when comparing the teen heroines from the 1990s films to the 1980s ones — a subject covered in the conclusion of this thesis.

Articles, journals and essays of a more academic nature on 1980s teen film are often written from a gendered and feminist perspective. Lesley Speed's writing (2002) critiques masculinity and focuses on vulgar humour, both male and female, a subject discussed with regards to the teen sex comedy and teen generic rituals in this thesis. It also foregrounds notions of romance in the John Hughes films — a key theme in this work. The research of Kleinhans (2002) and Dresner (2010) on female sexuality and virginity loss in the sex comedy is related to broader social implications and supports the analysis in Chapter Two. The chapter will also reference the aforementioned Carpenter's (2005) insights into virginity loss, which focus on male and female sexuality and forms a link with the binary structuralist concerns of this research.

All these texts on teen cinema, both journalistic and academic, will provide the material for the books, articles and journals more concerned with methodology on genre theory and narrative structure. As mentioned in the introduction, these sources often relegate the teen film or do not mention it at all, for example, Langford (2005), Altman (1999; 2004), Sobchack (2003), Neale (1999), Grant (2007) and Schatz (1999; 2003). Despite such omissions, which may initially appear to pose a problem for this research, certain fundamental structural characteristics of genre cinema and narrative are shared throughout all genres. Each genre has its own set of symbolic rituals, codes, iconography, situations and characters. For example, in the Western, there is often a shoot-out in the final act; in the teen film, as referred to above, someone loses their virginity. The differences between the two genres and acts are obvious, but the similarities are of more interest in terms of how these recurring characteristics work in terms of genre identification. Chapters Two and Three draw on Lesley Speed's article into the teen film and vulgar humour, 'Loose Cannons: White Masculinity and the Vulgar Teen Comedy Film' (2010), while Altman writes about the semantic/syntactic approach to genre (2004) and focuses on the Hollywood musical (1987), but an examination of the teen genre concerning this approach is equally valid. Indeed, Speed (1998a) discusses the semantic/syntactic approach when writing about teen films. In a similar vein, Robin Wood's essay, 'Ideology, Genre, Auteur' (2003b), debates the notion of the 'ideal' male and female in a capitalist society and uses Hitchcock's films as his case study — the same principles are relevant to the protagonists in the teen genre.

In terms of narrative structure, Schatz's (1991) model — the three-act structure — for mainstream cinema is referenced here. He also discusses genre identification by its 'generic codes' (again, Schatz does not mention teen films), in this case the visual iconography: the mall, home, school (these spaces are examined in the chapter on space). Sobchack's (2003: 109) reflections on film genre being 'cathartic' and capable of resolving 'cultural tensions' is illustrated in relation to the denouement of *The Breakfast Club*. Sobchack also points out that certain actors will always be 'instantly "knowable" as genre figures' (ibid.), like John Wayne in the Western; in the teen film, Molly Ringwald will always be associated most keenly with her roles in John Hughes' films.

The literature on structuralism, despite it not referring to cinema, has had in recent years, significant influence on film theory and is therefore used here. Palmer's

(1995) book will offer a basic introduction to the principles of structuralist thought regarding binary oppositions and their relationship values. Palmer refers to Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose investigation into cultural binary oppositions, myth and its contradictions (1968) resonate within this thesis. Following this is Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), from which the structural analysis of Russian fairy tales will inform the methodological approach of Chapter Four. Also, Will Wright's (1975) modified version of structuralism, when he writes about the Western genre and how oppositional forces have implications on wider social issues, acts as a model here; for example, when investigating the teen stereotype.

Much of the literature on adolescence and teen culture in America cited in this thesis focuses on the psychological, sociological and cultural concerns and, as mentioned in the methodology section, these sources do not reference the teen genre or cinema. The key is to find the right balance between what is in the frame and what is out, and to validate this relationship in order to conceptualise the genre and strengthen the central argument. The aim is to analysis the findings, observations and outcomes written in the various texts on adolescence, and to identify how these issues resonate with the scenes in the teen film. Additionally, how do these sources form a link with the literature more associated with teen film, structuralism and film genre? For example, when Hall (1904) and Arnett (1999) write about the 'storm and stress' phase of adolescence — conflict with adults, mood disruptions and risk taking — examples of these are visualised within scenes of the teen movie; *The Breakfast Club* features all three of these adolescent semantic features.

Ian McMahan (2002) covers a broad range of adolescent issues, for instance, sexuality, peer pressure, parenting and family, and all these themes are written about in the aforementioned literature on teen film. He adopts a scientific approach, which at first seems to be a barrier when linking it with the actions and emotions of characters in a genre that has a narrative structure and often a comedic tone, issues not relevant to McMahon's insights. However, like Hall and Arnett's research, it is possible to modify these ideas and relate them to the teen genre. In a similar vein, Erik Erikson (1968) writes from a psychological point of view about youth identity, and scenes discussed in the chapter on space respond to his ideas. For instance, Erikson discusses peer pressure and this resonates with the protagonists' actions in *Valley Girl* when they interact in the teen bedroom, which in turn forms a relationship with genre in terms of sites and their symbolism.

Articles and journals concerned with adolescent sexuality and romance are more empirical in nature but still valuable if the statistical data is ignored in favour of the overall outcomes and results of research. For example, Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg (1989) examine adolescent sex in relation to peer pressure and the gender divide, and their ideas are relevant in sex comedies such as *Little Darlings* and *Fast Times*. Similarly, the literature concerned with the more romantic aspect of adolescence, for instance, Downey et al (1999), discusses rejection and this corresponds with the experience of one of the characters, a male, in *The Last American Virgin*.

One article which forms a tangible connection between the teen genre and adolescent studies and helps bridge the gap between the topics is '*The Breakfast Club*: Utilizing Popular Film to Teach Adolescent Development', by Kaye and Ets-Hokin (2000). It uses the 'film as a vehicle for teaching about multiple aspects of adolescent development, analysing specific scenes of the film and their corresponding developmental themes' (2000: 110).

Murray Milner (2004) and David Kinney (1993) write from a sociological point of view, examining contemporary American high school culture in the context of hierarchal structures and stereotypes. Although the authors do not refer to structuralism or binary oppositions, their analysis shares some structuralist concerns in terms of how the differences and similarities between the teen stereotypes offer an understanding of this aspect of adolescence. These sources offer a basic description in establishing a foundation for the teen stereotype and are therefore limited, as the authors do not discuss how characters change and become more three-dimensional, like a film narrative does. Kendall's (1999) observations of the nerd in American culture work in the same way by outlining the nerd's basic characteristics, but not evolve them; *Revenge of the Nerds* is an example from the genre which will actually take this teen stereotype and flesh it out into a more rounded character by the end.

Grace Palladino (1996) and Thomas Hines (1999) trace the roots of the American teenager from inception to contemporary times and discuss its social and cultural impact. What is of interest in this work is how the authors outline the fragmentation of traditional family and how teenagers became more independent towards the end of the 20th century. This is evident in the 1980s teen films as parents are often absent or cast in a negative light, and teens are seen to be making their decisions without turning to adults for guidance; for example, in *Fast Times*.

Books cited in this thesis written on the Reagan era but which do not mention teenage issues or cinema are nevertheless important as they will offer an insight into the socioeconomic, political and ideological climate of the period in which the discussed films were made. The research will demonstrate how issues relating to the Reagan era are reflected in the films. Troy (2005; 2008) discusses the conservative and moralistic attitudes of Reagan and his supporters, which include the religious right in America, who strongly disapproved of the more hedonistic aspects of society in terms of sex and drug use as well holding strong anti-abortion views — all pertinent issues when positioning the sex comedies within this context. Troy's observations about this attitude of the American state and establishment corresponds with the literature related to modern teenagers from a more sociological perspective. Nicholas & Good (2004), meanwhile, debate the oppositional struggle between youth and adults.

Schaller (1992) writes about the Reagan era and points to several incidents of sex and financial scandals which exposed the hypocrisy of the Republican Party and its factions, who preached about moral standards on the one hand, while on the other engaged in contradictory behaviour. Incidents of this nature are depicted in films such as *Private School* and also point to the mythic aspects of story in terms of their contradictions, which creates a synthesis with the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss. Schaller goes on to examine how Reaganomics created a widening gap between rich and poor, another binary opposition, and this inequality is depicted in several of the films. For example, the issue is foregrounded in *The Breakfast Club*, *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful*.

Schaller and Troy's insights are developed here by books which focus on the Reagan era and position 1980s films within a socioeconomic viewpoint. Traube's (1992) ideas about 1980s cinema centres on gender and class differences and devotes passages to two teen films, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *All the Right Moves*, the former located within a white-collar environment, the latter within a blue-collar one. Her observations are reflected in the chapters on Propp and space. Alan Nadel's (1997) book on 1980s American cinema positions the subject within the Reagan era and debates how capitalist ideology is reflected in a wide variety of films from the period. He investigates John Hughes' films and offers a critique on the affluence of the characters and their relationship with those who are less well-off. However, other key books, specifically on 1980s Hollywood cinema like Stephen Prince's *American*

Cinema: Themes and Variations (ed. 2007), do not regard teen cinema as having any wider social impact and mainly analyse blockbusters and Vietnam-themed movies, containing only a brief reference to *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and the theme of conspicuous consumption during the Reagan era. Steinberg & Kincheloe (1998) continue Traube's ideas and critique white middle-class privilege in the teen movie, linking this to the affluence of the Reagan era. This is analysed in relation to the characters in *All the Right Moves*, whose blue-collar protagonist's narrative trajectory is depicted in oppositional terms.

The literature on space is wide ranging and, like the other sources and methodological approaches, needs justification as to its inclusion when discussing film genre. As discussed in the introduction, Henri Lefebvre's (1974) symbolic ideas surrounding space and their social value will form the foundation of the analysis in the final chapter of this thesis.

Lincoln (2004) and McRobbie & Garber (1976) discuss female culture and identity in groups within the space of the bedroom, and Alison Bain's (2003) article extends this by focusing on the teen films of the 1980s. She examines the notion of public, private and liminal space in the bedroom, which works in a binary context in relation to teen identity. This symbolic notion of space is expanded in the research by referencing Bailey & Hay's (2002) article, 'Cinema and the Premise of Youth: Teen Films and Their Sites in the 1980s and 1990s'. The article focuses on the generic sites of 1980s teen movies like *Risky Business*, *Fast Times* and *Valley Girl* and their oppositional and symbolic values.

Bakhtin's (1981; 1992) writing on the chronotope and carnivalesque and its inclusion in relation to the study of the space of the shopping mall and family home is justified, as Robert Stam (1992: 185) argues: 'Bakhtin never directly addressed the cinema, but his theories were nonetheless influential on film theory [and] provided a way to conceptualise an alternative kind of cinema pleasure.' Furthermore, Montgomery (1993) discusses the chronotope, teen films and the shopping mall in a chapter of his book about Bakhtin and cinema. Foucault's (1986; 2007) ideas on heterotopia and panoptic forces also draw on the ambiguous use of space in relation to the mall and the concept of surveillance, concerning parents and adults within the space of the home.

Kowinski (1985), Fiske (1989) and Goss (1993; 1999) write about the shopping mall, not in terms of film but more from a cultural and sociological perspective;

again, their ideas resonate with this research. They discuss the mall's positive and negative functions in terms of its symbolic position within Reagan's capitalist America, consumerism and conspicuous consumption. This also creates a connection with the chronotope with regards to examining a space from a specific time and place. William Paul (1994a) examines the positive aspects of the teens working in the mall in *Fast Times*.

The literature covering cities and cinema referenced does not mention the teen films, which is unsurprising as the city does not feature too often in the 1980s teen films under discussion in this thesis. However, books by Clarke (ed. 2007) and Webber & Wilson (eds. 2007) will provide some basic ideas on how the city functions metaphorically in film, and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Valley Girl* are two films that embrace these concepts.

The aforementioned books on teen film do not really offer any substantial information on how the visual aspects and editing contribute to meaning. Bordwell and Thompson's, *Film Art: An Introduction* (2008), and William H. Phillips, *Film: An Introduction* (2002), are texts cited here which are concerned with these issues. Throughout the thesis, there will be reference to how a film's mise-en-scène, in terms of camera movement, shot size, costume, cinematography and editing, reinforces the mood, tone and attitude of a film. For example, the opening montage sequences in *Fast Times* and *Valley Girl* comment on consumerism and different aspects of teen congregation and are evaluated in the space chapter.

The aim of this literature review is to critically interpret the material which focuses on the teen film, genre theory and structuralism, and synthesize it with sources from the wider academic field of adolescent studies, political sources about the Reagan era and ideas surrounding the symbolic use of space. One of the key determining features which will bring these sources together is how the oppositional factors emerge from the literature and, in turn, are identified and analysed within the films. This PhD will address a gap in the literature concerning the 1980s teen genre by representing youth culture as a case study which encapsulates these structuralist, genre, sociopolitical and adolescent ideas. The approach will argue that this particular mode of enquiry research effectively depicts and expresses a specific culture and its wider societal implications.

Chapter Two

Coming-of-age: The Teen Sex Comedies

Before analysing the 1980s films, a brief examination of the representation of the teen from a broader cultural perspective will help contextualise the issues. Ronald Reagan's Republican Party had swept to power in the November 1980 US election and a new era in America began, marked by a neoliberal economic policy and a morally conservative, right-wing ideology. This is the sociopolitical climate in which the films of this period were made and there are several references to how the sex comedies relate to this climate in the main body of this chapter. A more detailed examination of the themes and ideologies during The Republican Party's first term in office, is outlined under the section in this chapter, 'The Reagan Era and Teen Sex Comedies'. An analysis of Reagan's second term, which corresponds with the production of the post-teen sex comedies, continues at the beginning of the next chapter.

Into this new 1980s environment swept the modern teenager, whose media profile started making headline news in terms of youth sexual and cultural identity. Three cinema-related stories entered into the social discourse, which David Considine (1985: 1) referred to as the 'pervasiveness of the teen screen.' The would-be assassin of President Reagan was obsessed with the teenage star of *Taxi Driver* – Jodie Foster; Timothy Hutton was the first teenager to win an academy award for *Ordinary People* (1980); the 16-year-old Brooke Shields' performance as a teenage prostitute in *Pretty Baby* (1978) forced the government to abandon the anti-smoking campaign she was involved in, and reject her position as an appropriate American role model for young people – an early sign of the disparity between the conservative adult world and the changing identity of the teenager. Two other examples that featured provocative images of the youthful sex symbol Brooke Shields were the profitable yet critically maligned films, *The Blue Lagoon* (1980) and *Endless Love*. Although they are not part of the teen genre as discussed in this work, their commercial success 'seemed to indicate that audiences were ready, if not eager, for more sexually explicit portraits of youth sexuality' (Shary, 2002: 211). From this point on and up to the mid-1980s, images of teen nudity – for example, in the sex

comedies *Porky's, Fast Times* and *Private School* – were commonplace in spaces like school shower blocks, locker rooms and dormitories, hidden from the controlling glare of parents and adult authority figures.

Firstly, a more detailed definition than the one given in the introduction concerning the sex comedies and their semantic/syntactic elements is necessary to establish the key characteristics of the subgenre. Shary (2002: 212), who dubs them 'sex quest films', observes that their candid and uninhibited approach is focused on 'the pursuit of sexual practice' in the form of sexual initiation and characters attempting to lose their virginity, often in a casual and promiscuous manner. Oliver Jones (2003: 73), claims that *Porky's* and *Fast Times,* the subgenre's biggest box office hits, 'set the ground rules for those to follow', again invoking Altman's (1999) generic blueprint theory. However, Jones fails to mention *Animal House* or *Little Darlings*, both made before these two films, with the latter being an exception as it foregrounded female sexual desire. Lesley Speed (2010: 821) points out that the use of 'low humour' is a recurring semantic feature and calls them, 'vulgar teen comedies [that contain] acts of hedonism at parties, excessive drinking, having sex … ridiculing authority figures.' Much of this behaviour takes place in schools, summer camps, parental homes and shopping malls – key generic spaces within the genre.

A close reading of these generic ritualistic teenage acts will serve to expose the oppositional structures, tensions and contradictions in relation to issues such as teen identity, peer relations, sexuality and gender – what was referred to in the methodology section as 'dual-focus texts' (Altman, 1999), where genre relies on these dualistic, structuralist features. In addition, the subject of underage sex and abortion becomes a narrative device in *Fast Times* and *The Last American Virgin* as the teen sex comedy displayed a more serious attitude. This chapter will also begin to investigate the binary relationships between the teen stereotypes and the contradictions and myths that emerge from these. Furthermore, the teen characters' relationships with the adult and parental world will be developed here and provide a link to the following chapters, where the focus on this topic will be interrogated in more detail. This chapter will argue that, beneath the comic frivolity and vulgarity, a more serious study of adolescence is depicted in terms of sexuality, gender roles and relationships. Teen sexuality is more complex than any research or film can express, but the goal is to examine how this cycle of films positions the cinematic hormonally-charged teen within discourses relating to sexuality, adolescence and the coming-of-

age process. In the second part of this chapter, the films will be aligned to the changing 1980s sociopolitical landscape, along with previous youth cultures that were linked to political and ideological causes.

Much of the sexual behaviour by the teens in the sex comedies draws parallels with the 'risk-taking' stage of adolescence, which was mentioned in the introduction. Risk-taking serves as a teen generic ritual and is also part of the 'storm and stress' phase of Hall's (1904) research, which Arnett (1999: 319) writes about in a more contemporary context:

> Adolescents have higher rates of reckless, norm-breaking, and anti-social behaviour than either children or adults...are more likely to cause disruptions of the social order and to engage in behaviour that carries the potential for harm to themselves and/or the people around them (1999: 319).

However, these comments are linked more to real-life experience and suggest serious moral repercussions for those involved. Whereas in the fictional, mechanistic world of genre cinema and the teen film, the characters' suffering is only temporary and a happy ending usually ensues, the overall message of many of the comedies is not overtly moralistic, which may have alienated young audiences (Shary, 2002). Nevertheless, risk-taking is a recurring semantic/syntactic aspect of the 1980s teen genre, linking the stories and their characters, and often has significant consequences within the narrative. Much of this behaviour is related to sex. Synder (2006: 161) observes that, 'risky sexual behaviour is defined as sexual activity that places youth at a heightened risk of pregnancy or contracting a sexually transmitted infection.' Representations of this are portrayed in a more comic light in *The Last American Virgin*, when the boys contract an STD after having sex with a prostitute. Meanwhile, the teens in *Losin' It* incur the wrath of men in a Mexican town with their attempts to seduce the local woman. However, *The Last American Virgin* and *Fast Times* contain more serious examples of the dangers of sexual risk-taking, as characters become pregnant and have abortions. But such are the conventions of genre cinema that the conflicts and tensions that arise during the second act of the films are resolved in the third act, and the girls are seen not to suffer and end up leading assumed normal lives. For example, in *Fast Times*, the character of Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh) falls pregnant and decides not to keep the child. This is not

portrayed as a key dramatic event in the film, and by the end she has started a new relationship and is seen to be otherwise happy. This storyline of teenage pregnancy, however, resolved, along with the fortunes of Karen (Diane Franklin) in *The Last American Virgin,* reflected what was happening to youth in wider 1980s society and is discussed in more detail later in the chapter. There was an increase in teen pregnancies in the United States, which exceeded most advanced nations (Brooks-Gunn & Furstenberg, 1989). Furthermore, Tropiano (2006), citing a Gallop poll in 1985, notes that male and female youths by the 1980s were having more sex than ever before and were losing their virginities at a younger age.

With research into teenage sexuality on the increase in academic circles in the post-war period, it often produced contradictory and inconsistent findings. Some studies indicated a rise in sexual activities amongst teenage girls during the 1980s Brooks-Gunn & Frusenberg (1989); others claimed that females were more cautious 'and viewed the world in terms of relationships and closeness, whereas men attach more importance to individuality and had a more impersonal attitude towards sex', Bernard (1981), cited in De Gaston and Weed (1996: u.p.). This correlates with the gift/stigma attitude to sex and gender, discussed in more detail shortly.

Characters in the sex comedies often have sex as a result of peer pressure, another key adolescent theme – for example, in *Little Darlings, Porky's* and *Fast Times.* Pressure does not usually come from boyfriends or girlfriends, but from their immediate peers in order to galvanise group conformity. The motivation for teens in the sex comedies to lose their virginity was portrayed as a rite of passage into adulthood, but what transpires is that the pursuit of sex and loss of virginity is often more satisfying than the actual act, which usually ends in adversity: whether it is emotional torment, like Angel (Kristy McNichol) in *Little Darlings*, or the characters being humiliated like the boys in *Porky's*, who think they are going to have sex with a prostitute in a bar out of town, but instead are tricked and mocked by the locals. The films express that the coming-of-age process, sexual initiation and the transition into adulthood is fraught with problems.

A closer reading of the recurring semantic themes of virginity loss will help to articulate contradictions and fissures surrounding teen sexuality, as represented by this cycle of films. This chapter positions these themes within a structuralist oppositional framework in terms of virginity as a gift or stigma (Carpenter, 2002). Despite the topic of teen sexuality often being treated in a comical way in the films,

the repercussions of first-time sexual experience initially leaves the characters in a state of confusion and distress, especially the female teens like Stacy in *Fast Times*, and the aforementioned Angel in *Little Darlings* and Karen in *The Last American Virgin*. The males in teen films often, but not always, view loss of virginity as an experience that will make them more masculine, therefore, virginity loss as a stigma. Consequently, 'they express disdain for virginity, engage in sexual activity primarily out of curiosity and desire for physical pleasure. They felt a sense of shame, embarrassment and humiliation about being virgins' (Carpenter, 2002: 346). In *Porky's*, for example, one of the plot lines focuses on a peer group that humiliates one of its members because he is still a virgin, a character appropriately named Pee Wee. In a syntactic context, his main goal throughout the film is to lose his virginity, which he does at the end of the film, and therefore the stigma of being a virgin has been removed. In narrative terms, the final act has brought a satisfactory resolution to Pee Wee's dilemma, conforming to Schatz's (1991) classical narrative model.

Conversely, virginity as a gift is usually, but not always, associated with the female adolescent sexual experience as depicted in the sex comedies. One of the characters in *Fast Times,* Lisa (Amanda Wyss), refuses to have sex with her boyfriend, Brad (Judge Reinhold), because, 'I don't want to have to use sex as a tool.' She is a fictional teen who wants to preserve her virginity or at least wait until she gets married or is in a committed relationship. She represents someone who lives in a society that is 'more permissive than in previous decades [but] continued to value virginity and predicate sexual activity on love and relationships' (Carpenter, 2002: 346). However, Brad boasts to another male in the film that he has had sex many times with Lisa, but when she ends their relationship he is unable to get a date with anyone else, suggesting he may have been lying about having sex in order to protect himself from the stigma of being a virgin.

The dual-focus theme of the gift/stigma notion takes on a more complex approach as the conflicting messages from research into female teen sexuality, outlined above, are represented by the character of Stacy in *Fast Times*. A brief introduction here will lead to a more detailed examination of this issue later in the chapter. In syntactic terms, at the beginning and throughout the film, she viewed her virginity as a stigma and proceeded to have sex at the first opportunity. She was left abandoned and suffered the trauma of an unwanted pregnancy and subsequent abortion. However, towards the end of the film, a transformation occurs and she

treats her relationship and attitude to sex with the character of Mark as a gift, realising the importance of love and romance.

Several of the sex comedies foreground female sexuality, which departs from the more dominant portrayal of male desire in the sex comedies. It was not just the males actively seeking sex in the teen genre; female sexual desire was positioned at the heart of the story, especially in *Little Darlings*, *Private School*, *Fast Times and Porky's*, all of which show teenage girls discussing and engaging in sex. They become active as opposed to passive characters and challenge what Elizabeth Traube (1992: 24) claims about the gender bias in Hollywood films in the 1980s: 'The Reagan era organized desire along traditional asymmetric lines, encouraging men to pursue an inflated version of the American Dream from which woman continued to be excluded.'

In *Little Darlings,* the sexual initiation theme was predominantly viewed through the point of view of two teenage girls, both underage at 15, who set out to lose their virginity while away at summer camp. Like *Fast Times*, which features underage sex, it received an R rating, meaning under-17s in America were not allowed to see the films. This ambiguous position meant that the natural audience for these films at the time could not see them legally unless accompanied by an adult. Nevertheless, the film explored young female teen group sexuality, developing a new semantic/syntactic strand in the sex comedy, as the girls are portrayed as being much more sexually aware than those portrayed in films of an earlier era, like the 'beach movies'. While generic rituals and iconography provide the framework for these concepts to 'flow', as Kitses puts it: The girls take part in food fights and much of the film takes place in a familiar teen location, the summer camp. But what emerges is a depiction of girls constantly discussing and obsessing about sex, making it the key theme of the narrative. Thomas Hine (1999: 272), in his book about the history of the American teenager, discusses the changing attitudes towards youth in the latter part of the 20th century, which relates to the themes portrayed in *Little Darlings* and other teen sex comedies:

> Young people increasingly socialized in groups, and they saw sex not so much as a prelude to marriage but as a form of personal exploration and intimate communication...virginity was no longer prized, and...young people...seemed to be talking about sex constantly.

For example, in *Little Darlings*, during the coach trip to summer camp, one of the girls admits to watching *Last Tango in Paris* ten times. Similarly, at the beginning of *Fast Times*, the teen waitress informs her friends about admiring an older customer's 'cute little butt'. Males become sexual objects of desire in *Little Darlings*, which is evident from a scene in the first act, establishing the theme of female sexual desire. The girls' voyeuristic pleasure is conveyed when they are transfixed by the male body and partial nudity on display as a group of boys from a neighbouring camp swim in a lake, whom they spy on through binoculars. Similarly, in *Private School*, after discovering the boys have been spying on them in their dormitories, the female teens are seen to enjoy being objects of male sexual gratification. In the shower/peephole scene in *Porky's*, instead of running away in disgust and embarrassment, the girls revel in being watched. Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg (1989) discuss the shifting sexual identities within the oppositional forces of male and female sexual desire which were reflected in the 1980s sex comedy. Although, historically, young men were always more likely to lose their virginity as teens in the 1970s and 80s, 'the gap between male and female teenagers narrowed as more and more girls became sexually active' (1989: 251).

As already alluded to, peer pressure and adolescence are inextricably linked and this issue provides a distinctive semantic link for all the different 1980s teen films. In doing so, this research starts to examine how, despite its subgeneric differences, the 1980s teen genre becomes more of a unified whole. Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg (1989) explain that teenage peer pressure is more common in matters concerning sexuality than any other aspect of young peoples' behaviour. The theme also relates to the screen image of the teen stereotype and the binary oppositional forces with which this is associated. Youth tensions surrounding peer pressure are evident early on in *Little Darlings* when the ring leader and perceived most popular girl, the unpleasant Cinder (Krista Errickson), initiates a bet involving the rich Ferris (Tatum O' Neal) and the poor Angel: who will lose their virginity first during the summer camp vacation? Female sexual initiation on this occasion is treated as a stigma. Cinder bullies the two girls during the course of the film and encourages others to pressure them. This creates a tension between Angel and Ferris and both are seen to be at odds with each other for most of the film. Cinder claims to be sexually experienced and turns the loss of virginity contest into proof of the two

girls' heterosexuality; in turn, she expresses her homophobia, scornfully referring to them as, 'two little virgins…you're probably lezzies'. In adolescent terms, Cinder could be perceived as a depiction of someone who demonstrates 'relational aggression, by attacking their personal and social relationships, for example, through ridicule, exclusion, and malicious gossip' (McMahan, 2002: 193). This behaviour, from both males and females, is a recurring generic characteristic in the 1980s teen genre in relation to peer pressure and its varying degrees of unpleasantness, from the insidious girls in *Heathers* to the less vindictive (but still controlling) group in *Valley Girl*. Males include the jock antagonists in *Valley Girl*, *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful*. All these so-called 'popular' teen characters display contradictory and binary traits that support the structuralist and dual-focus agenda of this thesis:

> They are seen as being nice to others *at the same time* that they are high in relational aggression. Far from being disliked and rejected by others, they are well liked by many and seen as popular. (Cillessen & Rose, 2005; Keisner & Pastore 2005; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003), quoted in McMahan (2002: 193).

In *Little Darlings,* the resulting action from the peer pressure sees Angel pursue a teen of her own age who is attending a nearby camp, the suitably named Randy, played by Matt Dillon. Ferris, meanwhile, attempts to lose her virginity to one of the camp's instructors, an older man, Gary (Armand Assante). Both girls are assertive and forceful in attempting to have sex. The traditional gender roles are reversed, and they behave more like the boys in *Porky's* at this stage of their sexual initiation. Males become the objects of female sexual desire, and both girls treat sex as a stigma. As Dresner notes (2010: 179), Angel and Ferris in *Little Darlings*, 'act in some measure as sexual initiators/aggressors toward the male objects of their desires [displaying] a mixture of masculine and feminine approaches.' However, as stated above, sexual activity in some of the films ultimately has adverse consequences. After Angel loses her virginity to Randy in a barn, an awkward and acute atmosphere pervades; they are both viewed at opposite sides of the room, signifying at this stage both a literal and emotional distance. She confesses to him that, 'it was not what she thought it would be…It was so personal…different…I feel so lonesome'. He is initially defensive and appears insecure, but when she tells him it was her first time and asks if he thinks it is 'weird that she was a virgin', he moves close to her, they embrace and

he becomes more sensitive, displaying more of a gift attitude to sex. David Considine notes (1985: 269) in relation to the sex comedy, it was 'a rare post-coital scene, which revealed a moment of rare adolescent uncertainty and ambiguity.' When she returns to her classmates at the camp, Angel denies anything happened and later breaks off her relationship with Randy, suggesting her first-time sexual experience left her emotionally troubled. Arguably, the scene is a representation of what Erikson (1968: 137) discusses in relation to sex and youth:

> Much of sex is of the self-seeking, identity-hungry kind; each partner is really trying only to reach [herself]/himself. Or it remains a kind of genital combat in which each tries to defeat the other.

Ferris' irresponsible pursuit of the older man ends up with him unsurprisingly rejecting her, but she lies to the girls and tells them they did have sex. The white nightgown Ferris wears during their encounter reinforces her virginal status, and her experience reads more like a contemporary fantasy of a teenage girl's attraction to an older man, which is doomed to failure. Angel's sexual encounter, conversely, plays out in a more realistic way and is depicted as awkward and lacking any romance. Both of their experiences embrace the Lévi-Strauss notion of exposing the inherent contradictions in a story through their oppositions in order to make sense of a culture; in this case, the myths surrounding adolescent sexual initiation.

Furthermore, Ferris and Angel are from opposite ends of the economic divide: the former is from a wealthy background and the latter is less well-off, but these opposing forces are not foregrounded in the film, unlike, for example, in the teen cinema of John Hughes. In a syntactic context, they are defined throughout the film by their sexual behaviour and dislike by the popular girl, Cinder. In the final act, Ferris and Angel bond and become close friends, while Cinder becomes the outcast of the group, revealing the contradictions associated with the stereotypical image of the popular girl being a type of role model and trendsetter – an issue brought into sharper focus in films like *The Breakfast Club, Sixteen Candles* and *Heathers*. Also, despite, or because of, their different social backgrounds, Angel and Ferris have difficult relationships with their parents: Angel's mum and dad are going through a divorce during the course of the film, while Ferris lives alone with her mother. As well as highlighting tensions between the teen-adult community, this also suggests

an insight into teen sexuality in relation to what Jessor & Jessor (1977) cited in Brooks-Gunn & Furstenberg (1989) and McMahan (2009) points out: that teenagers from dysfunctional family backgrounds are more likely to enter into sexual acts earlier than those who have a better and more stable relationship with parents who are still together.

Teenage Sex Goes Mainstream

Fast Times at Ridgemont High came out a year after *Little Darlings* and, along with *Porky's*, was a box-office success, giving the teen sex comedy greater exposure. It follows the adventures of a group of high school teenagers in southern California who hang out in the shopping mall, party and engage in a variety of sexual activities. Oliver Jones (2003: 70) asserts that films like *Fast Times* and *Porky's* did not have to rely on 'hard-core thrills' to become popular:

> For the first time in mainstream American cinema, the brief sight of a young topless girl was enough to arouse the male teen cinemagoer. Without a doubt, no genre has ever done so little to meet such low expectations.

However, *Fast Times* is more than just young people seeking cheap thrills and the film raises some intriguing issues concerning gender and the teenage sexual experience. Following on from *Little Darlings,* what is immediately evident in terms of binary opposites is the equality of female and male sexual desire. Robin Wood (2002: 196-197) explains that in the film, 'adolescent sexuality is constantly enlightened and intelligent [it] restores a certain credibility to the concept of entertainment [and] allows its young women both desire and disturbance.' Jon Lewis (1992: 72) writes that the 'sexual rite of passage into womanhood is staged with seriousness, sensitivity and honesty, [and is] starkly realistic when it comes to teen sex.' Indeed, the film's bold approach to these issues broke new grounds in American cinema in terms of the portrayal of abortion, a subject in wider society that many conservatives and right-wing religious groups vehemently opposed. The 'credibility' that Wood (2002) refers to owes much to the writer Cameron Crowe's investigation of the book on which his screenplay was based before embarking on filming. He went undercover to pose as a teenager (he was 25 at the time) and enrolled at a Californian

high school for several months. This helped in the depiction of a more authentic and realistic high school environment.

The film's director, Amy Heckerling, made the foregrounding of female sexual desire more evident by readdressing the gender imbalance through the mise-en-scène. The opening of *Fast Times* expresses this realignment of opposing male/female sexual desire by capturing the frenetic and sexually charged atmosphere of the shopping mall, populated by hormonal teenagers. Here, female desire is conveyed visually in the opening passages and creates a kind of gender role-reversal. The editing and mise-en-scène are deployed for dramatic effect to 'rectify the cycle's sexist imbalance' (Wood, 2003a: 196). An establishing, medium-long shot frames the mall while fast-paced editing expresses the male and female gaze equally as the teens display their predatory sexual characteristics – 'a travelling shot along a row of asses in tight jeans bent over pinball machines looks like a typical sexist cliché until one realises that the asses are not identifiable as female' (ibid). However, it could be argued that *Little Darlings*, which Wood may not have seen, is just as progressive in terms of gender realignment favouring female desire.

In the next scene, the action moves to the high school canteen, where Stacy and her best friend, Linda (Phoebe Cates), are introduced and an opposition in terms of their characters is established. Linda, like Claire in *The Breakfast Club* and Cinder in *Little Darlings,* is the popular girl who at first sight appears confident and experienced in sexual matters, acting as a kind of mentor to Stacy who, at this stage, is still a virgin, sexually innocent and naïve. Lesley Speed (2002: 1) refers to the events in this scene as of 'low comedy', or vulgar comedy. This is usually carried out by males in teen films and is relatively specific to the teen genre. It serves to create equality in terms of gender and expand 'teen film and low comedy beyond their traditional masculine preoccupations' (ibid.). It is a comedic act that involves references to the lower parts of the body and 'a tendency to construct comic scenarios around themes such as masturbation, oral sex and sexual fantasy' (ibid.). The use of this humour is demonstrated by Linda simulating fellatio with a carrot for the benefit of the inexperienced Stacy, in full view of a group of male teens who are sat on the table opposite. The scene could be seen as a fictional portrayal of the more permissive behaviour that young people were demonstrating during the 1970s and 1980s, on account of the more liberal attitudes to sexuality in the west (Carpenter: 2002). Indeed, no teenager – male or female – would have been seen acting in this

provocative way in teen films of an earlier generation. William Paul (1994a: 101), however, writes that this scene is problematic insomuch that it adds a further layer of complexity by challenging this notion of female equality. He claims that it is the male perspective that ends up as the dominant desire, suggesting that female sexual desire is 'contained [and] the capper to the scene is that a group of guys, who have been listening to them the entire time, burst out laughing.' These acts of low humour are examined within a more political context towards the end of the chapter.

In a later scene, another use of vulgar comedy is used to privilege the female perspective as opposed to the traditional male position. Stacy's brother, Brad, is masturbating while watching and fantasising over Linda, who is by the swimming pool. Initially, this is seen from Brad's point of view as he dreams of the naked Linda approaching him and offering sex – slow motion and evocative music reinforce the dream's eroticism. But where a film like *Porky's* would 'devote minimal screen time to female perspectives, *Fast Times* here shifts the narrative's focus away from male fantasy to provide a female perspective of Brad's surreptitious behaviour' (Speed, 2002: 7). After Brad's fantasy has ended, the camera then becomes more objective as it follows Linda into the house. Therefore, while the viewer is initially caught up in Brad's fantasy, which in a male-oriented teen comedy may have ended at this stage, the female director prolongs the scene and seeks to challenge the male perspective by focusing on the banality of Linda's actions, as she enters the house and catches an embarrassed Brad in the act. As Vanderhoff (2005: 45) explains: 'There is a balanced perspective between male and female, fantasy and reality.' Like the above scene in the canteen, female sexuality is not seen as marginalised and passive; the teen girls, as in *Little Darlings*, become active narrative agents.

This portrayal of women as equals of their male counterparts is extended by the various conversations between Linda and Stacy that pepper the narrative. They are candid, revelatory accounts full of sexual references, breaking new ground in the portrayal of the female teen in American mainstream cinema. Peter Lev comments on how 'remarkable is the film's matter-of-fact treatment of teenage sexuality' (2000: 104). Instead of just talking about it like the teens do in the John Hughes films, youth in *Fast Times* and the other sex comedies from 1980 to 1985 actively engage. Furthermore, the theme of unwanted teenage pregnancy and abortion was a first in American teen cinema. In fact, abortion in America had only been made legal a

decade earlier in 1973 and to see it as a narrative device in a teen film with an underage character may have been one the reasons the film received an X certificate.

The experiences of youth in *Fast Times* and the other sex comedies comment on a range of issues relevant to the sexual and emotional development of a teenager, and the problems this brings in shaping a young person's identity. Reinforcing this is McMahan (2009: 412): 'Adolescent sexuality is generally treated as a source of problems, rather than as an integral part of human development.' Teen pregnancy, abortion and STDs are issues with which young people have to cope in these films, aligned to adult fears of teen behaviour in the morally judgmental era of Reagan's America.

This adolescent angst is portrayed in *Fast Times* by Stacey's naivety and innocence, which is built on the notion that her peers, like the popular Linda, are supposedly more experienced when it comes to sexual matters. Linda appears confident, brash and is constantly telling Stacy about her older, mature fiancé. She also pressurizes her into losing her virginity. Their relationship could be viewed in the context of what McMahan (2009: 182-183) refers to in terms of adolescence and 'reference groups'. Linda symbolises Stacey's reference group serving as a model on 'how to act, what to value, what attitudes to hold.' Stacey looks up to Linda as a status symbol of social power; teenagers are 'more likely to observe and imitate those who are admired or successful…and those that control sources that are important … such as praise or criticism' (ibid.). However, the mythic contradictions within the popular girl image of Linda (like Cinder in *Little Darlings*) are exposed. In the final act of the film, it is revealed that Linda may not be telling the truth. As Peter Lev claims, 'by the end of the film it is clear that the bond of sexual expert-sexual novice is based on a lie. Stacey understands that Linda's fiancé is imaginary' (2000: 105). This is conveyed when Linda is reading her a letter she has written to him, in which she berates his non-attendance at her graduation. The camera frames Stacey's visual expression, revealing a wry smile that implies her boyfriend is imaginary, thereby exposing her lies, insecurity and inexperience with men and, in turn, making her more of a three-dimensional character, forcing the spectator to re-evaluate her stereotypical popular girl image. Colin MacCabe (1995: 85) explains how a scene like this is conveyed through the mise-en-scène:

> The camera shows us what happens – it tells us the truth against which we can measure the discourse...the reality of the image ensures us that this is the way it really is...Narration in mainstream cinema, at times, relies on a conflict between spoken discourses which may be mistaken and a visual discourse which guarantees truth.

Therefore, in structuralist terms, if what Lev claims is true, the innocence/experience opposite, which has been associated with the characters up to this point, is exposed as a contradiction. It is Stacey who, despite her negative experiences during the course of the film, is the one who turns out more knowledgeable than Linda, who does not engage in any sexual activity, apart from in a fantasy context in the aforementioned Brad's dream.

Although the film is pluralistic in its characterisation, Stacey's sexual exploits can be seen as one of the main syntactic threads of the narrative as Shary (2002: 128) notes: 'The film takes on high school life in broad terms, and thus sex is merely one aspect of the narrative's matrix [but] the sexual development of Stacy...is a dominant plotline.'[1]

So what are the ramifications of the sexual issues outlined in the above narrative trajectory of Stacy's semantic/syntactic axis, and how do they affect and develop the other characters involved? Returning to the issue referred to earlier in this chapter – concerning sex as a gift or stigma (Carpenter, 2002) in relation to the 15-year-old Stacy's sexual encounters – will offer a detailed examination of how these opposites function and how the ambiguities and contradictions arising from this are revealed. 'Sex as stigma' can be associated with the two men Stacey has a brief sexual relationship with: the first she meets at her workplace, Ron Johnston (D.W. Brown), the local heartthrob who describes himself rather ostentatiously as an 'audio

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[1] Schatz's (1981) classic storytelling outline, referred to earlier, will elaborate on what Shary says about Stacy's predicament. It traces through the three-act structure, which Will Wright (1975) regards as an important feature of structuralist film theory, and also comments on Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to genre. The 'establishment' or introduction stage sees her part of her 'generic community', i.e. the mall, the high school, her peer group. She expresses her curiosity about virginity, although this is an unpleasant experience and a 'dramatic conflict' ensues. In the 'animation'/'intensification' or conflict stage, she becomes more sexually confident and has sex with Mike. She falls pregnant and has an abortion as the 'conflict reaches crisis proportions'. In the resolution stage, the 'threat' has been temporarily removed as the abortion was successful and appeared to leave no emotional or physical scars; any transgression on this would have challenged the generic boundaries of the teen sex comedy. Her and Mark become a couple and are portrayed as happy and content as a conventional ending is played out.

consultant'. At 26, he is considerably older than Stacy, who lies about her age and tells him she is 19. The second is Mike Damone (Robert Romanus), the college slime ball, to whom she falls pregnant and soon after has an abortion. The negative experience of adolescent sex is taken a stage further than in *Little Darlings*. The unromantic and insensitive manner in which the two scenes are played out in *Fast Times* is reinforced by the squalid mise-en-scène of Stacy's first encounter when she loses her virginity to Ron. It happens in a place known as 'The Point', a popular location for the teens in the film to have sex away from the regulated and authoritative glare of adults. It is an isolated, shed-like structure decorated with offensive slogans such as 'Surf-Nazis', which is seen from Stacy's point of view during her sexual engagement with Ron, making the whole experience for her and the viewer alike somewhat degrading. As William Paul (1994a: 192-196) comments, the scene has a 'hallucinatory, almost nightmarish quality [and] the sense of devastation in Stacy's sexual initiation is a daring dramatic strategy in a film that has a jokey surface.' It is an example of how the treatment of teenage sex differs from the humorous *Porky's*, as when Pee-Wee loses his virginity at the end of the film, it is a cause for celebration. The coming-of-age process and journey into adulthood for Stacey is far from a celebratory experience.

Tolman's (2002: 2) discussion about teenage girls and virginity loss resonates with Stacy's sexual encounter in *Fast Times*. A common response of young girls to their first sexual experience is that 'it just happened' and young teens' inexperience at such a young age suggests that Stacey's experience, like Ferris and Angel in *Little Darlings,* is an example of someone who has not 'yet constructed a sexual self.' Anderson, et al (1989: 99) echoes the negative aspects of teen female sexual initiation:

> Female youth are more ambivalent about first intercourse than male youth because the transition could potentially cause more problems for females [who] experience exploitation and ambivalent guilt feelings...but also they experience less physiological and psychological sexual satisfaction by males.

These negative feelings are evident in *Fast Times*, the male in this scene showing no sensitivity to the pain that an underage girl is feeling. The camera views Stacy's distressed face in close-up, made all the more uncomfortable by the dark

cinematography that engulfs the space to emphasise her anguish. She tells Linda that 'it hurt so bad'. Claudia Kunkes (1980), quoted in Considine (1985: 268), endorses the above views on the negative consequences that Stacy, Angel and Ferris go through in the films: 'Sex before sixteen or seventeen is counterproductive emotionally...Younger kids haven't developed the ego functions which are crucial in making their own choices about sex.'

However, Stacy appears more confident when she takes the lead the next time and has sex with Mike in a pool cabin at her house (her parents are away), a setting, like The Point, which connotes a kind of 'illicit' sexual encounter. The sex is brief and lacks any passion, sensitivity or tenderness. Mike leaves straight away, probably out of embarrassment, adding an awkward yet realistic tone to the scene, much like Randy in *Little Darlings*. Leary and Dobbins' (1983: 139) research highlights Mike's inadequate sexual performance and premature ejaculation. It is a symptom of 'heterosexual-social anxiety...defined as anxiety arising from real, anticipated, or imagined interactions with others of the opposite sex.' Both experiences are ephemeral and, as David Denby points out, reinforcing the sex-as-stigma metaphor: 'Stacy and her friends are shucking off their clothes before they've explored friendship or the pleasures of courtship or romance' (1982: 50).

When Stacy falls pregnant with Mike's child and decides to have an abortion, the film takes on a more serious tone, much like it does with Karen's story in *The Last American Virgin*, which is focused on shortly. However, *Fast Times* director Amy Heckerling never moralises and the film is 'strikingly non-judgmental in its treatment of promiscuity and experimentation' (Wood, 2003a: 197). The film does not revert to melodrama or histrionics, which may have been the case had Stacy's parents been part of the equation or if it were more of an adult-themed film. Her brother Brad's sympathetic support for her during the abortion is 'conspicuously absent from the cycle [of teen films, which represent] the positive potential of certain family ties, in Brad's gentle, understanding and non-paternalist acceptance of his sister' (ibid.). Furthermore, the abortion is portrayed as 'pro-choice [and] certainly not presented as a pleasant experience, but neither is it treated as in the least shocking' (ibid.). Even Mike is somewhat redeemed when he pays half of the medical fees towards the termination.

Stacy's relationship with the nerdy Mark (Brian Backer) is different and treated like a gift as opposed to a stigma. Their surroundings reflect this, her

bedroom offering a more feminine and habitual mise-en-scène compared to the two previous sites. Mark is seen as sensitive and indulges her in courtship and romance, taking her for dinner and acting like a gentleman. They are both viewed as opposites in terms of sexual awareness at this stage, which privileges female desire: Stacey, having already lost her virginity, is portrayed as confident and seduces the virgin Mark, who immediately feels uncomfortable, again displaying symptoms of 'heterosexual-social anxiety' (Leary and Dobbins, 1983). At one level his character reinforces the nerd stereotype and, like Brian in *The Breakfast Club*, he is desexualised and remains a virgin. But as the story develops, there is enough change in him to be more of an inclusive character. His behaviour is in opposition to the other males who are motivated by 'getting laid' or at least fantasising about it – for example, Brad and the stoner character, Jeff Spicoli (Sean Penn), who, like Linda, may claim to have had sex but is never seen in any sexual act. Mark is castigated about his lack of sexual prowess by the duplicitous Mike. However, the irony here is that the supposedly more experienced Mike turns out to be anything but the perfect lover, thus exposing the myth of male virility and sexual potency, another contradiction revealed through the myth of the fictional teenage experience. Despite his image, it is Mark who finds romance with Stacy and although we are informed just before the end credits, in a satirical tone, that they are 'having a passionate love affair but still haven't gone all the way', Mark remains a virgin. As Shary (2005: 228) notes, he is 'the one character who, by the film's end, does not have sex and seems better off without it...and his virginal status is more reassuring than frustrating.' A similar sensitive approach to sex and virginity is seen from the point of view of the Tom Cruise character, Woody, in *Losin' It,* who has a tender moment with a prostitute and decides he is not ready to have sex, thus preserving his virginity.

In *The Last American Virgin*, the character of Gary (Lawrence Monsoon) is another male who treats virginity as a gift and his predicament is brought into sharp focus. Shary points out that he 'is one of the most sympathetic and sensitive types in any teen quest film' (2002: 229). He is not a nerd like Brian in *The Breakfast Club* and is portrayed as more thoughtful than his peers. He is, however, still depicted as a hormonally-charged teenager and the film, up until the final act, is concerned with teen lust. Gary and his two friends – the muscle-bound stud Rick (Steve Antin) and the jovial and rotund David (Joe Rubbo) – act out various 'low humour' scenes in their attempts at gaining sexual fulfilment. Gary does not lose his virginity. He falls

for Karen, but she instead falls for Rick, who deflowers her and gets her pregnant. The heartless Rick abandons Karen, at which point the tone of the film becomes much more serious. Gary vows to arrange for her abortion and look after her while she recovers. He goes on to declare his love, thinking they will become a couple. He then discovers, in what is a shocking ending for a teen sex comedy, that she is back with the lecherous Rick who displays, like other alpha males in the teen genre, 'relational aggression' – an extreme form in this case. When seeing them in each other's arms at a party, Gary's horrified face is amplified by being framed in extreme close-up. He drives away, still a virgin, crying as a bleak and depressing final twist overshadows the high-spirited and humorous youthful antics of much of the film. This ending departs from the classic resolution of genre cinema where a 'well-ordered community' is re-established (Schatz, 1981). A darker outcome is expressed as the film articulates how the painful experience of love and relationships in youth can be a destructive and heart-rending experience. Shary (2002: 229) comments on the film's ending, which also echoes to a lesser extent the plight of the girls in *Little Darlings* and Stacy in *Fast Times,* as the binaries of love and sex, gift and stigma, create tensions and personal heartache. He says,

> waiting for the "right" person to lose one's virginity to, is a damaging ambition. Like so many youth/sex films, the division between love and sex is thus enforced – the two rarely occur in the same relationship. *The Last American Virgin* becomes a warning to youth against the pursuit of sex, which leads to disease, pregnancy, and the loss of friends, and the pursuit of love, which is unpredictable and unrewarding.

Downey, et al (1999: 149) expands on Shary's insights into this aspect of adolescent turmoil and proposes a more psychological definition. A young person who goes through similar experiences to Gary's character may suffer from being 'rejection sensitive', which could 'avoid or limit future involvement or investment in romantic relationships.' If the adolescent does form a relationship after being rejected, 'they may become hyper-vigilant for signs of rejection, such as the partner's being attentive or being friendly to a potential rival.' Furthermore, Rosenblum & Lewis (2003: 275-278) discuss how the increased hormonal levels and change that young people experience combine with pain and frustrations of romantic turmoil: 'Adolescents report emotional distress related to feeling pressure to "be in love"…

concerns over choosing the right romantic partner, and suffering the loss of a break up.' This is what happens to Gary, who is left devastated, proving that true love in the sex comedies, and the teenage years, is difficult to attain.

The downbeat and ambiguous end to *The Last American Virgin* differs greatly from other teen films, where a more traditional happy resolution is achieved. For example, Neil Campbell (2004) writes about the endings of *The Breakfast Club* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* being harmonious when at times they threatened to overturn the social order. Gary's plight in *The Last American Virgin*, which was seemingly heading for a stable resolution in the form of a steady romantic union with Karen, is shattered as youth experience depicted in the film becomes chaotic, disordered and unstable, thus challenging the generic boundaries of the sex comedy.

Such examples in the teen sex comedy of the males remaining virgins create a tension between the gift/stigma metaphor and correspond with research at the time, which revealed that more young men felt comfortable and less pressured into losing their virginity, treating sex more as a gift and 'expressing pride and happiness about being virgins' Sprecher & Reagan (1996) cited in Carpenter (2002: 347). Furthermore, their reluctance could represent a crucial statement in relation to their status as teenagers in the modern world, and an unwillingness to make the transition from adolescence to manhood, much like the young protagonist Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's tale of teenage angst, *The Catcher in the Rye.* Campbell & Keane (1997: 226) point out: 'Holden [e.g. Mark in *Fast Times*] resists overt sexuality for it represents a move into adulthood and phoniness, responsibilities and choices, preferring instead the world to stand still, in an imaginary time of innocence.' These male teens, along with Brian in *The Breakfast Club,* represent a group in the 1980s teen genre whose virginity is depicted in positive terms. Moreover, the oppositions between male and female teens in the above sex comedies in terms of sex, gift and stigma is an example of how the subgenre's semantic/syntactic features are characterised by repetition and difference, and points to how the definition of the genre, as written in this thesis, is starting to become more unified as a whole.

These infrequent examples of more sensitive males in the sex comedy, with a less masculinised image and who treat sex as a gift, contrast with *Porky's,* where the male characters' bravado and posturing are indicative of the sex-as-stigma attitude. Bernstein (1997: 8) describes the males in *Porky's* as 'a group of young male studs... blustering but inexperienced and foul mouthed – in feverish pursuit of sex.' The film

offers an intriguing insight into oppositional structures regarding the portrayal of gender and male/female desire. Where the film is similar to *Fast Times* is in its use of teen-generic characteristics like low humour – the aforementioned carrot scene is more than matched by the infamous shower/peephole episode in *Porky's*, where the male teens are seen spying on naked girls as they have their showers. However, a closer reading of these oppositional structures reveals some contradictory results. In terms of the gender balance, Wood (2003a: 196) and others claim it is seen through an active male point of view, with the females being passive agents in the narrative:

> Where the cycle as a whole is obsessed with male sexual desire and anxieties (the girls in *Porky's* have no problems, and exist purely in relation to the boys, whose 'needs' they either satisfy or frustrate).

Lesley Speed (1995: 25) echoes this point, claiming that females are marginalised and only viewed in relation to teenage boys' desire and have little narrative function. They serve as stereotypical versions of male fantasies, for example, in the guise of the 'slut', the attractive older sports teacher, the 'exotic dancer' called Cherry Forever, and the inverse feminine image of the 'monstrous Miss Balbricker'. Sex in *Porky's* is played for laughs, devoid of emotion or romance, and from beginning to end, as Vanderoff points out, it is 'a male fantasy film…completely driven by male characters' (2005: 150). In a similar vein, the fantasy of the older woman as sex teacher to teenage boys is illustrated in two other sex comedies of the period: *Private Lessons* (1981) and *My Tutor* (1983). It evokes an idealised sexual world for young men offering no-strings-attached sex without the emotional complications, that is, sex as stigma. It draws on Lévi-Strauss' notion of stories as myths and Jon Lewis (1992: 72) supports this when he comments that *Porky's* 'mythologizes' young boys' sexual experiences and refers to it as 'puerile'. Nevertheless, analysing the action through a more psychological lens, the origins of the boys' hormonal charges in *Porky's* and other sex comedies can be viewed in terms of what Erikson (1968: 128) refers to as a key phase in the early stages of sexual identity during adolescence:

> The male at age fourteen begins to consolidate a sense of identity around the biological nucleus of his maturing sexuality … At the same time he is concerned with questions of what kind of man he might become.

William Paul (1994a: 114) argues that the film has a more complex set of values in terms of gender and sexual representation. He offers an opposing view and claims that the women in *Porky's* are not objectified, as Robin Wood and others suggest, as the film 'strives for something like sexual equality between men and women…even to the point of objectifying the guys as well as the gals.' He comments on the amount of male nudity seen on screen and the film's obsession with penises, making it different from other teen sex comedies, which focus on certain parts of the female anatomy. Considine (1985: 268) supports this by claiming in films and society: 'Adolescent females were becoming more liberated and more libidinal', just like in *Fast Times* and *Little Darlings*. For example, in the shower/peephole scene, when the girls discover they are being watched they join in with the fun and become active, 'posturing for their voyeurs' entertainment' (Bernstein, 1997: 11). In another teen comedy they may have felt humiliated, but in *Porky's* male and female desire is equal: 'the girls *enjoy* being sex objects…male and female alike is a sex object and quite happy to be so, [and the girls are] presented as sexual adventurous and willing' (Paul, 1994a: 117-119).

Lesley Speed (2010: 820) offers a different viewpoint by arguing that instead of promoting male sexual bravado it does the opposite, 'it emphasises the failure of the male sexual quest.' This expands on what has already been written above about the negative repercussions of sexual activity, but without the serious overtones. Nevertheless, what happens in *Porky's* is no less significant to the themes and argument of this thesis. The boy's journey into manhood and pursuit of sex is beset by anxiety and the female is often seen as a threatening presence. For instance, when they travel across county to a salon-cum-strip club (the titular Porky's), owned by a man called Porky, hence the film's title, their pursuit of sex is met with hostility. This scene will be developed in the final chapter on space in relation to class conflicts and the dangers of border crossings.

The boys' quest towards sexual fulfilment and masculine identity can again be viewed through the 'storm and stress' aspect of risk-taking, albeit with comic effects. However, *Porky's* does raise some issues with regards to gender roles and their problematic nature, as already alluded to by William Paul (1994a). On the one hand, the females in the brothel scene are passive, sexualised and objects of the male gaze. On the other, the film provides an inverse feminine image of the female sports

teacher, the 'monstrous Ms Balbricker', a character who instils fear in the boys. Theissen (ibid: 72-73) describes her as, 'the archetypal phallic woman, mannish in appearance...strict...unforgiving...obsessively anti-male...the archetypal castrating woman.' She enters the room in the shower/peephole scene, grabs the penis that has been inserted through the hole in the wall, and makes it her mission throughout the film to find the teen responsible. However, she is ridiculed by staff members and students alike, and at the end of the film is arrested by the police, 'a drooling, blithering psychotic, a joke rather than a true threat' (ibid: 72).

The myth of male sexual dominance and potency is examined in several scenes in *Porky's.* In the film's first scene, which has been already mentioned in terms of how it unites the genre, the character of Pee Wee is in bed and is beginning to wake up. In close up, the camera slowly moves down his body, creating a sense of anticipation to reveal he has an erection. His mother enters and he has to turn over quickly to avoid embarrassment. When she leaves the room, Pee Wee then proceeds to measure his sexual organ, in what appears to be a daily occurrence, and is convinced it is getting smaller. In another scene, two of the teen males play a practical joke on several of their friends, including Pee Wee and a character named 'Meat' (another penis reference), by arranging for them to have sex with a prostitute – the aforementioned and ironically named Cherry Forever (Susan Clark) – in a log cabin. It is she who acts as the dominant sexual presence by checking and commenting on the boys' manhood as they are lined up and inspected; she becomes the 'sexual aggressive female' (Paul, 1994a: 115). Cherry then leaves the scene and the boys await their turn, naked on the porch. Framed in tight close-up, this amplifies their fear and excitement at the sexual pleasure they think they are about to experience. In the other room, two pranksters pretend to have sex with Cherry by making sexually suggestive noises and bouncing up and down on a bed. These two scenes are juxtaposed using parallel editing, which highlights the ensuing failure of the male sexual conquest: 'By crosscutting back and forth...it undermines the increasingly excited expectations of the classmates with the elaborate hilarity of the jokesters' (ibid: 115), The prank ends when a huge, masked knife-wielding man suddenly enters the scene, pretending to be Cherry's husband and, apparently in a murderous rage, chases the naked teens out of the cabin into the woods. The subtext of this scene, which turns from comedy to horror and back to comedy as the two pranksters and the maniac reveal themselves, is that sexual arousal and the lust for

casual sex will be punished in a sadistic (but comical) way. The scene ends with the ultimate humiliation as Pee Wee, still unaware of the prank, carries on running and is picked up by two cops on the highway, who then go on to ridicule him. Similarly, when the boys in *The Last American Virgin* catch an STD after having sex with a prostitute, they are seen in a shop, awkward and too embarrassed to ask the assistant for a suitable cure for their condition. They are also chased out of an older women's apartment by her angry boyfriend. Therefore, contrary to what Robin Wood and others say about *Porky's* being focused on 'male gratification', Paul claims that 'males are not only punished and humiliated in the film by the displacement of sexual desire into terror, [it also] reverses male and female roles to make the woman the predator and the men the sex objects' (ibid: 116).

A similar scene of unfilled sexual male desire is depicted in the boy's locker room between a young male coach, Roy (Boyd Gaines), and Miss Honeywell, the coach of the cheerleaders, nicknamed 'Lassie', played by Kim Cattrall (prefiguring her *Sex and the City* character). When they start making love he discovers the meaning of her nickname as she begins to howl like a dog, a sound that reverberates through the gym for all to hear, making the male coach's sexual experience anxious and frustrating, inducing a sense of fear on being discovered. It 'undercuts the pleasure of the sex [which becomes] a nightmare' (ibid: 117). Reinforcing this is Lesley Speed (2010: 835), who says his experience 'subordinates male sexuality to public surveillance and female desire.'

These representations in the teen sex comedy highlight the contradictory nature of male sexuality. The scenes could also be viewed as another case of what Leary and Dobbins (1983) viewed as 'heterosexual-social anxiety'. Also, the themes of male sexual humiliation and punishment challenges the notion that Robin Wood (2002: 193) proposes in his analysis of sex in teen movies in the context of the binary opposites of 'male as hunter, female as hunted'. Theissen (1999: 73) argues that the labelling and stereotyping of the women in the film (Cherry Forever, Lassie, Miss Balbricker) is born out of their 'fears and fantasies...and are exaggerated... masculine constructions.' The scenes become parodies of the hunter/hunted relationship and further comments on the misrepresentation of male sexual supremacy. Consequently, *Porky*'s proposes two opposing representations of young male sexual identity: on the one hand, it celebrates youthful sexual activity and promotes the male sexual quest; on the other, sexual experience reduces the male

teen to a series of humiliations and, in doing so, exposes the myth of male sexual dominance. Similarly, females can either be viewed as objects of the male voyeuristic gaze. Randy Theissen describes the shower scene in *Porky's* as 'an archetypal male fantasy' (ibid: 69). Conversely, William Paul argues the opposite, that the film empowers women and makes them more the predator than the prey.

What these films reflect is that, for a short period between the back-end of the sexual liberation movement of the 1970s and the conservative ideology of the Reagan era and the onset of AIDS in the mid-1980s, teenage protagonists in cinema, for the first time on such a large scale, experienced sexual freedom like never before. This corresponds with what Hines (1999: 271) says, that sex to young people was no longer 'a prelude to marriage but a form of personal exploration.' However, this new freedom experienced by the characters had negative consequences in the form of disease, abortion, humiliation and rejection. The union of Brian and Stacy at the end of *Fast Times* is an example of teens acting responsibly. Carelessness and restraint are opposing semantic aspects, which are consistent throughout the sex comedies, serving as a warning to young people in their exploration of their sexual identity.

What also begins to emerge from the sex comedies in terms of viewing them as dual-focus texts is the oppositional debates between youth and the parent/adult world. In the 1980s, teenagers were spending less time with their parents and not seeking their advice, but instead confided in their peers or siblings (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). This is reflected in the sex comedies, for example, Stacy confides with her brother in *Fast Times* about her abortion; similarly, Gary looks after Karen after her abortion in *The Last American Virgin*. In both films, their parents are never seen and these incidents resonate with what Grace Palladino discusses regarding the growing independence of youth during the latter part of the 20th century and the fragmentation of the traditional family unit, as 'teenagers began to shape their own space and chart their own futures without reference to their parents' plans' (1996: xviii). This is echoed by Gray & Steinberg (1999: 239-240), who refer to it as a process of 'individuation' where a 'young person develops a clearer sense of himself and herself as psychologically separate from their parents.'

Continuing with the theme of the generational divide, the teens who suffer because of negative sexual experience in the aforementioned films, may have had parents who are depicted in terms of what McMahan (2009: 146) refers to as, 'Indifferent... Those who are neither responsive nor demanding.' Adolescents whose

parents fit this description 'are more likely to get involved in delinquency, early sexual activity, and drug use.' These may be contributing factors to the issue of the growing divide between the teen and adult world. However, within the fictional narrative of the teen film it is problematic to define what the parents are like because they are often marginalized and out of sight. It is, however, safe to suggest that in some cases they are conspicuous by their absence.

The Reagan Era and the Teen Sex Comedies

This section will broaden the argument into how the sex comedies operate in terms of their relationship with wider sociopolitical concerns. It will develop and go into more detail regarding what has been discussed thus far in terms of the ideology and themes of the Reagan era. This is not an attempt to focus on Reagan the individual per se, but the values and ideas which were associated with his Presidency, the Republican Party and their affiliates, and how these resonate with the films under discussion.

Chuck Kleinhans discusses the teen sex comedies and claims they 'capture a social and historical moment, a liminal space…poised between the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate period and the 'Reagan Renewal'' (2002: 73). Dresner (2010: 175) claims that the mixed critical reaction to the teen sex comedies was borne out of the negative attitude towards youth culture and sexuality, that in 'the brief period between the sexually liberated 1970s and the "Just Say No" era of the mid-eighties, American society seems to have been deeply ambivalent about the concepts of teen sexuality.'

Firstly, it is important to look at American cinema in a broader context and its interplay with the political and economic climate of the period, and then relate this to the teen sex comedy which spanned Reagan's first term in office. By the end of the 1970s, America was still feeling the aftershocks of the Watergate scandal and President Nixon's resignation, and the military failure in Vietnam and its subsequent communist takeover. The country was experiencing an energy crisis, high unemployment, rising inflation and increasing crime rates. The Iran hostage crisis had scarred a nation. The Russians had invaded Afghanistan and the communist threat was intensifying. The socialist revolution in Nicaragua saw the Sandinistas rise to power and there were revolutionary struggles in other Latin American

countries, most notably, Grenada and El Salvador. America faced the prospect of a socialist uprising in South and Central America. Two Presidents after Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, had failed to halt the downward economic and political spiral. In 1980, the Republicans won a landslide election victory and Ronald Reagan became the new American President, ushering in the 'Reagan Revolution'. He saw himself as America's saviour, someone who could rescue the nation from the depths of despair. To his supporters, he became known as 'The Great Communicator' and his eternal optimism was a key feature of his personality. However, some commenters noted 'that Reagan's popularity rested as much upon his personal style and winning charisma as on his policy platform or commitment to particular issues' (Hudson and Davies, 2008: 7). This optimism was grounded in the notion that in order to succeed, Americans must have 'a firm belief in the possibility of social advancement, the inevitable reward of hard work, and the virtuous pursuit of wealth.' (Baker, 2007: u.p.). Reagan himself, was from humble origins, growing up in a poor family.

One of Reagan's characteristics was his macho image and assertive form of masculinity. America needed new leadership to take it into the new decade. Jimmy Carter was not 'man enough' and too 'feminine' to be President, according to political commentator John Mihalic, writing in *The Wall Street Journal* (1984) cited in Jeffords (2004: 4). Shary (2005: 30) points out that the cinematic representation of masculinity towards the end of the 1970s was negative and depicted a traumatised and 'shell-shocked' nation. Vietnam-themed movies like *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Coming Home* (1979) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) were examples of this. 'America seems eager for a refreshed sense of patriarchal ambition', as the 'mildly agreeable' Jimmy Carter's Democratic Party gave way to the 'assertive' Ronald Reagan, who would project a more masculine approach to leadership. Reagan was *Time's* 'Man of the Year' in 1981 and Jeffords (2004:11) explains that he and his administration portrayed themselves as 'distinctly masculine...tough, aggressive, strong... domineering...restoring economic and military as well as spiritual strength. [He] became known as the premiere masculine archetype for the 1980s...that came to underline the nation's identity.' Alan Nadel describes Reagan as 'exemplifying the power of display as well as a concomitant optimism about the effect of using power' (1997: 3). This image of power and display is evident in the teen sex comedies as the male characters in *Fast Times,* exhibits behaviour that puts them on display, which

they assume gives them a position of authority over others. Similarly, in other teen sex comedies, many of the alpha male types or jocks in films like *Porky's, Losin' It* and *The Last American Virgin* display aggressive masculine traits: hormonally-charged teens whose vigorous pursuit of sex was often without boundaries or censure. 'Boys in teen films similarly encountered – and often enjoyed – a new sense of aggression that renewed their ideals of masculine potency.' (Shary, 2005a: 30) However, as already explained, this image of masculinity was, at times, difficult to sustain and belied an underlying anxiety that affected the characters' quest for sexual fulfilment and manhood, making the issues more problematical and ambivalent within a film narrative context.

This new masculinity and assertive leadership was also evident in military and ideological terms concerning America's aggressive foreign policy and global status. One of the main goals of the Republican Party was defeating communism and the action-adventure genre, with films like *First Blood* (1982) and its sequel, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), the most obvious choice to convey the message. It pitted the muscle-clad Sylvester Stallone against the communist 'Other' on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Vietnam. These texts commented on American imperialism, the Cold War and the rejuvenation of the dominance of US military foreign policy after the failure in Vietnam (Prince, 2007). The teen war-themed films, *War Games* (1983) and *Red Dawn* (1984), were to the 1980s teen genre what the *Rambo* films were to the action-adventure genre – an anti-communist, cinematic demonstration of America's patriotic and military strength at the height of the Cold War. In addition, the macho-cop movies of the 1980s, like *Lethal Weapon* (1987), *Die Hard* (1988) and *Robocop* (1987), reasserted masculine values. Susan Jeffords (1994) refers to these as 'hard body' films of 'remasculinization' in the Reagan years. The ex-actor Reagan was unambiguous in his stance on America's foreign policy, labelling the Soviet Union as the 'Evil Empire', a quote he borrowed from *Star Wars*, 'which typified the extent to which Hollywood film pervaded the country's culture' (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010: 661). In fact, when Reagan announced plans to build a missile defence shield in 1983, it was quickly dubbed 'Star Wars'. Jean Baudrillard (1989), quoted in Nadel (1989), extends this movie reference when he claims that Reagan, 'has worked up his euphoric, cinematic, extroverted, advertising vision of the artificial paradises of the West to all-American dimensions.' His uncompromising attitude was a return to the fervent anti-communist position of the 1950s. Also,

America's invasion of Grenada in 1983, was the first time their military had invaded an overseas country since Vietnam, further demonstrating the aggressive renewal of their military foreign policy. Indeed, extending the *Star Wars* analogy, the highest grossing film of 1983 was *The Return of the Jedi*, who Nadel writes in terms of its similarities to American ideology on a global scale, 'envisioning America as [a] neo-imperialist enforcer' (2007: 86). As Andrew Britton (1986) in Barry Keith Grant (ed.) explains: 'The essential project of the Reagan administration is to recoup the recent losses of imperialism as rapidly as possible and to inhibit the further spread of world revolutions' (2009: 118). By the end of the decade, his supporters would claim that Reagan could, in part, take credit for his role (through his relationship with Russia's President Gorbachev) in the fall of communism.

Despite the optimism and the belief that hard work will lead to personal growth and upward mobility, the economic climate during the Reagan years was defined by an aggressive form of capitalism. The 1980s became known as the 'greed is good'[2] era, synonymous with materialism, the pursuit of wealth, conspicuous consumption and power. The period was marked by a right-wing, neoliberal economic ideology, dictated by free-market forces, deregulation, less government spending and tax cuts favouring the better-off in America. Much of the drama in the teen films takes place in white-collar, affluent milieus and many characters reflect the lives of white teens who come from families which benefited from these economic policies. Troy (2005: 5) explains that it was not just the lower and working classes who were marginalised under his administration, his 'insensitivity' extended to 'blacks, gays [and] woman'. There were few dramatic or leading roles for African-Americans or other ethnic groups in 1980s teen movies. They are often portrayed as crude stereotypes like the black character in *Fast Times* (played by Forest Whitaker), who is seen as aggressive and confrontational. In John Hughes' teen world, the absence of any black characters, according to Nadel (1997, p.172), is not down from any prejudice on Hughes' behalf but a reflection of the white middle class America he belonged to: 'As Hughes himself admits, he has little knowledge of or experience with blacks, and he simply doesn't know how to integrate them into his world'.

Reagan and his wife, the First Lady, Nancy, attempted to promote a conservative, moralistic agenda, marked by traditional, rigid family values in an

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[2] The term, 'Greed is Good', comes from the Oliver Stone film, *Wall Street* (1987), which features ruthless stockbroker Gordon Gekko, played by Michael Douglas.

attempt to return to the spirit of the 1950s nuclear family era of the Eisenhower years. Together, their 'Just Say No' campaign, which warned teenagers about the dangers of drug use and sexual promiscuity, was an effort to rehabilitate the nation's youth. But this, as Shary (2005: 54) notes, widened the opposing forces and 'gave youth a renewed sense of irritation for adult authority.' The religious right in America became allied to the Republican Party in the 1980s and both were united in condemning drugs, abortion and casual sex – all thematic strands featured in the sex comedies. Indeed, the theme of abortion is treated sympathetically in *Fast Times* and *The Last American Virgin*, suggesting these films were reacting against this right wing, religious ideology. Furthermore, the Republican Party's policy on drugs viewed addicts as criminals and without compassion, dramatically reducing the funding for treatment programmes for hard drug addiction. As Bourne explains (2008: pp. 41-45), the Reagan administration 'did not accept the idea of the addict as a sick person...Drug addiction was not a health problem but a moral problem...Drug users were not patients, but sinners or criminals who should be punished not treated.' They believe that society, racism and inequality were not responsible for social problems like addiction; it was down to the individual to take account for their own lives and actions. Although there are no stories of hard drug addiction in the teen sex comedies – a subject too serious for the genre – the teens smoke dope in *Fast Times*, which forms part of the wider debate of youth rebellion in the face of adult conservative authority and the Reagan's 'Just Say No' campaign.

The Republican Party and their conservative supporters were highly critical of the hedonism of previous youth generations; for example, the 1960s sexual revolution and the 1970s sexual excesses associated with the Disco scene and the gay underground. They believed in patriarchal values, where the husband is the breadwinner in the family and the wife remains passive as the stay-at-home mother. Reagan and the religious right disliked movies with sex and profanity, like the ones discussed here, and as Gil Troy points out, (2008: 236): 'He and many of his supporters feared that America's "anything goes" culture was undermining the country's moral fibre.' Michael Schaller reinforces this (1994: 92-95):

> Ronald and Nancy Reagan attempted to alter the sexual behaviour of many Americans and their attitude toward abortion, [and] like many conservatives, pursued the goal of recoupling sex and reproduction, two activities which, since the

1960s, had been decoupled. Woman's access to abortion and contraception, like gay sex, defied the linkage of sex, reproduction and marriage.

This agenda became known as the 'Culture Wars' of the administrations of both Reagan and later George W. Bush Snr. Significantly, as Prince (2000) quoted in Maltby (2003: 274) explains, in the 1980s, certain religious groups viewed Hollywood as, 'a godless industry whose products were corrosive to the spiritual health and value of the nation', with the teen sex comedies being a genre falling under this category. Furthermore, one of Reagan's senior staff publicly voiced his disapproval of an idea to distribute free/low-cost contraceptives to teenagers to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STDs at school-based clinics, calling this a 'dumb policy…that will damage our schools and our children', quoted in Tropiano (2002: 148-149). This reactionary position was at odds with the fact that teenagers in the 1980s were having more sex than ever before both in society and in film. This conservative attitude spread to a wider political and social spectrum of middle-class America, which distanced itself from the subject of adolescent sexuality. According to Gardner and Wilcox (1993), quoted in McMahan (2009: 413), 'many American adults believe adolescent sex is wrong, a lot of elected officials, school administrators, media commentators…shy away from asking detailed questions about sexual activity.' Similarly, Nicholas & Good (2004: 91) note that, 'many adults see youths' blossoming sexuality as threatening-feral behaviour to be controlled.' This is the climate in which these teen films were being made: the 'repressive mentality' (Shary, 2010: 57) of the Reagan government and other religious and educational institutions. In one respect, the sex comedies, as Shary (2002: 29) argues, could be seen as a response against this type of cultural conservatism: 'The sexual and narcotic hijinks of the early '80s films may have been an initial reaction to the Reagan era's puritan ethic for youth – movies were sites where teens didn't have to "Just Say No".' This opposition creates a tension between cinematic youths expressing themselves and the morally conservative attitudes of those in positions of power in the wider world.

However, the issues become ambivalent when viewing teenage sexual behaviour in the films in terms of responding against this conservative ideology. Despite the casual and promiscuous nature of the depiction of sex and the shifts in gender roles and male/female desire, the films are a representation of

heteronormative behaviour, where heterosexual sex and relationships are regarded as the normative values in a society, a cornerstone of conservative ideology. Therefore, arguably, the teen sex comedies are reactionary texts that enforce 'normal' codes of behaviour, as opposed to reacting against the prevailing systems.

Viewing the teen films through a structuralist lens reveals contradictions within the adult-teen binaries that echo what was happening in wider, sociopolitical life. For instance, in *Private School,* the adult community is exposed as hypocritical. Initially, in the first act of the film, the adults set the strict moralistic tone: at a school dance, teachers and school officials look on in shock as the teens get amorous with each other. The female gym teacher (a less fanatical version of Ms Balbricker from *Porky's* then reprimands a couple for getting too close to one another. In another scene, an awkward and embarrassing moment is experienced by one of the teens when she bumps into her teacher while buying condoms in a drug store. Despite the comic nature of these scenes and the representation of adults as caricatures, they serve to highlight the conservative and reactionary tone that high school teens experience when faced with surveillance from the adults. As the film enters the second act – the conflict stage – the incongruities are exposed. Adults and parents are seen just as sexually predatory and hedonistic as the teens: at a parents' day, a drunken father ogles the girls and attempts to grope them; a wealthy father arrives to visit his daughter in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce with a much younger girlfriend, both seen drinking and petting heavily; the aforementioned gym teacher is later seen extremely drunk. This type of behaviour may relate to what Milner (2004: 165-166) refers to when parents 'copy teenagers' in trying to reclaim their youth. If a conservative adult society is trying to impose restrictions and influence teenage behaviour, but at the same time, as Milner puts it: 'Parents gain status by being more like teenagers, it is difficult for them to exercise authority to change or shape the behaviours of those teenagers.' Parents and adults are seen as flawed and inconsistent, which sets the tone for their image in many of the films in the 1980s teen genre, irrespective of whether it's a sex or romantic comedy – further evidence of the genre as a whole becoming more synergised.

Furthermore, these contradictions within the adult community were witnessed in broader society: several prominent right-wing Christians who supported Reagan and his moral crusade to rehabilitate the nation by condemning abortion, casual sex and communism, fell from grace and became embroiled in sex and money

scandals, which proved their undoing (Schaller, 1994). Moreover, according to Gil Troy (2008: 237), 'most Americans condemned divorce, drug use and promiscuity in principle, but many often succumbed to temptation in practice.' He goes on to suggest that the values of the 1960s associated with the sexual revolution, free love and drug use, reverberated into the 1980s as individual freedom undermined tradition and moral conservative attitudes. Reagan himself was labelled a hypocrite by his two children. Despite his belief in patriarchal family values, he was divorced and both his wives were professional women who were not homemakers. Also, many conservatives and the religious right denounced homosexuality, despite Reagan having gay friends from his days in Hollywood.

These scenes in *Private School* validate the link between films, structuralism and contemporary myths by disclosing a more ambiguous depiction of the representation of adult behaviour in the context of their relationship with the teenage communities and its wider implications. But they also draw on what Susan Hayward (2013: 214) refers to in relation to meaning in classic Hollywood narrative being 'invisible' unless a more rigorous analysis is applied, as any symbolic value is often masked as the plot structure has its limitations. Hayward points out that meanings in Hollywood genre cinema, like what is outlined here, are repressed by the conditions in which they are produced: the enigma-resolution narrative arc and the continuity editing style of filmmaking often suppress meaning with 'invisible' cutting techniques and smooth narrative progression, a style that does not draw attention to itself. Although ideology is evident in teen cinema, for example, heterosexuality, gender differences and social and economic divides, it is nevertheless 'naturalised' and made seamless. Therefore, as Hayward continues, any contradictions within the ideology are not immediately apparent, as genres are 'hermeneutically determined...there will always be closure...they provide simple common-sense answers to very complex issues, the difficulties of which get repressed' (ibid.). Only a close integration like this one will uncover meaning and further the argument of this thesis.

Embracing Capitalism and Rejecting Youth Countercultures

Shifting the focus to how the sex comedies work as a commentary on broader ideological discourses will further enhance the argument and their representational qualities. *Risky Business* is part of the teen sex comedy cycle with its emphasis on

young men lusting after women and seeking to lose their virginity. It is also one of the few teen films of the 1980s whose plot is concerned with making money (Bernstein, 1997), a discussion that will continue in more detail in the Chapter Five and the film's relationship to spatial issues. One of the ways the film works beyond the boundaries of genre is by reinforcing 'patriarchal capitalism' and negating the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s in relation to rebellious youth (Wyatt, 1994). Robin Wood (2003a: 146) goes on to suggest that high concept films of the 1980s like *Risky Business* work to 'diminish…and render safe all the major radical movements that gained so much impetus and became so threatening in the 1970s: radical feminism, black militancy, gay liberation, the assault on patriarchy.' The Cruise character in the film represents what Ryan Moore (1998: 257) refers to in his analysis of youth in the cultural texts of the 1980s and 1990s, as becoming apolitical and apathetic to social and political change. There is no reference in the film or in others of the 1980s teen genre discussed in this thesis to 'the Sixties [as] a last gasp of idealism, an inarticulate longing for an alternative to the suburban rat race.' However, this becomes problematic in binary terms. On the one hand, while *Risky Business* negates any countercultural impulses and embraces the new capitalist ethic of 1980s America; on the other, the film still indulges in free love and casual sex, which was very much part of the 1960s sexual revolution and, as already stated, behaviour of which Reagan and conservative America disapproved.

In the film, Cruise plays Joel, the white son of affluent parents who live in an exclusive Chicago suburb. He is initially a shy, sexually inhibited virgin who, during the course of the film, undergoes a sexual transformation and becomes a mini-successful capitalist when he turns his home into a brothel for one night. He is initially taunted by his friends because of his lack of sexual activity and promptly calls an older prostitute, Lana (Rebecca de Mornay), who quickly satisfies his carnal needs and moves into his house while his parents are on holiday. He is forced to turn his home into a brothel in order to pay off a debt and thus enters into this 'business venture' with Lana as his 'partner'. She is from a dysfunctional family background, a character who represents the 'Other' in Reagan's new America, someone who is excluded from the financial opportunities and rewards experienced by America's wealthy. Joel even secures his success into an Ivy League college on the night. One of the college's representatives turns up and interviews him, accepts his application (which is academically undeserved) and is rewarded accordingly with the

opportunity of sex, thus expressing the link between 1980s capitalism and exploitation. Indeed, 'patriarchal capitalism' in *Risky Business* has been reinforced: the age-old American myth of the individual and equal opportunity is something that the film fails to deliver – Lana returns to being a prostitute despite her major role in organising the evening. As Wyatt asserts (1994: 197): 'Opportunities for advancement are still available in the Reagan era, but these chances are limited to those who are already ensconced in the affluent socioeconomic class.' Gil Troy (2005, p.15) illuminates this by pointing out that Reagan's policies were hugely divisive in the 1980s, largely benefiting the rich at the expense of the less well-off and marginalised, the 'wealthy seemed to reap Reagan's bounty disproportionately.' Or as Michael Schaller puts it, when he refers to 'The Other Americans' like Lana who did not prosper under the Reagan administration, the 'rich got richer and everyone else tread water' (1994: 76).

In the final brothel scene, *Risky Business* ironically becomes less concerned with the pursuit of sex than with Joel's new status, reputation and respect amongst his friends as a successful entrepreneur. However, like *Private School*, the film sits ambivalently within the Reagan era. Despite Joel living the capitalist's American Dream, albeit an illegal and immoral one, the film's liberal attitude to sexuality can be viewed as a reaction against the moral conservatism of the era. Therefore, the film's complexity extends to a broader sociopolitical context, but the tone remains comic and avoids any 'cautionary tale' or moralistic approach:

> All the events in the film are depicted as entertaining and comic, therefore, Joel's coming-of-age is more a celebration of his daring business education than a question of the licentious methods by which it is achieved. (Shary, 2004: 231)

David Denby (1983: 65) reinforces the moralistic tone and claims the attitude of the film is questionable, pointing out that the selling of sex is 'presented without a hint of irony or criticism [but] as a triumph of free enterprise.' Indeed, he considers the teenagers are not depicted in a positive light, as having sex with prostitutes 'may not be the coolest way for wealthy boys to break away from their parents' (ibid.). However, Harold M. Foster argues that the film successfully works on a deeper, more ambiguous level:

> *Risky Business* is a complex film that works on many levels. One level, unfortunately, brought down the wrath of many parents. But I feel the film, one of the most important of this decade, works on a much deeper level. 'Here's success. Mom and Dad', the film is saying. 'This is what you want me to be.' *Risky Business* almost demands discussion because of its ambiguity and complexity of values. But without question, this film requires a thinking audience (1987: 88).

The theme of disavowing 1960s and 1970s radical political ideals and social rebellion seen in *Risky Business* is evident also in *Porky's* and crosses over into the romantic comedies of John Hughes, another example of the genre becoming a cohesive body of work, despite its generic variances. According to Lesley Speed (1995), these films represent a crisis in white middle-class youth by betraying the political and rebellious attitude of the 1960s youth counterculture. They lack the left-wing satire of 1970s teen comedies like *Animal House* and *Meatballs*, and other cultural media associated with youth, such as the *National Lampoon* magazine, which was characterised by its satirical approaches to society's repressive tendencies. *Animal House* 'derives from 1960s anti-authoritarianism [and] serves as an allegory of American politics in the Watergate era. [One of the characters is a] satirical representation of Richard Nixon' (Speed, 1995: 821-822). The ambivalent link between capitalism, power and sexuality in *Risky Business* is highlighted by Shary (2002: 230-231), who describes Joel as a 'teen baron of Reagan-era capitalist exploitation. [The] film parallels Joel's ambitions to become a successful capitalist with his venture into the world of sexuality.' Although this and other teen sex comedies still share the hedonistic attitude of the 1960s counterculture, 'they mark a decline of youth films' aspiration to challenge the social order [which] marks advanced capitalism's eclipse of countercultural aspirations...Sexual promiscuity and the destruction of institutional property have shed their subversive image' (Speed, 1995: 821-822). Thomas Elsaesser refers to this apathy towards political conformism in cinema as 'post-rebellious lassitude', quoted in (ibid: 822).[3]

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[3] Ryan Moore (1998: 828) alludes to the representation of youth beyond the Reagan era in the 1990s, which would become known as Generation X. He describes a youth in this period characterised by 'downward mobility...and political apathy, many young middle-class whites have latched onto a defensive façade – that, in the end, nothing really matters.' Characters in Richard Linklater's *Slacker* (1991) and *Suburbia* (1996) are examples that represent this.

The 'crisis' of middle-class youth identity is further illustrated by returning to what was referred to at the beginning of the chapter in the context of a new cinematic representation in the Reagan era – an assertive new form of masculinity in the teen sex comedies. Theissen (1999: 66) views masculine identity in this period as a form of 'hypermasculinity [in an] atmosphere of exaggerated male bodies and anxiety'. The male teens' vigorous pursuit of sex, which characterises the patriarchal culture of the Reagan era, often belies an 'anxiety' over the negative aspects of sex, outlined earlier in this chapter: humiliation, STDs, premature ejaculation, etc. Particularly in *Porky's* case, as Theissen explains, the character of Miss Balbricker is the 'incarnation of masculine anxiety'. Moreover, the 'crisis' is further heightened in the sex quest films as the male teens are under pressure to prove their manhood by losing their virginity, such as Pee Wee in *Porky's*. In addition, the emergence of feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s, changing gender roles and young females becoming more sexually active may play a part in this 'crisis' of masculine identity, in a similar vein to how the new female post-war identity affected masculinity in film noirs.

The Demise of the 1980s Teen Sex Comedy

The cycle of teen sex comedies came to an end in 1985. *The Sure Thing*, starring John Cusack, blurred the boundaries between sex and love and acts as a transitional film between the sex and romantic comedy teen subgenres. One straightforward reason behind the end of the sex comedy is that, after the commercial success of *Fast Times* and *Porky's,* their imitations like *Losin' It* and *Private School* lost money at the box office. This sent out the message to the studios that films about raucous, sex-crazed teens were struggling to attract an audience. This is no different from any other subgenre or cinema movement; many of them have a short lifespan and go out of fashion, only to be replaced by another. In the teen genre's case, a more overtly conservative portrayal of teens in 1980s America emerged in the form of the romantic comedy and drama – more aligned with what Reagan and his moralistic philosophy were trying to promote in society. Another tangible reason for the shift was the emergence of the aforementioned 'Brat Pack' group of young actors, whose presence, as Shary explains (2002: 29), was

built upon wistful, tormented, and ultimately clean images of mid-eighties youth who proffered occasionally sincere questions about sex and drugs as they engaged less in these practices (on screen, at least) than their previous counterparts.

According to John Cawalti (1979), cultural myths that embody a certain cycle of films, for instance, the myth of male sexual dominance in the sex comedy, often lose their attraction. Cycles undergo 'generic transformation' and their mythic functions are 'no longer fully adequate to the imaginative needs of our times' (1979: 260).

As noted, a more important reason for the demise was the realisation in the mid-1980s that the AIDS virus could potentially be contacted not just through gay sex but also heterosexual sex. Shary observes that because of this: 'The youth sex-quest film stopped production altogether from 1986 to the mid-1990s' (2005: 63). To bring these issues into sharper focus, it is necessary to discuss the origins of the HIV/AIDS virus and its timeline; the reaction of the media, politicians and its positon within the wider public domain. AIDS first came to the attention of the medical community in America in June 1981 when five young gay men in Los Angeles were diagnosed with a rare lung infection, which became known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Two of them died soon after and by the end of 1981, there were 270 cases of the virus and 121 of those men died (AIDS.gov, 2015: u.p.). In these early days, it was thought to effect only gay, promiscuous men who had unprotected sex. However, in 1982, there was case of AIDS in an infant who had received blood a transfusions, and in 1983 there were reports of heterosexual men and woman who were diagnosed, through having unprotected sex. But it was still thought to be largely isolated within the gay community, and the media did not feature any stories about it and no politician discussed it in public, which points to the attitudes within mainstream institutions and the stigma which gay men and woman faced. As more cases came to light, in 1984, the bathhouses which were frequented by homosexual men in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York were closed down to prevent the spread of the virus. By 1985, more research was being committed and the US congress allocated $70 million and the search for a vaccine for HIV/AIDS was underway. When the actor Rock Hudson, an icon of masculinity who kept his sexuality secret throughout his life, died from the virus in 1985, this made global headlines and helped to humanise the virus. Societal institutions began to take notice, warning the population that unprotected sex, gay or straight, could lead

to death. Furthermore, more cases of people catching the virus from contaminated blood transfusions and needle sharing amongst drug addicts were on the rise. Before his death, Hudson went public with his homosexuality and donated $250, 000 to help start, along with Elizabeth Taylor, the American Foundation for AIDS Research. The mainstream media was now discussing AIDS in a serious light, in 'countless news reports, talk shows, [and] television broached the heretofore forbidden details of sexual congress, airing language and images unimaginable' (Doherty, 2002: 200). Batchelor and Stoddart write that this new understanding,

> paved the way for many broad reaching initiatives that have had far-reaching social impact on American society. [It] helped to institute a broader, franker discussion of sexuality in America's schools, [and] made sexual orientation a much more open situation in mainstream America, but the responses revealed that people could come together to fight injustice. (2007: 22-23)

Despite this, AIDS/HIV sufferers were soon demonised by certain sections of the media and religious institutions, the virus was labelled the 'Gay Plague' and 'Gay Cancer'. Leading right-wing Christian evangelical Jerry Fallwell, an example of someone who aligned themselves with the Republican Party in the 1980s, was quoted as saying 'AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals; it is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals.' This demonisation was not exclusive to the gay community, as the case of Ryan White proves. He was a teenager form Indiana who acquired AIDS from contaminated blood when he was being treated for haemophilia, and was subsequently banned from his school.

Positioning the teen sex comedies in the context of AIDS, widens the debate into this subgenre. The heterosexual teens in these films are portrayed has having casual sex, unaware of the potential dangers involved, creating a type of counter narrative. As it was only thought that gay sex was largely responsible for the virus when it was first diagnosed and given a name, which coincided with the start of the teen sex comedy, nevertheless, a fear, humiliation and a state of sexuality out of control is evident in these films, which results in some of the promiscuous characters catching other STDs. Although these scenes are often comically played out, the teen sex comedy could be viewed as a precursor to AIDS and the potential dangers of sexual promiscuity.

Hollywood responded to the impact of the AIDS crisis in the mid-eighties by changing the attitude and motivations of its characters in term of sex and relationships, and the teen film was obviously part of this. So where voyeurism and casual sex flourished and were celebrated in the sex comedies, a significant shift began to appear in the teen genre. Doherty (2003, 200) notes that, 'sex became the extracurricular activity that dared not speak its name', and also points out that Hollywood was also at this time featuring films with preteens as the heroes of the stories, for example, *Stand by Me* (1986) and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989). Subsequently, the dominant trends in the era of AIDS became the 'chronological downsizing and sexual neutering of the American adolescent' (ibid.). The filmmaker whose work most keenly featured this new representation of teen identity was the writer-director-producer John Hughes. His more sensitive portrayal of adolescent angst left an indelible mark on the 1980s teen genre. In the time of AIDS, Hughes' films featured young protagonists who 'were noteworthy not for promiscuity and licentiousness but for chastity and temperance, [who], almost always preferred cuddling to copulation' (ibid: 201). Where the teen sex comedies of the first part of the decade 'flaunt their cynicism and hedonism...Hughes' films are sexually and economically antiseptic' (Rapping, 1987: 18). Promiscuity was replaced by a more benign form of sexual activity. In Hughes' *Pretty in Pink*, *Sixteen Candles* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, the teens do no more than just kiss and embrace.

Consequently, 'sex as gift' is the prominent semantic/syntactic thread running through the romantic comedies and dramas, as is the focus on the genre's different stereotypes, which is analysed in the following two chapters, with romance replacing sexual promiscuity as both male and female characters display more of a judicious and thoughtful attitude to sex. As Timothy Shary puts it: 'AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases rendered the teen-quest film unpalatable, youth began finding love again' (2002: 261). However, this did not mean that the 1980s teen genre lost its subversive edge, as films made in the latter half of the 1980s, such as *River's Edge* and *Heathers*, which are discussed later, contained characters who Doherty describes as 'soulless nihilists' (2002: 200).

Chapter Three

Stereotypes and Other Roles in the Teen Romantic Comedies and Dramas

Before a close analysis of the films, a short enquiry into the second term of Reagan era, its themes and ideologies, and how it impacted on the teen genre from the mid-eighties onwards. This will offer an overview of the issues within a sociopolitical and economic context, much like the debate in the previous chapter concerning his first term and its links to the sex comedies.

In November 1984, The Republican Party were re-elected with an overwhelming majority. President Reagan continued to promote his love of America, patriotic ideals and family values in a number of speeches and commercials in the run-up to the election – a campaign which was named, 'Morning in America', which attempted to promote a feel-good mood for the American people. He would continue to reference Hollywood films, quoting *Dirty Harry's* famous line, 'Make my Day', when challenged by the Democrats in 1985. Similarly, he appealed to fans of *Star Wars* and his Christian supporters, by claiming that the 'Force is with us'. Anti-communist fervour was reaffirmed as the nation continued to recover from the political and military setbacks of the 1970s. Despite Reagan's demonization of the Soviet Union and communism, in 1985 he started to negotiate with President Gorbachev in the hope of ending the Cold War and scaling down both countries' nuclear weapons arsenal. However, closer to home, America continued to battle with socialist revolutionary groups in central and South America, with the Reagan government giving their support to 'right-wing dictatorial regimes...with the CIA aiding government forces that operated death squads in El Salvador, [and supporting] the 'contras' to overthrow the legitimately elected socialist oriented Sandinistas in Nicaragua' (Hammer & Kellner, 2007: 110).

The Republican Party's election victory had appeared to convince their supporters that America's global status as a superpower and economic driving force was re-established. Certainly, promoting a fear of communism, terrorism and the 'Other' was a successful campaigning tool, while his detractors would claim that he would embellish and exaggerate these issues and remain secret about the true nature

of his foreign and economic policies. Although in reality, the economic recovery only benefited the wealthier in America, as the less well-off struggled and remained excluded from the American Dream. The national deficit was a record $200 billion with the spending on military, tax breaks for the rich and large corporations accounting for much of this figure. The number of people in America who lived in poverty at the time of Reagan's re-election was 41 million (ibid: 111).

Following on from the timeline discussed towards the end of the previous chapter, there were significant developments concerning the AIDS crisis in the second half of the 1980s. The general public, not just in America, but worldwide were now aware of the extent and the potential dangers of the virus as people started to question and revaluate their sexual behaviour. By 1986, more money for research was being provided and by the end of the year, there were approximately 40,000 cases of AIDS worldwide. Initially, Reagan and his government refused to address the epidemic in public. Schiller (1994: 93) suggests that one reason behind this may be that Reagan's conservative views meant that he found 'the subject distasteful' and any sympathy he may convey towards sufferers may 'upset religious conservatives', like the aforementioned Jerry Fallwell. It was not until 1987, on the advice of the First Lady, Nancy, that he referred to AIDS in a speech, but only mentioned that scientists were 'still learning about how AIDS is transmitted' (ibid.).   In 1988, the aforementioned Ryan White (who died in 1993) became a spokesperson for AIDS education and by the end of the decade, there were an estimated 100, 000 AIDS cases in the United States. Also, by this time, 'it had become the *cause celebre*, initiating the practice of wearing red ribbons at awards shows, testing the tolerance and compassion of all Americans' (Stoddart & Batchelor, 2007: 22). No teen film made any reference to the AIDS/HIV during the 1980s, but several low-budget films and made for television movies featured the topic: *An Early Frost* (1985), *Parting Glances* (1986) and *As If* (1986). *Long Time Companion* in 1989 was the first to get a wide theatrical release and *Philadelphia* in 1993, became an Oscar winner and commercial success.

Returning to the films and their sociopolitical significance, the optimism of Reagan's first term in office and a couple of years beyond, was reproduced in the John Hughes' teen films, which are analysed in more detail in this, and the following chapters. These films are characterised by a prevailing positivity, featuring wealthy white kids skipping school and falling in and out of love. Geoffrey Baker (2006: u.p),

in his article, 'Social Mobility in Reagan-Era Teen Films', discusses how these issues of romance, wealth and status function in Hughes' *Pretty in Pink*. He links it to an era in which individuals were 'weaned on optimistic Reagan-era perceptions of social mobility [where] the poor girl got the rich boy.'[4] These middle class cinematic teens, as Stoddart and Batchelor write, 'embraced the politics of Ronald Reagan, believing that economic success was every American's privilege' (2007: 25). Alan Nadel refers to Hughes as the director 'who is the filmmaker sine qua non of President Reagan's America, [whose films] make concrete the combination of class values and pervasive optimism essentialized in President Reagan's America' (1997: 10). Although this optimism is generally the dominant mood, there are characters in Hughes' films who represent the other side of the economic spectrum in Reagan's America, those who were struggling to survive.

Before becoming a filmmaker Hughes worked in the advertising industry for several years, mastering the anecdote, the one-liner and the sound bite – verbal language which characterised Reagan's speeches, which, as already noted, made him popular with the electorate. Furthermore, notwithstanding the tensions during the conflict stage of these narratives, their resolutions usually conform to normative, conservative values. Neil Campbell (2004: 3) refers to *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* as a film, 'which is potentially disruptive, but ultimately reconciled in [its] own interest to American core values like family, home, school and friendship.' All principles promoted by Reagan and his party. Hudson and Davies (2008: 9) write that Reagan possessed a 'sunny temperament and infectious optimism', much like Ferris Bueller. Moreover, Grindon writes that Ferris Bueller 'is a master of self-promotion. He embodies the confidence of a President who wants to set free the entrepreneur from the restrictions of government, or in Ferris' case, the demands of high school' (2007: 160). Alan Nadel (1997: 154) further elaborates on this and points out that Ferris qualifies as an unmistakable leader' and compares him to Reagan in relation to his power of manipulation (Reagan was dubbed 'The Great Manipulator' by some of his critics), and goes on to discuss Ferris' 'unregulated' behaviour, which also

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[4] The original ending saw the alternative character of Duckie and the poor girl Andie getting together. However, when this was shown to a test audience they overwhelmingly rejected it and wanted the rich kid Blane and Andie reunion, suggesting the audience's idea of a happy ending was more conservative than unconventional. Bernstein (1997: 78) explains that Andie's and Duckie's 'poor but honest moral superiority gnawed deep into the corrupt souls of the richies who were forced to deal with their own worthlessness, [but the audience] wanted to see the poor girl get the rich boy of her dreams. They didn't care about the dignity of the oppressed.' Director Howard Deutch and screenwriter Hughes reluctantly agreed to change the ending.

characterises government economic policies. Nadel cites Vicky Lebeau (1992) who expresses a transatlantic approach, regarding Ferris' 'youth rebellion as nothing more than a series of tricks and revels in parental and personal wealth and status [becoming, like the film's audience], the children of a political and cultural exchange between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan' (ibid.).

The blue-collar dramas, *Vision Quest* and *All the Right Moves,* dramatise Reagan's triumph-of-the-individual-spirit message that hard work will lead to career advancement and wealth. However, towards the end of his second term, which concluded in 1989, a more pessimistic tone was evident, as sexual scandals perpetrated by politicians and religious figures, insider trading on Wall Street (depicting by the film of the same name), increasing unemployment, a widening wealth gap and the Iran-Contra affair, became headline news (Baker, 2006). *Heathers, River's Edge* and *Pump Up the Volume* (1990) could work as a metaphor for Reagan's second term, all films which are more negative and cynical in its portrayal of teen issues. These three films could be linked to what the Philipp Jenkins argues in his book, *Decade of Nightmares* (2006), quoted in Hudson and Davies (2008: 4). Jenkins does not focus on the economic aspects in terms of the revival, but more on the 'societal decadence and rampant criminality' of the Reagan age, which both *Heathers* and *Rivers Edge* depict in their narratives. Tonally and thematically, they are in stark contrast to the John Hughes movies. As Hammer and Kellner note, 'Hollywood films supported but also criticized the dominant political values of the period' (2007: 112).

Extending this negative tone, two of the Hughes' films reflected the changing mood of the socio-political climate during Reagan's second term. The aforementioned *Pretty in Pink* contrasts against Hughes' next teen film, *Some Kind of Wonderful,* and 'charts the starker pessimism of the decade's end. [Both films] bookend a rupture in the portrayal of class in American cinema of the 1980s' (Baker, u.p). Where *Pretty in Pink* conforms to the rags to riches narrative which is part of the optimism of the Reagan era ideology, *Some Kind of Wonderful* departs from this and offers a more abstruse analysis of class issues. It sees the poor boy initially becoming involved with the rich girl, although it transpires the she is also from more of a similar background to him, but is portrayed as aspirational and has been accepted by the rich crowd – she is initially the girlfriend of the jock character. This makes the issues more ambiguous than a straightforward poor and rich character

falling in love. By the end of the film, the male character chooses to get together with a girl from a similar class background, and the 'rich' girl rejects her adopted bourgeois status in favour of independence, revealing the myth of upward mobility in the Reagan years.

From more of a wider perspective in economic terms, the fathers of the main protagonists from *Pretty in Pink*, *Vision Quest* and *Lucas* (1986) are all unemployed; characters who represent those who struggled through the recession of Reagan's second term in office. They are also divorced meaning the teens are part of the single parent culture. Although the fathers do not play a major role in the films, they did depict a rising divorce rate during the 1980s as the family unit in America began to fragment, despite Reagan's belief in family values and patriarchy. Batchelor and Stoddert explain divorce and single parent households were issues which were impacting more on youth in the 1980s than ever before, and 'although it is counterintuitive, the conservative embrace of the Reagan years did not translate into a greater sanctity for marriages' (2007: 26).

The blighted landscapes of *River's Edge* depict a community which has suffered during the recession of the late 1980s in America. These are communities which Nadel writes about who are victims of Reaganomics, more specifically, 'lack of regulation…dismantling of social programmes, collapse of savings and loans… deflection into private pockets of billions of dollars in public funds…demise of its credit surplus and its standard of living' (1997: 8). Also, *River's Edge* is described by Grindon (2007: 147-165) as 'mixing nostalgia with malaise', when discussing it in terms of Reagan's evocation of 1950s and small town America, which is where the film is set, but in the present. Although the 'habits and fashions' of *River's Edge* recall the earlier period, 'the traditional values touted by Reagan's policies generally appeared to be fundamentally irretrievable or an ideological fabrication…, questioning the simple minded optimism of that disguised Reagan's politics' (ibid.). Therefore, the likes of *River's Edge, Vision Quest, Some kind of Wonderful and Lucas,* can be viewed as a challenge to the capitalist ideology of the period in terms of characters in these films who do not prosper under this system. In a similar vein, much like way that the sex comedies react against the Christian-based, moralistic agenda of the era.

Consequently, some see Reagan's period in office as a success in terms of creating wealth and cementing America's status as a world military and economic

power. More liberal commentators viewed his policies as an attack on the welfare state. He neglected the issue of civil and gay rights and abandoned plans to promote racial integration in schools. He showed a lack of interest in affordable housing programmes for the less well-off and displayed an ignorance and lack of empathy towards victims of AIDS and drug addicts. Less government spending meant a reduction in social programmes and subsequently there was an increase on defence. Also, during this period there was a crackdown on organised labour and the unions lost some of their power as workers were often sacked for going on strike. This, as Alan Nadel puts it, instigated 'a form of white supremacist social Darwinism…which created a bipolar economy that accelerated the gap between the rich and poor' (1997: 162). An oppositional and often contradictory era – a position which resonates within the stories of the teen movie.

Bearing these issues concerning the Reagan era in mind, the emphasis will shift to the analysis of the films, their characters and stories. As noted, the promiscuity of the sex comedy had given way to romance and sensitivity as the industry responded to a more sexually vigilant climate by attempting to 'reshape the moral landscape of the teenpic genre' (Doherty, 2002: 198). The Reagans' 'Just Say No' campaign, which attempted to suppress any hedonistic or subversive behaviour, ran parallel to this shift in tone of the teen movie. From the mid-1980s onwards, stories about casual sex and loss of virginity were replaced by comedic and dramatic narratives about love and romance. Even when there is a scene involving characters losing their virginity, which is rare in the post-sex comedy teen film, it is treated with a degree of sensitivity and tenderness and the two characters involved are seen in a committed relationship. In *All the Right Moves*, Steff (Tom Cruise) and his girlfriend Lisa (Lea Thompson) have sex for the first time, but it is seen off-screen. Prior to this, they discuss their relationship and talk about sex in terms of the importance of trust and responsibility.

An investigation into the role of the teen stereotype, its dual-focus oppositional forces, and contradictions will continue to develop the argument and the depiction of the teen in 1980s genre cinema. This will lead to discussing another teen role applied to the protagonists: the concept of the 'ideal male' and 'female' (Wood, 2003b), which will evolve the image of the cinematic teen. Themes which act as a unifying force across the genre concerning the coming-of-age process and the 'storm and stress' aspects of adolescence will continue to provide material in arguing

how the films make sense of a youth culture and articulate teen concerns, set against the changing 1980s' sociopolitical landscape. Also, despite the absence of sex, other adolescent themes which challenge moralistic values, such as teen rebellion against the adult world, drunken behaviour and trashing property, are still very much part of the genre from the mid-1980s onwards.

In the romantic comedies and dramas of this period, one semantic/syntactic aspect which is more prominent than in the sex comedies is that the protagonists experience a transformation in their personalities. This is an integral part of the message these films are conveying. It often revolves around issues such as the characters accepting their cultural and socioeconomic differences, like in *Valley Girl*, *Pretty in Pink* and, most notably, in *The Breakfast Club*. Also, the generational divide and the conflicts between youth and adult/parent are key themes in this chapter — semantic features which are not foregrounded in so much detail in the sex comedies.

The analysis will begin with *Revenge of the Nerds* (referred to as *Revenge* hereafter), which was made in 1984. It acts as a transitional, hybrid film between the sex and the romantic comedies as it contains characteristics associated with its predecessors, like virginity loss, but this is not central to the narrative. What the film brings into focus is the image of the teen stereotype and its binary oppositional forces, along with the contradictions that emerge from this relating to the nerd, the jock and the popular girl. In Chapter Two, the sex comedies touched upon the subject of the stereotype and set a platform for the following chapters. They provided an example of how this semantic feature started to unify the subgenres into a more cohesive whole. Cinder, the popular girl in *Little Darlings*, the jocks in *Porky's* and the nerd-like Mark in *Fast Times* all had significant roles to play. Timothy Shary (2002: 34) notes that *Revenge* offers 'the most dominant image of nerds in 1980s teen cinema.' In addition, what is different in the film is that it deals with teens who have finished high school and now, aged 18 or 19 and at college, they are entering into the latter stages of adolescence.

The film's plot concerns a group of nerds who start college and are immediately tormented by their jock/popular girl counterparts. What the introduction of the film illustrates is the clichéd representation of the nerd in the form of the two protagonists: Lewis (Robert Carradine) and Gilbert (Anthony Edwards). They are both portrayed as having buck teeth, bespectacled, socially inept

but clever and interested in maths and computers. They fit David A. Kinney's (1993: 21) definition of the media depiction of this teen character, 'awkward, intelligent, shy, unattractive social outcasts with unfashionable hair and dress styles.' When they arrive for the first day of college, they are 'ridiculed and rejected by [their] peers' (ibid.): the jocks and the popular girls. However, it is not just the nerds in the film who are initially depicted as the 'Other': a black effeminate male teen, an Asian student, a male slob and nerd-like girls who are not considered slim and beautiful are also treated like outcasts. They align themselves with the nerds and are subjected to harassment by a youth culture made up of white jocks and popular girls, the so-called mainstream of youth culture as initially depicted in this film. The jocks are conveyed as having high self-esteem and are rugged football players; they are highly visible alpha males (they run the school council); tough, masculine and narcissistic. They throw wild parties and engage in acts of 'low humour', a similar semantic trait to the sex comedies such as *Porky's* — further evidence of the genre's unifying themes. The popular girls are slim, obsessed by their appearance and are part of the cheerleading team. Kinney's research reveals that the jock and the popular girl emphasise,

> traditional gender roles (achievement, competition and toughness for boys; attractiveness, appearance, and interpersonal relations for girls). [They maintained] their high peer status which required limiting the size of their group by excluding peers who did not meet their standards. (ibid: 26)

The above definition of the different teen stereotypes can act as a paradigm for the following films in this analysis, although they are variations: not all jocks will be seen to play sports, as in *Valley Girl* and *Pretty in Pink*; not all nerds are computer enthusiasts, for example, the nerds in *Sixteen Candles* do not refer to computers; and not all popular girls are cheerleaders, for instance, Claire in *The Breakfast Club*. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate what was written in the literature review about Kinney's and Milner's (2002) analysis of the teen stereotype: they offer valuable insights in outlining a basic definition and set a foundation for the role, but are limited as they do not discuss how characters change and become more three-dimensional, unlike a film narrative and in turn, this research. In *Revenge*, by the end of the film, the nerd Lewis and the main popular girl shed their stereotypical images by forming a relationship and become more composite characters. However,

the jocks, like in *Porky's,* remain clichéd characters. In fact, Lewis loses his virginity to the girl at the end of the film, which is unusual; as stated in Chapter Two, nerds usually remain virgins in the 1980s genre. On the one hand, the film shares generic characteristics with the sex comedy with the virginity loss theme; on the other, its transitional status within the genre is conveyed by the focus on the analysis of the teen stereotype, which sets in motion one of the key semantic strands of the teen genre from the mid-1980s onwards.

If the nerds and outsiders are depicted in terms of their 'otherness' to the white, heterosexual male jocks in the film, this opposition, in metaphorical terms, can be viewed in relation to Reagan's America. As already stated, the Republicans were known for their tough, masculine identity, just like the jocks in *Revenge* and also, the 'traditional American values' message which the Republican Party preached. This promoted a selective view of US history, favouring white hegemony, which marginalised other ethnic and social groups, who continued to fight for equality in adverse conditions. Kendall (1999: 265) argues that the initial clichéd image of the nerd in the film 'substitutes for other oppressed groups and recodes bids for the overturn of the dominance of white straight males.' However, as the narrative progresses, the nerds fight back against their tormentors, undergo a transformation and in the final act, they 'demonstrate a reconfiguration of civil rights discourse' (ibid: 266). In mythic terms, the film becomes an underdog fantasy as they triumph in the face of adversity and displace the dominant white heterosexual male.

The transformation of the nerds and other outsiders in the film, and the blurring of the boundaries between their stereotypical image and the jocks, begins after they throw a party. The nerds get drunk, smoke marijuana and are sexually active. Lewis tells Gilbert: 'they are not girls [but] women...we're in college now.' They behave more like the jocks who, in the film's introduction, were having a party which included a variety of drinking games. As Shary (2012: 34) observes, they share 'somewhat ironically...common interests with their college cohorts in having a good time.' More generic unity is evident as *Revenge* demonstrates that the 'low humour', which Lesley Speed (1998) discussed in Chapter Two, can be experienced by the least likely of teen types. Furthermore, the binary oppositions in the teen story are again creating a contradictory message when viewing the issues through a Lévi-Strauss structuralist approach. This continues when the jocks and the popular girls break up and ruin the party and the nerds vow revenge. By doing so, they further assimilate

themselves into what Lori Kendall (1999: 266-268) describes as part of 'hegemonic masculinity', transforming from 'underdogs to everyman heroes.' They exact a covert plan and plant hidden cameras in the cheerleaders' dorm and behave like sexual voyeurs, observing the girls in their most private moments, a scene not unlike the shower/peephole episode in *Porky's*. This expresses the nerds as active sexual beings, just like their jock counterparts, that is, as 'normal men'. At the same time, they utilise the characteristics which define their stereotypical nerd status, as Kendall explains: 'They too want to survey and control women as sexual objects, and they use their special strength — control of technology — to express these desires' (ibid: 269). Also, the nerd transformation in *Revenge* is seen as more radical than others in the teen cycle, 'since its characters achieve pleasure, power, and popularity without shedding their nerdy images' (Shary, 2002: 34).

Another incident which reinforces the nerds' 'complicity with hegemonic masculinity' (Kendall, 1999: 270) is through an act of sexualised violence, albeit played out comically. They exact revenge on the jocks by rubbing liquid heat on their jock straps, a further stage in their transformation from nerds to 'men'. In the final act, Lewis has sex with one of the jock's girlfriends, Betty (Julia Montgomery), by tricking her through wearing a mask and pretending to be her jock boyfriend. She claims it's the best sex she's ever had, and still believing it is her boyfriend, says: 'you did things to me you never did before'. Although she is initially shocked and revolted when Lewis reveals his true identity, this is just temporary as she asks, 'are all nerds as good as you?', to which Lewis replies, 'all jocks think about is sports; all we think about is sex.' Driscoll (2011: 49) comments on this scene in relation to notions of maleness when she explains that 'the geeks seek recognition of their masculinity through the authority of sexual partners.' The transformation from nerd to a more 'normal' male is cemented and the myth-like fantasy of the triumphant underdog is achieved. Betty ends her relationship with her boyfriend and begins dating Lewis, thus redefining the teen stereotype, offering a less hackneyed version of youth sexuality in the 1980s teen genre. The nerds in *Revenge* get 'rehabilitated' (Kendall, 1999: 260) and a new identity is achieved.

Another example of the nerd who shares similar characteristics to those in *Revenge* is Ted, 'The Geek', played by Anthony Michael Hall in John Hughes' romantic comedy, *Sixteen Candles*. This was Hughes' first examination of the teen hierarchy within the high school system and the problematic nature of the labelling

of different youth groups. Ted's physical appearance fitted the nerd stereotype: 'Pint-sized and pale-faced, his barely formed features dominated by a huge pair of sheepish eyes' (Bernstein, 1997: 57). However, his general behaviour and attitude eschewed rigid definitions, as Susannah Gora (2010: 50) points out: "The Geek' was a nerd [but] he was no stammering, insecure, pocket-protector wearing dweeb. [He] would be charming, ebullient, cocky...the self-described 'King of the Dipshits'". Similarly, Thomas A Christie (2009: 66) comments on Ted and his geek friends, 'beneath their veneer of insecurity we are always made aware of the existence of very distinct personalities.' Ted, like Lewis in *Revenge*, also has sex with the popular girl, Caroline (Haviland Morris), at the end of *Sixteen Candles.* Therefore, the transformation works both ways in the two films: the shallow popular girl has become more of a complex character, distancing herself from her clichéd image as she enters into a relationship with the nerd. Even the jocks undergo a transformation, but this does not happen until the third instalment, *Revenge of the Nerds III: The Next Generation* (1992), when one of the jocks says: 'As I sat last night at the computer, I realized that...I was a nerd; and that there's a little bit of nerd in everyone.'

Other nerds depicted in 1980s teen films do not undergo such significant change as those in *Revenge*. For example, Brian in *The Breakfast Club* is described as having a 'liminal masculine identity' (Kendall: 1999) and is the only character at the end of the film who is not romantically attached. Also, as referred to in Chapter Two in *Fast Times* and *The Last American Virgin*, the nerd-like characters remain virgins, despite trying to have sex. Brian in *Fast Times*, as Shary (2002: 34) explains, at one stage is 'less developed and therefore viewed with pity and occasional contempt.' He is shy and does not display any 'masculine' characteristics like the nerds in *Revenge*, and he is reproved by the slime-ball Mike for still being a virgin. However, the contradiction in this teenage myth of sexual awakening is that the virgin Mark is the only male character in *Fast Times* who forms a loving relationship by the end of the film.

Another aspect of *Revenge* which challenges the stereotypical image of the nerd relates to issues of work, masculinity and the growing use of computers. The nerd and the computer were inextricably linked during this period, and Lewis and Gilbert say at the beginning of the film that they have chosen to attend their college because it has the 'best computer department in the country.' This may reinforce

their nerd status, but at the same time it points to something more significant in terms of the growing influence of computer technology and its relationship to masculinity, as Kendall (2011: 505) observes: 'The increasing legitimacy of expertise in computers as a form of masculine prowess.' Computers in the 1980s were a key part of capitalist America and pioneers like Bill Gates and Stephen Wozniak (co-founder of Apple) were 'geeky guys who couldn't get a date in high school [who] became millionaires through the very act of technological manipulation which labelled them nerds to begin with' (Kendall, 1999: 266). Therefore, if money and power equates to masculinity this results in 'revenge' for this previously non-hegemonic group' (ibid).

The image of the nerd in the 1980s teen genre comes under closer scrutiny in the teen romantic comedy-drama *Lucas*, made in 1986, which treats its characters with a degree of sensitivity and sincerity, as the shift away from the promiscuity of the sex comedies becomes more evident. In a mythic context, it is the quintessential American underdog fantasy, and the portrayal of the coming-of-age process avoids cliché and takes the dual-focus jock-nerd relationship to a different level. Although the title character, played by the late Corey Haim, fits all the physical signifiers of the nerd – bespectacled, small, unkempt and seemingly undernourished, similar to Brian's appearance in *The Breakfast Club* — he is also extremely intelligent; he is 14 and 'accelerated', clever enough to study with older students in junior high. He falls for the older popular girl, Maggie (Kerri Green), who is 16 and does not display any of the antagonistic characteristics or relational aggression that other popular girls in the genre do. However, she begins a relationship with one of the jocks, Cappie (Charlie Sheen) who, like Maggie, from the beginning of the film does not conform to stereotype. Shary (2002: 36) writes that he 'is a rare football player of some integrity.' He is a friend of Lucas who protects him, although his courtship of Maggie creates the central conflict of the film, as Lucas' failed attempts at transforming himself in an effort to impress her are not successful and potentially dangerous — he joins the football team but gets injured during a game and ends up in hospital. His transformation from a nerd to a more masculinised version of a teen is highlighted in the film's final scene. Though he may not lose his virginity like the nerds in *Revenge*, his bravery on the football field and subsequent hospitalisation garner him the respect of the jocks who previously taunted and bullied him. They give him a varsity jacket and his transformation from nerd to unlikely hero is complete when Lucas

'proudly dons it to signify his triumphant ascent to a potentially new level of masculinity in which he may gain both physical and sexual confidence' (ibid.). Here, the liberation of the nerd and the blurring of boundaries and oppositions between the teen stereotypes is not through sex, like in *Revenge,* but through being accepted by his jock counterparts in terms of physical courage in the face of adversity. It is also difficult to define the character of Lucas; his attempts to be more like a jock, although impressive and admired by a cross-section of the teen community, nonetheless seem difficult for him to sustain beyond the imagination of the film.

Unlike *The Breakfast Club* and other Hughes' romances, the teen stereotype in *Lucas* and its relationship to social status is not a main issue. Lucas lies about his background to Maggie, who is from a white-collar family. He says he lives in a big house when, in fact, towards the end of the film it is revealed he lives in a trailer park with an alcoholic father and his mother has left the family. Maggie's parents are also divorced, so despite their economic differences the teens share parental disharmony, again a unifying theme within the genre, and this time within a single film. Lucas is seen to use his intellect to survive and social differences are not foregrounded, as Shary (2011: 571) comments: '*Lucas* is one of the few youth romances to introduce class differences as a factor and then essentially disarm them.' As for status within the teen hierarchy, Lucas initially regards as 'superficial' the jock football team and the cheerleaders, the two clubs portrayed as having the most prestige. But when the jocks accept him as their rightful peer at the end, they go through a positive transformation, their clichéd image is overturned and the contradiction exposed, unlike the jocks in *Revenge* and *Porky's* whose respective clubs remain elitist and off limits to anyone not conforming to the footballer/cheerleader stereotype. It is also another example, in adolescent terms, of the jock's relational aggressive characteristics — they are antagonistic towards Lucas but also show him kindness and respect in the final scene (Mayeux, 2011).

The theme of jocks and other teen stereotypes experiencing transformation and becoming more three-dimensional continues in the more serious, but still at times comedic, *The Breakfast Club*. Teen roles and identity are closely interrogated as adolescent angst is foregrounded more than in any other film discussed thus far.

The Breakfast Club

Made a year before *Lucas* in 1985, John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club* is arguably the best-known teen movie of the 1980s. The following analysis examines and deconstructs the oppositions within the five main stereotypes of the American high school system: the jock, the nerd, the popular girl, the delinquent and the rebel. It will develop in much more detail what has been written on the teen stereotype thus far, as well as on the teen/adult relationship. The film concerns the so-called hierarchical structure of the American high school and its chain of command, and this research will examine the flaws and contradictions within this system. There is no physical sex in the film, although the teens do discuss the subject and it is treated with a level of seriousness not seen before in the genre. Banks & Bliss give it little attention when writing about 1980s cinema and refer to it as 'innocuous' (2007: 127), whereas Doug Rutsch points out that the film is still significant and influential today: '*The Breakfast Club* is no cultural relic. Its examination of social classes, basic human interaction and high school dynamics continues to make it fodder for college classrooms' (2005: u. p.).

The film revolves around five high school students who have to spend a Saturday in detention together in the school library: the jock: Andy (Emilio Estevez); the nerd: Brian (Anthony Michael Hall); the popular girl: Claire (Molly Ringwald); the delinquent: Bender (Judd Nelson), and the rebel: Allison (Ally Sheedy). Like in *Revenge*, their stereotypical image and binary oppositions are made explicit from the inception as the characters are portrayed by their differences in terms of social and cultural status, academic ability and domestic/family life. As Jonathan Bernstein points out, 'they are a quintet of representatives from disparate social groupings in a controlled environment' (1997: 62). It is not just within this environment where the drama plays out, it is within the 'rigid social system within the high school, and the cliques which constitute the structure of this system' (Christie, 2009: 78). This is the premise in which the film is presented, but as it approaches its resolution unlikely romances ensue and 'the rigid order of things begin to crumble' (Lewis, 1992: 138). Stephen Tropiano echoes this, 'their respective labels begin to fade as they let down their defences and start to open up' (2006: 178). Like the sex comedies, *The*

Breakfast Club contains comic moments but the film attempts to represent and foreground the emotional problems of the 1980s teenager with much more seriousness than its predecessors.

In referring to Kinney (1993) and Milner's (2004) research into the different teen groups within the American high school and their differences and similarities, will establish the foundations for the teen stereotype here but again, these authors research is somewhat limited as it does not take into account the transformations characters go through. Milner outlines the different teen groups and their variations, demonstrates how they operate within a 'hierarchical status system' and focuses on modes of behaviour such as 'conformity' (2004: 93), which help shape and characterise the individuals and the groups. His research reveals that teens were 'stratified by status and most had variations on a common structure' (ibid: 40), and that,

> most high school students are organised into sets of crowds and cliques with distinguishable identities and most students are associated with one of these particular identities. The details of these groups can vary from school to school and year to year, but the basic structure is common to most hierarchical high schools. (ibid: 43)

What are the characteristics of the members of these groups or cliques which Milner refers to, and how does his research relate to the hierarchical structures and stereotypical characteristics with regards to *The Breakfast Club*? Firstly, Milner discusses the so-called 'top' of the pecking order — the image-obsessed 'preps' including popular types such as the prom queen and jocks. Those at the bottom were the 'nerds' or 'geeks', typically (male) virgins, socially awkward and inept and who focused on their studies, usually maths or science, like Brian in *The Breakfast Club* and the *Revenge* nerds. This leaves the criminal/delinquent and rebel, who would probably fit closer into the lower end of the high school self-styled pecking order. The delinquent would be nonconformist or apathetic to any chain of command structure. But what is of interest in *The Breakfast Club*, and not revealed in Milner's research about teen stereotypes, is the contradictions within this system and how they expose a more truthful depiction of adolescence within a fictional narrative.

In the first instance, how does John Hughes establish the protagonists' stereotypical characteristics? Towards the end of the opening credits, a quote from the David Bowie song, 'Changes', appears as an intertitle against a pane of glass, in which 'the songwriter berates the adults intervening in the adolescents' world and admonishes them that their children are well aware of the tasks before them' (Kaye & Ets-Hokin, 2000: 111). The glass shatters to symbolise how these teens react against the adult world. Over a montage of images of the high school the voice of Brian is heard reading out a letter written by him (at the end of the film) to the teacher, Mr Vernon (Paul Gleason), who takes the detention. This introduces the premise of the film:

> You see us as you want to see us — in the simplest terms, in the most convenient definitions: a brain, an athlete, a basket case, a princess, and a criminal. Correct? That's the way we saw each other at 7:00 this morning. We were brainwashed.

The opening scene acts as a mini-like narrative and foreshadows and codifies one of the main semantic/syntactic features of the film: the relationship between teenagers and their parents. Immediately, they are recognisable by their stereotypical high school identities. After the opening credits, the camera focuses on the front of a Mercedes Benz car, or more precisely, a 'swank sedan' (Wood, 1986: 63), framing its logo in close up to emphasise the wealth of the owner, a character who is successful in Reagan's capitalist America. Claire and her father are the occupants and her role as the rich popular girl (the princess) is immediately established. Her father's attire reinforces their wealthy status: he wears a Burberry scarf and a 'Brooks Brothers suit' (ibid.). Claire is pretty, pristine, clean-cut and 'exudes an elite nonchalance' (Shary, 2002: 31). She is like Cinder in *Little Darlings* and Betty in *Revenge of the Nerds*, but her character is revealed as more complex and later is treated with a degree of seriousness and sensitivity. Her visage conveys her displeasure at why such a prom queen would have to attend detention, 'for skipping class to go shopping' — an activity which Scott Long (1990: 157) explains as 'a social function' in this context:

> The teenage years became a training-ground for consumption…In the arena of adolescence, people learned to satisfy their needs with objects; they were taught the

flat obligation and the intricate techniques of consumption. Teenagers turned into a market; they went to the mall.

This social function reached its peak in the money-obsessed 1980s, a theme which is investigated later in relation to *Valley Girl*, consumerism and the shopping mall. As Claire leaves, her father gives her a gift as if to buy her off, which suggests her emotional detachment from him. Indeed, all the parents are portrayed as:

Essentially faceless and voiceless, because they have no identities beyond their complaints, parents in the film are drivers who transport their children to and from detention, goad them with criticism, and ultimately, represent the source of their children's inadequacies. (Charney, 1996: 30)

This estrangement is linked to what Palladino (1996), Steinberg & Kincheloe (1998) and McMahan (2009) referred to in the last chapter, with regards to teenagers in the 1980s becoming more distant from their parents and more independent, compared to previous generations. Landes (2001) develops this and argues that it relates to the fact that parents were spending more time at work than ever before and less time with their families in the Reagan era. This created a tension as teens became starved of attention from their parents, a recurring and coalescing feature of the 1980s genre. However, the irony is that while teens complained about, and rebelled against, their parents in *The Breakfast Club* and other teen movies featuring affluent characters, they still benefited from the privilege bestowed upon them and wealth in terms of the expensive cars and clothes bought for them, and their Ivy League educations.

Next is Brian, the nerd (the brain), who is seen with his mother and younger sister. An oppositional structure is evident here to Claire in terms of wealth. Brian appears to be from more of a blue-collar background: the family car is less expensive, his clothes are drab, connoting a lack of fashion sense. This is compounded, as David Denby (1985) in Shary (2002: 34) observes, by his 'pale skin, pale-blue eyes, and almost milky blond hair; he's bodiless, almost translucent.' Although Claire 'exhibits a snobbish attitude toward Brian...the working class member of the group' (Shary, 2002: 63), he shares with her the estrangement with a parent, in his case a demanding mother who shows little sympathy towards his plight. This is another example of similarities creating unity, this time within the individual film, and it also

prefigures scenes later in the story. However, Brian, unlike the nerds in *Revenge,* is desexualised and clearly contrasts against the stereotypical jock image, that is, 'lack of sports ability, small body size, lack of sexual relations with women' (Kendall, 1999: 264).

Andy, the jock (the athlete), is the next to appear and his characteristics are defined in a similar way to Claire and Brian in terms of mise-en-scène and the attitude of the parent figure, his father. His jock status is apparent from his wrestling jacket; he appears pumped-up but tense; his father calls him 'Sport' and, like Brian's mother, is demanding. They pull up in a huge jeep, conveying an aura of masculinity and authority: 'the heavy guy in the heavy station wagon' (Wood, 1986: 63). According to Marianne H. Whately in her article on teen cinema and *The Breakfast Club,* the car becomes a phallic symbol: 'The possession of a powerful expensive car [is] a sign of male power' (1988: 114). Like the jocks in *Porky's* and *Revenge of the Nerds,* Andy possesses other traditional characteristics associated with the jock stereotype: physicality, aggression and uber-masculinity.

On his own, Bender (the criminal) enters the scene next and is described as a postmodern version of 'a classic Dead End Kid' (Wood, 1986: 63), linking images of youth from 1930s cinema to the 1980s. He is the delinquent who, according to Milner's research, is defined in opposing terms to jocks by being at the bottom end of the scale in the high school caste system: 'Anyone who is not a jock...might be labelled 'alternative'' (2004: 40). On the surface, Bender's appearance is more explicit and his costume makes him stand out as it conveys his rebelliousness and nonconformist attitude. As Bordwell and Thompson explain, 'costume can have specific function in the total film, and the range of possibilities is huge, [and] can play important motivic and casual roles in narratives' (2008: 122). His shoulder-length hair, long coat, shades and black combat boots compared to the more conventional costumes of the three aforementioned characters, reveal his opposing values to the so-called higher status of the jocks and popular girls. Milner writes about the alternative characters within the high school system and Bender falls into this category with his 'bizarre dress and hairstyle, [rejecting] both adult authority and the cultural dominance and superior status of the popular crowd' (2004: 42). Shary echoes this description of Bender, 'he lurks behind shades and working-class garb' (2002: 31).

Lastly, Alison (the basket case) appears. She gets out of the car, her parents remain unseen, goes to say goodbye, is ignored and they drive off. She is the rebel and appears to be the most non-conformist of the whole group and, like Bender, is framed in medium-long shot, which contrasts against the three other characters who were framed in medium close-up inside the car with their parents present. This distancing effect is both literal and metaphorical, as mise-en-scène separates them from the others on account of their status. Furthermore, the oppositional forces already evident between parent and teenager appear more extreme in Bender's and Alison's case, as their estrangement is augmented by the fact that their parents are not seen or heard. Alison's costume is also revealing in terms of characterisation. She dresses down and hides behind her black make-up and clothes.

Shary's analysis of the stereotype in 1980s teen movies points to the similarities between the nerd and the delinquent, which continues to bring these contrasting images of teens together: 'As with nerd characterizations, the great majority of delinquent characters are male and from lower-class backgrounds' (2002: 41). Therefore, even at this early stage, the teen stereotype is being deconstructed and the myth is being exposed, albeit implicitly. Although they are polar opposites in terms of academic ability, appearance and physicality, their comparable qualities foreshadow events to come, as the characteristics between the protagonists become blurred, giving rise to a more problematical and ambiguous set of agendas. The antagonism between teen and parent/adult has been established in the first few minutes and is summed up in colourful terms by John Bernstein, echoing the above quote by Charney (1996), as he regards parents and adults in the Hughes' films as 'cringing, vindictive...bewildered and spiritually undernourished...criminal in their neglect and simpleminded' (1997: 52). Or to put it less dramatically, as Graham Turner (2006: 235) explains: '*The Breakfast Club,* and other teen movies — conflicts between individual self-expression...and social restraints are articulated in different ways...the key constraining influences are parents and schools.'[5]

Once all the students meet in the classroom and detention begins, the oppositional structures are amplified. The various differences between the students

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[5] These two quotes from Bernstein and Turner can be traced back to what was written in the literature review about the different style of writing about the teen film. Although they are saying the same thing about the parents, the language differs. Bernstein writes from more of an informal perspective, where Turner writes academically. See also next footnote.

are first demonstrated not by dialogue but by the positioning of the characters within the composition of the shot, which alludes to the so-called hierarchy within the high school. As William H. Phillips points out: 'How filmmakers position people and objects in the background and how they situate them in the foreground are options that influence what the images communicate' (2009: 45-46). Bach (2006: 73) explains when referring to this scene in the film that it 'emphasizes the function of social groups on identity formation in high school which not only determines who sits where but who can occupy what role in this space.' A close textual analysis of one shot in this opening scene, lasting only a few seconds, will foreground the themes under discussion, not only between the students, but between teacher and student. The two popular figures, Claire and Andy, who appear to be acquainted, sit next to each other at the front of class towards the left of the screen. They are sitting upright and paying attention to the teacher, Mr Vernon, who is in charge of detention. Their presence in this shot conveys an air of conformity; they appear to be trying to set an example to the other students, amplified by their subsequent behaviour in the next few scenes, reaffirming their roles as the students supposedly at the top of the school hierarchy. Being at the front of the class, the jock and the popular girl at this stage can be viewed symbolically in terms of what Kinney (1993: 23) refers to as 'adolescent socialization', where teens of these groups are highly visible within the space of the high school. For instance, they take part in extracurricular activities, which has an effect on how they are perceived within the youth community. They participate in school activities like football, basketball and cheerleading, and are involved in groups which offers them a degree of power and authority, for example, the student government and the year book, like the jocks in *Revenge*. This, in theory, works to 'express significantly higher levels of self-esteem than do their peers who are members of less popular groups', like the other three who 'do not participate in widely recognised extracurricular school activities' (ibid.)

Sat behind them is Bender, his seating position extending the metaphorical nature of the scene. As mentioned above, his blue-collar status and role as a delinquent suggest he is below Andy and Claire within the high school chain of command (although when he starts to exert his influence on the proceedings he is later seen on the same level as them). He is slouched in his chair, his feet on another chair and he is looking away from the teacher. He is playing the classic delinquent

role, rebelling against authority which 'draws attention to his thuggish attitude' (Shary, 2005: 68).

Opposite Bender is Brian, who sits in a similar conforming posture to Andy and Claire but behind them. Like Bender, the nerd is low in the high school pecking order. However, although the differences between them are obvious, the fact that Brian and Bender are sitting on the same plane supports Shary's above statement that nerds and delinquents come from the same social background. This continues to create a bond between these two disparate figures, which suggests at this early stage that the rigid definition of the teen stereotype is beginning to be deconstructed.

Sat right at the back of the class, turned away from everyone is Alison who, like Bender, and to an extent Brian, is the outsider or the 'Other'. At first, she comes across as an extreme version of the rebel outsider, as Shary observes, 'she seems to have no status at the school at all; since she is so unknown; she does not even speak to her detention peers until the day is half over' (2005: 70).

At the top of the class, lording over the students, is their teacher, Mr Vernon. His positioning here would appear to reinforce his authority, but the image tells a lie, exposes the contradiction within the student/teacher opposition and prefigures events to come. As the drama unfolds, Vernon is depicted as an 'antagonist and fool [and] has absolutely no legitimate authority in the eyes of these students' (Bulman, 2004: 105-106). Loukides and Fuller (1996: 30) describe him as 'a nincompoop, a preening peacock who hates his job, detests his students, and has an inflated sense of superiority.' His authority is immediately challenged when Bender makes a humorous remark about his suit: 'Does Barry Manilow know you raid his wardrobe?' This provokes laughter from Claire and Andy, hinting at the bond which will develop between the students. This slur costs Bender another Saturday in detention, as Vernon attempts to establish his authority with his retort: 'Don't mess with the bull young man or you'll get the horns.' Additionally, Vernon has his back to camera; the spectator does not see his face which implies an emotional distance — much like the negative portrayal of the parents in the first scene.

On the one hand, the shot is unbalanced, asymmetrical and lacks unity, which anticipates the following scenes of disharmony and conflict. Conversely, the issues are made more complex and ambiguous as it also hints at harmony between the teens, especially in their relationship with the teacher whose intransigent attitude eventually galvanizes this disparate group; 'his rants against their worthlessness only

serve to bond them together as students, in spite of their differences' (Bulman, 2004: 106). Therefore, within the first five minutes — the establishment phase of the film in terms of what Schatz (1991: 30) outlines — the mise-en-scène has revealed a 'generic community with its inherent dramatic conflicts', but also foreshadows a certain togetherness which will be played out towards the end of the film.

Before any tangible transformation takes place, the students start to interact and 'portray their initial defensive posturing while they feel each other out' (Kaye & Ets-Hokin, 2000: 111). They act out their roles in a variety of ways, most notably through an exchange of verbal insults relating to their lifestyle, family life and status of their respective stereotypical images. But, as referred to above, there are hints which reveal contradictions and challenges to the so-called rigid system of high school stereotype. Throughout the establishment, animation and intensification stages of the narrative which Schatz (1991) refers to, there is a 'blurring of distinctions within the high school hierarchy' (Speed, 1998: 104). This is played out until the resolution, 'where each character has undergone a life-altering revelation of the injustices of social stereotyping and confronted their own personal flaws' (Lee, 2010: 47).

Bender is portrayed as the aggressor and his behaviour towards the other students at first perpetuates his delinquent label. But beneath the surface, his attitude and identity reveal a more complex and ironic set of characteristics, as Shary explains,

> he is the catalyst who initiates the intense dialogue among the students, and despite their initial disdain for him, they recognise that his disinterest in social acceptance is not genuine but is demanded by his image, which is itself motivated by an intense hatred of his abusive parents. (2005: 68)

The contradiction here is that, far from being at the lower end of the high school caste system, it is Bender who shows leadership qualities. It is he who provokes much of the debate and, in doing so, is portrayed as more of a romantic figure.

In a key early scene, he tampers with the door that separates the students from the teacher in order to fix it permanently closed, which 'effectively forges the group, pressing toward greater honesty with each other and a consequent deconstruction of their role...the adolescents draw a boundary, creating their own

peer group' (Kaye & Ets-Hokin, 2000: 111-112). They are now both literally and metaphorically separated from the adult world of authority and Bender urges them to 'get real'. He initiates discussions into issues concerning sexuality, loss of virginity and parental relationships — subjects which had not yet been discussed in depth in the 1980s teen genre and are pivotal to a young person's identity and development. Levy-Warren's (1996) comments, quoted in Kaye & Ets-Hokin, (2000: 111), relate to this: 'Adolescents must permit themselves to become aware of those to whom they are attracted, what they wish to do with them, and how it feels to be involved physically and emotionally with the same person.'

The narrative enters the conflict phase, or how Schatz (1991: 30) puts it: the 'animation' and 'intensification' stages. The verbal insults begin to start, leading to tension and threats of physical violence as the teen stereotype is defined more acutely; but despite the hostile atmosphere, slowly, a unity develops. Bender starts to taunt Andy and Claire, mocking their roles as jock and prom queen. He says to Andy: 'Well hey, Sporto! What'd you do to get in here? Forget to wash your jock?' About Claire, who he sarcastically refers to as 'sweets', 'cherry' (slang for virgin) and a 'richie', he suggests to the others that they get her 'impregnated'. Andy retorts and berates Bender, 'if you disappeared forever it wouldn't make a difference. You may as well not even exist at this school.' Bender momentarily looks upset at this remark; shot in medium close-up so his expression is clearly visible, his status within the high school caste system is bluntly conveyed. His face conveys an indication of the emotion that will follow in the final act.

During the lunch scene, there is a number of visual signifiers symbolic of the characters' difference to one another in terms of their social status and relationship with their parents. Lesley Speed writes about this scene: 'What a person eats for lunch becomes a reflection of his or her identity' (1998: 106). Brian's meal is dull and ordinary, reflecting his emotional detachment from his humourless parents who expect him to achieve academic excellence. Andy's lunch box is overloaded with a variety of food containing a high level of carbs to reinforce his macho persona, demanded of his father who will not accept second best. Claire has an expensive sushi dish packaged in an attractive box with chopsticks which Bender has never heard of. This demonstration of wealth and materialism (like in the opening between Claire and her father) bolsters her rich-kid status and her parents' need for her to feel 'special'. Alison has a can of coke which overflows. She discards the food her parents

(who ignore her) have prepared for her, and hastily prepares and eats a sugar and Cap 'n' Crunch sandwich. Bender does not have any food.

This leads to a key scene concerning the students' domestic lives and relationships with their parents, 'eating lunch becomes the catalyst for a series of taunts and arguments which highlight the markedly different domestic environments of these characters' (ibid.). Bender, in a mockingly theatrical facade, acts out a family scene in what he perceives to be Brian's typical home-life situation: a companionable father-son relationship. When challenged by Andy on what his home life is like, he again adopts a theatrical pose and sarcastically acts out a scene to illustrate his abusive treatment by his violent father, both verbal and physical; he shows a cigar burn on his arm to Andy, inflicted by his father — framed in extreme close up in order to intensify the dramatic nature of the scene — a punishment he received for 'spilling paint in the garage.' Two extremes of domestic family life are brought into sharp focus by Bender whose presence dominates the screen here. He then goes on to vent his anger and jettisons a pile of books from a table. According to Shary (2005: 220), his

> class status is integrally linked to his rage and his role in the school...a direct connection between Bender's poverty and his aggression, which stems from living under abusive parents and the popularity regime of wealthier kids at school.

In the lunch scene, Claire and Bender's identity in terms of class can also be viewed in a broader political context within 1980s America, and is another example of the dual-focus text which Altman (1999) regards as a key structural aspect in genre cinema. As indicated above, Claire and her family represent the success and affluence of the Reagan era. Bender is at the opposite end of the socioeconomic scale, in a group which became marginalised by the neoliberal economics of the period, signifying the film could be seen as a microcosm of this social divide. Furthermore, Bender's aggressive behaviour could be linked to an adolescent phase which, as Erikson (1968: 130) suggests, may be destabilising in his attempts to form an identity, if the 'environment tries to deprive him to...develop and integrate...he may resist with the wild strength encountered with animals who are suddenly forced to defend their lives.'

The next part of the film highlights and develops the key semantic feature of risk-taking in the teenage years, which has been discussed in the context of Hall (1904), Arnett (1999) and others, concerning the 'storm and stress' phase of adolescence in relation to teen virginity loss in the sex comedies. Here, it takes a different form but is nonetheless another example of the subgenres coming together to form a coherent whole. In *The Breakfast Club,* risk-taking is more aligned with the 'conflict with adults' phase. The group leave the library and head for Bender's locker where his marijuana is stashed. He says to Claire: 'Being bad feels pretty good, huh?' This act of risk-taking signifies the teenagers' necessity for exploration and enlivenment and, in the process, reaffirms their separation from the adult world by breaking the rules of detention laid down by Vernon. The act also binds them together as a group with a committed show of strength which serves to reassure them about their own uncertainties and vulnerability. For the first time, a palpable sense of unity has been established and their differences are temporarily non-existent. In narrative terms, the film is now building towards a resolution and what Will Wright (1975: 186) refers to as a 'statement that explains a change in the situation. It is through the logic of this situation that a narrative 'makes sense'.' This development and sense of harmony is reflected by a change in visual style as a series of fast cuts and several stylised montage sequences capture the students' rapid movement through the corridors as they try to avoid Vernon. The school here, as Lesley Speed (1995: 27-28) points out, serves as a site for teen rebellion against authority: 'the oppositional aspects of teen enjoyment are heightened by being situated within a politics of educational discipline.' This rebellion is reinforced by the soundtrack which accompanies the action: a fast-paced pop song, *Fire in the Twilight*, by Wang Chung. Speed notes that, 'popular music is firmly linked to youth liberation and rebellion' (ibid.). When the students realise they have reached a dead end and will be caught, Bender again exhibits strength and courage, setting out on his own knowing Vernon will catch him and the others will return to the library unnoticed. Bender is subsequently locked in a cupboard by Vernon but escapes and returns to the group.

As soon as they start to get high on Bender's dope all the social barriers begin to break down and the teenagers transform from stereotypes into archetypes. In his book, *Story,* Robert McKee explains the difference between these two opposing terms, which is highly relevant in relation to this film:

The archetypal story unearths a universally human experience then wraps itself inside a unique, culture-specific expression. A stereotypical story reverses this pattern. It suffers a poverty of both content and form. It confines itself to a narrow, culture-specific experience and dresses in stale, nonspecific generalities. (1999: 4)

The 'unique cultural expression' in this case is teenage malaise and angst revolting against adult and parental culture. Furthermore, each character is trapped by their image and 'nonspecific generalities', i.e. the stereotypical characteristics attributed to teenage groups. As the characters change, the tone becomes confessional and conciliatory, which rubs against the abrasive and confrontational atmosphere pervading the film up to this point, thus setting up another binary opposite and adding more depth and meaning to the narrative as it reaches its resolution.

When Brian gets high he is particularly funny and his transformation is radical (but temporary); as Shary explains: 'Nerds most often attain their liberation through some abandonment of academics' (2002: 32). Much like the nerds in *Revenge* but to a lesser extent, Brian has shed his stereotypical image and, in a similar vein, both Claire and Andy, while under the influence of marijuana, parody their roles as prom queen and jock: the former by saying how 'popular' she is in an ironic, self-deprecating manner; the latter, by aggressively running and dancing round the library, mocking his jock image. By smoking pot with Bender, Claire makes it known that 'she is attracted to [his] delinquency because she longs to be deviant herself' (Shary, 2005: 69) — further evidence of how the oppositional structures within the teen stereotype are exposed as contradictory, even if it takes the use of recreational drugs to achieve this.

The act of dancing to popular music and getting high further extends and deconstructs social, emotional and economical barriers. It continues to eliminate the differences and oppositions between the characters. Lesley Speed argues that this creates a sense of utopia and a kind of extended family is established, with Bender as the father-figure. The scene represents,

a relaxing of inhibitions with the affirmation of a new intimacy...a sense of community is associated with the shared consumption of popular culture...The

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desire to invest commodity culture with a sense of community is fundamentally utopian. (1998: 106)

This behaviour sets the foundation for what Shary calls 'the film's climactic set piece — an extraordinary 20-minute scene of non-stop communal confession' (2005: 69). Here, the issues are laid bare and the myth of the teenage high school stereotype, and the oppositional structures which are supposed to define them, are exposed as hypocritical. It reinforces the structuralist approaches of this thesis in terms of what Lévi-Strauss and, later, Will Wright discuss in relation to how binary oppositions function to expose contradictions within a story, and how they comment on a culture as a whole. In the scene, there is no hierarchy, all the characters are equal as the truth emerges and the group is galvanised. The camera movement emphasises this new sense of togetherness — each character is framed equally as it slowly rotates around them — which contrasts against the opening scenes in relation to their parents' cars, seating positions and the food they eat for lunch. The film has entered its resolution stage and, to reiterate what Schatz says above, it 'eliminates the physical and/or ideological threat and thereby celebrates the (temporarily) well-ordered community' (1991: 30). The slow-moving camera also captures the contemplative and introspective mood of the teenagers as they reflect on their positions within a world where they struggle to express themselves.

As alluded to in the early scenes and up to this point, the primary source of their anger is their relationship with, and opposition to, parents who, like their teacher Mr Vernon, are symptomatic of a corrupt and antagonistic adult world. David Edelstein (1985) cited in Shary (2002: 43) explains:

When they realise they're united against a common enemy — the teacher, their parents, adults in general — they begin to open up confessing sins and fears and telling stories. And all, in their way, feel trapped by their images.

Brian speaks of the pressure his parents put him under to receive high grades and that he contemplated suicide when his 'average' slipped because he got an F. Andy explains the reason he is in detention is because he humiliated a weaker student while his friends 'laughed and cheered me on'. A scene of this nature would have been played for laughs in the sex comedies; for instance, in *Porky's* when Miss

Balbricker is subjected to ridicule by her colleagues in her attempts to identify and apprehend the students who were present during the shower block/peephole episode. In *The Breakfast Club*, the true emotional consequences are conveyed, which marks a shift in the tone of the 1980s teen genre, from vulgar humour involving groups to more of a personal and intimate individual reflection. Andy admits that he carried out this act to gain the respect of his father, who constantly challenges his masculinity and by stressing the 'win, win, win!' attitude, a key philosophy of Reagan's America. His relationship with his father also reflects what Spencer Bloch (1995), in Kaye & Ets-Hokin (2000: 114), discusses in terms of the 'adolescents' need for sponsorship...this comes forth from the parents...when it is not available... their growth becomes twisted or aborted.' Furthermore, this may point to Bender and his 'twisted' behaviour and relationship with his parents. Andy also admits that another motivating factor which led him to carry out the attack was how he perceived himself, not only in the eyes of his father, but his peers. Erikson (1968: 128) explains that this is one of the psychological features of adolescence which causes problems in searching for a true identity: 'They [adolescents] are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they think they are.' Moreover, developing the relational aggression characteristics of the popular teens, Andy is another example of how the image of the teen stereotype is more complex than its surface appearance suggests. Lara Mayeux (2011: 349) writes on the oppositional nature of this behaviour: 'Perceived popular adolescents are...complicated. Paradoxically they are seen as having both positive qualities, such as leadership skill and kindness and negative ones, including physical, verbal, and relationship aggression.'

Alison says she is a nymphomaniac, which prompts a frank discussion about sex and virginity — a new development for the 1980s genre. Claire, under intense pressure from the others, admits to being a virgin — a statement which challenges the perception of the popular girl within the high school caste system, much like Linda in *Fast Times* and Cinder in *Little Darlings*. Alison then confesses to being a compulsive liar and says: 'I never did it either' — behaviour which may explain her 'basket case' label.

Claire goes on to complain that her parents hate each other and use her as a pawn to fight their battles. Bender, at this stage, has 'the least to reveal' (Shary, 2005: 69) because he has already exposed so much of himself earlier. However, the

oppositional structure in relation to the rich/poor binary erupts again as Bender vents his anger towards Claire, referring to her diamond earrings: 'I bet he [her dad] bought those for you! I bet those are a Christmas gift! You know what I got for Christmas this year? I got a carton of cigarettes.' Again, this outburst reaffirms the above point relating to the widening divide between rich and poor, as Shary explains: 'Bender's group becomes a testament to Reaganomics and the stratification of American class roles in 1980s America' (2005c: 220).

The film moves towards its conclusion and raises key issues concerning their identity as teenagers, continuing relationship with each other, their parents and the future. Andy asks: 'Are we going to be like our parents?, to which Alison replies, 'When you grow up your heart dies'. This statement lends itself to the notion of how the oppositional forces that separate youth from adulthood will soon become blurred and eventually 'adulthood [will] inevitably overtake them' (Bulman, 2005: 107). Their stereotypical images have been deconstructed 'as they move beyond the confines of their roles, identities and connect on a deeper, more intimate level' (Kaye & Ets-Hokin, 2000: 114).

In the film's final scenes, two unlikely romantic unions are established: Claire/Bender and Andy/Alison. Here, Hughes propagates the 'opposites attract' myth and, in doing so, defies generic expectations and conventional wisdom as a more complex, ambiguous and symbolic ending is played out. Shary (2005c: 220) observes,

> after he [Bender] ironically woos the prom Queen...she gives him one of her diamond earrings...which may signify his 'payment' for relieving her of her conceited arrogance (or virginity), and it also implicitly suggests a dual shift in Bender's image...for he is now richer and feminine.

Alison and Andy's transformation is equally ironic given their two opposing cultural backgrounds. Claire gives Alison a beauty makeover, which effectively turns the basket case into a popular girl, 'thus modelling the less popular girl after her own image' (Speed, 1998: 108). This new image attracts the attention of the jock as she is now more 'traditionally' attractive, and they kiss at the end of the film. Her new identity is revealed, which Shary (2002: 52) claims has more of a negative effect, saying it 'diminishes her previous rebel status and provides simply another false

façade behind which she can hide her anxieties.' Hadley Freeman (2015: 80) echoes this and is highly critical of Alison's transformation, noting that while Hughes' female characters are usually strong-willed and independent, on this occasion, in order for her to win the attention of the jock, she undergoes one 'of the most misguided makeovers of all time, [swapping] her fabulous eyeliner for pink blusher and quite a lame Alice-band.' Or as Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998: 113) put it, she is now 'wearing a pink bow in her hair, a lace blouse and looks like a freshly scrubbed teenager.' For Andy, this change points to his conflicted masculinity and his need to explore more of an emotional and vulnerable side, brought out by Alison. At this stage, another jock character in a 1980s teen movie displays similar delicate emotions to Andy. Made a couple of years before *The Breakfast Club*, Tom Cruise's character, Steff, in *All the Right Moves* is a football-playing jock who does not quite fit the stereotypical image. Shary (2002: 74) points out, 'he does not exploit his popularity [and is] troubled and frustrated.' Similarly, Traube (1992: 75) describes him as 'decent, honest, industrious'. He could be described as the prototype 'sensitive jock' (Shary 2002) of 1980s teen films. Although an infrequent characterisation within the genre, it paved the way for the likes of Louden in *Vision Quest* and, to an extent, the jocks in *Lucas*.

This transformation in the characters reinforces the romantic myth, as illustrated by Galician: 'All you really need is love, so it doesn't matter if you and your lover have very different values' (2004: 103). The paradoxical romantic union between rich popular girl/delinquent boy and jock/rebel represents a radical shift in their identity, something which did not seem possible up to this point, due to their antagonistic behaviour towards each other. Conversely, the ending of *The Breakfast Club* could be viewed, as Mark J Charney points out rather disparagingly, as 'unrealistic and...laughable', although he concedes that the 'idea of an extended family, one that willingly accepts members for who they are, makes [the film] successful at the box office' (1996: 34). Lesley Speed, like Shary, offers a more sophisticated and thoughtful response and suggests that their unions work not just on a 'verbal' and 'emotional' level, but on a metaphorical one, referring to the 'symbolic exchanges of the earring and the makeover [which] can be seen as attempts to consolidate a reconciliation in light of the more problematic exchanges that have taken place during the day' (1998: 108). The symbolism could also offer a possibility that the personal and socioeconomic differences will be eradicated in the long term,

especially in light of when the group question whether on Monday morning they will still be friends or will they ignore each other, as the world beyond the movie is brought into focus. This issue illustrates the adolescents' search for an identity, as Erikson (1950) explains, quoted in Kaye & Ets-Hokin (2000: 114), 'the struggle to feel real, the struggle to go through whatever has to be gone through.'

As far as Brian is concerned, he does not really experience any radical change in his personality (apart from getting high and dancing); therefore, his stereotypical nerd characteristics and 'virginity' remain intact, just like in the sex comedies: Mark in *Fast Times* and Gary in *The Last American Virgin*. While the others pair off, he is left alone and is asked by them to write the detention assignment for the whole group, which he 'kisses' after completion, suggesting his 'partner' is and will be his studies. Viewing this in relation to the theories of Lévi-Strauss, the myth and contradiction of the nerd stereotype is real and in Brian's case has not been overcome. As Shary points out: 'Unlike most nerd characters in other teen films, Brian ultimately appears to accept his labelling' (2005: 70). This contrasts with the nerds in *Revenge* who disavow their nerd stereotype. However, on one level, because Brian has not changed like the others and has kept his independence, he can be viewed as the least conformist of the group, which is ironic considering the so-called 'rebel' personas of Bender and Alison. Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998: 109-110), taking this analysis of Brian's status further, argue that he has transformed into a 'maverick hero' by writing the essay, which in no uncertain terms tells the parental/teacher and educational institutions to 'go to hell'. He can therefore be seen in the same terms as the other male 'heroes' in the film, Bender and Andy. Altman's notion of the generic template (1999) raises an interesting point here when comparing Bender's rebel persona to James Dean's archetypal rebel in the 1950s. Bender experiences a significant transformation when he becomes romantically involved with Claire, whereas by the end of *Rebel Without a Cause*, Dean is left just as alienated and his future remains more ambiguous.

In narrative terms, *The Breakfast Club's* resolution in relation to the structure outlined by Schatz (1991: 31) has eliminated 'the physical and/or ideological threat and thereby celebrates the (temporarily) well-ordered community'. Indeed, a resolution of sorts has been achieved and the contradictions and tensions in class, stereotypes and gender have been overcome, although Brian's comments about whether they will speak to each other on Monday suggest an uncertain

outcome. As referred to above, in treating genre as a kind of cinematic modern-day myth, *The Breakfast Club* analysis here adheres to what Thomas Schatz proposes (2003: 98),

> a popular folktale [which] assigns a function that generates its unique structure, whose function is the realisation of collective ideals, the celebration of temporarily resolved and cultural conflicts, and the concealment of disturbing conflicts behind the guise of entertainment.

Reinforcing this is what Thomas Sobchack (2003: 110) refers to as the 'cathartic potentials of the genre film' which 'can be seen in the way in which the tensions of cultural and social paradoxes inherent in human experience can be resolved.' Therefore, the myth in *The Breakfast Club* of the oppositional structures between the different characters in terms of stereotypes, social status, popularity, physical appearance is exposed as a lie in the final act. As Lévi-Strauss points out, 'myth progresses from the awareness of oppositions towards their resolutions...The purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction' (1968: 224-229).

In terms of the film's relationships and how they resonate with the emotional development of the adolescents, the experience which the characters have gone through in the context of what psychologists Brown and Theobald (1998) in Bach (2006: 76) discuss, has

> charged [them] with the task of achieving a 'sense of identity' — crystallizing their self-concept, positioning themselves on a career path, and embracing a set of values and beliefs that will guide their choice of activities and interpersonal relationships.

The 'Ideal Male' and 'Female'

Relating *The Breakfast Club* and other 1980s teen films to what Robin Wood (2003b) describes in his essay, 'Genre, Ideology, Auteur', as having 'ideal' and 'shadow' characteristics will develop the argument and widen the structuralist debate in terms of the opposing nature of the different teen types and their roles. Wood's essay is concerned with how Hollywood films reinforce capitalist ideology and links

this to 'the work ethic...success and wealth...happiness', and how problems are 'solvable', hence the happy endings in genre films (2003b: 61-62). Wood goes on to discuss heterosexual relationships, gender roles and the family. What emerges from this ideology, Wood claims, is that genre films produce the 'ideal male', one who is the 'viral adventurer...potent, untrammelled man of action'; his 'shadow' is the 'settled husband/father...dependable but dull.' The 'ideal female' is the 'wife...mother...the endlessly dependable mainstay of heart and home'; her 'shadow' is the 'erotic woman...adventuress...fascinating but dangerous' (ibid.). If this is applied to *The Breakfast Club* before any transformation of the characters takes place, Alison can be described as a shadow-type figure, not fitting the exact definition of Wood's description, but a modified version: an outsider who Shary accurately describes in this context as 'coiled-up and nonconforming in the shadows' (2002: 31). Here, the mise-en-scène plays an important role as her black, Goth-like image and costume reinforce her 'shadow' status. She says she is a nymphomaniac but then admits this is a lie and that she is still a virgin, making her a 'dangerous' character. Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998: 113) describe her as a 'renegade, a grunge girl who really doesn't fit into the mainstream of high school.' But the transformation she experiences at the end on account of the 'makeover' changes her more into an 'ideal' female, her black clothing discarded and replaced with more classically feminine attire. She now rejects her shadow role and becomes something more traditionally acceptable to wider society and, in doing so, attracts the attention of the 'ideal' male, Andy, the athlete/jock, the 'virile...potent...man of action'. Alison and Andy now represent the ideal white heterosexual couple in a capitalist society. Within the context of this approach, we can see links back to the sex comedy, and thereby generic cohesiveness: in *Fast Times*, Stacy's 'erotic woman' persona is part of her syntactic characterisation for much of the film, but in the end she becomes the 'ideal' female when she starts a relationship with Mark (ibid.)

In John Hughes' romantic comedy, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Ferris Bueller (Mathew Broderick) and Sloane (Mia Sara) are an 'ideal' couple from start to finish: he is active, she is passive. Both are from wealthy backgrounds and the film suggests they will marry and live the American capitalist dream. But in this and other teen films there are 'shadow' characters who often challenge and critique the dominant ideological forces (Landes, 2001). The character of Cameron (Alan Ruck) is a variation of the ideological 'shadow', 'dependable but dull' (ibid: 62), to Ferris' ideal

man throughout most of the film. He is monotone, cautious, asexual and lacks Ferris' sense of adventure. However, like other characters discussed in this chapter, in the final act of the film he transforms into something more rebellious and critical of the status quo when he destroys his father's car, an act of defiance which is analysed in more detail in the Chapter Five.

Other shadow characters who challenge the ideological position of the ideal male surface in two other John Hughes romantic comedies, *Sixteen Candles* and *Pretty in Pink,* starring Molly Ringwald in the lead roles. In both films, the Ringwald character longs for the popular and rich ideal man: Jake (Michael Schoeffling) in the former and Blane (Andrew McCarthy) in the latter. For much of the two films she is romantically pursued by two shadow men whom she rejects, the aforementioned Ted the 'Geek' in *Sixteen Candles,* and the effeminate Duckie (Jon Cryer) in *Pretty in Pink*. She is faced with difficulties in establishing a relationship with the two ideal men who 'both hold positions of power, due to social status and money, over Ringwald's characters' (Landes, 2001: 23). In contrast, the shadow characters are her friends, are not in any positions of power within the teenage hierarchy of these films, and therefore will never be a suitable match ideologically. In the final act of both films, the union is established between Ringwald and the popular characters as the concept of the 'ideal couple' is realised. Any deviation from this would challenge the boundaries of classic Hollywood narrative and the capitalist agenda of these films, within the context of Wood's research.

Like *The Breakfast Club*, another film which challenged the jock stereotype was *Vision Quest*. Matthew Modine plays the ideal male, the blue-collar Louden who is from a single-parent family; his mother has left and he lives with his unemployed father. His syntactic development differs from Andy in the Hughes' film in that, from the beginning, Louden is portrayed as sensitive and thoughtful and does not experience such a radical transformation in his character. He possesses all the physical attributes of the stereotypical jock: he is muscular and constantly working out and jogging; he is also seen as ambitious in his 'quest' to become the best wrestler in the state. His winning mentality and individual spirit reflect the work ethic required to succeed in capitalist America. He is a character in the *Rocky* tradition — an underdog against whom the odds are stacked. Louden does not have rich parents who can buy an Ivy League education for him; instead he has to attain a wrestling scholarship in order to progress. His sheer determination to get the grades and win

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the big wrestling match in the dénouement instils the film with what Stephen Tropiano calls 'a Reagan-induced sense of individualism' (2006: 187). Echoing this is Barker (2006, u.p.) who points out that Reagan's image as a former actor and the 'economic conservatism and relentless optimism' of his first term in office were reflected in terms of the 'social mobility' of the blue-collar characters displayed in the films. Ideal males like Louden and Steff in *All the Right Moves* are key examples of characters who achieve this success, from 'proletarian to managerial class' (ibid.) *Pretty in Pink* is another film which frames this issue within a romantic Cinderella scenario with the poor girl who gets the rich boy. Moreover, Louden is a representation of what Robin Wood (2003a: 147) refers to when he writes about Hollywood films of this period: he is part of the 'capitalist myth of freedom of choice and equality of opportunity, the individual hero whose achievements somehow 'make everything alright'. He is similar to the Tom Cruise character in *All the Right Moves*, another blue-collar teen hoping for a sporting scholarship to a college. Both are unlike many other teen movie jocks; they are portrayed as being studious as they need the required grades to get the scholarship. Louden is sensitive, shy and, throughout most of the film, a virgin. Cruise's Steff does eventually have sex with his girlfriend, but only after a couple of failed attempts. Also, the nerd/jock opposition is becoming more blurred in this context relating to studies and sexuality. In a shift from the comedies discussed thus far, both *Vision Quest* and *All the Right Moves* fall under the subgenre of drama/romance, marking another variation in the tone of the 1980s teen genre. They further develop the hybrid nature of the teen films by focusing on sports.

Despite his sensitive characteristics, Louden is an 'ideal' character, a man of action, determined and highly motivated. He meets Carla (Linda Fiorentino), an independent, free-spirited and sexually liberated woman who is slightly older. She is a 'shadow' character, the 'erotic woman'. He becomes fixated with her and at one point becomes jealous as she spends time with other men. They do eventually have sex, but she subsequently leaves him unannounced. As Wood (2003b: 62) states, she displays shadow characteristics by being 'adventuress...fascinating and, [she] betrays the hero'. However, where in a film noir a shadow character may cause the downfall of the male protagonist, in the 1980s teen genre Carla's 'betrayal' is seen in positive terms. She returns to watch him in his wrestling match (which he wins) and explains that she would be a distraction and may prevent him from achieving his goals. The

ending echoes what Wood concedes about these definitions, that in generic terms they are full of 'contradictions' (ibid.). Although she is unconventional, Carla is not seen as a negative influence on Louden's adolescent development. In terms of Wood's theories, the ideal female character in *Vision Quest*, Margie (Daphne Zuniga), is depicted as more of an appropriate match. She supports him throughout the film and is seen as responsible and conventional, but Louden does not appear interested in her. However, the end of the film suggests they may get together, thus confirming an 'ideal' relationship which is more suited in ideological terms. In a mythic context, the film is a modern jock fantasy, more complex and personal than the likes of *Porky's* and *Revenge of The Nerds* in the shaping and development of a fictional adolescent identity. As Shary (2012: 73) explains, 'the film offers a notion of masculine fulfilment that is narrowly focused on sexual and physical achievement, sustained through getting the girl and beating the guy.'

As mentioned towards the end of Chapter Two, *The Sure Thing*, directed by Rob Reiner is, like *Revenge,* a transitional film between the sex and romantic comedies, validating Richard Maltby's (2003: 74) assertion that 'Hollywood is a generic cinema, which is not the same thing as saying that it is a cinema of genres.' It stars John Cusack as a college teen, Walter 'Gib' Gibson who, during the Christmas break, travels from the east coast to California where his friend Lance (Anthony Edwards) promises him that he will have sex with the 'sure thing', played by Nicolette Sheridan, the supposed 'erotic woman' in the context of Wood's research. Lance asks Gib: 'How would you like to have a sexual encounter so intense it could conceivably change your political views?' This question positions the film early on within the sex comedy teen subgenre, although Gib is difficult to define in terms of the teen stereotype. Initially, he displays jock characteristics, is seen playing American football and is generally hyperactive: he is hormonally-charged like the teens in the sex comedies, is on a mission to lose his virginity and indulges in drinking games. He is the 'ideal' male and man of action. However, he also displays quite eccentric, nerd-like characteristics. He shares the journey with one of his fellow students, Alison (Daphne Zuniga), who is travelling to the same place to be with her boyfriend. She is portrayed as clever, obsessive and preoccupied with schedules and lists. She is more of a female nerd, a rare occurrence in the teen genre of the 1980s. Her boyfriend, Jason, is the 'settled husband...dependable but dull' (Wood, 2003b: 62), unlike the free-spirited and spontaneous Gib, who attempts to romance Alison

during the course of the journey. They are incompatible at first; they argue and bicker, but get together in the final act. The 'opposites attract' myth is evoked, just like in *The Breakfast Club*.

What is revealing about the film is that it brings into sharp focus the embarrassing nature of teen relationships, without them having sex. For example, Alison and Gib have to share a bed together in a motel; they wake up in an embrace, both are self-conscious and uncomfortable, but a connection has been established. The film moves away from the sex quest theme, and examines the more intimate and romantic nature of adolescent and romantic encounters. Also, *The Sure Thing*'s hybrid nature takes on new meaning as the syntactic elements of the film, the plot structure in terms of the protagonists' journey and the development of their relationship, imbues the teen genre with a road movie generic quality — a rare example in the 1980s.

In the film's final act, when Gib meets 'the sure thing', who is portrayed rather stereotypically as a passive sexual object, she displays none of the 'erotic woman' characteristics of Carla in *Vison Quest*. Her and Gib meet but do not have sex (if the film was more of a sex comedy, they probably would have done). Alison meets up with her 'settled husband' and realises that she is not part of his structured and controlling lifestyle. The film's final scene sees Alison and Gib back at college on the East coast, where they finally kiss and become a couple. In classic generic terms, as Wood (2003b: 62) points out, 'the problems the film has raised are now resolved', which, incidentally, is not quite the case with *The Breakfast Club*. Furthermore, linking *The Sure Thing* back to the sex comedies, where sex at the beginning of the film was treated as a stigma, by the end it is more akin to being a gift. The representation of adolescent love and relationships in *The Sure Thing* is more mature and intimate, as the genre's attitude continues to shift — the hero choosing romance over casual sex and remaining a virgin. The film's reactionary attitude conforms more to the morally conservative values of the Reagan period and the religious right, than the hedonistic nature evoked in the sex comedies. Moreover, *The Sure Thing*'s educational figure of authority is not depicted in a negative light like in *Fast Times* and *The Breakfast Club*; here, the female English professor is portrayed as having a positive effect and encourages the students' creativity. Education is a significant thematic element, where it is largely ignored in other teen films of the era and which are focused on in this thesis.

To conclude, the romantic comedies and dramas discussed in this chapter feature a more morally conservative representation of the teenager than the sexually liberated teens of the sex comedies. Their tone reflects the moral ideology of the Reagan era and the growing rise of the religious right at a time when HIV/AIDS was front-page news. However, the irony is that the teens in the films were becoming more distant from their parents and the stability of the nuclear family — an important feature within conservative ideology — was becoming more fragmented, imbuing the issues with a degree of ambiguity. This shift in tone with regards to sex, from stigma to gift, in conjunction with the strained teen/adult relationships, illustrate that binary oppositional forces exist in the 1980s teen genre not just within individual films, but also within a broader generic context between the subgenres.

Also of significance in the teen movie subgenres is not just the characters' differences but their similarities, as the 1980s teen genre becomes more of a unified and cohesive corpus of films. The protagonists in the sex comedies had none of the politically subversive and countercultural attitudes of previous post-war youth generations and this is extended to the teens in the romances and dramas. Echoing Speed (1995) in the previous chapter, Lebeau (1995: 22) argues that John Hughes' films are 'the symptom of a youth culture which is both self-obsessed and anomic...which has betrayed the youth rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s.' The teens rebel in the 1980s against the adult and parental cultures, but not against the wider prevailing political and social order.

What has also emerged is that the films discussed in this chapter, more so than the sex comedies, attempt to expose the myth of the teen stereotype and its hierarchal structures, and create a more democratic representation of adolescence through examining their differences and similarities. Differences in couples — boys and girls at different ends of the socioeconomic spectrum — are brought into sharper focus, issues such as social status and how this is positioned within the ideological capitalist criteria proposed by Wood (2003b) during the Reagan era.

The subject of teen roles and their implications for youth culture and wider societal issues will continue in the next chapter, while the focus will remain on the romantic comedies and dramas of the period. The approach will mark a shift away from the teen stereotype and the 'ideal' role. The research will draw on the theories of characterisation and narratology of Vladimir Propp and apply them to the films,

an approach which will continue the structuralist and oppositional analysis, highlighting the representational values of the 1980s teen genre.

Chapter Four

Propp's Tale Roles and Narrative Functions in the Teen Romantic Comedies and Dramas

Applying the ideas of Vladimir Propp's character and narrative study of Russian fairy tales from his book, *The Morphology of The Folk Tale* (1968), will develop the notion of the teen 'roles' referred to thus far. It will also highlight the films' narrative and dramatic structure. It must be emphasised that the purpose here is not to foreground or update Propp's work, but to use his theories as a framework in continuing the argument and debates surrounding the representational aspects of teen culture and its wider sociopolitical issues.

What does Propp add to this thesis and how does his inclusion develop the central argument? What are the limitations and possibilities in using this method of study? A Proppian analysis shares similar characteristics with the structural debate concerning how binary oppositions operate within a story, much like the ideas of Lévi-Strauss and Altman's (1999) notion of the dual-focus text. For example, the hero/villain oppositions which Propp discusses are applied to this chapter and evolve the structuralist debate of the thesis. However, unlike Lévi-Strauss, Propp was concerned with the narrative of a story and this relates to the syntactic axis of a film, which again embraces Altman's ideas about genre. Indeed, Altman points out that Propp was 'resolutely synchronic' (2004: 682) in his approach to structure and narrative. Will Wright (1975) refers to Lévi-Strauss and Propp when writing about the structural form of the Western. He was not just concerned with the binary oppositions and relationships within the genre (cowboys/Indians; garden/wilderness, etc.) and how these created meaning; he went a stage further and questioned what happens to a story within its narrative structure, as Stam et al (1992: 79) put it, 'emphasizing story events and temporal sequence.' This corresponds to a Proppian approach and Wright acknowledges his own research as a 'liberalised version' of Propp (1975: 25). Furthermore, the teen films have a fairy tale and mythic quality that links them to a Proppian tale: *Valley Girl* is a modern-day *Romeo and Juliet* set against the backdrop of a Californian sunset; John Hughes' *Weird Science* is a contemporary version of the Greek myth of *Pygmalion; Pretty in*

Pink is an updated version of *Cinderella*. Matthew Broderick, star of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, quoted in Freeman (2015: 160), says the director John Hughes intended for the film to be more of a 'fable'. In relation to the teen sites and space, the 'kingdom' — an archetypal site in the fairy tale — becomes the high school in the teen film, and the 'ball' becomes the prom. *Valley Girl* and *Pretty in Pink* are examples of this. The prom becomes a ritualistic event and a rite of passage in a teenager's life, representing the transformation into adulthood. For high school girls in particular, it is like a wedding rehearsal, with the dress taking on almost magical, talismanic powers.

Propp's work is limited in this context as it does not refer to mood, tone or dialogue. It is his structuralist approach and character study which is of value to this work and the tone and mood will be produced by the films. Also, Propp refers to dragons and other mythical creatures/figures as villains, so these 'roles' in the teen genre often become the jocks or adult characters. The villains are not necessarily male; for example, this chapter discusses female villains in *Heathers*. Another restrictive aspect is that Propp's writing was born out of Russian formalism, which was scientific in nature. As Bordwell (1988: 16-17) points out, it is a 'taxonomic and meaning-neutral scheme...by recasting Propp [and] tinkering with his static taxonomy, a relationship can be achieved.' Peter Wollen addresses this anomaly when he discusses Propp and film genre in his essay, 'North by Northwest: A Morphological Analysis', and states: 'I wanted to test Propp's method by applying it not simply outside the field of the Russian folktale...but...in the narrative field of the cinema' (1975: 22). Others include Shelia Johnston's (2007) Proppian analysis of *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), and John Fell's (1977) work on *Rio Bravo* (1959).

So what are the principles of Propp's structural analysis and how can these be applied to the teen movie? He identified 31 plot attributes in fairy tales which he termed 'functions'. For example, one such function is 'Interdiction' (1968: 26), which means the hero receives a warning about a possible threat. When characters carry out these functions, Propp says they become 'spheres of action'. John L. Fell (1977: 19-20) explains in more detail:

> By functions he [Propp] meant elements following chronological, linear sequence which served as fundamental components, stably, independent of how or by whom...they were fulfilled. An example would be hero and villain join in

combat...functions always followed the same chronological order...and describes an astonishing uniformity of structure among all the apparently primary sources.

This approach can be applied to the teen genre and its narrative structure as, for the most part, the films in this thesis follow a chronological and linear pattern. Propp's purpose in studying folk tales was to identify recurring functions and themes, similar to the way genre films work in terms of their repetitive nature, like the virginity loss in the sex comedy. In a Proppian sense, this could be a function dubbed, 'Sexual Initiation: the youth attempts to lose his virginity'. These similarities are extended to the 'tale roles' or *dramatis personae* which Propp identifies as his main character types: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess and/or her father, the dispatcher, the hero and the false hero. Some of these roles will be used here in a contemporary form to suit the particular character and linked to the ideology which a film is conveying. For example, Ferris Bueller's hero status is allied to his mischievous nature, privilege and moneyed lifestyle, some key definers of the Reagan era — so the approach sustains the sociopolitical debate of the thesis, but expressed in a way related to Propp's notions. Propp points out that a character may act out several roles, for example, the donor may also act as a helper, the princess as a dispatcher. It must be noted, however, that not all the functions and tale roles appear in a single film, and to include them all within this chapter would be far beyond the scope of the work.

Positioning Propp's tale roles in relation to the teen stereotype and Wood's 'ideal' male and female' is useful here as it continues the notion of the teen role and its representative value, making this chapter a kind of companion piece to the last one. The Proppian villain, for example, will be aligned with the depiction of the jock in the previous chapter in order to contextualise the issues. They differ insomuch as the basic role of the stereotype in this research is only relevant to the teen genre, where Propp's tale roles are more archetypal, covering a broader canvas and not limited to one genre (this is also the case with Wood's ideas). But they share similarities in that the aggressive and confrontational jocks in *Revenge*, or Hardy in *Some Kind of a Wonderful*, for example, could be viewed as Proppian villains. A different role title but the same motivations and characteristics. This is an example of how the different character types and roles serve the same function and unify the genre.

Some Kind of Wonderful

The analysis will begin with an examination of the aforementioned romantic drama, *Some Kind of Wonderful,* written and produced by John Hughes and directed by Howard Deutch. This film is appropriate as several teen character roles and their actions are compatible with Propp's tale roles and functions, so it will act as a kind of paradigm for this method of study for the other films discussed in the chapter. The plot concerns the protagonist, Keith (Eric Stoltz), who plays the tale role of a modern Proppian hero. He comes into conflict with the rich kid, Hardy (Craig Sheffer), who plays the villain and becomes his love rival and nemesis. Like other similar antagonistic characters in the genre, they all experience little transformation in their characters. Jon Lewis describes Hardy and other rich kids in the genre as 'dissolute, bored and heartless' (1992: 140). The object of Keith and Hardy's affections is the popular girl, Amanda (Leah Thompson), who, at the beginning of the film, is Hardy's girlfriend and her tale role is the teen genre's Proppian princess. As noted, she is not so well-off but hangs out with the rich crowd who have accepted her because of her good looks and traditional appearance, despite her lack of status within the teen hierarchy. The repetitious nature of genre is illustrated here as the film shares similar themes to Hughes' *Pretty in Pink* and *The Breakfast Club* in its 'class-clash' teen romance (Shary, 2011). Roz Kaveney (2006: 33) dubs *Pretty in Pink* its 'thematic stablemate'.

Keith is from a blue-collar family and is artistically inclined, thoughtful and introspective; he is a character who is difficult to categorise. Lesley Speed (2002: 107) writes, he 'is a product of the romance genre's tendency to remodel masculinity with an emphasis being placed on his gentle and artistic nature.' He is similar in this respect to Louden in *Vision Quest* and Steff in *All the Right Moves*, but he is no football-playing jock with all the masculine implications this entails.

Keith's best friend is the tomboy, the working class Watts (Mary Stuart Masterson), who secretly desires him and is a similar type of outsider figure to Duckie in *Pretty in Pink*, with their alternative dress sense and ambivalent sexuality. She plays two Proppian roles in the film: first, the hero's helper; then later she becomes the princess. Keith says to his father: 'I like art. I work in a gas station. My best friend is a tomboy. These things don't fly too well in the American high school.' Lewis (1992: 140) describes him as a 'hapless outsider'. Another key figure is the

delinquent, Duncan (Elias Koteas), the 'skinhead', who befriends the hero Keith and ironically becomes his helper/donor.

In the beginning of the film, a montage credit sequence introduces the main characters and an implicit connection is made between them. Certain functions also emerge as Propp's narratology begins to take shape, which provides a framework for a broader sociopolitical reading of the text. Keith is seen working his part-time job in a gas station; Watts is playing the drums in her bedroom; Hardy is seen in a relationship with Amanda which Kaveney (2006: 33) describes as 'an unfeigned passion whose complexities we only learn about later.' The image in the next scene is significant: Keith is framed walking 'moodily' (ibid.) along a railroad; a train is heading towards him and he steps away just before the moment of impact, suggesting he has some type of death wish, foreshadowing events to come. Towards the end of the opening montage, Propp's functions begin to be applied to the action. Keith, from a distance and obscured, sees Amanda and Hardy together in an embrace — Hardy drives off in his expensive sports car to immediately indicate his wealthy status. Keith is framed in medium close-up and his charged look conveys his feelings for Amanda. He looks at his hands, which are covered in oil and grime from his job at the gas station, signalling his blue-collar background. Jon Lewis (1992: 140) observes that this binary in relation to social status at such an early moment in the story points to a wider discourse within teen culture, as already discussed in Chapter Two in relation to *Little Darlings* and, more explicitly, with regards to *The Breakfast Club* and the teen stereotype in the previous chapter:

> The problematics of the romance are made obvious...Like *Pretty in Pink* the drama
> is reduced to simplistic class issues...a high school rigidly organised according to
> cliques that solely regard wealth in its division of society.

Keith makes sure Amanda and Hardy do not see him, invoking Propp's function: 'An interdiction is addressed to the hero' (1968: 26), a warning that Keith should not get involved, or as Propp puts it: 'You dare not look into this closet' (ibid.). The function in this instance can also be related to the risk-taking phase of adolescence as it transpires that Keith's sphere of action will expose him to a possible threat of violence. Of course, he does get involved and, like Bender in *The Breakfast Club*, Randy in *Valley Girl*, Andie in *Pretty in Pink* and Johnny in *Reckless,* he becomes a

contemporary version of the Proppian hero in the context of issues surrounding class conflicts and hierarchy, which resonates with what Bulman (2004: 100) describes as,

> student-heroes [who] express themselves in opposition to the tyranny of the middle [and upper] class establishment...creativity and freedom are alive when they battle the forces of conformity, status hierarchy and restrictive social conditions.

Later, Hardy and Amanda pull up to the gas station where Keith works and he fills their car up with petrol. The affluent Hardy's villain persona is immediately apparent in his condescension towards Keith and he warns him not to look at the princess Amanda, his 'property', a word alluding to 1980s wealth and capitalism. The 'Violation of Interdiction' function is illustrated as the 'villain enters the tale. His role is to disturb the peace...to cause some form of misfortune, damage or harm' (Propp: 1968: 27). 'Be nice to me or I'll make you check the tyres', he says scornfully. The meaning here is more literal, compared to the opening scene where gesture and body language conveyed denotation. Watts' role as a Proppian 'helper' is highlighted soon after this scene. Keith tells her of his romantic interest in Amanda and Watts urges him not to go near 'the big money, cruel hearts society' or 'go roaming where he doesn't belong.' Again, invoking the 'Interdiction' function, he ignores her and does venture into this potentially dangerous environment and the central conflict of the narrative begins to evolve. *Some Kind of Wonderful,* like *Pretty in Pink* and *The Breakfast Club,* as Ryan and Kellner point out (1988: 120), 'make class difference the basis of their romantic plots, and they seem to mobilize persistent populist anger against unjustifiable differentials in the distribution of wealth.' Moreover, the scene resonates with what DeMott (1990: 12) asserts about the notion of a classless society being a 'deceit'.

Propp's functions, 'Reconnaissance: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance' (1968: 28), and 'Trickery...The villain uses persuasion...deception or coercion' (ibid 29-30), are represented in terms of their relationship to the syntactic nature of the story. Hardy has been dumped by Amanda and he becomes aware of her and Keith going out on a date. Enraged, he devises a plan, that is, a 'sphere of action' to lure Keith, his 'victim', into a deadly trap by inviting him and Amanda to a party at his house where he and his friends plan to attack him. Hardy insists there are no hard feelings and says to him: 'It wouldn't be the weirdest thing in the world if

we turned out to be friends'. This apparent attempt to bridge the class divide within the American high school system makes Keith reply cautiously: 'Yes, it would'. Propp refers to this: 'An inverted form of reconnaissance is evidenced when the intended victim questions the villain' (ibid: 28). When Watts is told of this situation, she agrees: 'Did I miss something, like a new world order?' Keith agreeing to go to the party introduces another of Propp's functions: 'Complicity...The victim submits to deception and...agrees to all the villain's persuasion [as] deceitful proposals are always accepted and fulfilled' (ibid: 30). In addition, the 'Interdiction' function intensifies this as it is clear that Keith is being set up and the spectator urges him not to go to the party.

In relation to cliques and peer pressure during adolescence, as already noted by Erickson (1968), Milner (2004) and McMahan (2009), Amanda is confronted with similar dilemmas previously discussed in relation to *The Breakfast Club* and *Little Darlings*. The group pressures her into staying with Keith and when she refuses, the girls lambast and ignore her. She is no longer part of the popular girl clique: 'She knows that to cease to be Hardy's girlfriend is to forfeit the social status she required...if she is dating Keith, she no longer exists' (Kaveney, 2006: 35-36). This incident could be interpreted within a couple of Propp's functions. In terms of 'Absentation', Amanda exposes herself to the censure of her peers by 'absenting' (1968: 26) from the security of the family home, the 'family' here being the popular girl clique. Her being banished from the clique, this is illustrated by the function 'Villainy', where the villain (Hardy) 'expels someone' (ibid: 33). Using Propp's methods as a framing device to dramatise the recurring theme of peer pressure offers a different approach in arguing how the teen genre engages and represents adolescence and the coming-of-age process. It also continues to bring together the subgenres of the teen film. The use of peer pressure, using this approach, also demonstrates how this theme serves to unite the genre as a whole.

Part of Keith's sphere of action is illustrated through the Propp function of 'Transfiguration...the hero is given a new appearance...and puts on new garments' (ibid: 62). A reading of this leads to a more complex and problematic set of concerns when viewed through the prism of social status and the high school hierarchy. Keith takes Amanda on a date, which blurs the boundaries between blue and white-collar sensibilities. Firstly, he wears a smart suit, transforming his appearance from someone who has been casually dressed or seen in oil-stained overalls; like the teens

in *The Breakfast Club*, costume takes on a symbolic meaning. DeMott (1990: 65) explains with regards to the date, 'despite humble origins [Keith] is worldly and poised in posh settings...he selects a lucco restaurant, orders wine and Belgian caviar.' These qualities, along with his ability to restore classic cars and his talent as an artist, 'set him a notch higher than the richies who condescend to him.' All this, despite the fact that 'voices [are] warning him that a social system exists that can hurt him' (ibid.). He even uses the money he saved up for his college fund, much to his father's anger, to buy Amanda a pair of diamond earrings, thinking that this is what she is used to. However, Roz Kaveney (2006: 37) argues that this exchange becomes 'morally ambiguous' because it equates Keith with Hardy. Amanda becomes,

> a valuable possession who automatically confers status on him [Keith], she is a glamorous aesthetic object [and] he wants to own her rather than love her, [making him], just as guilty as the villain.

Likewise, Shary (2011: 572) claims that by Keith giving her the earrings and taking her out on a lavish date (unusually, Watts is their chauffeur who drives a rented limousine), he has made 'the biggest mistake of his life...as he fails to understand that such financial demonstrations appear relatively disingenuous to a middle-class girl trying to resist upper-class impulses.' The earrings, like in *The Breakfast Club* where Claire gave Bender her diamond stud, are viewed within a wider social discourse. Lesley Speed (1998: 109-110) refers to them as 'an object of socio-economic exchange [and] social reconciliation.' However, Nadel (1997: 153) views the gift in more positive terms, observing that Keith's 'misfit' persona will disappear as buying the diamond earrings 'are his way of being worthy of [her] love because being able to give them will change his image.'

In the final act, Propp's 'Mediation' function is apparent when Keith finds out what will happen to him at the party. His sister, who plays the role of 'helper', overhears Hardy and his cronies making plans to harm Keith, and 'misfortune or lack is made known' (1968: 38). She then informs her brother and he begins the 'Counter Action' function (ibid.) when confronted by the villain, who makes threats of violence against him. Also, the 'Struggle function: The hero and villain join in direct combat', is demonstrated (ibid: 51). This is when the delinquent, Duncan, who acts as Keith's

helper/donor, enters the scene. 'The first function of the donor' is enacted when the 'hero is...attacked...which prepares the way for him receiving either a magical agent or helper' (ibid: 39). This leads to the function of the 'Hero's reaction...The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor [and in doing so] saves himself...by employing the same tactics used by his adversary' (ibid: 42-43). Keith leaves but it is not revealed whether Duncan and his gang harm Hardy. Nevertheless, Propp's function of 'Victory...The villain is defeated' (ibid: 53) concludes this scene. Applying Propp's methodology here continues to underpin the issues concerning the social status within the American high school system. According to Shary, who discusses this scene, it is an 'invasion of the lower class upon the upper, [suggesting] that brute force is the most imminent threat the poor pose to the sensitive rich' (2011: 575). The hero, Keith, and his friendship with the helper, Duncan, is allied to their blue-collar backgrounds. Jon Lewis (1992: 141) comments on this and says: 'Hughes' heroes eventually transcend the rigid high school order and are befriended by delinquents who are really more like them than they or we had expected.' Bender's role in *The Breakfast Club* is a similar example.

Propp's function, 'The Wedding...The hero is married and ascends the throne' (1968: 63) is symbolically played out in *Some Kind of Wonderful's* final scene. The romantic union is sealed although not between Amanda and Keith as she decides that she is better off on her own, which Shary states is a 'rare declaration of independence for any leading character in a romantic film' (2011: 574). He realises that Watts is the girl for him and he gives her the diamond earrings. Again, this raises more issues concerning social status, but also, sexuality. Shary describes Keith and Watts' union as 'conservative' (ibid.). Watts is portrayed as tomboyish, masculinised and disparagingly called a 'lesbian' by Duncan in the early part of the film, but her romantic union with Keith alludes to her becoming feminised and any debate about her sexuality has now been supressed. However, unlike Alison in *The Breakfast Club,* she does not have to change her appearance to satisfy male sexual desire. The gender norms of the teen caste system are 'destabilised [as] the boyish character of Watts...wins...Keith's affections without conforming to the feminine ideal represented by Amanda' (Speed, 2002: 109). It contrasts to the ending of *Pretty in Pink*, where Andie rejects Duckie who is culturally 'different', and chooses a more conventional partner, the rich kid Blane.

The rationale behind a Proppian analysis of *Some Kind of Wonderful* and the following films in this chapter, is that it has enabled the themes of the coming-of-age process, teen romance and its wider sociopolitical implications to embrace another structuralist methodology for the enhancement of the argument. This is augmented by the application of the tale roles and Propp's functions, which broaden the scope of the thesis in terms of characterisation and narratology.

A Proppian approach will continue to underpin the teen drama, *All the Right Moves,* a film linked to achieving the American Dream in the Reagan era, 'the dream of an open, mobile society where individuals rise through talent and achievement' (Traube, 1992: 71). Unusually for a 1980s teen movie, it is set in a blue-collar community, a fictional Pennsylvanian industrial town called Ampipe, where the local steel mill is the town's main employer. When faced with closure, this threatens the workers' livelihoods. Tom Cruise's Steff, the hero, is a talented high school football player hoping for a college scholarship to study engineering. His Proppian hero status is viewed within the context of individual aspiration and the American Dream. Traube (ibid: 67) describes him as a 'success hero [who] has been used to reformulate an older republican dream of individual freedom in the context of an increasingly organised, consumption-orientated, corporate capitalist society.' Being from a blue-collar community, his sphere of action is linked to hard work and determination — qualities which characters from this social group in the teen dramas need to possess in order to succeed — unlike the depiction of the wealthy kids in the genre. Steff eventually achieves his goals but not before overcoming several obstacles. One of these is his football coach (Craig T. Nelson), initially portrayed as the Proppian villain who clashes with Steff and stalls his progress. As Bulman (2005: 95) writes, 'high school football coaches [in teen films] are often portrayed as antagonists...who are cruel and heartless.' He is similar in this respect to the coach in *Revenge*, played by John Goodman, but Goodman is more of a caricature and portrayed comically. Despite this tonal difference between the coaches — one serious, the other comic — it is their similar adversarial character traits which help cement the films as part of a larger generic body of work. Also, like *The Breakfast Club,* this binary opposition concerning the conflict between youth and adult forms part of the dramatic conflict of the film, although this time the parent, Steff's father, with whom he initially clashes, is ultimately seen as a decent, honest man who supports and encourages his son — an adult version of a Proppian helper.

Other Proppian functions operating within *All the Right Moves* and which comment on adolescent issues and the wider social context include 'Absentation'. Previously alluded to in this chapter, it refers to when 'one of the members of a family absents himself from home...sometimes members of the younger generation' (1968: 26). Steff is viewed leaving his home in the morning and walking to high school, which fits Propp's description of 'the hero [who is] an ordinary person...depart[ing] on a search' (ibid: 80). Here, this means the search for a better life, pursuing the American Dream. In Steff's case, it starts at high school and achieving a good enough education and grades to get a sport scholarship to study engineering at college and escape his surroundings. Although he is a jock and demonstrates all the physical traits associated with this, he is depicted as more sensitive and introspective, like Keith in *Some Kind of Wonderful*. Timothy Shary writes that '*All the Right Moves* is the first notable film of the 1980s to portray the teen jock as troubled and frustrated' (2002: 74). The film shares semantic aspects with the sex comedy: there are penis jokes, a brief scene of female nudity and the males are generally seen in groups at football practice, demonstrating adrenaline-fuelled macho behaviour. But the focus is on Steff and his sphere of action, which is more about achieving success in Reagan's America than casual sex and gross-out humour.

Steff is seen walking to high school and is picked up and dropped off by the character Bosco (James A. Baffico), who turns out to be another Proppian villain. Like Hardy in *Some Like it Wonderful*, his role 'is to disturb the peace...cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm' (1968: 27). This scene is an example of the function: 'Violation of interdiction....where the villain enters the scene' (ibid: 28). It is later when Bosco reveals his true nature — after the college football team loses a big match against one of their rivals, he and his drunken friends vandalise the coach's house. Steff is with them, also drunk. He was previously thrown out of the team after he had a disagreement with the coach, and although he realises what they are doing is wrong and is unaware what the others intend to do to the coach's house, he is nonetheless involved and becomes the villain's 'victim'. This triggers the function: 'Complicity...The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy' (ibid: 30). The coach sees Steff at the scene and then prevents him from obtaining his scholarship. At this stage, he is unable to achieve his goals and pursue the American Dream as his Proppian 'search' is stalled and the 'hero's decline

is initiated' (Traube, 1992: 75). He takes some temporary work on a construction site demolishing a decommissioned mill — a symbolic image of a community and its inhabitants suffering during the Reagan era as the decline in manufacturing leaves its impact. When Steff confronts Bosco and asks him to tell the truth about the incident to the coach in the hope that he will be forgiven, this triggers Propp's function — when the hero begins his 'Counteraction' (1968: 38) — in order to defeat the villain. Bosco refuses to help so they end up in a fight, prompting the function, 'Struggle: The hero and villain join in direct combat' (ibid: 51). Steff then has to approach the coach directly and apologise for his actions and his bad attitude during football. In this, the Propp function, 'Difficult task: A difficult task is proposed to the hero' (ibid: 60) is demonstrated. Additionally, Steff's girlfriend plays the Proppian helper (see below) when she intervenes and talks to the coach's wife, who then persuades her husband to rethink his decision. This turns out to be a success, as in the film's final scene the coach forgives Steff and he gets his college scholarship to study engineering. In other words, a happy ending ensues and the ideological ramifications of the film are upheld in terms of succeeding in Reagan's America. As Traube (1992: 76) writes, the setting of the mill where the final scene takes place is 'the symbolic boundary between blue-collar and white-collar worlds.'

A comparison between Steff and Joel, the lead character and hero in *Risky Business* (also played by Cruise), will comment on the plasticity of Propp's tale roles in the context of this thesis. *Risky Business,* although a sex comedy, is another type of crossover film as it goes beyond the sex quest theme and comments on the capitalist ethic of the 1980s. Bernstein & Pratt (1985: 33) note that the film 'extends the terms of [the sex comedies] by crystallizing their conventional components and by translating the uncertainty of the adolescent situation into a comparable ambivalence towards American affluence.' This comparison is highlighted by the role of the Proppian 'helper' (1968: 79) in both *Risky Business* and *All the Right Moves,* key figures who actively move within the hero's spheres of action and worthy of further investigation here. It is another semantic/syntactic feature, where the similarities and differences point to a wider observation on the generic unity of the teen film and its symbolic values. The roles are played out in an oppositional context, offering commentary on different approaches to the work ethic in capitalist America. The prostitute, Lana, in *Risky Business* becomes Joel's business partner and helper; she assists him in organising the brothel in order for him to make enough money to

pay off his debts and repair the damage to his father's car. As mentioned above, in *All the Right Moves,* Steff's girlfriend, Lisa (Leah Thompson), becomes his helper when she speaks to the coach's wife in the hope that she will persuade her husband to change his mind concerning Steff's future, thus enabling him to go to college. Despite these opposing situations and different motivations of the characters, their roles are similar in that their ultimate goal as the hero's helper through their sphere of actions is to 'achieve a solution to a difficult task' (ibid.) A further example of a Proppian-like helper features in *Pretty in Pink*. This time it is between two females, the lead character Andie and her older friend Iona (Annie Watts). The latter is a constant source of help and advice throughout the film and lends Andie a gown for the prom. Propp's tale roles continue to be updated in the teen film in terms of working as a device to continue the notion of a unified genre.

The romantic comedy, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off,* when compared to *All the Right Moves*, offers another variation on the Proppian-like hero role. Traube (1992: 78) describes the character of Ferris from the perspective of the 'boy-hero tradition, which links the achievement of success to an opposition between youth and age.' In *Ferris Bueller's,* the opposing forces are his parents and his teacher. But the difference here is that the likes of the blue-collar Steff 'are ambitious industrious youths [who] achieve success as a reward for toil, self-denial, and obedience to authority.' Whereas the wealthy Ferris and Joel in *Risky Business* are 'romantic, roguish heroes: boys who prefer play to work, who succeed through tricks or daring [and], routinely subvert established conventions and repressive authority.' Ferris's 'project is not work but play' (ibid. 76). Hadley Freeman claims that Ferris, 'thinks deeply about nothing' (2015: 161). Steinberg & Kincheloe, in their article, 'Privileged and Getting Away With It', dub *Risky Business* and *Ferris Bueller's* the 'misbehaviour films' (1998: 116). Ferris plays truant from school and his goal is to avoid detection from his parents and his teacher, offering a more comic variation of the recurring semantic feature of the generational divide. Part of his hero status is defined by his anti-authoritarian attitude, especially to the teacher figure, the inept and unsympathetic Mr Rooney (Jeffrey Jones), who is depicted as the villain, albeit one who is made to look a fool by Ferris. He is the 'villain...who makes an attempt at reconnaissance' (Propp, 1968: 28) as he tries to locate and punish the errant Ferris. But the hero's rebelliousness is calculated and at times ingenious — he hacks into the school's computer records at one stage in order to amend his attendance records,

demonstrating skills similar to the nerds in *Revenge*. Indeed, Ferris' hero image in terms of the films discussed here 'uniquely combines characteristics of the nerd and popular boy...which threads through Hughes' films as an index of individuality' (Driscoll, 2011: 51). Rooney's assistant says to him: 'He's very popular...The sportos, the motorheads, geeks, sluts, bloods, wastoids, dweebie, dickheads...all adore him...They think he's a righteous dude.' Even Jean (Jennifer Grey), Ferris' sister, who resents him throughout most of the film, saves him in the end when Mr Rooney is on the verge of exposing him. She too falls under his spell and becomes a Proppian 'helper [who rescues Ferris] from pursuit' (1968: 79), as the villain is defeated. The use of Propp's functions here facilitate the notion that, in the teen romantic comedies, if you are rich and privileged like Joel and Ferris, you will not be punished for the various transgressions you commit. Instead, the films portray them as noble acts, with adults depicted as inept at controlling and disciplining these teen characters. Their heroic attributes and rebelliousness is based on freedom and pleasure, which Traube (1992: 76-80) labels 'cool', and 'the films are fantasies of the rebellious independent self [set against] a benign authority...leaving no space for any reconciliation between the generations.' Joel's transformation by the end of *Risky Business* is significant: he is now admired by his friends for organising the brothel and his hero status is elevated to a god-like level, whereas when he was first introduced, he was a shy virgin, taunted by his friends. Ferris misbehaves from the start and does not go through such a transformation, as Hadley Freeman points out, 'he is as blithe and content at the end of the film as he is at the beginning' (2015: 161). Furthermore, *Ferris Bueller's* and *Risky Business* represent a shift when returning to the notion of the generic template which Altman (1999) identified. The rebellious characteristics of the male heroes of the 1950s teen genre like James Dean and Marlon Brando were marked by a broody, alienated spirit. Joel and Ferris are carefree, playful and popular.

Heroic teen rebellion is played out in a more serious way by Steff in *All the Right Moves,* depicted as impulsive behaviour and short-lived as he comes to realise that, in order to succeed, he must be obedient and play by adult rules. Steff initially rebels against the 'villain' football coach and ignores his father's advice, but eventually submits to authority by the final act. His father warns him not to be 'too proud' when making decisions about his future. The coach yells at him: 'You want to go to college? Then play the way you've been taught!'

The binary oppositions inherent in Propp's functions and tale roles, which facilitate the representation of teen culture in these films and wider implications concerning the balance of power, privilege, freedom and influence, favour the wealthy teens who misbehave and are disrespectful towards adults. Catherine Driscoll (2011: 53) reinforces this view when she notes that, during the 1980s teen films, the 'US image of adolescence had become more symbolically middle class...and associated with Reaganomics.' Taking this a stage further is Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998: 110), who point out that in the 1980s teen genre, these

> young men *are entitled* to misbehave [and] to destroy, by virtue of who they are: white, male, and middle-upper class Americans. Hollywood is positioning these youth as the CEOs of tomorrow, the new inductees into the "Old Boys Club", these "new boys" are just following in the footsteps of their fathers. They are doing what society, their parents and the audience expect them to do.

This white-collar entitlement contrasts with the blue-collar teen of the more dramatic and serious *All the Right Moves*, who comes to realise that the only way to succeed in 1980s America is by hard work, discipline, respecting the value of money and submission to adult values. There is not so much a major transformation in Steff during his sphere of action: at the beginning of the film his goals are outlined, he overcomes the obstacles in the 'conflict' stage and, in the final act, is successful in reaching his goals by getting a college scholarship. The difference between *Ferris Bueller's/Risky Business* and *All The Right Moves* again can be read as a metaphor for the polarisation between the 'haves' and 'have nots' of Reagan's America. Applying Propp's ideas on character and narrative to help illustrate this, offers an alternative version of the teen role and its relationship to the argument and methodological nature of this thesis.

Traube (1992: 76) adds another dimension to the use of Proppian roles when she points out that Ferris is the first 'postmodern hero of a teen comedy'. He often breaks the fourth wall by addressing the audience and the fragmented narrative contrasts against the more classical structure of other teen films. Also, these hero qualities are part of his adolescent relational aggression, not in a vindictive way like other so-called popular figures discussed in previous chapters; he is more benign and likeable but nevertheless controlling. Traube (ibid: 80-81) explains: 'His cool

rebelliousness is not an expression of...an emotional struggle...but a highly crafted and effective strategy for dominating others. [He is] the omnipotent patriarch to Sloane, Cameron, and Jean [his sister].' Hadley Freeman says something similar but writes from a more informal, personal point of view: 'Ferris, I realised, was kind of a jerk...He manipulates his parents' blind love for him. He torments his younger sister, and he lies to pretty much every person in the movie' (2015: 162).[6] Additionally, both Ferris and Joel appear immune from the 'storm and stress' phase which affects other teens in the genre and this is another facet of their respective hero personae.

Reckless (1984) is a teen romantic drama which shares similarities with *All the Right Moves* with regards to having a blue-collar protagonist in the leading role. It is located in an unnamed industrial steel town in Pennsylvania. But thematically, the two films differ as *Reckless* is not so concerned with chasing the American Dream in the Reagan era; the film is more introspective and ambiguous as the protagonist's motivations are never clearly defined — he appears more complex than other teen characters of the 1980s teen genre. It stars Aidan Quinn as Johnny, the Proppian hero, from the wrong side of the tracks who starts a relationship with rich girl cheerleader, Tracey (Daryl Hannah), the princess. Like in *Lucas*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Valley Girl, Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Pretty in Pink*, a relationship between two characters from different social and cultural backgrounds provides the semantic/syntactic axis of the film — the 'opposites attract' myth. Johnny, although initially a member of the football team, does not possess any of the jock characteristics associated with this stereotype. His father is an alcoholic who does not support him and his mother has left the family home, a similar situation to *Lucas*. He is a rebellious loner and an outsider who sustains these characteristics and does not experience any kind of significant transformation, apart from falling in love. Johnny lives on the edge, literally of the town; he rides a motorbike and dons a leather jacket, similar to Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, and is moody like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. He seems to have a death wish, like Keith in *Some Kind of Wonderful,* as he takes adolescent risk-taking behaviour to its extremes when he rides his motorcycle perilously close to a cliff edge on several occasions during the film — a 1980s version of the 'Chickie run' scene in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

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[6] Another example of the differences between informal and more academic writing on the teen genre.

The Proppian villain, unsurprisingly, comes in the form of the jock, Tracey's boyfriend Randy (Adam Baldwin), the popular football player who, like Hardy in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, reacts aggressively when he discovers Tracey and Johnny are romantically involved. Propp's 'Interdiction' function, 'an interdiction is addressed to the hero' (1968: 26), is triggered when Johnny is seen watching Tracey. Randy notices this and expresses his displeasure to Johnny, invoking the part of this function: 'You dare not look into this closet' (ibid).

Johnny and Tracey are paired together by chance at a school dance and begin to bond by dancing wildly together. At the end of this scene, Randy expresses his jealousy and he and Johnny engage in a minor fracas, again evoking Propp's function, 'The Violation of Interdiction...The villain enters the tale...to disturb the peace...to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm' (1968: 27). In a later scene, Johnny and Tracey break into their high school and trash a classroom and its contents, another example of the ever-present adolescent risk-taking behaviour. In a similar vein to *The Breakfast Club*, in which the teens are seen running down the corridor, in *Reckless*, the Kim Wilde song, *Kids in America*, symbolically conveys how popular music has a liberating effect on youth (Speed, 1995). Shary comments on the romance between Johnny and Tracey, and again a comparison with *The Breakfast Club* is apparent. It echoes Claire's attraction to Bender, which is based on the dynamic of their social differences: 'Tracey's attraction to Johnny seems founded solely on her repressed drive to rebel (again the barbarism of the working class is romanticized by the rich) and his attraction is to drive her to rebel' (Shary, 2011: 569). But where in the last chapter, Claire was the teen stereotype – the popular girl; here Tracey is the Proppian equivalent – the princess. Bender was the delinquent, where Johnny is the Proppian hero. Interestingly, the sex scenes between Johnny and Tracey are rare for a romantic teen drama of this era and contrast with the sex in the sex comedies — they are stylised and fairly erotic, but they do not treat sex as a stigma. They involve a genuine emotional connection and desire between the two protagonists.

Where the film is different from other teen romances, especially the John Hughes' films, is that it is not so much a critique of wealth in the Reagan era as represented by Tracey, or by teens from less affluent backgrounds chasing the American Dream; the film is more about youth liberation and rebellion. According to Shary (ibid.), 'it is a stylish celebration of both characters' needs to escape from their

polar opposite positions...to a place that is most romantically ambiguous.' In the final act, Johnny and Randy clash and demonstrate several of Propp's functions: 'The hero and villain join in direct combat' (1968: 51); 'The villain is defeated' (ibid: 53) and 'The villain is punished' (ibid: 63). In the final scene, despite peer pressure from Tracey's friends who object to her forming a relationship with someone not from the popular crowd and outside of their clique, she leaves with Johnny as they ride off out of town into the sunset. This resolution differs from other teen romances in that the hero and princess depart with no destination in mind and no apparent means for survival — their future is uncertain.

The Revisionist Teen Films: *Heathers* and *River's Edge*

Developing the brief discussion in the introduction, the dark drama-comedy *Heathers* takes an ironic view of high school life, imbuing the 1980s genre with a postmodern twist. The action takes place in the same environment as *Fast Times* and contains the same teen stereotypes as *The Breakfast Club*, but the black humour sets it apart and a very different tone is created. Those familiar with the modern teen film are in on the joke as genre expectations dictate our understanding of the film. Jon Lewis (1992: 142) explains when writing about the film that,

> the very predictability and familiarity of the genre allows the teen audience not only to laugh at themselves, but to commune in the acknowledgement of a shared knowledge...of the very idiocy of the media's re-presentation of them.

Indeed, several murders, albeit comically played out, form the heart of the story in Heathers. It differs dramatically from the relatively safe universe of other teen romantic and sex comedies. Shary (2005: 76) describes *Heathers* and *River's Edge* as 'revisionist teen films...that made an important statement on the genre...understanding [its] generic heritage [and] transcend[ing] the typical concerns of subgenres dealing with delinquency, romance and schooling.' The film also departs from a more traditional aesthetic of the teen movie as it is punctuated with some dream-like and surreal images. Lewis goes on to describe the film as a 'teen-pic pastiche; a teen film to end all teen films' (1992: 142). The screenwriter of Heathers, Daniel Waters, explains his approach, quoted on his IMDb page (no date: u.p.):

Films often portray teenagers as the innocent victims of a cruel society. I've always felt that young people were born with a lot of evil already in them. I wrote 'Heathers' with the idea that most teens are not innocent victims, and that it's a cruel world from day one.

The three characters from which the film takes its title are the popular girls, all called Heather. These are the film's Proppian villains whose cruel behaviour to others is the most extreme form of relational aggression demonstrated by females in the 1980s genre. They are a powerful teenage clique, although their image remains lampooned and caricatured throughout, one of the ways in which the film provides a postmodern twist on the genre. They are the rich, snobbish, arrogant and self-proclaimed leaders of the school. Like Cinder in Little Darlings, they do not experience any type of transformation and are never aware of the superficial and shallow nature of their positions. As Shary (2005: 65) writes, 'unlike Claire in *The Breakfast Club,* the Heathers never come to a profound realisation of their tenuous positon.' Similarly, Scott Long (1990: 163) comments on this syntactic feature by noting that 'the group boundaries are relentlessly enforced' in *Heathers*, unlike *The Breakfast Club, Revenge of the Nerds* or *Lucas*. The Heathers resist this syntactic development and remain villains. One reason why this particular film is an appropriate case study for a Proppian analysis is the image of the villain, who is central to the film's narrative. In an early scene, the leader, Heather Chandler (Kim Walker), expresses her arrogance and hubris. When asked by the main character Veronica (Winona Ryder) — a reluctant member of the group who is torn between her friendship with other less-popular figures in the high school and her allegiance to the Heathers — why others in the school think she's a 'piranha', she responds, 'they all want me as a friend or a fuck...I'm worshipped'. Ironically, this distorted view resonates with what Mayeux (2011: 350) discusses regarding adolescent popularity: 'The very visible nature of popular youths makes them potentially sought after romantic companions for adolescents who wish to improve their own social standing among peers.' The Heathers then go on to demonstrate Propp's (1968: 30-31) 'Villainy' function, 'where they cause harm or injury', in this case to another student, on whom they play a cruel prank. They get Veronica to forge a love letter, which she signs to make it look like it came from Kurt (Lance Fenton), one of the two main jocks in the film; the other is Ram (Patrick Labyorteaux). These are the Heathers'

male counterparts, and just as cruel. The Heathers give the letter to a student they consider one of the 'losers' within the high school system, the overweight and lonely Martha (Carrie Lynn), whom they cruelly nickname 'Dumptruck'. Martha is then humiliated in front of the entire school cafeteria and attempts suicide. Veronica is ashamed and starts to question why she is part of such a clique. This incident of villainy, when applying a Proppian reading to the film, is a key moment, 'since by means of it the actual movement of the tale is created' (ibid: 30). At this point, the new kid in school is introduced, the mysterious Jason Dean (J.D.), played by Christian Slater, who turns out to be the film's biggest villain.

Veronica and J.D. begin a romance and he uses her anger, and his own, at the Heathers to persuade her to join him in making them suffer. 'I don't really like my friends...It's like they're people I work with and our job is being popular and shit', she says. However, J.D.'s sphere of action involves him acting out several of the villainy functions in attempting to achieve his goals whilst he 'wages war against the system of identities' (Long, 1990: 164). The drama turns into a tale of murder as he tricks Veronica, and she unwittingly becomes his accomplice and witness to his crimes. He kills the leader, Heather Chandler, and then the two jocks, deceiving Veronica into thinking he will just scare them. The murders are made to look like suicide, and J.D. becomes a representation of a Proppian villain, a very dangerous one in the context of this chapter, saying: 'The extreme always makes an impression'. The hyperbolic tone of the film is extended as the 'suicide' of Heather Chandler perversely makes her, in death, more popular amongst the students, reinforcing the rigid high school caste system depicted, 'her beauty and bitchery, everything that made her, are reified forever' (ibid:165).

By deceiving Veronica, J.D. acts out the 'Trickery' function, where the 'villain uses persuasion [and] employs means of deception or coercion' (Propp, 1968: 30-31); and 'Villainy', where 'the villain demands or entices his victim [and] commits murder' (ibid: 33) — J.D. lures the two jocks to their deaths. In turn, Veronica's sphere of action in her role as victim involves 'Complicity: The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps [the villain].' Also, 'The hero agrees to all the villain's persuasions' (ibid: 30). However, Veronica's transformation is ambiguous as she continues to side with J.D. after the first murder and fantasises about killing one of the Heathers, but by the end she becomes the hero and defeats the villain, J.D.

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The parents and teachers in *Heathers,* like many adults discussed so far in this thesis, are cast in a negative light, incompetent and irresponsible, albeit portrayed more satirically than anything seen thus far. Shary (2005: 79-80) explains that, in the film, part of the problem of adolescent turmoil and their villainous acts may be down to the lack of adult role models in Heathers:

> Responsibility is placed on teachers and administrators who are sorely out of touch with their students, parents who are self-absorbed and as immature as their children, and the students themselves who succumb too easily to the pressures of acceptance.

This is another example of the estrangement explained in relation to *The Breakfast Club* and the growing emotional distance between teenagers and their parents which Palladino (1996) and others outlined. Interestingly, the similarities between J.D.'s father and J.D. is an exception, but not in any positive way. Their weird and corrupt relationship sustains the dark humorous approach of the film and offers an insight into the roots of J.D's villainy, characterised by an extreme form of adolescent 'storm and stress'. Scott Long (1990: 164) writes he has 'learned his destructiveness from his father, a mad bomber who has harnessed his explosive skills as a destroyer (and developer) of buildings...Destruction gives him [J.D.] energy: and this means murder.' 'Chaos is great', J.D. proclaims.

In the final act, J.D. plans the ultimate form of villainy as he plans to blow up the school and make it look like as a mass suicide, in what Long describes as the 'apocalypse of adolescence' (ibid: 165). To do this, he recruits and again uses the act of deception to coax one of the Heathers (Shannan Doherty) into getting students to sign a petition, which J.D. intends to use as a fake suicide note. But in the last scene, Veronica discovers his plot and wounds J.D., who then blows himself up. Propp's functions of 'Struggle...the hero and the villain join in direct combat' and 'Victory...The villain is defeated' (ibid: 51-53), are played out. Veronica, her face blackened, hair unkempt and her clothes torn to shreds from the effects of the explosion, demonstrates the function of 'Transfiguration...The hero is given a new appearance' (ibid. 62). This works symbolically as she is no longer the pretty and popular girl. She then goes and embraces Martha 'Dumptruck' and pledges her friendship, suggesting a more socially inclusive high school system without divisions

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and tensions between the different teen groups (Bulman, 2005). However, the ending is ambivalent as she approaches one of the Heathers and declares herself 'the new sheriff in town', which seems to be implying that a new chain of command is being initiated at the school, with Veronica in charge.

The result of these various acts of villainy in the film is that the theme of teenage suicide is foregrounded for the first time in the genre (and in this thesis). Although the audience knows they are faked (apart from Martha's attempted suicide), the characters in the film do not. It reflects what was happening in wider society at the time and resonates with other depictions of 'real life' adolescent turmoil, as already noted in this research in terms of sexuality, abortion and pregnancy. Donna Gaines (1990), quoted in Steinberg & Kinchelcoe (1998: 119), writes that, in the United States: 'By 1990, 400,000 young people were attempting suicide yearly.' However, the already problematic issue of linking these films with studies of adolescence becomes more challenging in the ironic and satirical Heathers, which Scott Long (1990: 164) refers to as 'comic nihilism'. Nonetheless, it is an example, for the first time in 1980s teen films, of how the genre represents youth suicide and death. Propp comments on this link between society and its relationship to a fictional narrative when he writes: 'Real life itself creates new, vivid images which supplement tale personages' (1968: 87).

In Tim Hunter's *River's Edge* (1986), the tale roles become blurred and ambivalent as teen malaise shifts from suicide to murder, but unlike *Heathers*, a serious and grim tone pervades the film without any hint of irony or humour. It is part of the delinquent teen subgenre and offers an opposing image of youth to the sex and romantic comedies and dramas. It is set in a town where dysfunctional, fragmented families grind out a daily existence, characterised by drug and physical abuse; they are considerably less well-off than their counterparts in the Hughes' films. There seems to be a lack of sunshine in the town and the dark, gloomy cinematography captures the foreboding and pessimistic mood. Based on a true story, the plot concerns the motiveless killing carried out by one of the teens, John (Daniel Roebuck), the incarnation of the Proppian 'villain who commits murder' (ibid: 33). He strangles his girlfriend and leaves her dead body by a river. Taking the sardonic Heathers out of the equation, the villainy in *River's Edge* is more extreme than anything discussed so far. John boasts to his friends about his crime and they go see the corpse. Their reaction is indifferent, apathetic, disinterested, and ultimately

as perplexing and disturbing as the crime itself — they do not immediately go to the police and keep it a secret for several days. The teens are constantly stoned and they seem to lack any real motivation, which initially makes it problematic to defining them in terms of Proppian tale roles — they appear to resist being categorised in this context, apart from the aforementioned villain. Furthermore, unlike other groups of teens in 1980s genre films, there appears to be no coherent hierarchy. Scott Long (1990: 162) argues that, in the film, adolescence becomes,

> irrelevant...which vanishes in vapid, imitative violence [and] monotonous uniformity. The pervasive emptiness of the movie is merely the 'sensitivity' and 'understanding' of Hughes' films pushed to the limit. River's Edge shows a world made repressively understandable, hence flat, unvaried, and void. It is a world where all boundaries are broken down.

Reaffirming a recurring and unifying theme in this thesis, Lewis (1992: 15) suggests that parents and adults are partly to blame for the teens' 'cold...misguided...inexplicable and inexcusable behaviour.' However, the parents in *River's Edge*, unlike those in the teen comedies, are not part of the success story of Reagan's America and represent the ones who struggle to achieve the American Dream. They are absent, drunk, violent and abusive. This relates to what McMahan (2009: 440) writes when discussing family and adolescent antisocial behaviour in society: 'The stress on parents who are struggling to get by tends to make them less effective and more coercive toward their children, which, in turn, may lead to aggressiveness in the children.' The teens in the film experience a more extreme form of 'storm and stress' than any others referred to so far in this research, with the exception, perhaps, of certain characters in the satirical *Heathers* and Bender in *The Breakfast Club,* although his problems are never seen. It is a factor which leads to teen 'anomie', which Robert K. Merton (1962), cited in Lewis (1992, 15-16), describes as 'a breakdown in the cultural structure...an acute disjunction [between] norms and goals [and the] capacities of members of a group to act in accord with them.' The failure of the nuclear family leads the teens in *River's Edge* to form their own group values and loyalty, which marks their ignorance and obliviousness to the crime. These are all reasons why the teens in the film do not quite embrace the Proppian roles; Long (1990: 162) points out that they are 'stripped of a coherent identity, they

are left with the scraps of the adult world.' They face a similar, but much more malign, struggle to the teens in *The Breakfast Club*, with their resistance to adult culture. Gavin Smith (1987: 70-71), echoing Long's comment above, goes on to claim that the teens in *River's Edge* depict a group who portray a

> more truthful, if still distorted image of freedom, liberated from Hollywood's glamour and middle-class optimism, a million miles from the Self Help and Self-Aggrandizement ethics of *The Breakfast Club* — a distillation of middle-class fantasy values formulated by Hollywood into a universal teendom where there is room for all and a future without Armageddon.

Eventually, a Proppian version of a hero emerges from this nihilism and breaks away from the group's silence about the crime. Matt, played by Keanu Reeves, the 'reluctant hero' (Lewis, 1992: 15), acts as the one moral voice of the film and goes to the police about John's crime, demonstrating Propp's function of carrying out a 'difficult task' (1968: 60). He does not come into conflict with the villain John; this is left to another character, Feck, played by Dennis Hopper, an adult who is part Proppian villain, part hero. Feck is an-ex biker, gun-toting sociopath who has also killed his girlfriend in the past and hides out in a shack, administering free dope to the teens. He kills John and the 'villain is punished' (ibid: 63). Feck represents the spirit of 1960s rebellion but this proves a dangerous mix for the teens in *River's Edge.* The high school teacher is similar to Feck: he is not a caricature like other teachers in the teen genre, but is cast as a left-wing radical who grew up in the 1960s, again part hero/part villain. After John has been identified as the killer but is still on the loose, the teacher berates the class for not taking extreme measures, saying that if they cared for their dead friend they would be hunting the killer down with guns. This is a more explicit example of what Lebeau (1995) and Speed (1995) were referring to previously in this research, concerning youth in the 1980s teen genre depicted as becoming less politically rebellious than previous generations. But where the rich teens in the sex comedies and Hughes' cinema express their rebellion by trashing their parents' houses, youths in *River's Edge*, as Gavin Smith notes (1987: 71), are part of the 'pre-apocalypse, post-hippy idealism where there's nothing much to do except get messed up.' Different representations of rebellion, but nevertheless another adolescent semantic feature which continues to coalesce the teen genre.

Another quasi-Proppian villain is Layne (Crispin Glover), the self-styled leader of the teen group, but this turns out to be his twisted fantasy. His 'hyper kinetic behaviour' (Lewis (1992: 18) and amphetamine-fuelled determination to protect John and his crime invokes Propp's functions of 'Trickery [and] Villainy...where the villain casts a spell [and] uses persuasion' (1968: 30-33). He attempts to sustain the unity and silence of the teen group by any means necessary, but his villainous exploits, unsurprisingly, end in failure and turn into a kind of dangerous satire. His villainy takes the form of adolescent peer pressure and is taken to a more insidious and malevolent level here than previous examples discussed. Layne acts out the role of the 'deviant peer...which becomes a powerful force during adolescence, [he] models antisocial activities and puts social pressure onto others to take part in them' (McMahan, 2009: 439). He is inspired by right-wing, media-induced scenes of militaristic action and references John Wayne and Chuck Norris movies. His teen mentality and 'bizarre set of values' (Lewis, 1992: 14) are exposed: 'It's like a fuckin' movie when a good friend gets in potentially big trouble. Now we have to deal with it. We've got to test our loyalty against all odds. It's kind of exciting. I feel like Chuck Norris', he says. A similarly detached and weird attitude, but far less menacing, is expressed by one of the female teens, Clarissa (Ione Skye). She appears confused yet unaffected by her friend's murder; she can only say that she 'cried for the guy in *Brian's Song'* (1971) — a popular TV movie. Part of the anomie of the teens in *River's Edge* is how their emotions are shaped by fantasy as opposed to reality, as Rapping (1988: 19) observes: 'Media characters are truly more real and compelling to these kids than their real adult models.'

The pseudo-Proppian tale roles represented in *River's Edge* are expressed early on in the film through the mise-en-scène: John takes Matt and Layne to see his girlfriend's body. It is Matt, the hero, who is framed in medium long shot, alone, in the background of the frame, 'his head down, his eyes...never meeting the gaze of the camera' (Lewis, 1992, 15). The villain, Layne, is viewed in medium close-up in the foreground, on the same plane as the other villain, John. His morbid excitement is expressed through his manic body language as he starts his villainous, yet doomed, sphere of action to cover up the crime and protect the killer.

The toxic combination of extreme right and left-wing ideologies in the film is finally renounced as a more conservative ending is played out, Matt informing the police to let the patriarchal forces of law and order take control in the final act. It is

also another example of Altman's concept of a generic blueprint when comparing the film to *Rebel* and *The Wild One*, which develops and evolves over time and was referred to in the introduction.

At the same time as John is being murdered by Fleck, Matt and Clarissa are having sex, two scenes illustrated by the use of parallel editing. Shary (2005b: 32) points out that this makes 'a certain link between sex and death, but more so juxtaposing the lack of emotion all of these characters feel toward two such extreme circumstances.' It turns into a kind of distorted Proppian tale, as the hero Matt's 'sphere of action' does not 'defeat the villain in open combat' (Propp, 1968: 53). This is left to Fleck, who turns from a villain to a kind of anti-hero as he kills Layne. The two scenes could relate to what Propp refers to when 'victory is encountered in a negative form' (ibid.). When one hero 'hides' [Matt], while the other is victorious [Fleck].' But in the last scene, Fleck has been arrested and confesses to killing his girlfriend, becoming the villain again.

Shary (2005b) claims *River's Edge* is symbolic in terms of youth representation, from the sex comedies through to the image of the dead girl's body. A generic link is created between the subgenres as the body 'is the final result of all the abuse inflicted upon prematurely sexualized young woman in the exploitative sex romps', discussed here in Chapter Two. Many teen males in the 1980s genre do not understand the consequences of their actions, and in *River's Edge* the female teen becomes the victim of the most deadly form of macho behaviour.

Despite its limitations, outlined at the beginning of this chapter, applying Propp's ideas to fit the stories of the 1980s teen genre has added another dimension to the characterisation and narrative potential of this thesis. It does so by offering an alternative method of defining the characters, their stories and wider implications by the 'roles' they play and the 'functions' which they act out. Propp's approach also continues the structuralist, oppositional investigation into the issues. Even a film like *River's Edge,* which initially resists any such definitions, ultimately comes to share some of Propp's roles and functions due to the classic narrative structure of the film.

It is important to reiterate that Propp's methods serve to underpin the analysis in relation to how the genre continues to become more of a unified whole and its representational values concerning teen culture, adolescence and how the films resonate with sociopolitical aspects of the period. In the next and final chapter, the interrogation into teen culture and its society will position the genre within the

context of its space and its generic sites, developing and evolving the argument by viewing the issues through another analytical lens.

Chapter Five

Teen Generic Sites and Their Spaces

This chapter will examine the 1980s teen film in the context of the symbolic nature of space and will argue that the generic sites do more than just operate in terms of their iconography and genre recognition. Henri Lefebvre's (1974) notion of 'social space', referred to in the introduction, will act as a foundational concept here. The sites under investigation are the ones most associated with the teen genre: the home, the bedroom, the high school and the shopping mall. The chapter will then analyses the symbolic space of the city, a less frequented space of the genre. A short inquiry into the space of the beach and car, will lead to an examination which will conclude the chapter, concerning another spaces which are traditional teen generic teen sites, that is, more dangerous spaces where the characters venture beyond the relative safety of the mall, high school and home, and which require some mode of transport, like in *Porky's* and *Losin' It*.

The research will explore how teens as individuals and in groups react and function within these spaces, which will develop the argument relating to teen culture and its wider implications already discussed in previous chapters. The approach will remain the same, in that the stories told in the films are the main focus, with the methodologies (in this case relating to space) underpinning them. Space, as Grant (2007: 11) contests, can become 'symbolically-charged' when viewed from a cinematic perspective. Extending this idea is Gibbs (2002: 16-17), who notes that space has the potential in cinema to become 'expressive' and when 'things happen' it becomes 'endowed with meaning beyond the literal.' To reiterate what was explained in the methodology section, as far as the structure of this chapter is concerned, the films will be organised around the different sites, not chronologically or by their subgeneric category. Using space in this context is another way of uniting the disparate parts of the genre, the bedroom, for example, serving as a backdrop to the adolescent concerns expressed in both the sex comedy, *Porky's,* and the romantic comedy, *Pretty in Pink*. Similar themes are examined here in relation to consumerism and the shopping mall in *Fast Times* (a sex comedy), and *Valley Girl* (a romantic comedy).

Theorising Space in the Teen Film

The significance of space in relation to the teen genre, or indeed other Hollywood genres, is an infrequent topic for analysis, as Richard Maltby explains (2003: 353):

> Spatial representation is rarely stressed in Hollywood, making it difficult to appreciate its significance...a richer understanding of a Hollywood movie can be offered by examining its visual discourse than by presuming that its meaning is located solely in plot and dialogue.

Moreover, Manny Farber (1998: 3) notes that 'space is the most dramatic stylistic entity...seldom discussed in film criticism.' Peter Wollen (1980: 25) points out that the relevance of space and place in classic Hollywood cinema has often been subordinate to the narrative, plot and dialogue: 'Places are functions of the narrative (actions must take place somewhere) yet the fascination of the films are often with the films themselves.' The actions relating to teen issues such as sexuality, relationships, identity and the different roles, discussed in the previous chapters, all take place in the spaces of the teen genre, and this chapter will interrogate how these actions, behaviour and character types link and intertwine with the spaces. In doing so, parallels can be drawn with the semantic/syntactic approach when positioning space and place as an active agent within the narrative. For example, one of the functions of the shopping mall in *Valley Girl* and *Fast Times* is the use of it as a narrative device to introduce the action.

Like Henry Lefebvre, the ideas of other scholars who do not refer to films and discuss the symbolic notion of space are relevant here. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 3) refers to the 'unexpected meanings' inherent in space and place, an issue which he stresses may 'raise questions we have not thought to ask.' Hetherington (1997), cited in Bain (2003: 211), notes that place is meaningful when it is instilled with 'memory, representations and relationships and the actions of valuing, naming and ordering [is] cross-cut by tensions, conflicts and contradictions as social groups assert their alternative readings of space.' For example, the dual-focus concerns of the adult-teen order and chaos dynamic are illustrated in the space of the parental home (discussed later in more detail). Similarly, Foucault (1986: 23) proposes, 'the anxiety of our era

has to do fundamentally with space.' This is demonstrated when conflict between the teens arises in the space of the high school in *The Breakfast Club* and, in a more violent form in the teen delinquent drama, *Class of 1984* (1982), where a youth gang terrorise fellow students and staff in a high school setting.

This chapter will draw on Bailey & Hay's (2002: 226) writings on the mall as a 'counterspace' to the school in teen films and will discuss the notion of these sites in oppositional terms, reinforcing the structuralist approach of this thesis. William Paul (2002a) goes on to propose that the mall space has a constructive effect on a teenager's identity in relation to work and the transition into adulthood. Conversely, Kowinski (1985) claims the mall has more of a negative impact and is a space which controls the teens and programmes them into engaging in shallow consumerism. Goss (1993) argues that the architecture of malls are designed to keep groups like teenagers under control and separated in terms of gender, which is evident in *Valley Girl* and *Fast Times*. He comments on the control that adult authority attempts to impose on teenagers' lives, one of the recurring themes of this research which merges the genre into a coherent whole.

Foucault's (1986) concept of 'heterotopia' or 'other space' continues to draw on structuralist ideas and the ambivalent use of space, and is relevant to the shopping mall. It elicits an alternative reading of these generic sites, 'a counter-site [which is] simultaneously mythic and real....the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs' (1986: 23-24). Foucault discusses space in terms of its oppositional forces of power, knowledge and surveillance, and its relationship to social situations and the restrictions and limitations which are created from this:

> These are oppositions we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. (ibid: 23)

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope' adds to the structuralist debate in relation to the shopping mall scenes in the teen film. It translates literally as 'time-space' and is a depiction of a precise time and place and the relationship between the two. Foucault and Lévi-Strauss share similar views to Bakhtin on this relationship,

but where Bakhtin differs is in his ahistorical agenda, where time and space are undividable,

> the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships...expresses the inseparability of space and time...in the [cinematic] artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indictors are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (Bakhtin, 1981: 84)

Montgomery (1993: 92), drawing on Bakhtin, argues that in teen films, the mall articulates not so much issues of genre and narrative but rather how the shopping mall setting itself influences the characters. This has broader connotations beyond the film: 'By continually referencing a 'real' dynamic social space, the mall setting functions as a chronotope. As a result, a commentary upon the [teen] subculture is developed across the decade.' This idea is reinforced by Ganser, et al (2006: 2) when writing on 'the road movie', whose ideas can be viewed in the context of the mall:

> The chronotope serves as a means of measuring how...real historical time and space as well as fictional time and space are articulated in relation to one another. [It] operates on two different levels: first, as the means by which the text represents history [1980s in this thesis] and second, as the relationship between images of time and space [the shopping mall] in the text, out of which any representation of history must be constructed. The chronotope of a particular text [the teen genre] thus functions as an ideological index [Reagan era, consumerism].

In other words, a film chronotope is a fictional space which the spectator will be able to register when viewing the visual information which makes up the content of the frame, in this case a shopping mall: food stores, retail outlets, shoppers' entertainment venues, bars, gyms, etc. Allied with placing this information within a precise time (chrono), i.e. the 1970s onwards, specific relations become visible and certain stories can 'take place', because the setting is familiar.

Montgomery (1993: 94) notes that 'films provide us for analysing in miniature the larger implications of consumerism as a shared activity...In what sense does it

begin to resemble a belief system?' This quasi-religious connotation is echoed by Fiske, who points out that consumerism is the new religion and 'shopping malls become cathedrals of consumption' (1989: 13). These analogies are discussed with reference to the films below. Moreover, Goss (1999: 45) discusses Foucault's notion of heterotopia and space (1986) and extends the consumerist metaphor as the mall becomes an 'other space' or 'counterspace':

> The contemporary shopping mall is an example of what Foucault calls 'heterotopias of compensation,' real and discrete 'counter sites' where multiple images of ideal times and places combine to create an illusion of a world outside of everyday life, [and] promises restoration in a utopian community of consumption.

Parallels can also be drawn between the concept of the chronotope and Lefebvre's writings on space. Soja (1996: 6) writes: 'As Lefebvre insistently argued, historically, sociality and spatiality are too important to be left only to such narrowed specializations.' In this thesis, historically being the 1980s; sociality meaning the teenage culture expressed in the films; and spatiality refers to the symbolic value of the mall, bedroom, school, home and the city. Additionally, Bakhtin's writing on the carnivalesque can also be applied to the parental home; for example, the out-of-control party scenes in *Risky Business*, *Pretty in Pink, Sixteen Candles* and *Weird Science* subvert and liberate the dominant ideology through chaos and humour, drawing on the oppositional debates surrounding parent/teenage culture. Again, Altman's (1999) notion of dual-focus texts can be applied to the estrangement between the teen and the adult communities, but on a broader scale, as opposed to the differences between individual characters in the genre.

These ideas surrounding the ambiguous use of space in the teen movie are extended to the opposing forces of public and private space. Bain (2003: 202), writing on gender and space in teen movies, draws a distinction between,

> places of retreat and places of interaction. The former refers to those more private places where teenagers can withdraw from the adult world, the latter to those more public places where teenagers can put themselves on display in order to be seen.

Teens in the 1980s genre 'withdraw' to the private space of the bedroom and 'display' themselves in public places like the mall and the beach.

When these ideas on space are allied to the oppositional debate, they are also challenged. Bain (ibid: 204) argues that, when the characters are either alone or interacting, space in teen films becomes ambivalent and boundaries are blurred. She writes about the bedroom in *Valley Girl* and *Pretty in Pink* in terms of 'retreat' and 'liminal' space, characters confronting their hopes, dreams and fears in a space that is 'simultaneously public/private, collective/individual, material/symbolic.' Where structuralism would attempt to identify and expose contradictions, the idea of 'liminal' space leaves some questions unanswered; it becomes problematic as the ambiguity makes it difficult to read the binaries in structuralist terms. Turner (1982), quoted in Goss (1986: 27), subscribes to this point of view, saying that liminal space is 'a state between social stations, a transitional moment in which established rules and norms are temporarily suspended.' The boundaries between the public and private are blurred when a liminal space is created. For instance, the bedroom scene discussed below in *Valley Girl*, is an example of how liminal space is created when related to the themes of peer pressure, conformity and the teenage clique.

The Shopping Mall

The shopping mall is a key generic site and will provide a rich source of meaning when discussing space and the 1980s teen movie. Montgomery (1993: 88) writes that the mall has 'provided social commentators with one of their most enduring metaphors for American society in the 1980s.' Emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the mall in America was designed to address a variety of social problems and one idea was for them to restore a certain kind of festival and marketplace atmosphere by uniting shopping with entertainment. In doing so, part of the aim was to boost the economic potential of troubled communities. By the mid-eighties, according to Kowlinski (1985), after the home, school and workplace, the mall was where Americans spent most of their time.

How does the shopping mall chronotope function beyond its literal representation, towards a more symbolic evaluation in terms of its relationship to issues of work, consumerism, adolescent sexuality and wider sociopolitical implications? Research has produced some ambivalent results as to how the mall

space affects the youth experience: from restriction and control to a sense of freedom, possibility and liberation, away from the more adult-controlled spaces like the home and the high school. It brings into sharp focus the issue of consumerism and its negative connotations — highlighted in the opening mall montages of *Fast Times* and *Valley Girl* — in relation to work, consumer behaviour, shopping and sex, creating an 'ideological index' of the 1980s.

Here, the mall represents a space in which teens are free from the discipline and control of the family home and the high school, but this freedom has its limits. These scenes mark a shift in terms of how the teens are represented in the genre in terms of them being seen in groups, as opposed to couples engaging in intimate relationships which was, at times, the focus in previous chapters. In *Fast Times*, the teen group offers an alternative take on consumerism. They are seen behaving like 'mallrats'[7], a pejorative term referring to young people who aimlessly hang out in shopping malls, generally causing mischief. The frame is dominated by rowdy teens whose behaviour suggests they need to be kept under control in this public space — two boys race past an elderly woman on an escalator, almost knocking her down it. Pressdee (1986), quoted in Fiske (1989: 16), describes a situation like this as a 'youth invasion' and says that the mall,

> belongs to them, they have possessed it. [It is not] based on consumerism...but rather around the possession of space, or to be more precise the possession of consumer space where their very presence challenges, offends and resists.

Their actions, as Fiske (1989: 16-17) suggests, become an 'oppositional cultural practice [where] the youths consumed images and space instead of commodities, a kind of sensuous consumption that did not create profits.' At the same time, in the money-obsessed 1980s, teen groups are portrayed as powerful consumers — a rapid montage in both films captures them spending money on clothes, pizzas, records, arcade games and movies. This wanton consumerism is viewed from a contradictory perspective by Kowinski (1985), quoted in Montgomery (1993: 88), who, in one

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[7] Kevin Smith's 1995 film, *Mallrats,* is concerned with youths who behave in this manner. Its tagline, 'They're not there to shop. They're not there to work. They're just there', presents an attitude that contrasts somewhat with the 1980s teen films under investigation here, all of which feature malls but also teenagers utilizing this space in more diverse ways.

respect, is captivated by what the shopping mall has to offer in terms of its retail outlets and other services:

> You can get anything from diamonds to yogurt in the Mall; you can attend college classes, register to vote, go to the library, see topless dancers and male strippers, give blood, bet, score, jog, and mediate, and get a room or a condo and live there.

The ambivalent nature of freedom that the mall space affords teens is evident in that its consumer delights and leisure activities are still, to a degree, under the supervision of adult control. The authority figures lurking in these scenes from *Fast Times* and *Valley Girl* — for example, the mall management, security guards, retail bosses in the outlets where the teens work — represent a type of surveillance, creating more of a liminal space. In *Fast Times*, the montage creates a 'controlling' effect in the mall space as various excitable male teens are seen in the video arcade, which creates a separate space for them, segregated from the adult world and, in turn, from their female counterparts who are seen shopping. This is an example of what Goss writes in relation to youth in this space; it is a 'deliberated tactic by the mall management, designed purposefully to keep them on the periphery' (1993: 26).

Montgomery (1993: 89) citing Kowinski (1985) offers an opposing view to the teen consumer paradise and refers to the bleak symbolism of the mall in Reagan's America, characterised by qualities of having a 'lulling effect...enclosed... protected...controlled by its own consumerist practices.' He signals out teenagers as a group who are vulnerable and are 'imprisoned' by the mall environment. They are 'programmed to consume, easily bored, and shallowly obsessed with clothing' (ibid.). He refers to the many products on sale that teens are pressured into buying, for example, the adult products targeted at teenage girls, such as the more provocative clothing items, are all ways in which consumerism affects teens and adds 'to the social pressure to look like an adult' (ibid.). Kowinski (1985: 351) makes reference to how psychologist David Elkin coined the phrase 'the hurried child' in response to the pressure of consumerism and its negative effects on youth, claiming that it forces them to grow up too soon.

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The female teens in *Valley Girl* are captured buying items of this nature in the 'shopping fantasy' mall scene which opens the film, but before this spatial analysis, a brief outline of the film and its themes will bring the issues into sharper focus. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the film is loosely based on *Romeo and Juliet* and, unlike the sex comedies of the same period, where 'the pursuit of sexual practice is the focus, [in *Valley Girl*] the attainment of love is more prominent' (Shary, 2002: 212). It is more of an intimate, realistic portrayal of adolescent love between two mismatched teenagers: Randy (Nicholas Cage), the rebellious punk from Hollywood, and Julie (Deborah Foreman), the girl from the Valley. The term 'Valley Girl' was first coined in the 1970s and it has a significant influence on the attitude of the film. It describes a stereotypical image of a teenage girl growing up in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles during this period and beyond; a variation on the popular girl/prom queen/Proppian princess discussed so far in this research. In this film, the Valley Girls and their interaction within different spaces of the genre will amplify these characteristics. Their roles are defined by their distinctive slang — 'awesome', 'totally', 'for sure' — and 'their almost cartoonish hyper-sexuality, love of shopping, obsession with personal appearance and concern with advancing their social status' (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008: 595). Timothy Shary describes the girls' lifestyle as one of 'excess consumption and vapidity' (2011: 567). The image of the stereotype here, as in *The Breakfast Club* and *Some Kind of Wonderful,* is challenged through the character of Julie, who is forced to confront those who conspire against her in her desire to form a romantic union with someone from a different teen culture.

Returning to the opening shopping scene in *Valley Girl*, montage editing is deployed and 'becomes an active and obvious source of 'meaning' in the assembled sequence' (Perkins, 1972: 21). The meaning here being the wider implications as the mall chronotope becomes more clearly defined. The girls demonstrate their love of shopping and preoccupation with their looks and status when trying on clothing items, each shot isolating different fashion accessories, labels, price tags, cash registers and their (parents') credit cards. These images are shot in close-up, amplifying the image of this teen group and their act of conspicuous consumption. Montgomery's (1993: 99-100) comments could also apply to any of the other popular girls discussed so far in this thesis as it,

introduces an obsession with clothing, the idea of 'accessorizing' to construct a complete image, and the guiltless, almost instinctive use of someone else's money, their parents' plastic. [It] links hedonistic spending to femininity and the basic need to preserve high school popularity.

The scene is a microcosm of the 1980s attitude to money, wealth and self-image, with even the song accompanying this sequence, 'They Got a Name for Girls Like Me', 'further suggesting a narcissistic spree' (ibid: 99). Young people and mall culture became synonymous with the phrase, 'shop till you drop', now part of the consumerist lexicon. The broader economic implications of this scene correspond with what Batchelor & Stoddart (2007: 25-26) write about the white middle-and upper-class youth of the 1980s, like those discussed in this research, as the "Me Generation', mainly because of their social and economic advantages...they represented a central ethic of this generation — you are what you wear, so long as you are seen with members of the right crowd.'

In economic terms, the films are portraying a powerful group of consumers. Pamela Klaffka (2003: 38) explains that, by the end of the 20th century, there were '32.6 million teens roaming the malls of the United States, spending in excess of $155 million annually...the most consumer-oriented generation ever to walk the earth.' Jon Goss (1993: 19), echoing Fiske (1989), notes that the mall works 'as a system of signification that gives symbolic expression to the [youth] cultural values of consumer capitalism.' Similarly, Shary (2005: 54) responds by saying teens in the Reagan era were 'lulled into expressing their politics through consumption' within the space of the mall, and this scene in *Valley Girl* is an example of this. Contrast this with previous youth cultures, as referred to in Chapter Two, when teens expressing their politics was countercultural, through protest in the 1960s to satire in the 1970s.

These negative representations of the shopping mall space are reinforced by Goss (1993: 23), who notes that some malls in America betray the original concept of what they were intended for — a 'marketplace atmosphere.' The mall was 'built on a large scale [and] its harsh exterior...refused any compromise with the rustic aesthetic.' Echoing this is George H. Lewis (2004: 122), who comments on the mall's physical appearance, 'behind the colourful neon store logos and displays, is anonymous, uniform, predictable and plain'. In *Fast Times*, the 'harsh exterior' is illustrated in the opening establishing shot as the mall entrance dominates the screen

— a large glass and steel triangular structure flanked by two concrete exteriors. It is shot at night and despite the following images of teens laughing, fooling around and generally having a good time, this initial darkness foreshadows some of the more downbeat moments in the film, like Stacy's sexual experiences.

Furthermore, the theme of the 'hurried child' can be linked to the teen drama *For Keeps*, starring Molly Ringwald as a young mother 'hurried' into parenthood too soon and not emotionally equipped to handle her situation. It also describes the girls who rush into sex in *Fast Times, The Last American Virgin* and *Little Darlings*, and who suffer the consequences of abortion and emotional distress. Peer pressure from Linda in *Fast Times* 'hurries' the underage Stacy into sex when she says to her while they work in the pizza restaurant in the mall: 'What are you waiting for? You're fifteen years old. I did it when I was thirteen.' As explained in Chapter Two, Linda is probably lying about her sexual experiences, and in doing exposes contradictions about teenage sexuality, a further example of how 1980s teen movies addressed the problems associated with the coming-of-age process.

The mall space as a chronotope is extended by Montgomery (1993) as he discusses the links between consumerism, work and relationships in the opening of *Fast Times*, which in this thesis develops the concerns discussed in Chapter Two in terms of sexual relations, notably between Stacy and Ron, and later, Stacy and Mark. For example, 'They exploit ambiguities between the shopping mall and high school environments and position teens in jobs and roles that directly influence their social and sexual activities elsewhere' (1993: 95). A critique of consumerism, work and the ongoing debate about sex, gender roles and divisions is established in the opening scene of the film. A 'commodification of sex, and throughout the film, the Ridgemont High students continue to pursue financial goals' (ibid: 96). The montage creates a dual-focus, male-female binary opposition in terms of job status and the 'controlling' effect the mall space has on the teen workers, which contrasts against the more positive view of teens discussed below. Montgomery notes: 'Working in the shopping mall...programmes the male characters to think themselves in a position of power over females' (ibid: 98). This is shown when the fast-food worker Brad is introduced walking confidently, greeting people. In addition, the ticket scalper Mike attempts to look like a businessman and adjusts his collar accordingly, framed in a glass elevator. Both are shot in medium close-up, emphasising their supposed significance — an example of what Bain (2003) was referring to at the beginning of this chapter

concerning how public spaces present opportunities for teenagers to put themselves on 'display'. Males are seen on the move, roaming the atrium, cruising for business and recognition. Conversely, in the opening montage, the females are seen in groups, as consumers, in shops or working in the pizza restaurant — all comparatively passive. This links back to Woods (2003b) notion of the 'ideal' male and female. But the girls also want to put themselves on display and are less concerned with their jobs in the pizza restaurant and more interested in being seen, the mall space offering them a chance to flirt with the male customers.

Job status in *Fast Times* appears to afford the males in the film an opportunity for sex and romance. Ron, the older and supposedly more mature 'audio consultant' who works in a nearby store, begins his quest to seduce Stacy: 'How about a meatball sandwich, a medium coke, and your phone number?' Later, Mike encourages Mark to ask Stacy out for a date: 'Look at her...look at you, member of the honour roll. Assistant to the assistant to the assistant manager of the movie theatre. I'm tellin' ya...if this girl can't smell your qualifications, then who needs her?' In a similar vein, Brad's mid-level position at the burger joint gives him the impression that his girlfriend and co-worker, a cashier, will not leave him. Another connection to previous themes emerges as the gender divide, in terms of work as a conceptual imprint expressed in the mall chronotope, echoes the gift/stigma opposition to sex. Montgomery (1993: 98) asserts that, in the film, 'the mall chronotope begins to manufacture flat character models for females and dynamic ones for males.' However, Lévi-Strauss' (1968) structuralist concerns, where the purposes of a myth is to expose cultural contradictions through its oppositional structures, become apparent later on in the film: in *Fast Times*, the dominant image of masculine sexual prowess is brought into question when Mike and Ron, once outside of the mall space, are exposed as inadequate lovers in their attempts to have sex with Stacy. Brad is later dumped by his girlfriend.

William Paul (1994a) offers an alternative and more optimistic perspective of the teens working in the mall and does not refer to the gender divide, thus viewing adolescence as more inclusive. In *Fast Times*, the characters are seen working in various part-time jobs, which Paul claims is a positive aspect of the coming-of-age process in terms of the transition into adulthood, unlike the sexual awakening experiences outlined in earlier chapters. Linda and Stacey work in a pizza restaurant and as previously stated, Brad in a hamburger joint. Mark works as a theatre usher.

Mike is a freelance ticket scalper, an illegal practice making the mall a 'site of both official and illicit commerce.' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 226). Their work,

> carries a great deal of meaning. [Their jobs represent] an entry into the adult world through the independence and responsibility they signify...*Fast Times* establishes a real contrast between the school and the mall...a real opposition as a way of defining the dimensions of their lives. (Paul, 1994a: 200-202)

The mall becomes a specific teen space in *Fast Times* as it represents a site where teens can be viewed in positions of legitimate (and illegitimate) authority through their employment status. This would not generally be the case in other spaces like the home or high school.

Paul rejects the definitions of the mall as 'bleak' and 'harsh' and all the negative ramifications with respect to consumerism and the 'lulling' effect it has on the teens. The mall 'is cut off from the world at large [and] emerges in the film [*Fast Times*] as a kind of fantasy world for teenagers, the place where they can most fully define themselves' (ibid.). This echoes Bailey and Hay's (2002: 218-219) discussion of the mall as a space where the 'social identity of youth finds articulation...a critical element in the depiction of the teenage experience.' It acts as a conduit between late adolescence and adulthood, 'in the development of an identity and the preparation for participation in the adult world of working, shopping and sex' (ibid: 226). Similarly, Lewis points out that teens can 'congregate and develop their own contacts and develop their social networks' (1990: 154). Moreover, while on the one hand, Kowinski (1985: 61) views the mall in a negative way, on the other, he claims the teens can use the space for their own purposes:

> When you have a space that you have separated from the outside world, and the ability to create your own world inside, governed by your own rules, what you have is the ability to make magic. You've got yourself a house of fantasy.

The ambiguity of the mall in this context transforms it into what Olendburg & Brissett (1980), cited in Anthony (1985: 311), describes as a 'third place...It provides democratic friendship; a sense of belonging...spontaneity...surprise...emotional

expression...a chance to gain perspective on private idiosyncrasies.' Evidence of this occurs in the opening scene of *Valley Girl*, when the teen girls are seen socializing together, just after their shopping spree. The lead character Julie complains about her jock boyfriend, the 'highly visible but lecherous Tommy' (Shary, 2011; 567) who, as she points out in Valley Girl slang, 'has got the vibe but his brains are bad news.' He shares many of the narcissistic qualities with other unpleasant jocks mentioned so far, such as Hardy in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Steff in *Pretty in Pink* and the jocks in *Revenge of the Nerds*. The girls sit in a café and the background mall space is blurred, temporally relegating its relevance; they are viewed in sharp focus and in close-up as personal issues regarding relationships and romance are the dominant theme. Here, the scene comments on the recurring adolescent semantic features of peer pressure and the teenage clique, a 'small, tightly knit group of friends [who] are the same age and sex, in the same school class, and from similar economic and ethnic backgrounds' (McMahan, 2009: 200). Julie's friends insist she stay with Tommy, 'who is such a hunk', and in doing so the issue of conformity within the adolescent peer group is expressed, much like the examples in *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Pretty in Pink*. This plays a key role in the emotional development of the teenager and the syntactic development of the narrative, which begins within the space of the mall. Brown, et al (1986: 521) explain further:

> Conformity to peers is often considered one of the hallmarks of adolescent behaviour [and] the adolescents need for affiliation with a group of peers is manifested by group norms, and that the group itself is strengthened when members exert conformity pressures on each other.

Pressure to conform is what creates the tension in the narrative, as in the next mall scene Julie bumps into Tommy; they briefly argue and their relationship comes to an abrupt end. Tommy's arrogant reaction to the breakup further comments on the image-obsessed, narcissistic attitude of the 1980s; he thinks Julie must be 'totally freaking out [as] none of the other Valley dudes can touch me.' The camera frames him in tight close-up, putting him on 'display' and accentuating his blonde, perfectly groomed hair and his upturned collar on his shirt. At this stage, the alpha male Tommy is displaying all the characteristics of 'relational aggression', similar to those

discussed in relation to Cinder in *Little Darlings* and Andy in *The Breakfast Club*.[8] He is 'popular' [within his own group], athletic, smart, cooperative, and outgoing', but 'aggressive' to others like Julie, her friends and, later, Randy, which makes him 'disliked' (McMahan 2009: 193-194). Julie's growing affection for Randy, who represents someone from a different cultural group, threatens the solidity of the teen clique as 'dating the wrong person...can result in teasing, ridicule and the threat of expulsion' (ibid: 202) — a similar situation to *Reckless*, discussed in the previous chapter in terms of the Proppian hero and princess. This is illustrated as the theme of peer pressure is intensified in a different space — the bedroom (see below) — when Julie is challenged by her friends over her relationship with Randy.

It could be argued that the spaces in these films adhere to what Ken Fox (2001: 413-414) writes about in terms of its narrative potential, which resonates with Wollen's (1980) comments on the importance of places having narrative functions. It becomes an '*authenticator of the narrative*' (author's italics), a framing device that introduces and concludes the action. Furthermore, in *Valley Girl,* the heavily coded accents and Valley speak help 'to authenticate the actions and attitudes of the characters' (ibid.). Fox writes about space that has a 'metonymic function' (ibid), a metonymy being a figure of speech in the form of a concept. In both *Fast Times* and *Valley Girl*, the shopping mall works to produce the metonymic term/figure of speech: 'mall culture'. Similarly, the San Fernando Valley creates the Valley culture and Valley Girls. These spaces are filled with human activity, networks and relationships, teenagers working, on display and in gender groups. The coded use of these spaces and places 'metonymically and ideologically locates central characters, their beliefs and values and attitudes' (ibid).

Consequently, in narrative terms, the opening mall scenes of *Fast Times* and *Valley Girl* introduce the characters, set up the story and offer various dramatic insights for events to follow. Moreover, the analysis reveals a deeper cultural and sociopolitical understanding as the space of the mall is a conduit for representing both negative and positive issues relating to adolescence and modern consumerism, work and oppositional themes concerning gender identity. The space also acts as a conduit for expressing the themes of peer pressure within the teenage clique, which

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[8] Tommy does not go through a transformation in any way, unlike Emilio Estevez's character in *The Breakfast Club* who, as already discussed, experiences redemption when his stereotypical characteristics are gradually deconstructed. Tommy remains a stereotypical jock.

will come under closer scrutiny in the next section on the teen bedroom — a space that at times is more private and intimate, with adolescent identity depicted as more acute and personal.

The Teen Bedroom

The bedroom is another key space that has symbolic meaning within the teen genre. It is, at times, the most private of spaces for teens and their emotional impulses in terms of sexual exploration, individual reflection and introspection. It also acts as a space for teen congregation, like in *Valley Girl*, a site for female expression and peer pressure. William Odem, et al (u.p. no date) note that,

> most teens feel the sense of place attachment to their bedrooms. Here they live with their things, make sense of their lives, and work to understand the complex changes and challenges of growing up. The bedroom provides moments for solitude and reflection, a social space to engage parents and peers, and a canvas to experiment with an evolving sense of self.

In the teen films, it is a significant and important space, a place of retreat, interaction and, ultimately, a liminal space (Bain, 2003). It goes beyond its literal and denotative meaning and transforms into a space which comments on the coming-of-age process and modern consumerism or as Reid puts it, a space of 'leisure and consumption...and an important tool in the maturation process' (2012: 419). It forms part of a larger narrative discourse with regards to youth consumerism in post-war capitalist America, as 'youthful demands for freedom played themselves out within the home through various acts of consumption' (ibid: 425). In the 1980s, most American teens had at least one item of audio equipment, whether it was a record player, cassette recorder or Walkman. The bedroom was no longer a space to which parents sent their kids if they misbehaved; it was 'transformed into a powerful entertainment centre/communications hub', with the new technology creating a space with a 'unique social dimension [where] teens could entertain their peers away from the prying eyes of parents' (ibid: 427). For example, the 'computers and giant stereo system' (Freeman, 2015: 166) in Ferris Bueller's bedroom are used to facilitate his misbehaviour and transgressions as he lies to his parents and evades the school headmaster.

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Autonomy was literally illustrated by teens decorating their rooms. It encouraged young people to create 'a bold expression of self' which celebrated an independent spirit. It gave teenagers the 'power to define and revise one's image through decor' (Salinger, 1995: u.p.). It forged a separate identity from their friends, siblings and parents. The bedroom became a 'privileged space that was considered part of the home in a structural sense, yet divorced from it in an emotional one' (Reid, 2012: 429). Consequently, this space becomes a tool within the structuralist context of the teenage-parent relationship, echoing *The Breakfast Club* where the door in the library separates the teens from the teacher in a literal and metaphorical sense:

> The autonomous teen bedroom [works by] spatializing the liberation process, creating walls, both literally and figuratively, that teens could use to separate themselves from their mothers and, to a lesser extent, their fathers. (ibid: 432)

During the 1960s and 1970s, the privacy of the teen bedroom served as a space which became a by-product of the so-called sexual revolution. Youth culture and sex became intertwined during the free love period of the 1960s and onwards; the presence of erotica became a common visual feature, in particular in relation to gender and sexuality. Examples of this are portrayed in *Porky's* and *Losin' It* and will be discussed shortly:

> The teen bedroom was seen by some as a sacrosanct space in which various forms of teen sexuality could find expression ... as a sexual lab of sorts, a relatively safe place where forbidden and culturally sanctioned sex acts could find expression. (ibid: 437-438)

In the 1980s teen films, the bedroom is a place of escape, from the pressures of school and family life and a site to 'cultivate a personal identity through various acts of consumption' (ibid: 438). The bedroom afforded teenagers a sense of control over their lives, unlike other spaces within the family home or the high school where parental/adult surveillance was more palpable. Sian Lincoln writes about the modern teenager and bedroom culture and points out that they 'can extent control over what level of the public can filter into their bedroom space' (2004: 96). Lincoln also refers

to the teen bedroom as having 'zones'; it is 'material rather than abstract', and gives teenagers the choice and freedom to make their own decisions, unlike the school. Objects like furniture, posters, memorabilia, in fact any item or cultural artefact belonging to the bedroom space; technical objects like the phone, TV or record player; all of which give the space extra meaning by becoming a 'mediated and fluid construction, enhanced through [these] technologies [making it] a fluid and dynamic cultural domain' (ibid: 97). Unique to the bedroom as a teenage space is its individuality, which sets it apart from the homogeneous space of the mall. The teen bedroom has 'subcultural spaces which are rigidly defined through 'style' and 'membership' (ibid.). The notion of zones in the teen bedroom is the very fact which makes them unique — no two bedrooms are the same, each one exclusive to the individual owner.[9]

As a feminine space, the bedroom was a dominant feature of the teen film. The scenes focused on here will illustrate how the space creates meaning and comments on issues relating to adolescence and its broader societal issues. It,

> has been given the task of socialising contemporary adolescents, acting as an incubator for teen identity and development while also serving as one of the most important sites of teen consumption (Read, 2012: 430).

Also of significance in this debate is McRobbie and Garber's analysis of female teen cultures, which attempts to readdress the gender imbalance in the context of bedroom culture. They discuss female groups and spaces being marginalised and invisible within a broader youth subculture and absent in academic literature at the time of writing their article in 1976. The authors refer to the prominence of male groups — Teddy Boys, Mods and Rockers, Motor Bike Gangs — and that for groups of teenage girls to gather and 'hang out' in the street would have been inappropriate and 'frowned upon'. 'Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings. [This absence] is quite striking and demands explanation' (2006: 177). They focus on the bedroom as a specifically teenage space, free from the dangers of the male-dominated outside spaces like the street corner, where girls could be subjected to sexual intimidation and bullying. Girls could create a

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[9] For an example of the individuality of the teen bedroom, see Adrian Salinger's *In My Room: Teenagers in Their Bedroom* (1995).

subcultural space of their own, which centred on the pursuit of beauty and discussing potential or existing romantic attachments, listening to music and dancing:

> There was room for a good deal of the new teenage consumer culture *within* the 'culture of the bedroom' — experimenting with make-up, listening to records, reading the mags, sizing up the boyfriends, chatting, jiving. (ibid: 181)

This is illustrated in the two bedroom scenes in *Valley Girl*. In the first one, Julie and her friend Stacy (Heidi Holicker) are preparing to go to a party and they use the privacy of the teen site to discuss candid issues relating to boys and sex. The space also 'serves to re-inscribe divisions of gender and taste' (Caterforis, 2003: 102), which serves as an opposition to the male culture in the film and is conveyed by diegetic music in the scene, 'Love My Way', by The Psychedelic Furs:

> Julie is associated with a commercial, dance-orientated (and supposedly 'artificial') style of synthesizer pop, while Randy is linked with the masculine authenticity of guitar rock and bar bands. [This] accentuates the cultural distance between [Randy] and the suburban valley teenagers (ibid.).

Randy, from the city, listens to hard rock punk, which is 'more synonymous with a male-defined sexuality' (ibid.), and the division of 'taste' and 'gender' are established between the two teens and their different cultures. Similarly, the feminised space of Julie's bedroom is represented by an abundance of pink, a colour which clashes sharply with the dark masculinised hues of the places Randy inhabits, like the nightclub in the city. The music in this scene also sets the 'emotional tone of bedroom culture' and is important in 'merging both the public and private spheres' (Lincoln, 2004: 100).

In the second bedroom scene in *Valley Girl*, teen sexual desire is expressed by Julie and her friends in her room as it becomes an interactive space, free from parental surveillance. In the scene, Julie and her friends are listening to music, dancing, trying on makeup, discussing the men in their lives. In syntactic terms, it is a key moment in Julie's relationship with those around her and further demonstrates how female teen cultural expression manifests in the bedroom. Alison L. Bain explains:

> The adolescent girl bedroom is particularly well illustrated in *Valley Girl*. [The females] eat junk food, practice dance moves, peruse magazines, paint their nails, apply make-up and do each other's hair. (2003: 204)

The scene resonates with McRobbie & Garber's research when they discuss teenage girls establishing a subcultural identity which creates 'alternative strategies to that of the boys' subcultures' and becomes a 'significant' and 'distinctive culture of their own' (2006: 186). It is an argument that moves the teen girls away from the more generally passive roles which defined them in previous chapters. The privacy of the bedroom is the ideal space for the girls in the film to express themselves away from the ridicule and judgmental gaze of their male counterparts. It can be seen as a 'kind of defensive retreat away from the possibility of being sexually labelled' (ibid: 187). McRobbie & Garber go on to mention the 'teenybopper' culture which this scene reflects. It is a culture in which the focus is on the girl/pop idol relationship and involves the buying of pop records, record players, posters, magazines — all acts of consumption and all clearly evident in Julie's bedroom. Furthermore, it enables the girls to partake in a 'variety of negotiative processes' (ibid: 186). All that is needed is a bedroom and a record player and there are 'no exclusion rules or qualifications on entry' (ibid.) McRobbie & Garber write that teenybopper culture can indulge in 'quasi-sexual rituals', demonstrated in this scene by the girls candidly discussing the sexual potential of the various males in their lives. Frith, quoted in Brake (1980: 143), notes that,

> Girl culture becomes a culture of the bedroom, the place where girls meet, listen to music and teach each other make-up skills, practise their dancing, compare sexual notes, criticise each other's clothes and gossip.

Boys, on the other hand, in the sex quest films are interested in seeking sex and indulging in vulgar humour in more public spaces. Conversely, as Lesley Speed (1995: 24) notes, girls in the more romantic subgenre of a teen film like *Valley Girl*,

> retreat from the male domain of sexual experimentation in quest of romance, dancing, teen idols, new fashions and accommodating boyfriends. Girl culture presents pleasure as the utopian source of social transformation.

Part of this transformation adopts the form of the girls dancing in this scene. It is not part of the narrative drive of the film and acts as an interlude of feminine pleasure and individuality, quite separate from how female desire is defined in the context of their relationship to males. McRobbie (1984: 134) argues that dance is associated with a utopian fantasy for girls and signifies 'a displaced, shared and nebulous eroticism rather than a straightforwardly romantic, heavily heterosexual 'goal orientated' drive.' The use of space here enables the female teen to break free from the more passive roles which have been discussed in relation to the 'ideal' female or Proppian Princess. Lesley Speed (1995: 27) points out that the dancing in this scene 'is associated with good memories which are essential to justify enduring the obstacles of...strained relationship with friends.' In other words, this act of pleasure works to temporarily disavow the romantic conflicts and narrative closure of the film as the focus of the scene shifts.

However, the tone of the scene changes and the dialogue between Julie and her friends begins to show signs of strain as Randy becomes the topic of conversation. The teen bedroom is now a space where a more complex set of emotions relating to peer pressure and conformity are dramatised, as the boundaries of the teenage clique are challenged. Julie's friends begin to disparage Randy's outsider status by referring to the place in which he hangs out as the 'zoo'; they say to Julie if she goes out with him 'she'll never be able to go to any parties...and can kiss class rep goodbye.' Julie attempts to defend Randy and lambasts the jock, Tommy. Here, peer pressure intensifies as her friends from this point on 'threaten to disown her...and systematically convince her to return to Tommy, to preserve the clique's wealthy image' (Shary, 2011: 568). This starts to create tension as Julie begins to oppose the values and codes to which she is expected to conform within the Valley Girl culture. Her isolation is conveyed through her being alone in the frame, compared to the others all grouped together and dominating the mise-en-scène as they attempt to dictate Julie's relationship choices. She is framed from a high angle as her friends look down, making her look small and defenceless as they continue to insult her. The space of the bedroom becomes oppressive and claustrophobic as Julie looks at herself in the mirror, experiencing an identity crisis as her friends chastise her. The scene relates to adolescent identity formation with regards to what Douvan and Adelson (1966), quoted in Kinney (1993: 22), view as a stage where teenagers

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investigate different social roles and consider the different options about their present and future. Julie has to decide whether to conform to the Valley Girl lifestyle or to break free and enter a different cultural world to which Randy belongs. Part of this process involves seeking her friends' approval, which she is unable to attain. Teenagers attempt to 'crystallize an identity, and for this, [they need] others of [their] generation to act as models, mirrors, helpers, testers, foils' (ibid.). This involves day-to-day interaction with their peers, an important part of this identity development when 'a symbolic communication' is formed (ibid.). Julie's concern over the opinions of her friends about her relationship with Randy is a 'mechanism of identity formation'. It shows how 'humans think about themselves from the viewpoint of others' (ibid: 22). Her friends' rejection of Randy and his lifestyle creates anxiety and tension, which becomes the central conflict of the narrative.

Like other teen female characters mentioned thus far, Julie faces similar dilemmas to, for example, Claire in *The Breakfast Club* and Amanda in *Some Kind of Wonderful:* the need to conform to a rigid set of rules which define the stereotype of the popular girl/prom queen/Valley Girl. Barbara Hudson (1984: 37) claims that this type of behaviour is not borne out of 'sulkiness or youthful paranoia', but stems from the fact 'that teenage girls are confronted by conflicting sets of expectations.' Julie's dilemma stems from choosing someone who represents a kind of 'Other' to her friends and her position within the Valley Girl culture. Similarly, in *The Breakfast Club*, Claire's parents use her as a pawn in their unhappy marriage and her need to conform to uphold the clique's image and her attraction to the delinquent Bender.

Erikson's (1968: 132-133) research is also relevant to this bedroom scene. Like McMahan (2009), he discusses adolescent cliques and peer pressure and comments on how 'destructive' teenagers can be when confronted with difference, someone like Randy or Bender who challenges or threatens the values and stability of the group. He says that young people can seek 'clarification' about their existence and 'become remarkably clannish, intolerant, and cruel in their exclusion of others who are 'different' in...cultural background...tastes...dress...gesture.' He points out how cliques like the one represented in *Valley Girl* go to great lengths to establish togetherness and preserve their identity. However, at the same time, Julie is being released from the phoniness and snobbery of the Valley Girl culture which she is part of, as 'she is realizing their immaturity and confronting her own isolation as she navigates her passage through various stages of self-empowerment' (Lane, 2000: 81).

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On the one hand, the bedroom in *Valley Girl* becomes interactive and public; on the other, it is a place of retreat, as Julie is alone and has to decide where her future lies — making it more of a liminal space.

Valley Girl also offers an infrequent moment in the 1980s teen genre of a male and female teen alone in a bedroom. One example has already been discussed in reference to *Fast Times*, where Stacy's attempt to seduce the virgin Mark end in him getting nervous and leaving the scene. This was awkward and embarrassing, but in *Valley Girl* a more serious tone is conveyed as the space becomes more threatening. In one of the early scenes at a party, Tommy, having just been dumped by Julie, attempts to seduce her semi-naked friend Loryn (Elizabeth Daily) when they are alone together in a bedroom. When she asks him if they are now 'going together', he reacts vindictively, rejects her and abruptly leaves the room. She is left alone and the camera briefly lingers in close-up on her distressed face. Here, space becomes oppressive as Loryn struggles to cope with the cruelty inflicted on her, and her half-naked body 'becomes an indictment of Tommy's manipulation' (Citron, 1988: 60). Moreover, Loryn's body is framed in a way as to challenge the traditional male point of view. The film's director, Martha Coolidge, offers an examination of aggressive masculine sexual behaviour while endorsing female subjectivity, and in doing so "the spectator is encouraged to identify with female characters'. At the same time, the scene 'incorporates female perspectives into generic frameworks that were not traditionally thought to be feminine' (Speed, u.p., 2002).

In John Hughes' *Sixteen Candle*s, the teen bedroom is depicted as more of a private and less volatile space than in *Valley Girl* when the protagonist, Sam Baker (Molly Ringwald), is alone. She is viewed just after she gets up in the morning, it is her 16th birthday and her parents have forgotten as they are preoccupied with her older sister's wedding which is the next day. Sam's bedroom shares physical characteristics with the bedroom in *Valley Girl*, teen consumption is evident within the mise-en-scène: posters of pop bands and teen idols, a record player, telephone, all aspects indicative of modern teenage identity and consumerism. Here, as Lincoln writes (2004: 102), the teen bedroom becomes 'personalized' as a 'process of biography is inscribed on this space [consisting of] a haven of memorabilia which represents their role in social life worlds', existing beyond the bedroom, making it a liminal space. However, it is very much a space of retreat, 'personalized and intimate' (ibid: 94), and is more about the individual than the group, like in *Valley Girl*. Sam is

looking at herself in the mirror and is unhappy that she is not maturing physically or mentally; she appears to be experiencing torment over her adolescent sexual and intellectual development. As she turns 16, she is expecting a physical transformation that has not occurred and she says: 'Chronologically, I'm 16 today; physically, I'm still 15.' Sam is experiencing what J. A. Hadfield (1962: 180-188) calls the 'transition phase' in adolescence, where teenagers become 'moody' and 'introspective', another variation on Hall's (1904) 'storm and stress' phase of mood disruptions during adolescence. Hadfield also refers to how some adolescents during this period go through what he refers to as the 'gawky age', which is how Sam is being represented in this space, where the female teen at the age of 15-16 'feels self-conscious of her breast development.' What is also exposed during this scene is that Sam does not fit easily into any particular teen stereotype. As Lisa Borders points out (2007: 25-26): 'The film establishes Samantha as an every girl who exists in a kind of a social limbo, neither one of the cool kids nor a dork, neither beautiful nor unattractive.' She is framed in close-up, accentuating her 'flaming mop-top [and] punk flapper fashion appearance' (Lee, 2010: 43).

Ann De Vaney (2002: 207-208) uses the bedroom space as an example to critique the Hughes' films. She claims that Sam and other girls in his films (and, by extension, those in *Valley Girl*) are not three dimensional enough and have no nuanced characteristics,

> to negotiate their gendered positions...Hughes's young women are conventional models...They inhabit frilly bedrooms strewn with dressing tables and ample mirrors but no desks or computers as the boys' bedrooms have.

Hughes' female teens, De Vaney asserts, are 'anti-intellectual' and marginalised, 'thinking and talking about male-female relations.' Sam 'is a stock romantic stereotype who always gets her man' (ibid.), although De Vaney does note that Andie, in *Pretty in Pink*, is an exception who is not just concerned with romance; she is also seen to be interested in education.

Indeed, the opening scene in *Pretty in Pink* uses the bedroom space differently compared to *Sixteen Candles* and *Valley Girl*. Here, Andie is shot in extreme close-up, applying make-up and getting dressed. Her full visage is not revealed until she walks out of the room and appears more confident. She is not

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portrayed as isolated or vulnerable, like Julie or Sam. She has more responsibility in domestic terms than her peers: she lives with just her jobless father, makes his meals and encourages him to look for work.

Research into the male bedroom in the 1980s teen film has been overlooked, so an investigation here will serve as an oppositional space to the female bedroom. Where Sam in *Sixteen Candles* was portrayed as confused and vulnerable about her body and sexual development, in the opening scene of *Losin' It,* one of the protagonists, Dave (Jackie Earle Haley), is depicted as celebrating his supposed sexual prowess and confidence. He looks in the mirror, flexes his muscles and puts a sock in his underwear to emphasis the size of his manhood. Although this is done for comedic effect, it highlights the gender division and, once again, refers back to the gift/stigma oppositions in Chapter Two. Hudson (1984: 37) discusses male sexuality and its oppositional image, which is relevant to this bedroom scene where the male is 'objective, independent, competitive, adventurous, self-confident and ambitious.' The contradictions in the cultural myth of male sexuality arise again and are discussed in more detail shortly: in *Losin' It* and *Porky's,* when the males are taken out of the 'safe' space of the privacy of the bedroom and the high school and into other spaces, their masculinity is challenged and threatened.

De Vaney (2002: 206-207) goes on to discuss more oppositional structures in relation to girls in the teen films of John Hughes, who are subjected to 'gender biased values that have been, and continue to be, sanctioned by Hollywood...Even under surveillance [like in the bedroom] boys are offered more subject positions than...girls', like the above scene in *Losin' It* and the opening scene of *Porky's* where Pee Wee is measuring his penis. These examples reflect what Reid (2012: 437) writes as a site of retreat in terms of the teen male and sex: 'The relative privacy of the teen bedroom offered adolescents from all backgrounds the opportunity to experiment with their sexuality, relatively free from interference by siblings and parents.' There is no evidence in the teen films of the 1980s of individual females engaging in sexual activity on their own. McRobbie & Garber claim that 'girls have no access to the masturbatory rituals common amongst boys' (2006: 187).

The bedroom male space in *All the Right Moves* offers a different perspective on male sexuality compared to *Losin' It* and *Porky's.* The opening scene, where Cruise's Steff awakes in his bedroom, is shot using montage editing to juxtapose the muscled torso of him doing press ups, with his father and brother returning home

from their nightshifts at the local steel mill. This, as Ruth O'Donnell notes, highlights 'their [father, brother] exploited corporeality contrasted with [Cruise's] exhibitionist masculinity' (2012: 51). His exhibitionism is not playful like the opening scene in *Losin' It*, and points less to the pursuit of sex and the exuberance of youth, and more to the themes of the film — education, sport and the pursuit of the American Dream. Visible within the mise-en-scène of the bedroom are shelves filled with textbooks, essential to Steff's development in the film. This also validates De Vaney's above comment on the lack of any educational props within the girl's bedroom.

The bedroom space can operate outside of its traditional domestic domain and be viewed as a symbolic space. It comments on issues of teenage sexuality and development; of forging a personal identity; a group space which provokes difficult feelings and subjects individuals to peer pressure, gender issues and the differing roles the bedroom plays for male and female teens alike. It is also a site that facilitates the youth consumer boom of the post-war years.

The Parental Home

Shifting the focus away from the bedroom but keeping within the same environment, the parental home is another key teen generic site. In Hughes' *Sixteen Candles*, Jake Ryan (Michael Schoeffling), the object of Sam's affections, holds an out-of-control party while his parents are away. However, the party is more than just a teen generic ritual and goes beyond its literal interpretation. Campbell & Keane (1997) write that, when parents are present, the home is a place of discipline and order and its spatial symbolic function in an adult-teen opposition context represents the dominance and control of patriarchy. The home, to youth in this perspective, is a 'constant reminder of their subordinate position...It represents responsibility, order, stability and predictability, the very things that youth is supposed to find itself opposing' (1997: 220). In *Risky Business*, Joel's father says to him: 'My house, my rules'. This can be analysed in the context of Foucault's concept of panopticism, where one socially dominant group (adults, parents) exert control and power over another (teens). Foucault was discussing panopticism with regards to prisons, but as Campbell & Keane note (1997: 223): 'Such social control can be extended beyond the prison to all social institutions.' In the family home in the teen movie, when parents are present they exert control and discipline over their children; when they are away

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the children resist this set of forces, experiencing freedom and liberation and 'seek their own space for expression and definition [in order] to find ways beyond these panoptic forces' (ibid.). Foucault stresses the panoptic forces are always watching their subjects, often clandestinely. In this case, a more benign form of surveillance keeps an eye on the teens, and it is 'the captivated viewer who cheers them on' (De Vaney, 2002: 207). Consequently, Bailey & Hay (2002: 219) discuss the ambivalent nature of the home as a liminal space for teens in the genre, 'one in which the individual is both materially and emotionally dependent on parents, but resentful of the restrictions that accompany such dependence.'

As already outlined, the trashing of the family home and property are semantic features of the teen genre. Bleach (2010: 35) writes that the 'destruction of upper-class privilege...and the Reagan culture of consumption is epitomised in what happens to the Ryan's house during and after the party.' Jake's parents are super-rich and the mise-en-scène reflects their economic status, and the objects of consumption in it are clearly visible and point to the materialism of the Reagan era. The house is equipped with,

> a stereo with turntable and tape player; a kitchen with food processors and huge refrigerator; an exercise bike and set of weights; a well-stocked wine cellar; a piano and central air conditioning...three-car garage with a Rolls Royce [and] Jake's red Porsche. (ibid.)

The trashing of many of these objects during the party is done in high spirits and, as Nadel (1997: 152) points out: 'The limitless resources of the house allow Jake to let it be trashed when he is left alone.' Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998: 122-123) expand on this as they discuss rich privileged teens and how they (usually males) abuse this sense of freedom by wrecking the family home during a party; 'male privilege consistently exhibits itself in a lack of regard for property.' Like the other rich male teens, Ferris Bueller and Joel in *Risky Business,* Jake suffers no consequences for his actions. The film does not question or debate the value of money or the indifference of the characters; rather, it attempts to 'problematize conspicuous consumption [by asserting that the] destruction of property leads to empowerment. Wealth is easy to attain, and easy to regain...if you are white, male and middle-upper class' (ibid: 123). Landes (2001: 5) sees the rebellious nature of these teens trashing the family home

as problematic, in that 'they often destroy the very items that they also desire. There seems to be a simultaneous attraction to material goods and a rejection of the methods used to acquire them.'

Both Jake's and other family homes in the Hughes' teen movies develop the cinematic chronotope. Here, the homes of the American wealthy are placed within a specific time and place which Nadel defines as, 'Reagan's America, which is...fundamentally, safe, suburban and white' (1997: 142). Cinematically, Hughes' mise-en-scène conveys the chronotope by the use of an establishing long shot to frame the site of this recurring motif in all its splendour: 'This domestic site is the common denominator connecting [Hughes'] films' (ibid: 146).

Apathy and indifference to wealth is also demonstrated in a more malign way by another rich kid in Hughes' *Pretty in Pink*, the sleazy and snobbish Steff, played by James Spader. He throws an out-of-control party in his parents' mansion while they are away. He tries to convince his equally rich friend, Blane, not to start a relationship with the poor Andie, who Steff offensively refers to as 'low grade' and a 'mutant'. Like Cinder in *Little Darlings* and Hardy in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, here is a teen using relational aggression to create a sense of superiority: 'Young people of both genders use rumours, hurtful jokes, insults [to achieve] their own social standing.' Pellegrini & Long (2002); Savin-Williams (1979), quoted in McMahan, (2009: 1194). It is also another example of how adolescent characteristics unify teen subgenres in terms of generic repetition despite their differences: *Little Darlings* is a sex comedy, the other two romantic comedies. When Blane charges Steff with only being concerned with money and status, he responds by referring to the trashed space of the family home: 'Would I treat my parents' house like this if money was any kind of issue?' Nadel states that, 'For Hughes, indifference to money is the luxury of the same class that sees it as definitive' (1997: 153). Steff's attitude is comparable to that of Donald Regan, Secretary of the Treasury and then Chief of Staff in the Reagan administration. He made// his fortune on Wall Street before entering politics and was known to have bragged to Reagan that he had a 'fuck you' attitude, meaning he had enough money and freedom to be able to quit his job at any time (De Mott, 1990). Ironically, Steff is seen throughout wearing a bright white suit, a colour which usually symbolises purity and innocence, but here it connotes something more vindictive and threatening and also isolates him within the crowded space of the school and his parents' house. The depiction of rich characters such as Steff conveys

the immoral side of the 1980s. With this example of class snobbery and condescension, maybe the likes of *Pretty in Pink, The Breakfast Club* and *Lucas* support De Mott's (1990: 12) assertion that, contrary to popular belief, 'America as a classless society is...a deceit [which] causes fearful moral and social damage.' Andie offers a view from the opposing spectrum of the social divide when she conveys a fetishistic attitude towards one of the big houses as she drives past and says instinctively: 'I wonder what it's like inside. I bet the people who live there don't think it's half as nice as I do.' This, as Nadel suggests, implies the 'rich...do not share adequately in Hughes' fetishizing of wealth' (ibid.)

Steff's parents are not seen within the space of the family home, so there is never a sense of discipline or parental guidance. Similarly, Blane's parents are absent throughout the film and he says to Andie that he is part of a 'corporate family' who will 'arrange' a marriage for him. Conversely, Andie's working class father, played by Harry Dean Stanton, is very much a sympathetic presence throughout. He is an ever-present figure within their home and, despite being unemployed and nursing a broken heart due his wife leaving him, he is portrayed as a caring and understanding father unlike many of the images of adults and parents within the 1980s cycle of teen movies. Home as a place in this context, is an important space in the nurturing and well-being of Andie's character and developing her relationship with the outside world. Creswell's (2004: 24) humanistic approach is relevant here as he references Gaston Bachelard's book, *The Poetics of Space* (1994):

> The house/home is a primal space that acts as a first world or universe that then frames our understandings of all the spaces outside. The home is an intimate space where experience is particularly intense.

Andie's father's advice on her relationship with Blane is pivotal to the syntactic development of the story. The same can be said for the patriarchal influence at work in *Valley Girl* and *Sixteen Candle*s: Julie's father (Fredrick Forrest) in the former and Sam's (Paul Dooley) in the latter; both offering similar advice within the safe confines of the family home, which has an effect on the outcome of the experiences of the female characters in the outside world. Similarly, in John Hughes' *Some Kind of Wonderful,* the father (played by John Ashton) is seen as caring if overbearing within the parental home as he tries to persuade his artistically-natured son that a business

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studies college education is the best way forward. However, in *Pretty in Pink*, the contentment of the home becomes a problematical issue for Andie when, after leaving Steff's party at his mansion, Blane drives her back but she is too embarrassed for him to see her house: 'I don't want you to take me home... I don't want you to see where I live.' This raises the issue of how space in the film becomes symbolic in expressing the problems encountered by Blane and Andie concerning the class divide. Geoffrey Baker (2006: u.p.) notes that the only way, during the 'conflict' stage of the narrative, for their relationship to prosper is for it to take place in a 'neutral space [which] is the only locale for inter-class romance.' They experience uncomfortable feelings when they are seen together in several different sites within the film: at the aforementioned party at the wealthy Steff's house; at a night club which is populated by less well-off people. They are rejected by both of the groups. Their first kiss is not 'on Andie's porch or in Blane's BMW, but on the street, between the two zones' (ibid.). Similarly, within the space of the school, both feel uncomfortable in each other's presence. It is only at the prom in the final scene (discussed below) when all the uncomfortable feelings are removed and their romance blossoms unconfined.

The space of the parental home becomes symbolic in *Risky Business* and three scenes in particular illustrate this. They do more than blur the boundaries between public and private, retreat and interaction — an extreme version of 'liminal' space is created. Early on in the film, in terms of the hierarchical sense of order and discipline, all furniture and household objects are symmetrically positioned and balanced. Janet Maslin describes Joel's parents as 'crude caricatures' (1983: u.p.) and they are seen leaving Joel strict instructions regarding the home before embarking on a weekend break. A long tracking shot frames this scene through the house and beyond. Joel is not seen throughout this sequence; he is out of shot and the action is viewed only through his point of view. He is obscured, restricted and inhibited while his parents are visible throughout the scene.

Left alone in the house, Joel starts to transform from a mild-mannered and frustrated virginal teenager to a rebellious, hormonally-charged and sexually liberated one. Drinking his father's whiskey, and playing forbidden rock 'n' roll on the stereo (a 1980s household object associated with consumerism and wealth) lead Bernstein and Pratt to note: 'Here, the barriers enacted by the parents to bar access to domestic technology become the initial motivations for practices of liberation'

(1985: 35). Joel dances around the house in his underwear, his sexual presence dominates the space and contrasts sharply from the previous one where he was invisible and remote. The space of the parental home temporarily provides freedom from adult panoptic control, propelling him into a world of teenage sexual awakening.

In the film's final act, when Joel turns his home into a brothel, the out-of-control party takes place. It represents the endangering of the family home and an assault on the physical and domestic space — it has become a site of hedonism, social and sexual freedom, released from the oppression and control of adult discipline (Bailey & Hay, 2002). Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque are relevant to the three scenes as they subvert and liberate the dominant structuralist model within the parent/teenage culture through chaos and humour: 'Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions' (Bakhtin, 1984: 10). Campbell and Keane echo this without mentioning Bakhtin when writing about the scene in *Rebel Without a Cause,* when the three main teen characters play-act in an abandoned mansion, 'a space once ordained by adult authority.' Like in *Risky Business,* 'it temporarily carnivalises the adult control and parodies the dominance of the family, [and] for comic-ironic effect, the consumerism and narrow-mindedness of the suburban restraint of the family' (1997: 219). This is an example of how the space and its social characteristics creates similarities between two different teen subgenres from different eras — *Rebel*, a 1950s delinquent drama, and *Risky Business*, a 1980s sex comedy. However, Bakhtin states the carnivalesque is 'temporary' and this proves to be the case in *Risky Business* (and *Rebel*). Joel earns the money from the brothel to repair his father's car and when his parents return, the 'well-ordered community' which Schatz (1981: 30) describes is restored and a classic narrative closure is realised.

In Francis Ford Coppola's teen delinquent drama, *The Outsiders,* the family home is depicted as a space absent of parental guidance and control. Three poor brothers — Darry (Patrick Swayze), Sodapop (Rob Lowe) and Pony (C. Thomas Howell) — eke out an existence after the death of their mother and father. The eldest brother (Swayze) is the parent figure to his two younger siblings, a responsibility not experienced by any of the teens in the Hughes' films or other romantic comedies. There are no mischievous parties or trashing of property and no expensive items in

the house. The opposing forces of order and chaos do not exist in this home. Campbell and Keane's (1997: 227) writing about youth resonates with the film, 'a 'family' of boys...is a mythic, surrogate community fulfilling one of the central fantasies of youth...to exist in a space beyond the adult world.' But the reality is that the youths occupy more violent spaces as they battle with another gang from the richer side of town called The Socs.

In a similar vein, in *River's Edge*, Matt's (Keanu Reeves) single mother, an ex-Flower Child from the sixties, is practically a non-existent parent figure. Her countercultural and anti-authoritarian past clashes with her ability to operate as a mother/role model. She struggles on her own as 'head' of a troublesome, dysfunctional family, failing to enforce any discipline within the family home. She has to hide her dope from her kids. Her partner, who lives there, is abusive and threatening and the home in this instance becomes a space of chaos and volatility. While the houses in the middle-/upper-class comedies convey an ambivalent view of home and family life, the delinquent teen film 'points to a troubled domestic sphere as the origin of a kind of adolescent moral crisis...presenting the home as emotionally and morally empty' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 220). *River's Edge* relates to what McMahan (2009: 440) discusses concerning 'single parents [who] become so discouraged by the constant battles that they give up trying to monitor or control their deviant teens.'

The High School

The American high school in the 1980s teen genre is a microcosm of wider society in terms of groups and their different economic and cultural status. The irony is that, generally, in the teen genre, little learning and education takes place; rather, the school becomes an 'an ambiguous space within the genre...a site...of unofficial knowledge' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 222). For Bulman (2005: 85-86), it is primarily a 'social space within which the drama of teen angst is played out, it is not academic achievement that is important, but the achievement of one's independent identity.' As already noted, teachers are not normally portrayed as role models or educators but more as comic figures or antagonists (*The Breakfast Club*, *Fast Times* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*). This 'angst' and 'unofficial knowledge' are often reflected in terms of binary oppositions and played out within the iconography of the high school:

classroom, locker rooms, shower blocks, canteen and the sports field. In a classroom scene in *Pretty in Pink,* social status and the oppressive high school hierarchy are evident. Andie is being taunted by the platinum blonde rich girl, Benny (Kate Vernon), who, like other popular characters in the genre, is displaying adolescent relational aggression — she is the girlfriend of Steff and equally obnoxious. She asks Andie if she got her clothes from the 'five-and-dime store'. Colour symbolism is relevant here as Benny, like Steff, is deceptively wearing a white outfit, and Andie is associated with more muted, pink-like colours (hence the film's title), which connotes a more sensitive and romantic persona. As the film's title suggests, her bedroom and the clothes she wears (which she recycles and makes herself) are pastel shades. Most notable in this colour palette is a faded pink, an extension of her eccentricity, individuality and one which helps separate her from the conformism of the popular crowd.

Further examples of 'unofficial' knowledge in the space of the high school space come in the form of vulgar humour in *Fast Times* (referenced in Chapter Two) in the Ridgemont High canteen, when Linda teaches Stacy about sex with the aid of a carrot. A more romantic demonstration occurs in *Pretty in Pink* when Blane and Andie flirt with each other in the space of the library. In *The Breakfast Club*, there are no classroom scenes as the detention takes place in the school library, a space which serves not as its intended purpose of punishment and detention but more 'as a kind of informal psychotherapy, [where the protagonists] exchange confessional narratives, recognise a common humanity and find love' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 222-223).

Extending the semantic/syntactic feature of rich kids taking things for granted in the teen genre, education and academic study are no different. For example, *Ferris Bueller* is successful in avoiding the class room, his teachers 'deliver their lectures with such a monotonous drone that it takes all the life out of their subjects' (Bulman, 2005: 98). As the below section on the city outlines, Ferris plays truant and experiences freedom and liberation in this space. The teacher in *Fast Times,* Mr Hand (Ray Walton), is mocked and disrespected by his students. It is a rarity that teachers in 1980s high school comedy teen films are successful in implementing any authority and when they attempt to, like *Porky's* Miss Balbricker or *The Breakfast Club's* Vernon, they fail and end up being humiliated. Returning to the issues of the teachers in *Private School* monitoring the students' behaviour at the school dance,

they are later seen getting drunk and having casual sexual liaisons, exposing more contradictions within the teen film when viewing it as contemporary myth.

Conversely, when education and schooling is represented in the blue-collar communities of teen dramas like *All the Right Moves* and *Vision Quest*, the protagonists are seen to take their studies seriously. Steff in the former and Louden in the latter are not teens from the wealthy, privileged backgrounds of Ferris or Joel (in the comedies), who transgress and generally misbehave without consequence. For teens in the blue-collar dramas, to progress and succeed in Reagan's America, hard work and respect for the value of money and authority are paramount. The educational space is depicted as more literal and teachers are not caricatured like they are in the teen sex and romantic comedies; they are more three-dimensional, if flawed, characters, and their presence is instrumental to the hero's syntactic quest. The sports field in *All the Right Moves* and the gym in *Vision Quest* are school spaces where the protagonists are seen to be bettering themselves. To touch on the teen delinquent drama, *Stand and Deliver* (1988), set in a gang-infested inner city Hispanic community, a teacher (Edward James Olmas) inspires his 'at risk' students to pass their exams. The emphasis of these films is very much on the benefits of education.

Analysing the school space and teen hierarchy, in *Pretty in Pink* and *Heathers,* where the characters sit and eat their lunch in the canteen specifies which group they belong to. In the former, Andie and her outsider friends are seen eating outside of the building. In the latter, The Heathers are always dominant within the frame in the cafeteria. A group of nerds are briefly seen at the beginning of *Heathers* and then never seen again, and other groupings of students low down the school hierarchy are generally seen in the distance and on the edges of the frame. These examples depict the school as 'a kind of sociological microcosm of a wider society...a space in which power dynamics evident in larger social formations — which usually involve bullying, snobbery, humiliation...are played out on a modest scale' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 222).

The prom takes place in the space of the high school and is featured in several of the films under discussion. It also serves a narrative function in that it is often the event and space in which the final act plays out. In *Pretty in Pink,* the romantic union of Andie and Blane takes place here, despite the many obstacles they have to overcome. Blane appears to have succumbed to peer pressure and is ignoring Andie.

However, he confronts Steff at the prom when he realises he wants to be with her and says: 'You couldn't buy her, she thinks you're shit and deep down you know she's right.' As Jon Lewis (1992: 139) notes: 'The issue of class that so dominated the rest of the film is rendered moot at the turn of such a phrase.' Therefore, the boundaries and contradictions between the oppositional structures have become blurred as love has transcended the class barriers and, in a generic and narrative context, the resolution adheres to the conventions of romantic comedy: 'The social class obstructions to the (re)union of the desired and desirable couple are overcome...as a new order is established' (ibid.). Furthermore, Lewis (ibid.) quotes Jim Leach (1977), who equates romantic comedies like *Pretty in Pink* with a broader ideology of the American ideal, 'the mystical presence of the loser-outsider and *her* victory over a corrupt and corrupting society [the cruel high school hierarchy], engages a restoration and realization of...a classless and egalitarian society', much like the case in *Little Darlings*.

The space of the prom is where Andie and many other American teens experience their coming-of-age, their rite of passage or 'moment of truth' (ibid.). As Amy L. Best (2000: 18-19) explains, the prom is a significant event in shaping an identity and an opportunity for teens to transform themselves; 'it is important cultural rites of passage [and their] images provide a basis through which 'adolescence' is culturally defined, interpreted, and made meaningful as a socially organised experience.' Best refers to *Pretty in Pink* as an example that works to 'erase class...differences among youth' (ibid: 24). But, significantly, she points out that the this film and other 1980s teen movies promote a narrow-minded representation of America's youth within the space of the prom that is white, middle class and heterosexual: 'They reproduce prevailing cultural notions that adolescence is ahistorical and universal' (ibid.).

The prom, like the mall in *Fast Times*, serves as a space where romance happens. It is a site where various desires and behavioural patterns within the psychology of a teenager come into focus. McMahan explains that the three main ones are: 'attachment, romantic passion and sexual gratification ... Adolescence is the first time that all three of these systems are fully active' (2009: 403). Andie's encounter with Blane at the end of *Pretty in Pink*, when they embrace and kiss, reflects the 'attachment' and 'romantic passion' process of adolescence. There is not much evidence of 'sexual gratification' experienced by the teens, as already alluded to

in the sex comedies, except for Joel in *Risky Business* when he and Lana make love on a night-time train as it hurtles through a cityscape, shot in slow motion and to music to emphasise the eroticism.

While the union of Andie and Blane is viewed in positive terms by Jon Lewis (see his comments above), Shary (2011: 273), Baker (2006), Freeman (2015) and De Vaney (2002) argue that the ending of *Pretty in Pink* is more problematic in terms of the high school hierarchy. Shary views it as a 'distorted reconciliation' (2011: 273) which sees the wealthy Blane first listen to his friends and reject Andie because of her role as the poor girl. When he tells her they were wrong about this, she forgives him. The wealthy protagonist does not have to discard his status; he merely has to condemn his way of life and the arrogance of his friends and corporate mentality of his parents, while the blue-collar character forgets about the snobbery she has endured because their love surpasses class lines. Shary (ibid.) quotes David Denby (1986) in relation to the film's ambiguous ending and suggests it comments on a broader discourse in America: 'Is it telling us that the rich always hate and fear the poor — or that in the Reagan period there's a new mean-spiritedness among the moneyed suburban kids?' While the film on one level is a critique of the vulgar attitude to wealth in the 1980s, Shary claims it also highlights money and status as the ideal aphrodisiac for females who appear more compatible with males from the same class who are more genuine. In *Pretty in Pink,* Andie rejects the culturally different and less well-off outsider, Duckie (Jon Cryer), in favour of the traditional 'ideal' male, Blane. '*Pretty in Pink* preserves a treacherous mythology that young woman want men with money [in order] to achieve that financial-romantic goal' (ibid: 273). Hadley Freeman (2015: 157) echoes this when she notes that, in the teen movies, 'unfortunately...the way a teenager [like Andie] could truly move up out of their socioeconomic group was if they dated someone [like Blane] wealthier than them. Cinderella-style.' De Vaney (2002: 204) writes that, in Hughes' romantic comedies, characters like Jake,

> do have a capacity to change in an appealing way, although the changes are formulaic...the popular rich boy realizes the superficiality of his class behaviour and 'falls for' the heroine, socially a step below him.

Carolyn Anderson (1990) writes about *Pretty in Pink* and other Hughes' high school-set films, *Sixteen Candles* and *The Breakfast Club*, and points out the significance of space in this context: 'Like many in the genre, these three were all set in public high schools, a perfect site for interrogating the American social ideal of a classless society' (1990: 148). Within the conflict stage of the narrative in these films the antagonisms relating to social and economic status between the characters are foregrounded, and in the final act within the space of the high school these conflicts are resolved. Anderson cites Benjamin DeMott, whose 1990 book, *The Imperial Middle Class: Why Can't Americans Think Straight About Class,* is a strong critique on Americans' attitude to this subject. DeMott uses the teen genre to reinforce his claims and discusses the aforementioned films to explain that the class barriers, which are initially prominent, become irrelevant as a resolution is achieved. According to De Mott, the adolescent experience in this context becomes,

> evanescent and meaningless...The message is unvarying: the surface of things may look structured, and some members of the society may talk themselves into believing that escape from fixed levels is impossible, but actually where we place ourselves is up to us. (ibid)

The City

The city is a less frequented space in the 1980s teen genre, but several of the films feature the protagonists spending time in this generic site, which again produces some ambiguous interpretations. They are: *Risky Business; Valley Girl; Ferris Bueller's Day Off; Class* (1983); *Times Square* (1980)*; Fame* (1980)*; Foxes* (1980) and *Adventures in Babysitting* (1987). The lack of exposure is matched by the dearth of scholarly research as far as the city and 1980s teen genre is concerned, although Bailey and Hay's article, 'Cinema and the Premise of Youth: Teen Film and Their Sites in the 1980s and 1990s', brought this subject into closer focus.

The American city and cinema have been inextricably linked since the end of the nineteenth century, both thematically and stylistically, as Mark Shiel explains: 'Formally, the cinema has had a striking and distinctive ability to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity, and social dynamism of the city through mise en scène, location filming, lightening, cinematography, and editing' (2001: 1). In the scenes examined below, these stylistic features are evident and convey the symbolism

of the city and its relationship to the characters. Baudrillard (1988) cited in David B. Clarke (1997: 1) points out: 'The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies...To grasp its secret...you should began with the screen and move outwards towards the city.' Clarke refers to this 'as a conceptualization of the cityscape as *screenspace'* [author's italics] *(*ibid.).

This section will address this lack of research and develop the notion of how teens react and interact within the cinematic space of the American city. All the examples here are shot on location, adding a sense of realism to the mise-en-scène. Baily and Hay note that the city in the 1980s teen film,

> serves as a kind of radical other [and] cannot easily be placed within the normal grid of teen cinema. [It] offers a contrast to the social order epitomised by the world of the bourgeois home, the cliquish school and the sanitised shopping mall. (2002: 227)

Although it must be highlighted that a couple of the films listed above – *Fame* and *Foxes* – are exclusively set in the city and the characters also live there, which means the 'otherness' may not be so apparent. Where in the other films, the teens are suburbanites who are lured to the city to experience something different from their everyday lives. This corresponds to what Geoffrey Nowell-Smith discusses when 'films whose representation of the city plays heavily on authenticity or where the decision to shoot on location, radically alters the character of the films' (2001: 103). This is particularly relevant to *Risky Business* and *Adventures in Babysitting*, as when in suburbia they fall under the film comedy subgenre, characterised by bright, well-defined colour cinematography, which highlights the mansions and high schools where the wealthy teens live and hang out. When in the city, the dark, neon-lit streets convey something different, nourish, hostile and foreboding as oppositional structures are at work within the films' visual landscapes. But of course, the comic tone remains despite the different locations, which again creates a sense of generic unity. Also, as Nowell-Smith continues, the city becomes more than just a visual backdrop to the action, the space 'possesses an inability to be subordinated to the demands of the narrative. The city becomes a protagonist, but unlike the human characters, is not a fictional one' (ibid: 104). This is highlighted when the suburban

teens in *Adventures in Babysitting* ask one of the city characters for help, he says: 'This is the city. I don't help anyone but myself'.

The city is portrayed (to an extent like the teen bedroom) as a space free from adult surveillance in terms of teachers and parents, unshackled from panoptic forces. Whereas freedom and liberation is both tempered and temporary in the school, the home and the mall, the city offers up a space where anything can happen unchecked. Soja's (1996:6) does not mention cinema but his analysis is relevant here when he describes the city as a 'thirdplace...radically open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge.' Foucault's notion of heterotopia or 'other space' is where the city acts as a 'real space that exists within the real world but is somehow separated from the wider society' (1986: 94). Andrew Webber (2007: 1) writes on film and the city in structuralist terms, which are pertinent to the scenes under investigation here. The city acts

> as the dominant organising structure of modern culture [and] has become a key place of interest focusing on issues such as control and disorder, mapping and disorientation, transportation and fixation, memory and oblivion, inclusion and exclusion.

Valley Girl depicts a romantic view of the city. The early stages of Julie and Randy's relationship is developed through using the cityscape as a metaphor for their relationship, when viewed in oppositional terms. As already noted, Julie's environment, the Valley, is depicted in the film as spurious and conceited: a white-collar milieu with a culture of cliques and conformity. The city is depicted as a world of punk rock and rebellion, typified by the passionate Randy who represents the antithesis of the mall culture with all its phoney characteristics. The scene which illustrates this is when they drive down Sunset Boulevard at night and enter into a world which, for Julie, is a 'slice of forbidden fruit' (Bernstein, 1997: 106). It creates contradictory feelings within her as she struggles to come to terms with her affection for Randy and the cultural differences between them, and the new environment of the city. The use of music during the scene is important; a rock and new wave soundtrack plays out, which associates Randy with the city. This contrasts with the 'techno rock' (his description) that Julie and her friends listen to in the bedroom. The clash of taste in music styles works simultaneously throughout the film; it serves the

themes of gender and cultural differences and is aligned to the key dramatic points of the narrative, like the aforementioned scene in the teen bedroom. Cateforis explains (2003: 101-102):

> The disjunction between these two lead characters is underscored in the film by the use of the music score. Julie is associated with a commercial, dance-oriented (and supposedly 'artificial') style of synthesizer pop, while Randy is linked with the masculine 'authenticity' of guitar rock and bar bands.

This binary dislocation continues as they end up in a club and discuss the differences between the city and the Valley lifestyle. Randy tells Julie that she and the other Valley Girls are 'programmed', which echoes the mall culture and its 'controlling' influence on teens. Randy goes on to say that his life in the city makes him 'free' and it is 'the real world', while Julie says life in the Valley is 'normal'. The cinematography also highlights the disparity between the two worlds: the city at night is shot in a red glow and distinctive neon lights to symbolise danger, passion and excitement, whereas the space of the Valley and the mall are lit in more pallid tones, conveying a less frenetic tone. Bailey & Hay observe (2002: 227) that the city 'is far livelier than the boring, homogeneous vision of the valley earlier in the film.' The binaries of 'inclusion and exclusion' which Webber (2007) discusses above are relevant when Julie experiences life in the city, as she has to decide whether to embrace this different culture or reject it and go back to her friends. However, one montage scene has an effect of achieving a romantic harmony between Randy and Julie: they are viewed spending time together over several days in both the Valley and the city. Their happy, contented faces and body language are framed in close-up and in sharp focus; the background space of the two different milieus are out of focus, temporarily relegating their existence and, in turn, the opposing forces which threaten their union.

When the action in *Risky Business* (re)enters the city of Chicago (the aforementioned love scene on the train plays out over the opening credits and foregrounds what is to come), the film becomes more like a film noir, a rare departure for the 1980s genre, and the space becomes a site of both liberation and danger for Joel. His relationship with Lana, who is a kind of femme fatale, brings him into conflict with her pimp, Guido (Joe Pantoliano), who represents the 'urban

criminal class' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 228) — a character type new to this thesis. The city in *Risky Business* is where Joel experiences sexual liberation and provides a space properly free from panoptic adult forces, as opposed to the 'temporary liberation' (as Bakhtin puts it) of the party scene, after which order will be restored when Joel's parents return. In the city, liberation is permanent for Joel. When he and Lana have sex on a train, it is not treated as a stigma like in the other sex comedies; it is more erotic and stylised, not passionless, embarrassing or awkward, where sex occurs in unpleasant spaces like the 'The Point' in *Fast Times* or the more clichéd space of the back of a car, like in *The Last American Virgin*. It is 'the film's most memorable visual, in which [they] make love on an elevated train, an event presented in a luminous slow-motion sequence...the city becomes the site of Joel's sexual awakening and his first real steps away from the comforts and limits of his suburban life' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 228). The city to Julie in *Valley Girl,* represents a 'more forbidden and mysterious (and even frightening) space to the suburbanite' (ibid.). Where Julie's experience in the space of the city acts as a conduit for a more realistic portrayal of teenage relationships, Joel's is more like a stylised teen fantasy. The representation of the city in these two films highlights the semantic/syntactic hybridity of the genre by expressing the differences: one is concerned with sex, the other with romance, but both are forms of adolescent desire, so the space in this context unites the two subgenres.

A different version of the city of Chicago is presented in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, a space where some of the action takes place. Yi Fu Tuan (1977: 4) writes about the city as having 'a feeling of openness infinity [in an] unrestricted space' – a feeling which relates to scenes in this film. Ferris, his girlfriend Sloane, and best friend Cameron, skip school and spend the day in the city and experience its freedom. The film sets itself up in opposition to other more adult films set in the same environment and period, like *Working Girl* (1986) and *Wall Street* (1987), which are more concerned with the work space and the capitalist ethic. The *Ferris Bueller* city is one that also contrasts with the space of the high school, which Traube (1992: 80) describes as 'bureaucratized' and 'denaturalized'. For the errant trio, the city 'projects an exaggerated fantasy of freedom from supraindividual authority, [offering] pleasure and consumption...so seductively.' In one scene, Ferris takes centre stage on a travelling float and is surrounded by a huge, admiring crowd who are in awe of his talents. Traube calls this, 'the film's most outrageously, narcissistic

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fantasy...surrounded by buxom blonds in peasant blouses, he delivers a rendition of 'Twist and Shout'' (ibid: 77).

Like the mall, the city in *Ferris Bueller's* symbolises Reagan era capitalism and wealth. Echoing what Driscoll (2011) and Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) referred to concerning rich teens, privilege and power, Ferris represents a comic vision of this within the cityscape. He visits the stock exchange, a key iconographic site of corporate America, and he imitates a businessman in a meeting at an exclusive restaurant. He also visits an art gallery and a baseball game. For these 'suburbanites' on an 'unofficial field trip', the image is 'less one of untamed street life...than one of unfettered recreation of the city as the playground of the affluent.' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 227). Significantly, his father is seen working in the corporate sector at the same time and, ironically, views the travelling float his son has hijacked, but does not recognise him from high up in a skyscraper. It is all done for comic effect and Ferris is treating his day as pure leisure, but it points to the assumption that the future for rich teens in the 1980s genre is one in which 'business is the only promising career' (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1998: 10).

A contrasting space to the affluence of the city is depicted in *All the Right Moves*, in which a community at the opposite end of the economic spectrum live and dream. The opening panoramic shot immediately establishes the milieu as a rain-swept, industrial, blue-collar landscape. The steel mills and the smoke-filled environment dominate the screen and the dark cinematography reinforces this mood. People are getting laid off, and unemployment and desperation are looming for many of the town's inhabitants. It is all in stark contrast to the brightly lit and colourful scenes of the city in *Ferris Bueller* and the mise-en-scène in other John Hughes' films, where mansions and expensive cars dominate the frame, and where the privileged teens enjoy all the trappings of wealth and privilege. They have limitless funds and their future career paths are guaranteed. The symbolic use of the city space in *Ferris Bueller's* and other films facilitate this kind of playful teen rebellion, enabling the genre to express such ideas.

Another film made in the same year as *Risky Business* (1983), and which shares similar characteristics is *Class*, in its use of the city as a site for sexual freedom and discovery. It stars Andrew McCarthy as Jonathan, a prep-school student who loses his virginity to a much older married woman, Ellen (Jacqueline Bisset), with whom he subsequently has an affair. Unbeknown to him, she is also mother of his roommate and best

friend, Skip, played by Rob Lowe. The film begins in the all-male environment of the prep school where Johnathan is viewed as an outsider to the other students from more wealthy backgrounds. Like Joel in *Risky Business*, he is seen at the start of the film as slightly awkward, nerdy, gullible and naive. At first, he is confounded by his classmates' cavalier attitude towards money and sex, and is humiliated and forced to run around the school grounds in bra and panties as a kind of initiation. Skip gives Jonathan a hundred dollar bill to go to the city in order to prove his masculinity and to have sex, or as he puts it, 'get laid, and bring us her panties', saying that a 'a fuck is just a fuck' , as the sex-as-stigma approach is part of the syntactic axis of the film.

Unlike the other educational sites discussed in this thesis, the prep school in *Class* is an exception, shown to be strict with teachers as disciplinarians. Sexual activity can only be experienced outside of this space. Jonathan goes to the city at night (Chicago) in the hope of losing his virginity and meets Skip's mother in a bar, appropriately named 'Free 'n' Easy'. This image of the characters in this scene relates to what Clarke (1997: 4) writes about concerning the space of the city and the image of the stranger. 'The modern city was, concomitantly, the world experienced by the stranger, and the experience of a world populated by strangers'. In this context, the city contrasts against the other spaces like the mall and the high school where the characters are generally known to each other. In this scene, anonymity is guaranteed, and it offers a learning experience for youth to experience a conduit to adulthood, similar to what was discussed in relation to the teens working in the mall.

Like for Joel, the city represents a place of freedom and sexual awakening for Jonathan, away from the all-male environment of the prep school and the rigid authority which goes with it. However, unlike *Risky Business*, the city is not filmed in a stylistic way. When Jonathan has sex with Ellen, they are viewed in close-up and the background of the city (Chicago) is blurred as the attention focuses on the couple. They make love in an elevator and then in a motel room, both encounters depicting the inexperienced Jonathan as nervous, with the claustrophobic mise-en-scène reinforcing this. The sex here is more realistic than the eroticised, soft-porn version of *Risky Business*. Jonathan returns to the school and boasts to his friends about his sexual conquest. He has been transformed from a shy, inexperienced virgin to a male brimming with sexual confidence. However, when Jonathan returns a second time to the city to see Ellen, a more romantic and tender atmosphere is evoked, as the film's focus shifts. The sex is now portrayed as more passionate and the mood more romantic. He covers the hotel bedroom in flowers, tells Ellen he loves her and they discuss the importance of relationships. More adult themes are conveyed as the film enters the realms of melodrama. Sex is now a gift. Inevitably, Skip finds out about Jonathan and his mother: they argue and fight but they ultimately make up, reinforcing the notion of a

strong patriarchal bond. However, Ellen is revealed as an alcoholic with emotional problems whose role is as 'a sexual outlet for her son's friend, then abandoned and eventually sent to an asylum. Her son and best friend reconcile — theirs is the relationship that matters' (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998: 115).

Another film which features the danger and criminality of the city of Chicago, which is experienced by teens, is *Adventures in Babysitting* (1987), directed by Chris Columbus. It stars Elizabeth Shue as Chris, who, along with the two young children she is babysitting, has to leave the safety and comfort of the suburban home and venture into the city to pick up a friend who is stranded. When her car breaks down, the perilous ordeal begins as her and the children witness a crime and are then pursued by criminals. The film, as the title suggests, is a comedy and all the adults – parents and criminals alike – are portrayed as caricatures. But the city environment, shot at night, becomes a threatening space as the suburbanites have to negotiate a safe passage home through a variety of unsavoury locations, populated by street gangs and gangsters. The space also displays an image of the urban African-American in a stereotypical manner. When the teens are forced to sing 'the blues' in a bar they have ended up in and successfully complete this task – the all black audience respond favourably to their impromptu performance – Bailey and Hay point out: 'Here the film utilises a particular crude caricature of African-American 'soulfulness' as an emblem of a world alien to the white suburbanite protagonists' (2002: 228). Ultimately, the city in this film 'is presented as cartographically incomprehensible to the teenage protagonists – its spaces cannot be understood within the set of co-ordinates offered by suburban life' (ibid.).

In *Times Square* (1980), New York City provides the space for youth expression and independence. This is different from the above films as it does not take place in white-collar suburbia, the action stays in Manhattan and there is no high school, shopping mall or parental home to offer any type of safety or sense of discipline. It also differs as it is more of a drama and there is no comedy to offset the general seedy tone, unlike in *Adventures in Babysitting,* which is set in a similar milieu. The rich/poor opposition is evident again as two, mismatched teenagers go on the run and hide out in Times Square. It is set amongst the porn shops, strip bars and sex shows of one of the city's more squalid locations. One of the girls is an unhappy, innocent rich girl, Pamela (Trini Alvarez), the thirteen year-old daughter of a prominent public official, a widower, whose role is to clean up Times Square. The

other, Nicky (Robin Johnson), the rebellious runaway punk and street musician with guitar and amp; she is pugnacious, street-wise and fouled-mouthed – a product of a broken home. They meet in a psychiatric hospital and form a bond, much like the delinquent Bender and the rich-girl Claire within the space of the high school in *The Breakfast Club*. The girls escape and make their home in a disused warehouse; they attract the attention of the local Times Square community and anti-establishment radio station DJ Johnny LaGuardis (Tim Curry), who offers a running commentary on the girls various rebellious activities. They are dubbed 'The Sleaze Sisters' and temporarily become a mini-*cause célèbre*, inspiring other teenage girls to rebel. Here, the space of the city offers the hitherto innocent Pamela, 'to become self-sufficient, emotional, and expressive - to shout, to dance, to stride around enjoying herself in a public space' (Kleinhans, 2002: 82). While the girls appropriate the public space of the city, the authorities are closing in on them and the space, like their lives, is 'inherently temporary, contingent and unstable' (ibid.).

Times Square also comments on broader sociopolitical themes. It was made on the cusp of the Reagan era and images of homelessness and poverty in the American city are evident in the film, but were not as widespread in America at the time. However, issues such as these which marginalised poor communities escalated during the 1980s due to Reaganite policies, which 'entailed slashing attacks on the welfare state [and] massive increases in socioeconomic equality' (Hudson & Davies, 2008: 2).

Alan Parker's *Fame* (1980) is also set entirely in New York and its cast of diverse, multi-racial teens emphasises this. They are students at The New York High School of Performing Arts, a rare cast of characters for a 1980s youth film. Much of the action takes place in the high school with occasional ventures into the city streets. Like in *Times Square*, the teens are from New York so do not experience a change in location away from the suburbs. But the high school offers a source of opposition to the exterior scenes. In the school, the assorted characters form a type of surrogate family as their studies and learning experience are prominent narrative features, unlike other school scenes discussed in this research. Where in the city, the teens who interact are often shot in close up, and the background is out of focus, suggesting the cityscape is less significant than the emotional development of its characters. Also, the city scenes are often portrayed in a negative light: one of the characters, Coco (Irene Cara), pretends to live in an expensive apartment when in

fact, she lives in a poorer part of town, again evoking a sociopolitical response in the context of the Reagan age and the divisive economic policies which arose from this. Another, Leroy (Gene Anthony Ray), faces taunts and threats from his peers when he enters the streets of his rundown neighbourhood. Although one celebrated scene where the students run out of the school onto the street and start to sing and dance to the title song, 'Fame', encapsulates the colourful, vibrant and chaotic nature of New York City, images which are absent from *Times Square.*

Like in *Fame*, part of *Foxes* is set in the city, in this case Los Angeles. The film revolves around four high school friends from dysfunctional families who live in the San Fernando Valley. They party, smoke pot and have fleeting relationships. As usual in the teen genre, parental guidance is largely absent. But they are not stereotypical Valley Girls like the ones in the film of the same name. *Foxes* is more dramatic, naturalistic, loosely structured and avoids cliché; it is not about class, cultural differences or teen cliques. Where the cityscape of Hollywood Boulevard in *Valley Girl* facilitates a romance between two teens from opposing cultural backgrounds, liberating them from the conformity of their lifestyles, in *Foxes,* the girls drive down the same space but 'far from celebrating youthful freedom [the city] entraps it.' (Kleinhans. 77: 2002). A montage scene conveys the street life of the city of LA, with all its diversity and chaos. Fry et al (1998: 230), discuss the film's director, Adrian Lyne's visual style which depicts the cityscape using low-key cinematography, where the background is often blurred, creating an overpowering and consuming visual aesthetic, resonating with the teens' experiences in *Foxes*. The 'steamy city streets, backlighting [which] plays on light and dark, and scores of shots framed to emphasize a character caught up in an enclosing, suffocating situation.' Another example of what Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2001) refers to when the city becomes a character and foregrounds visual qualities over the script and generic conventions.

The city in the 1980s teen film functions and comments on the characters experiences in different ways. It often acts as a site of freedom like in the comical, *Risky Business* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, away from the more traditional and ordered teen sites of suburbia, like the high school and the family home. It is a space where romance can happen between characters from different cultural backgrounds (*Valley Girl*), challenging teen stereotypical norms and conformity. A place of danger and menace like *Times Square* and *Adventures in Babysitting,* with the latter being played out in a comic way. In *Fame,* its significance is relegated to the story and

characters and in *Foxes,* the city is shot in such a way that it reflects the protagonists' experiences, which eschews generic and character conventions.

The Beach

Another public space where teen identity is articulated in the 1980s genre is the beach which, like the mall, is a place for the youth to 'hang out'. One scene at the beginning of *Valley Girl* is set in this space and enables Julie and her friends to express female desire and sexual curiosity. In so doing, it acts as a narrative device in terms of what Peter Wollen (1980) refers to as 'functions of the narrative' (discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter). After the mall scene, the central themes and plot are developed further with the aid of various visual cues which begin to emerge within the generic community (Schatz, 1981). Like in *Little Darlings*, males are depicted as sexual objects in *Valley Girl*, thereby readdressing the gender imbalance of the genre. A point-of-view shot from Julie's perspective frames the half-naked Randy in medium close-up as his physical attractiveness dominates the image. They exchange glances through the shot-reverse-shot technique and it is Julie who first declares her affection and interest by smiling. The scene serves to establish the main theme and mood behind the film as Julie is revealed, at this early stage of the film, as the 'active agent in the pursuit of romance and sexual knowledge, and her desire drives the narrative' (Lane, 2000: 78). According to the director Martha Coolidge, these initial scenes were instrumental and helped to 'deepen the material' and 'structure the love story in a more sound way' (quoted in ibid: 79). In this scene, Julie is an active agent within the narrative space which challenges the more passive portrayals of female teens discussed so far, like the 'ideal' female in Chapter Three. This female point-of-view remains an important visual and narrative device throughout key moments of the film and 'helps to encourage spectator identification with her, and to establish female-looking relations as an underlying structure of the film' (ibid). Although *Valley Girl* was made during the period of the sex comedies, it is closer to the romantic vision of the 1980s teen genre. Other films which use the beach as a key iconographic space in the 1980s include *Spring Break* (1983), *Where the Boys Are '84* (1984) and *Fraternity Vacation* (1985).

The scene shortly after, in the *Valley Girl* family home, offers a comparison space to the beach, hence why it features in this chapter as opposed to the previous

one. The teens are at a party, but this time the parents are present, and Julie and her friends are there along with Randy and his friend. Like the bedroom scene, the attitude of Julie's friends and the vindictiveness of the teenage clique are rampant. It is from Julie's point-of-view that the action plays out, as she attempts to attract Randy and, in turn, draws closer attention to the teenage romance. Randy was wearing just his shorts in the beach scene — a 'neutral space' in this context — and was admired and lusted over by Julie and her friends. However, in the indoor space, Randy is seen in his natural guise as a punk and fully clothed, and Julie's friends now view him as the 'Other', his 'spiked hair, torn vest and gold chains are regarded with horror' (Montgomery, 1993: 99). Here, costume becomes an important narrative function and much more than just a prop, as the connotative value of Randy's appearance highlights the difference between the Valley Girl culture — all phoney and snobbishness — and the punk sensibility representative of a more unadulterated portrayal of youth culture.

The Car

The automobile is a potent semantic feature in the teen movie and, of course, an icon of the modern American way of life. Webber writes that the 'city is understandable both as a spatial structure (a more or less fixed system of spaces and places) and as the motions or transitions that traverse that structure' (2007: 1). These motions mark the city out as different from the other teen generic sites. In films like *Valley Girl*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Risky Business,* motion becomes an important part of the teen experience. As already discussed, as Randy and Julie drive down Hollywood Boulevard in *Valley Girl*, their cultural differences are highlighted within the space of the car. Bailey & Hay (2002: 229) note that, in both *Risky Business* and *Ferris Bueller's* the car 'serves as an emblem of the kind of freedom and escape' which sustains the thematic thread in terms of the parent/teen relationship. In *Ferris Bueller's,* the trio borrow, without permission, Cameron's father's prized Ferrari and head to the city. When they return, Cameron accidently destroys the car but decides to treat this as an act of rebellion against his father, thus invoking the 'conflict with parents' phase of Hall's (1904) 'storm and stress' notion. 'They're married and they hate each other…they make me puke…he loves the car, he hates his wife', Cameron protests. Again, this relates to what Pallandino (1996)

discusses in relation to wealthy parents in the 1980s neglecting their kids. Hadley Freeman (2015: 167) reinforces this when she claims that 'Cameron's parents simply don't love him…his father loves his Ferrari more than he loves his family.' Where the destruction of the family home in the out-of-control party scenes is emblematic of teens and white privilege, the destructive of the car is symbolic 'as both a renunciation of parental authority [and] a marking of adulthood, of independence from the social and material resources of the parents' (Bailey & Hay, 2002: 230).

The Dangerous Implications of Border Crossings

When the teen genre moves into a different space like the city, away from the familiarity of the mall, the high school and the home, the teen protagonists experience a new found freedom. However, other less familiar spaces are depicted as more hostile and threatening. How do such spaces affect the white middle-class teenage experience, in which they find themselves confronted by communities from a different economic background, culture and nationality? The following examples create a link back to the teen male sexual experience in Chapter Two — sex as stigma.

In *Porky's,* space and its dangerous implications is represented by the male teens crossing county lines in search of a good time and casual sex. They travel to a neighbouring area in order to become 'real' men. They assume they will be free to indulge in hedonistic pleasures, away from the panoptic forces of the adult and parental world that discipline their behaviour in the high school and family home. However, issues of economic status and masculinity are invoked which challenge and threaten the teens as they soon realise they are under threat (Speed, 2010; Theissen 1996). The boys live and go to school in Angel County, which connotes sexual constraint and adult surveillance. They travel to the nearby Wallace County, to the saloon-cum-brothel called Porky's, a place which conveys a tone of hyper-masculinity and described by its owner, Porky, as 'man's county'. In syntactic terms, the teens travel across the border on the pretext of indulging in hedonistic acts in order to become 'men', or as Thiessen (1996: 67) puts it, their journey is a 'masculine rite of passage.' The locals who frequent Porky's are portrayed as stereotypically lower class, which Speed (2010: 831) claims 'reinforces white middle-class dominance.' They set out to humiliate the rich kids and refer to them as 'clean-cut Angel Beach Pussies', thus feminising them and transferring class anxieties onto sexual themes. For the

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privileged teens, instead of travelling to a place which will fulfil their sexual dreams, they are subjected to hostility and humiliation as the locals punish suburban youth for 'unsolicited crossings of boundaries' (ibid.). This differs from the other comedies like *Ferris Bueller's* and *Risky Business*, in which the teens get away with transgressing within the space of the city. In *Porky's,* when the protagonists cross the border, they are punished for their transgressions. The difference between the groups are reinforced by the mise-en-scène in terms of costume and general behaviour of the characters. The rural, unkempt attire of the locals is compounded by their regional dialects, uncouth mannerisms, coarse language and capacity for violence. This contrasts with the well-groomed appearance and innocence of the teens. The depiction of the sexualised female is also seen in opposing terms. The teen girls from the shower scene and Cherry Forever, described in Chapter Two, are more active and predatory than their male counterparts, whereas the girls employed as prostitutes at Porky's are objects of male desire, unthreatening and readily available to fulfil male fantasies. However, this stereotypical image of the female as 'unthreatening' becomes problematic as the female 'threat' is still present. Porky takes the male teen protagonists' money and sends them to a room on the premise of sex, but the room is booby-trapped and they are dumped into the swamp below the saloon. The locals then begin to mock and humiliate them. Theissen refers to this in symbolic terms: 'It is the ultimate penetration, the return to womb' (1996: 69). The boys' syntactic quest towards sexual fulfilment on this occasion is characterised by being double-edged, 'the feminine as constructed by Porky, at least, is always a trap' (ibid.). The failure of the male sexual quest in this context is linked to their attempts to negotiate power within a different place, away from their safe, white-collar environment, but they only met with aggression from Porky and the locals. The teens were seeking out a place where they thought they would experience sexual liberation but instead faced the threat of violence.

Porky and the locals are portrayed as a kind of 'Other' and their community can be defined as a place resistant to the bourgeois attitudes of the teens in the films. Creswell's (2006: 61) ideas are relevant here. Although he writes about place in the context of modern globalisation, his views relate to Wallace County where Porky and his cohorts live. It is a space where the inhabitants want to live 'differently from the mass of people'. Creswell goes on to quote Harvey (1996), who discusses place as a 'locus of collective memory' (ibid.), which associates a group of people to the past

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through memories. In this case Porky's saloon represents the Wild West in America and its resistance to the teen protagonists who represent a more modern capitalist version of America. The saloon/brothel connotes a site which sits uneasily within the teen genre, and the film's setting — Florida — is not normally associated with any Western generic characteristics. This ambiguous use of space extends to the mise-en-scène in the form of costume. Porky, in his large cowboy hat, symbolically recalls the myth of the macho Western hero, 'a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do', but he is obese, vulgar and more of a caricature. Furthermore, his dwarf subordinate also wears a flamboyant cowboy outfit. This iconography is misaligned within the teen genre, suggesting the masculinity on display is ironic, a parody, dysfunctional and diminished. Also, Porky's car is pink, which feminises his character and further challenges notions of masculinity. Therefore, the community of adults that live and work at Porky's are seen in one respect to be like other adults — as antagonists — but with more violent and anti-social tendencies.

Other similar incidents of punishment and humiliation for characters who cross physical borders in the teen sex film are prevalent in *Losin' It*. Here, the location is another country, as four teens travel from their wealthy suburb to the hedonistic milieu of the bars, brothels and strip joints of Tijuana in Mexico to lose their virginity and generally misbehave. This inevitably incurs the wrath of the local townspeople who, like Porky and his friends, are depicted as stereotypes: the corrupt Mexican police chief, the Latin temptress and the sleazy locals are contrasted with their white, Waspish American counterparts who, despite their transgressions, are seen as being victimised by the Mexican 'Other'. In other words, the economic privileges of the American teens in the film are augmented by the stereotyping of characters from different social and ethnic backgrounds. America's privileged white are represented in opposition to those who they feel are inferior.

One of the teenagers is suspended from a crane because he attempts to seduce a Mexican girl by giving her a 'Spanish Fly' (an aphrodisiac). His assailant, the brother of his intended victim, berates Americans who 'come into Mexico to do things you wouldn't do in your own country...this is our country and you treat us like pigs.' This point of view is extended in other scenes where the teens are confronted by aggressive tactics from the local police, ripped off by a cab driver, and one of them is subjected to a violent attack in a prison as the 'unpleasant consequences of hedonism are linked to encounters with the boundaries of class and

gender...provoking confrontations with those who live outside the protagonists' suburban locales' (Speed, 2010: 831).

This chapter has broadened the argument of the thesis in analysing how space and its symbolic values add another dimension to how the genre portrays youth concerns and their wider implications. As an interrogation of teen space, it demonstrates that meaning can be achieved not only by the characters within the dramas and the different 'roles' they play, but by extending this to how the protagonists interact and function within the film's mise-en-scène in the form of its iconography and generic sites. This produces a synthesis between human actions, emotions, motivations and cinematic space, resulting in the text becoming invigorated with further meaning and significance. One of the functions which the less traditional teen spaces convey is that they introduce the urban criminal like in *Risky Business* and *Adventures in Babysitting*. Also, communities which are defined by their 'otherness' when compared to the white-privileged teens provide material for an oppositional debate. Furthermore, when the teens travel to these different communities, it extends the ideas in Chapter Two concerning sex and its negative implications; this time, the teens are confronted with threats of violence and intimidation. The wealthy teens thought the privilege they experienced, and the transgressions they got away with in the safe spaces of suburbia would be extended to less familiar spaces, but, of course, this is not the case. However, such is the narrative resolution of these films, the teens always escape the threatening sites and return to the safe space of suburbia, as the status quo is returned in the Hollywood genre film.

Conclusion

This thesis has been a contribution to the knowledge and study of Hollywood genre film. It provides a singular focus on a particular period of teen films in terms of the methodologies and approaches used. In applying genre theory and structuralism to ideas around adolescence, characterisation and space in 1980s teen films, all of which are set against the backdrop of the Reagan era, the central argument concerning how these films represent and depict the values of youth culture and broader societal concerns has been investigated. The research has evaluated how these themes and debates operate within individual films, across several different films and even across subgenres, resulting in a more unified reading of the genre as a whole.

The first part of this conclusion will look back at what was discussed in terms of the key issues and methodologies.   In the second part, the focus will look ahead to the teen films of the 1990s and discuss how the genre has evolved and developed, while also making suggestions for ideas related to future research.

Reflecting on the methods of study here will help clarify the approaches and central argument of the thesis. Despite the genre's hybridity and tonal and attitudinal differences, an underlying unity has emerged in the study of the films. For example, one of the key semantic themes to arise from this work is the 'storm and stress' phase relating to the teens' estrangement from adults and parents. Whether in a sex comedy like *Porky's* or *Fast Times*, where parents are absent and have little or no influence over their children's' emotional well-being or decision making, or in the more serious and dramatic *The Breakfast Club,* where the protagonists have a lengthy discussion about their ineffectual parents, the prevailing sentiment surrounding this oppositional relationship, irrespective of the differences in individual films, is one of negativity towards adults. There are some exceptions to the rule, for example, in the romantic comedy *Valley Girl* and the romantic drama *Vision Quest*, parents are portrayed as caring and supportive towards their kids. This thesis makes clear that, generally, there is a definite emotional distance between youth and the adult/parent world. It reinforces the synergy and unity across the genre. Furthermore, the films' portrayal of this and other recurring themes, such as virginity loss and adolescent peer pressure, marks the genre out from others and

imbues the teen film with distinctive qualities. As Steve Neale (2000: 124) explains: 'Despite their generic diversity, these films can all be defined as teenpics because they all focus on teenage characters [and issues pertaining to adolescence]. '

Positioning the themes within an ideological context has developed the argument in terms of how the films reflect and comment on wider societal issues — an approach which resonates with Graham Turner's (2009: 4) comments about mainstream cinema:

> Popular films have a life beyond their...stars, genres...Film as a social practice for its makers and its audience then; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of ways in which our culture makes sense of itself.

Echoing this is Bulman (2005: 16), who writes more specifically about high school teen films and points out that they are more than just entertainment for a casual audience:

> [The films] reveal patterns that transcend entertainment and art and teach deeper lessons about American culture. [They] are cultural artefacts that provide clues to the society that made them and paid to see them. In particular, they offer clues to how Americans make sense of education, youth, and inequality.

The evidence in this thesis of how the narratives make sense of teen culture has been illustrated in terms of the binary oppositions within the films. As the above references allude to, when reading the films in terms of their symbolic value and how they comment on wider sociopolitical and cultural issues, it is necessary to look beyond the cinematic text and its generic characteristics to understand how this reading contributes to the argument and ideas which the thesis is conveying. The dramatization of the generational divide in the films reflected what was happening in modern society, and is reinforced by scholars like Palladino (1996) and others who write from a more cultural and sociological perspective. They discuss how the concept of the traditional family in the post-war years became fragmented, and young people were more independent and less reliant on their parents with regards to decision making and emotional support. Furthermore, when using Lévi-Strauss to approach the treatment of these stories of teen/adult conflict as modern-day myths,

the contradictory nature of adult identity is exposed. Teachers are revealed as incompetent bullies and antagonistic, behaving at times in a negligent manner towards their students, all the while demanding that the teens behave in a moralistic and responsible way (*The Breakfast Club*). Parents are often seen to be absent and obsessed with getting rich and embracing the bourgeois lifestyle of the Reagan era, most notably in the Hughes' romantic comedies (*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*). More extreme behaviour depicted them as violent and abusive in the teen delinquent subgenre (*River's Edge* and *The Outsiders*). Instead of being seen as positive role models for their children, the genre frequently conveys them as part of the problem. Again, these contradictions resonate with real life incidents at the time, when right-wing politicians and bureaucrats were implicated in various sex and financial scandals whilst proclaiming to set a moralist tone for society at large.

Other evidence of how the generic characteristics are unified includes virginity loss linked to peer pressure and portrayed in terms of the gender divide. In the sex comedy *Porky's,* the males berate a male virgin throughout the film and pressure him into losing his virginity — an example of sex as stigma. This is played for laughs and when he does have sex they all celebrate his achievement. In *Little Darlings*, the unpleasant popular girl instigates a campaign to get the two lead characters to lose their virginity, which is portrayed as more of a vindictive act. When one of the girls finally has sex it is not met with jubilant applause like in *Porky's*; instead, sex is portrayed as more of a gift, and something of a tender and emotional response is observed. The same theme unites the films but tonally they are significantly different as there is an obvious male/female divide in how virginity loss is portrayed. Meanwhile, peer pressure in the romantic comedies stems from socioeconomic and cultural differences, which create oppositions. In *Pretty in Pink*, the wealthy male teen is pressured by his obnoxious friend to end his relationship with his poor girlfriend; in *Valley Girl*, the female clique exert pressure on one of its members to end her relationship with her boyfriend because he is from a different culture to them, a scene which is amplified by the symbolic use of space. Ultimately, this study has demonstrated that adolescent peer pressure in relation to sex and romance in all its various forms is a key semantic/syntactic feature of the genre.

Continuing the evaluation of how teen sex in the genre has been interrogated in this research, issues concerning the image of teen masculine and feminine identity have been raised. Using Lévi-Strauss to reflect on the ongoing debate on how these

films work as myths has exposed the contradictions of teenage sexuality and the portrayal of the coming-of-age process. Scenes from the films, which often resonate with the literature on adolescent sexuality, suggest that sexual initiation and virginity loss are far from pleasurable experiences as the characters often end up humiliated, abused, confused, contract STDs, or become pregnant and have abortions. Beneath the veneer of gross-out humour and comic exchanges, which are frequently aligned to scenes of this nature, it can argued that the films act as a warning to young people, that treating sex as a stigma and taking risks may have negative consequences, both emotionally and physically. Shary's (2005: 63) comments highlight the potentially dangerous implications of this behaviour:

> While the majority of these narratives could be characterised as comedies, they also tend to take seriously the stakes of sex. [To] most of the teens in these films, sex was a dark continent to be explored, and most of them faced certain fears and frustrations.

Moreover, although these teen films are not overtly moralistic, the underlying message with regards to the various forms of adolescent peer pressure, often concerned with sex, is that caution and resisting this pressure will often result in a better outcome, and prove less emotionally confusing and upsetting.

When the genre shifts away from the sex comedies and focuses on the more romantic side of teen relationships, a more positive outcome is often achieved in terms of relationship issues, notably in the John Hughes' romantic comedies and dramas. In *The Breakfast Club,* the rigidity and hypocritical nature of the teen stereotype and high school hierarchy is exposed at the end of the film, when unlikely romantic unions form between the opposing teens. Similarly, in the 'class-clash' (Shary, 2011) teen romances, in which couples from opposing socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds become romantically attached, despite the objecting forces around them, there's an indication that these films send out optimistic messages that differences of this nature can be overcome, even in a culture often perceived to be defined by hierarchical status, wealth and conformity.

Other forms of risk-taking behaviour concerned with the 'storm and stress' phase of adolescence link the different films across the genre. The risk-taking by teens in *The Breakfast Club* is evident in their rebelling against their teacher. A more

dangerous, self-destructive form of risk-taking appears in the romantic drama, *Reckless*, which is then taken to extremes in the murderous teen delinquent drama, *River's Edge*, and the satirical *Heathers*.

Examining how the teen 'roles' operate within the different subgenres has been one approach in which the methodology in this thesis has integrated the contrasting themes of the films. The concept of Robin Wood's 'ideal' male and female roles and their 'shadow' characters has been applied to the teen characters in Chapter Three, positioning the genre within an ideological context relating to post-war capitalist and patriarchal ideals. Examples discussed in the romantic comedy and romantic drama include Ferris Bueller, depicted as an ideal male — active, adventurous, with his more passive and submissive ideal female partner, Sloane. Ferris' best friend, his shadow character, Cameron, is more responsible and dull, but ultimately it is the ideal couple who leave their ideological imprint on the film. *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is played out in a comic fashion with characters from a privileged and wealthy background. This contrasts with *Vision Quest,* in which its blue-collar protagonists search for the American Dream. Here, the ideal male role is depicted more dramatically, and the shadow character is an unconventional female adventurer. In syntactic terms, she is seen to have a more potentially disruptive influence on the ideal male's progress towards achieving his goals. The end of the film does, however, suggest that the ideal male will choose a more conservative option in the long run when he begins a relationship with an ideal female.

Despite their many differences (subgenre, tone, attitude, economic/social background of the characters, not to mention the adolescent impulses on display), both *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Vision Quest* subscribe to Wood's model of many Hollywood genre films emphasising a reactionary outlook where the dominant ideologies of capitalism, a virile form of masculinity, family and patriarchy ultimately pervade. In *Pretty in Pink* and *Sixteen Candles*, shadow male characters temporarily disrupt this ideology, but the female lead in both films (Molly Ringwald) chooses the ideal male. Any challenge or influence from shadow characters is normally suppressed in the final act (*Some Kind of Wonderful* being a notable exception, in which Watts graduates from shadow character to ultimate ideal female). Moreover, Wood's analysis focused on the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Successfully applying his theories to 1980s teen cinema points to the possibilities of how this research can be applied to other genres, and indicates the malleability of this line of enquiry in terms

of Hollywood genre studies. Whether the characters go through a transformation or not is also relevant. In *Ferris Bueller's* and *Vision Quest,* the ideal and shadow characteristics remain fixed throughout the narrative; in The *Breakfast Club*, the protagonists go through a transformation: the shadow female character transforms into an ideal female and becomes romantically involved with the ideal male. The same transformation occurs in *Fast Times,* but here the shadow female transforms into the ideal female and begins a relationship with the shadow male.

In Chapter Four, the functions relating to the teen version of the Proppian hero and villain are played out humorously in the romantic comedy *Ferris Bueller's,* whereas in the more dramatic *All the Right Moves* a serious tone dictates how these roles and functions are conveyed. Also, the role of the helper in the sex comedy *Risky Business* differs from the role of the helper in *All the Right Moves.* Despite the differences, the broader characteristics of the roles and functions work in the same way in relation to Propp's methodology and unites the films in this respect.

In terms of adolescent behaviour concerning the jocks and popular girls — the characters at the top of the so-called high school hierarchy — relational aggression is a consistent semantic feature of their behaviour throughout the different subgenres of 1980s teen films. Both genders display this type of behaviour in equal measure, although it varies as to what form it takes and its severity, depending on the film and its hybrid nature. In the sex comedy *Little Darlings*, the popular girl displays a form of malevolent relational aggression in trying to bully the two protagonists into losing their virginity. In John Hughes' romantic comedy *Pretty in Pink,* the rich popular girl mocks the poor protagonist in front of the class. As a group, the eponymous Heathers demonstrate a more vindictive and malicious form of aggression in their singling out and bullying of an obese female student.

For the popular male jocks in the sex comedy *Porky's,* relational aggression is leavened with humour and involves gross-out acts, whereas in *Revenge of the Nerds,* the jocks' aggression is more malign. Even Ferris Bueller displays a form of relational aggression, albeit in a benign yet nevertheless controlling way. In Hughes' other teen rom-com, *Pretty in Pink,* the rich male character, like his aforementioned girlfriend, expressed relational aggression in a nasty and malevolent way. In the teen dramas *The Breakfast Club* and *Lucas,* despite displaying relational aggressive tendencies, the jock characters are redeemed in the final act and are somewhat forgiven for their negative and undesirable conduct. By and large, jocks discussed in this thesis tend

not to experience much of a transformation from their stereotypical roles, with Andy from *The Breakfast Club* and the jocks at the end of *Lucas* being notable exceptions. The incidents in which the teen stereotype has the potential to change for the better within the confines of the genre send out an optimistic message to signify that a culture and its members do not need to be burdened by simplistic and clichéd ways of behaving. Conforming to a particular way of thinking and behaviour will not, as some of the films claim, be positive in terms of adolescent development.

In the final chapter, similarities and differences are highlighted through the use of space. The family home becomes a symbol of capitalist gain in Reagan's America, the mansions in the John Hughes romantic comedies are a visual image which comments on the privileged lifestyles of the characters who live in them. In more chaotic and often adversarial environments there exist individuals and families lower down the economic scale and depicted in the dramas *All the Right Moves*, *Lucas* and the teen delinquent subgenre films, *River's Edge* and *The Outsiders*. While the films may differ (sub) generically, they all denote in a broader context the economic divide that was widening in the Reagan era, as right-wing neoliberal policies favoured the rich and excluded people who were less well-off. Meanwhile, the high school space, so inherently linked to the genre and its subgenres, is consistently depicted throughout the teen films as a space where very little learning and education takes place, a distinctive theme of the 1980s genre in which teen rebellion is a hallmark. One exception being *Stand and Deliver,* a film which focused on the benefits of education and also differed from being viewed from an adult-point of-view.

As discussed throughout this thesis, the films from the 1980s teen genre explore issues and themes concerning the oppositional nature of sexuality, the generational divide, relational aggression and the different teen roles within the high school caste system. In doing so, they often convey in acute detail the concerns of young people in a modern era, and the adolescent conflicts they face at home, in school, the mall and beyond the boundaries of suburbia. When these issues and themes are examined across different films of the genre, their contradictions are exposed, but they also have the potential to unite the genre with distinctive and unique characteristics. In addition, this mode of interrogation has reinforced the structuralist methodology which pervades the work, in that the 'phenomena of

human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations' (Blackburn, 2008: 351).

Beyond the 1980s and Further Research

The thesis has briefly made reference to the teen film historically, which has helped contextualise the issues and brought them into sharper focus. Looking beyond the 1980s will provide a more rounded evaluation of how the genre has evolved and developed. There is no intention here for this to be an in-depth study of the immediate period after the 1980s — that is for further research on the teen genre. But it is useful to understand the changes and different trends which emerged towards the end of the 20th century as the Hollywood studio system continued to become more fragmented. Also, the emergence of American independent cinema enabled filmmakers to make more nuanced and unconventional films about youth, set against an ever-changing sociopolitical landscape in America.

What is considered to be the last teen film of the period in question is the aforementioned *Pump Up the Volume*. Made a year earlier, *Heathers*' darkly comic depiction of youth contrasted with the more conventional romantic comedies and dramas of the mid-1980s onwards, and *Pump Up the Volume* continued this departure from more conservative values, but without *Heathers'* satirical slant. The film stars Christian Slater as Mark, who lives in a white-collar suburban town and runs a pirate radio station, encouraging students to rebel against the high school authorities. The film was not afraid to address more controversial topics than previously seen in the 1980s and, like *Heathers*, the theme of teen suicide becomes part of the story — a troubled teen kills himself on air. Also, a gay teen comes out during a broadcast — the first such incident in the teen genre — and Mark's anti-authority outbursts address the growing teen alienation in the face of a hostile adult community. The students respond to Mark's call-to-arms and chaos breaks out in the school. Both *Heathers* and *Pump up the Volume*, although critically appreciated with the former becoming a minor cult classic, did not perform well at the box office. Shary (2005) suggests that *Pump Up the Volume's* confrontational and provocative youthful attitude, allied to its failure at the box office, may have been reasons why the Hollywood studios stopped making films about white middle-class teens rebelling against the system. After the film's release, as Shary notes,

the only notable films in the next five years to feature the contemporary white suburban high school population, which had been the staple of teen films throughout the 1980s, were the farcical comedies *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Encino Man.* (2005: 80-81)

This was a similar situation to five years previously, when the teen sex comedies began to fail at the box office and casual sex in movies was no longer considered appropriate due to the impact of the AIDS virus.

If *Pump Up the Volume* signalled an end to the so-called 'golden age' of teen film, a radically different portrayal of youth emerged through American independent cinema. Urban crime dramas featuring black youth created a prominent subgenre from 1989 to 1995. Few teen films in the past had black characters in leading roles, and Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), an incendiary tale of racial tension between the black community and other ethnic groups in inner-city New York, was the first one to make an impact. This was followed by John Singleton's influential *Boyz in the Hood* (1991) and the Hughes Brothers' *Menace to Society* (1993) — both gang-related films set in economically deprived urban areas. What these films established in terms of oppositional structures was a shift away from the wealthy white teens of the 1980s, whose parents were absent and ineffectual. In the African-American dramas, the binaries between youth and the 'hegemony of the racist legal and political system' (ibid: 82) were foregrounded. These oppositions relating to American cinema and the black adolescent experience could provide further debate and research when positioned against similar structural issues within the white teen cinema of the 1980s.

In a wider sociopolitical context, 1993 saw a new Democrat President, Bill Clinton, sweep to power, whose more liberal attitude contrasted with the previous moralism of the Republican administration under Reagan and George H. W. Bush. Gradually, society was starting to become more tolerant towards homosexuality and the initial panic over the AIDS crisis was diminishing. As a result the 1990s saw the positive depiction of gay characters in American teen films. Again, like race in the teen genre, there was very little attention to this subject in the 1980s. Gay filmmaker Gus Van Sant's indie hit *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) starred two straight male actors, River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves, playing homosexual hustlers. In *Totally*

Fucked Up (1994)*,* by gay indie filmmaker Greg Araki*,* a group of young gay male characters engage in sexually explicit acts. Araki called it 'a kinda cross between avant-garde experimental cinema and a queer John Hughes flick.' (quoted in Hart, 2013: 66). Further research into this area could take the form of a comparison study into how sex is portrayed in these films — in terms of adolescent issues like virginity loss and peer pressure — and teen heterosexual behaviour in mainstream Hollywood cinema. Again, despite most 1980s teen films treating sex through the vehicle of comedy versus the more tonally serious gay teen films of the 1990s, the goal of any future study into these subjects could be to show how the broader themes share similar characteristics.

Moreover, Clinton's philandering coincided with the re-emergence of teen sex in 1990s cinema and the heterosexual sex quest film returned in 1995, but it was far removed from the 1980s cycle of sex comedies. The notorious *Kids*, directed by Larry Clarke was, as Shary (2005: 104) points out, 'a radical revision of the sex quest story.' It was not only radical in terms of its content but, stylistically, its documentary-realist aesthetic marked a shift away from the traditional mainstream means of visualising film. *Kids* has echoes of *River's Edge* in its portrayal of delinquent youth, but is more nihilistic and does not have its reactionary ending. *Kids'* narrative revolves around impoverished drug-taking and violent teens in New York, seeking out young virgins as the sexual initiation theme is represented in a disturbing and unflinching manner: rape and HIV are introduced as new semantic features of the teen genre. It shares the 1980s theme of ineffective parents, but the whole tone of the film differs dramatically in its bleakness and extreme cold-heartedness. The bespectacled nerd in the film, played by its scriptwriter, Harmony Korine, may look like those other nerds from the 1980s sex and romantic comedies, but he is revealed to be an ultra-weird drug dealer. The ending offers little hope as it depicts a kind of apocalyptic world where the adolescent transgressions seem to be beyond redemption. In the final party scene, the kids here are a long way from the teens in the Hughes' movies, where the trashing of their parents' house was a symptom of wealth and privilege. *Kids* is more of a realistic horror show of urban subcultural youth, where drugs, underage sex and rape are overtly depicted, making it a kind of distorted carnivalesque environment with extreme chaos, but without the humour. *Cruel Intentions* (1996) extends this ruthless theme of deflowering virgins, but is more of a genre film involving rich teens and not as extreme as *Kids*.

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Teen sex and relationship issues were depicted in a far less pessimistic and disturbing manner in other teen films of the 1990s, these themes again part of the narrative. Mainstream teen cinema also tended to be less raucous and licentious than the sex comedies of the 1980s, maybe because there was not a rigid, moralistic social backdrop to the films, so the teens had less to rebel against. Several of them treated sex more as a gift, with characters who remained virgins throughout. *Clueless* (1995) revamped the teen romantic comedy featuring (almost exclusively) white wealthy teens living in suburbia; it was based on the classic Jane Austen novel, *Emma,* which gave it an intertextual significance. Others, such as the more edgy *Wild Things* (1997), featured teen characters that were already sexually active prior to the narrative of the film. In films where teenagers did lose their virginity, like *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), this act was not a cause for celebration (like in *Porky's* or *Losin' It*) and was treated more seriously.

The sex comedy *American Pie*, made in 1999, was a big box-office hit and was an update of the 1980s sex comedies, in that a group of high school teenage males make it their mission to lose their virginity. It still contains scenes of gross-out humour and low comedy: one of the boys is caught by his father literally having sex with a pie, hence the title. However, Shary (2005: 105) claims that the overall tone of the film is more realistic as it 'often handles the libidinous boys' travails in an honest, believable fashion.' By the end of the film, they all come to the conclusion that the girls they've tried to seduce have feelings and should not be treated like sexual objects, and when the subsequent sex scenes occur there's an element of affection and romance to them. Driscoll (2011) notes that *American Pie* was more a hybrid romantic/sex film of the 1990s, similar to *The Sure Thing* in the 1980s. Shary concludes that *American Pie* signified a positive change in attitude by the studios regarding the teen comedy, with the 'common acceptance of safe sex...and the sense of confident female sexual interest that the film promotes' (2005: 116).

American Pie is more progressive in its attitude towards sexuality and relationships, in a society which was becoming more liberal. Whereas in *Porky's*, it is arguably a male point of view that remains dominant, and females are either marginalised or viewed as sexual objects, reflective of a society in which a strong type of masculinity and traditional conservatism was being promoted. However, a debate of this nature becomes problematic if the ideas of a scholar like William Paul (1994a)

are taken into consideration, which promote the theory that female sexuality is foregrounded in *Porky's* just as much as male sexuality.

In addition, any future debates around this subject could include Hadley Freeman's (2015) recent ideas on teen cinema, in which she discusses female gender representation in the 1980s and 1990s in oppositional terms. She argues that the Hughes' female heroines of the 1980s romantic comedies were more three-dimensional and unconventional than teen female characters in the 1990s comedies. She refers to the female protagonist of the 1990s as 'Manic Pixie Dream Girl' (like in *Clueless*), that 'dreaded stock (read: lazy) female film character...bubbly and shallow...who occupied a world of gloss and glamour' (2015: 74-83). Conversely, Freeman argues that the female character leads in the films of John Hughes — Andie in *Pretty and Pink* and Watts in *Some Kind of Wonderful* — are depicted as individuals. Of Andie, she 'exists in her own right. She is confident, and insecure, wise and foolish, happy and furious, mature and childish, lustful and fearful, savvy but gauche.' (ibid: 75). Andie is granted sophistication, revealing a character who can be viewed in oppositional terms, unlike the heroines of 1990s romantic dramas who, according to Freeman, are seen in a more simplistic context.

Hadley Freeman also writes about how *Clueless* not only reinvigorated the mainstream teen comedy in the mid-1990s and beyond, along with other films such as *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *American Pie,* but also marked a significant shift away from the depiction of less well-off characters in mainstream teen cinema. The divisions in social status which this thesis has discussed in relation to the 1980s were not apparent in the 1990s teen comedy, 'which depicted a world where all teenagers came from the same upper-middle social class...there were still cliques and outcasts...but these had nothing to do with social class' (2015: 169). The reason behind this may simply be financial: just as the sex comedies of the early 1980s tailed off once they started losing money, audience capacity for class-related comedy drama may have waned. When the director most associated with this subgenre, John Hughes, decided to make other types of films, the studios may have decided that without him, the mainstream teen romantic comedy would no longer be profitable and switched their attention to other topics in mainstream teen cinema. Another reason that could have had an effect, and which could apply to all Hollywood genres, is that mainstream cinema became less diverse in its outlook. People working in Hollywood were more middle-class and college educated and less

likely to make films concerning more broadly-themed subjects. Freeman (2015) also notes that maybe the main reason is that, by the 1990s, Hollywood was increasingly reliant on the international market for its revenue, and tales about socioeconomic issues would not be popular with audiences in the profitable Far East market, for example.

Future research might focus on comparing the teen film to other genres in terms of character roles, which would be an innovative addition to genre studies. For example, the Proppian roles discussed in relation to the romantic comedy and drama could be aligned to more adult versions of these types of film. In a similar vein, notions surrounding the 'ideal' male and female in the teen film could be positioned within more adult-themed films.

Finally, evaluating the goals of this research has demonstrated that the 1980s teen genre is a cinematic topic worthy of legitimate academic study, despite it often being ignored by scholars writing on Hollywood cinema. The representational values of the genre have effectively been delineated in this work in terms of expressing youth concerns in the context of sexuality, romance, relationships with their peers and adults, the different fictional roles they play, and how space becomes a symbolic feature. It has been reinforced by positioning these issues within a formal generic, structuralist and oppositional framework and merging this with ideas concerning adolescent identity and sociopolitical concerns. What has emerged is that the teen films of this period, both as individual texts and as a whole, have a distinctive set of characteristics unique to the genre. For instance, the generational divide highlights this distinctiveness. Also, the interrogation of the evolving characteristics regarding the teens' sexual and romantic identities — the former in the first half of the decade and the latter in the second — is a trend unique to the genre.

Along with teen films of an earlier age in Hollywood, what 1980s teen cinema established was a set of foundations for a genre which has since become more diverse and provocative in its stories and characters regarding the portrayal of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race — films which reflect a changing and evolving society in terms of these issues. This thesis has demonstrated that cinema is a medium which can articulate youth concerns and attempt to make sense of a culture, thus elevating the significance of the 1980s teen film within the Hollywood generic canon. Maybe Harold M. Foster's (1987: 86-87) comments would go some way to supporting this, as he regards John Hughes' *Sixteen Candles* as 'excellent quality, perhaps among the

best produced in America, [full of] vitality, fine acting, and spirit.' In addition, the cultural impact of these films can be even be linked to the First Lady, Barbara Bush, when she paraphrased *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* during a commencement speech in 1990 at the private Wellesley College, in Massachusetts. Quoted in *American Rhetoric: Top Hundred Speeches* (1990: u.p), she encouraged students to: 'Find the joy in life, because as Ferris Bueller said on his day off: 'Life moves pretty fast; if you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it!"

Filmography (in chronological order)

The Wild One (1953)
Blackboard Jungle (both 1955)
Kiss Me Deadly (1955)
Rebel Without a Cause (1955)
Rock Around the Clock (1956)
Dragship Girl (1957)
Motorcycle Gang (1957)
Untamed Heart (1957)
High School Confidential (1958)
Rio Bravo (1959)
Splendour in the Grass (1961)
The Pink Panther (1963)
Bikini Beach (1964)
Muscle Beach Party (1964)
Beach Blanket Bingo (1965)
How Stuff a Bikini (1965)
Wild Bikini (1965)
Wild Angels (1966)
Easy Rider (1969)
Last Summer (1969)
Brian's Song (1971)
Dirty Harry (1971)
Last Tango in Paris (1972)
Taxi Driver (1976)
Star Wars (1977)
Animal House (1978)
Halloween (1978)
Pretty Baby (1978)
The Deer Hunter (1978)
Alien (1979)
Apocalypse Now (1979)
Coming Home (1979)
Meatballs (1979)
Fame (1980)
Foxes (1980)
Friday the 13th (1980)
Little Darlings (1980)
Ordinary People (1980)
The Blue Lagoon (1980)
Times Square (1980)
Endless Love (1981)
Porky's (1981)
Private Lessons (1981)
Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)
Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)
First Blood (1982)
Goin' all the Way (1982)
The Last American Virgin (1982)
All the Right Moves (1983)

Class (1983)
Class of 1984 (1983)
Flashdance (1983)
Getting It On (1983)
Losin' It (1983)
My Tutor (1983)
Porky's II: The Next Day (1983)
Private School (1983)
Screwballs (1983)
Spring Break (1983)
The Outsiders (1983)
The Return of the Jedi (1983)
Valley Girl (1983)
War Games (1983)
Beverley Hills Cop (1984)
Footloose (1984)
Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)
Reckless (1984)
Red Dawn (1984)
Revenge of the Nerds (1984)
Sixteen Candles (1984)
The Joy of Sex (1984)
Where the Boys Are (1984)
An Early Frost (1985)
Fraternity Vacation (1985)
Just One of the Guys (1985)
Porky's Revenge (1985)
Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985)
St Elmo's Fire (1985)
The Sure Thing (1985)
The Breakfast Club (1985)
Vision Quest (1985)
Weird Science (1985)
As If (1986)
Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)
Lucas (1986)
Parting Glances (1986)
Pretty in Pink (1986)
Stand by Me (1986)
Top Gun (1986)
Working Girl (1986)
Adventures in Babysitting (1987)
Dirty Dancing (1987)
Less than Zero (1987)
Lethal Weapon (1987)
River's Edge (1987)
Robocop (1987)
Some Kind of Wonderful (1987)
Wall Street (1987)
Die Hard (1988)
For Keeps (1988)

Stand and Deliver (1988)
Do the Right Thing (1989)
Heathers (1989)
Long Time Companion (1989)
Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (1989)
Pump Up the Volume (1990)
Boyz in the Hood (1991)
My Own Private Idaho (1991)
Slacker (1991)
Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1992)
Encino Man (1992)
Revenge of the Nerds III: The Next Generation (1992)
Menace to Society (1993)
Totally Fucked Up (1994)
Clueless (1995)
Kids (1995)
Mallrats (1995)
Cruel Intentions (1996)
Suburbia (1996)
Wild Things (1997)
American Pie (1999)
10 Things I Hate About You (1999)
The Virgin Suicides (1999)

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