Wonder girls: Undercurrents of resistance in the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American cinema

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This thesis explores the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American teen films such as Little Darlings (1980), Smooth Talk (1985), Just One of the Guys (1985), Pretty in Pink (1986) and Mermaids (1990). It uses film analysis and feminist film theory to subject a range of case studies to three principal lines of enquiry: it firstly explores whether the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American teen film constituted part of a neo-conservative cultural backlash against Second Wave Feminism; it secondly exposes undercurrents of resistance amongst these representations, and suggests such ‘pockets of agency’ may have opened up new possibilities for the more progressive images of teenage girls that followed in the 1990s; and thirdly, this thesis looks at what the figure of the teenage girl on film in itself (a transitory figure that is in a perennial state of ‘becoming’) can offer a feminist film theory that has thus far focused predominantly on the images of adult women, with the hope of sparking new areas of debate within this field of study.
WONDER GIRLS

Undercurrents of Resistance in the Representation of Teenage Girls in 1980s American Cinema

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INTRODUCTION

“Of all of the blind spots that exist in film scholarship, the lack of serious analyses of young women in the cinema has been one of the most glaring.”¹

When I was a young girl in the 1980s, my parents suggested my younger brother and I refrain from watching commercial television during the week and rent a film from the video store in the weekend instead. Over the course of the next few years, my brother and I alternated weekends in our selection of viewing materials, which included a strong partaking of the 1980s teen film genre; we eagerly consumed new releases and insatiably devoured repeat viewings of common favourites such as Sixteen Candles, Pretty in Pink, The Breakfast Club, Labyrinth, Weird Science, Flight of the Navigator, Back to the Future and Ferris Bueller’s Day Off². The films that we encountered on these weekend viewings shaped us in many ways; they showed us what ‘high school’ (an American, exotic phenomenon for us) was like, what teachers were like, what friendships should be like, what romance could be like, what music and cultural objects we ought to like, and what kinds of teenagers we could grow up to be. As the 1980s faded into the 1990s, and I became more aware of the cultural images that surrounded me, I assumed that the representations of strong, individual and intellectual teenage girls that were calling out to me from all corners of the Anglo-American media in this decade (from the Spice Girl’s “Girl Power”, to television shows such as My So-Called Life and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, animated series like Daria, and films such as Pump Up The Volume, Hackers and Clueless) had always been there. I assumed that the images I had encountered in the 1980s had been as empowering. But upon frequent revisits to these films, I began to realise more and more they were only superficially similar. The stereotypical characterizations may have looked the same – the cheerleaders still looked like cheerleaders - but their content, the moral and ideological messages of the material, and the access I had to the voices and the individual subjectivities of these heroines, were strikingly different.

² All details of television programs and film can be found in the filmography at the end of this thesis; titles are listed alphabetically.
Just after the turn of the century, now a student of Film Studies in the UK, I found my fingers would often run past the shelves of the university library in search of writings on the films that I had loved and embraced so much in my youth. But I was disappointed to find very little had been written about the teen films of the 1980s or about the representation of teenage girls in cinema in general. As my own interests developed – as my passion for research and writing on cinema grew and my desires to unravel the constructions of gender in popular culture and the arts were becoming increasingly vocal – it seemed natural to return to these films of my youth, and to approach them, now, from an academic perspective. When Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance released their edited volume of essays on the representation of teenage girls in film, *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice – Cinemas of Girlhood*, in 2002, one particular article in it appeared to confirm my instincts about the conservative nature of the 1980s films that I had so thoroughly enjoyed as a young girl. In ‘Pretty in Pink? John Hughes Reinscribes Daddy’s Girl in Homes and Schools’, Ann De Vaney writes:

> During the 1980s when academic and professional doors were opening for women, and when ‘Roe vs. Wade’ was the law of the land, [John Hughes, prolific teen film director] elected to depict ... his girls as under the rule of their father ... He was an important part of political and popular discourses that articulated a backlash against women’s rights.

When I read this, I felt validated in my call to further research these teen films of the 1980s – surely the evidence of ‘this backlash’ (and of course, Ann De Vaney is referring to Susan Faludi’s seminal book *Backlash* here as well - in which Faludi traced the cultural backlash against the politics of Second Wave feminism, across various political and cultural lines under Reagan’s 1980-1988 administration in the US) was not only presented in the films of John Hughes, but in a much wider array of teen films throughout the 1980s. And this made me wonder; how did this actually work? How do we recognise an ideology ‘imbued’ within a genre? At what levels of the frame, and the narrative, is a ‘backlash’ articulated and made (in)visible? There was more to it, I felt, than just these John Hughes films that presented “girls as under the rule of their fathers”; this ideology would have had to infuse the very fabric of all these films, and their representations of a teenage generation.

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At the same time, however, De Vaney was, in my opinion, neglecting to fully acknowledge that these films somehow produced a more active and strident teenage girl on film as well⁴. I was convinced that the heroines of the teen films of my childhood, and Molly Ringwald especially, had also somehow invited me to celebrate teen girlhood, and of all her intellectual, creative, and physically powerful potential. Had the teen girls of the 1980s teen films not inspired, or in some way led to, the feisty teenage heroines that American popular culture so readily embraced in the 1990s? The 1990s were, in fact, the ‘quintessential’ decade for the representation of the teenage girl on screen, where most lines of discourse that involved this figure took on newly progressive stances; from Riot Grrrls, to Girl Power, to Reviving Ophelia, to the fighting Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar), to the well-spoken and emotionally sophisticated Joey (Katie Holmes) and Jen (Michelle Williams) in Dawson’s Creek, to the poignant reflections on early adolescence in Welcome to the Dollhouse, the ironic commentary on teenage girlhood in Clueless, and the intellectual sensibilities of Felicity (Keri Russell) in Felicity and Lindsay (Linda Cardellini) in Freaks and Geeks, to name but a few. As Peggy Orenstein wrote, in an article entitled ‘The Movies Discover the Teen-Age Girl’ in The New York Times, August 11th of 1996:

No one has called it such, but if 1996 is to be christened anyone’s, it ought surely to be named the year of the teenage girl. Consider the evidence: Alanis Morissette packs concert venues with thousands of ululating 13-year-olds who thrill to her hit “Ironic” the way their mothers swooned over “Love Me Do”. Reviving Ophelia, a therapist’s account of her work with young women is at the top of the paperback best seller list. “My So-Called Life”, a drama about a 15-year-old girl and her angst, plays in perpetual reruns on MTV. Time magazine recently named the psychologist Carol Gilligan, who first brought girls’ faltering sense of self to public attention, one of the country’s most influential people. And in the ultimate Zeitgeist test, a slew of films are being released this summer centring on the lives of adolescent girls... [These are not films that use young women as plot devices, as virginal blanks upon whom other characters project fantasies, or as victims. Rather, these are films...] for children and adults alike, in which girls are in charge of their own fates, active rather than reactive;

⁴ Even though De Vaney does propose that, in spite of their conservative messages, the John Hughes films are still much loved by audiences even today, she does not connect his films to the more progressive representations that came after, or to a larger perspective on the representation of teenagers in film in general.
films that are about girls’ relationships to one another rather than to boys, that tackle the big themes of teenage life, like anger, sexuality, alienation and displacement.\(^5\)

And Orenstein was not alone in this observation that the 1990s celebrated a newly progressive representation of the teenage girl (see for instance Gonick (2006), Tassone (2003), Kearney (2002 and 2011), Wald (1998), and Levine and Parks (2007)). Something must have happened in the 1980s that led a seemingly ‘conservative’ representation of teenage girls (that according to De Vaney, constituted a possible backlash against feminism) into a space where more progressive representations were possible. So how did they get there? Could it be that the 1980s was a decade that presented some kind of innate ‘tension’ in its teen films? Could the representation of teenage girls within this genre have acted as a catalyst of sorts, where most of the output might have been highly conservative in nature, yet somehow, undercurrents of resistance were forming, and pockets of agency were being enabled to create small cracks in the assumed ‘stable’ image-output machinery that is Hollywood? Could these films, unknowingly, have slowly begun to shift our tastes, and desires, towards more forward and independent inscriptions of the teen girl identity on screen? Or could it be that there was something specific about the representation of the teenage girl in itself that allowed for this ‘moving back and forward’ at the same time; that this figure opened up of a space and time in the image, that, by remaining suspended in contradiction, could de-stabilise our set thoughts on the representation of women on film? Feminist film theory, an area of cultural criticism that evaluates the very relation between the depiction of gendered identities, power, ideology, language, the arts and spectatorship, has thus far commonly overlooked the figure of the teenage girl. What might analysis of her representation contribute to ongoing debates?

These were the questions I had going into this project – the aim of which had now become threefold; through close reading and textual analysis, I want to examine the representation of teenage girls in 1980s teen films in order to 1) investigate whether these representations constituted a (neo-conservative) backlash against feminism in American popular culture, 2) figure out what it was about these images that might have opened up pockets of resistance for the more progressive images of teenage girls that followed in the 1990s, and 3) understand what the figure of the teenage girl on film, in itself, might contribute to a feminist film theory that has, thus far, focused predominantly on the representation of adult women on screen. These three ‘quests’ engage with three principal areas of research.

The first is that of (structural) discourse analysis, of understanding and exposing the ideology that consistently underpins a particular line of ‘discourse’ (or output) within popular culture. The second is that of genre studies, an area of film studies research that analyses a particular cohesion between films of a specific genre, by mapping and analysing recurring tropes and trajectories. And the third (most relevant) area of research is that of feminist film theory and, at some specific junctures, its connections to the areas of cultural theory/analysis and philosophy as well.

In the following three sections of my introduction, I will briefly go into these three areas one by one; I will introduce some of the literature that became the starting point (and/or a sample methodology) for my work, explore their areas of interaction and relate them to how my own project took shape, and developed. In doing so, I wish to expose more clearly the specific gaps within the fields that this project is attempting to fill, and sketch out the framework and background for my project at the same time. When I look at the area of discourse analysis in film studies, I will first briefly introduce some of the history, politics and socio-cultural themes of 1980s America, and relate this to the popular cinema that the decade produced. What were the important themes of the decade, and how have its representations of adult men and women so far been understood? I believe it is essential to introduce this here, because it allows me to set out the context (the landscape) that my own ‘objects’ were thrust into and became a part of. I will also call upon some of these themes throughout the rest of my thesis. By looking at a few examples of the critical discourse analysis that has so far engaged with this period, I simultaneously introduce where the roots of my own approach and my thinking lie, and how I have come to understand the connections between popular American cinema and its contemporary politics in general.

As I move on to introduce the second area of research I engage with – writings on genre, or teen film, and 1980s teen film more specifically - I take the opportunity to relay the process I underwent to find my corpus for this project as well, and discuss how I came to select the case-studies I use throughout the thesis. In the third and final part of this introduction, I introduce my main area of research, feminist film theory, and, more specifically, representation studies (I focus not on issues of spectatorship, for instance, but on a textual analysis of the image only), as I sketch out the organisation and structure of my thesis. Both the areas of discourse analysis and genre studies will remain relative ‘jumping off points’ (starting points, or touching stones) for my research, which is why I introduce them at greater length here, whereas key texts from within the fields of cultural and feminist film theory allow me to enter into more elaborate dialogues with the films, and the representations
of teenage girls, throughout the rest of the project. As I engage with these texts in the main body of my thesis, I will introduce them more specifically, at each relevant juncture.

1980s America: Introducing the Social-Political Landscape and the Films It Produced

The 1980s was a decade densely laced with political, sociological and cultural events (and its many intersections) in America; it presented an intense reawakening of Cold War sentiments, in what is often called the ‘Second Cold War’ (Republican President Ronald Reagan declared the Soviet Union “the focus of evil in the modern world” in a speech in 1983), as well as several tensely fraught, international ‘stand-offs’ with Iran, invasions of Grenada and Panama, the Aids epidemic (reintroducing discussions about homosexuality and safe sex into mainstream debate), the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, Reagan’s call to bring down the Berlin Wall, the introduction of VHS videotapes and the ‘fair use’ act, conglomerate mergers and takeovers radically transforming what remained of the Hollywood Studio system, and the king and queen of pop, Michael Jackson and Madonna, reigning over the new (and globally exported) channel MTV. Politically, for America, it was a period fuelled by unwavering conservative rule; it was the decade that saw Ronald Reagan elected, and re-elected in a landslide, and a decade that thereby strongly positioned a ‘new’ wave of (neo-) conservative political ideals into mainstream American culture and thought.

I choose to use the term ‘neo-conservatism’ here, and throughout this project, because this is how Ann De Vaney describes the recurring ideology underlying popular culture in the 1980s. I recognize it is a much debated term, and not one generally associated with Reagan’s politics per se, even though it is more formally associated with his voting public, often consisting of former Democrats, like Reagan himself. I use it to refer to the 1980s popularization of a new (second generation) wave of political ideals, embraced by former neo-liberals, who suddenly turned to Republican alliances. These ideals generally supported free markets and capitalism, individualism and representative democracy, a return to nostalgic, 1950s values (the centralization of the nuclear family unit, a focus on the suburban home, and the upholding of certain Christian traditions and ways of thinking), an unshakeable sense of patriotism, low interest for international diplomacy, an unconditional support for military action, and a rather ‘binary’ outlook upon the rest of the world (that we have since come to associate with more recent neo-conservative politicians such as George W. Bush and Dick Cheney.) The consistent popularity of these ideals at the time were further established

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6 For further readings about neo-conservatism, see for instance Mark Gerson’s *The Essential Neo-Conservative Reader* (1996), Irving Kristol *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (1983) or Neo
when the Republicans won a third consecutive term with the election of George H.W. Bush in 1988, and made these views part of a zeitgeist that dominated the US for more than a decade.

A few key works that introduced pertinent areas of discourse analysis on the films of this period inspired my own methodology and thinking early on. Robin Wood’s *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (1986) drew important connections between particular films of the 1970s and early 1980s and the specific cultural context that produced them. In his chapter ‘Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era’, Wood, for example, addresses how strong, conservative themes of the decade, such as the fear of fascism and the relationship with the father, featured in sci-fi blockbusters such as *Blade Runner, Starwars* and *E.T.* In his chapter on ‘Images and Women’, Wood addresses what he calls the ‘anti-feminism’ that is presented by some films of the 1980s, such as *An Officer and a Gentleman* and *Terms of Endearment* yet in contrast to this, Wood argues, the teen film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was more progressive and female-friendly, because it embraced and constructed a new female spectator position. Alongside Wood’s book, Andrew Britton’s article ‘Blissing Out: The Politics of Reaganite Entertainment’ (1986) suggested that during the Reagan years, Hollywood presented a certain conservative reassurance to its public, specifically with regard to its representations of masculinity, paternity, technology and nuclear anxiety, in films such as *Kramer vs. Kramer, Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark, Ghost Busters* and *WarGames*. Michael Ryan and Douglas Keller’s book *Camera Politica: the Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (1988) similarly connected different structural and thematic recurrences to specific film genres of the 1970s and 1980s (technophobia in fantasy films for instance, metaphors of fear in disaster films, and the restoration of the masculine in superhero films), and also addressed the politics of sexuality and of representation in films such as *Klute* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*. More recently, Stephen Prince’s volume of edited essays, *American Cinema of the 1980s: Themes and Variations* (2007), addresses specific themes and films for each year of the decade, and relates many of these to specific aspects of Reagan’s conservative politics. Ultimately, what became most clear to me from this last book, and the previously mentioned titles, is that 1980s popular American cinema introduced a newly divisive representation of gender on film; where depictions of ‘the new man’ were competing with (although greatly outnumbering still)

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representations of ‘the new woman’. Much has been written about these representations of (adult) gender in the 1980s, and these findings were really important for my own work – in the next few paragraphs, I will briefly sketch out an overview of this aspect of the cinematic landscape of the decade, and refer to relevant sources in footnotes below.

Most of 1980s leading Hollywood output was created by male producers and directors, male stars, and featured male driven narratives. The 1980s was a decade in which the former brat pack directors of the 1970s, Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma and Oliver Stone, and new commercial talents, such as James Cameron, John Landis, Robert Zemeckis, Barry Levinson, Rob Reiner, Joe Dante and John Carpenter, alongside a new wave of more independent filmmakers, such as the Coen brothers, Spike Lee, Jim Jarmusch, David Cronenberg, David Lynch and John Sayles, were all predominantly preoccupied with male wish fulfilment. This ‘theme’ has been analysed in/traced back to several groups (or sub-genres) of films in the 1980s. Firstly, it features in trilogies/series that presented male fantasies about exploration, heroism and man-made manipulations of time; in the Indiana Jones series, the StarWars and StarTrek series, the James Bond films (six Bond films were released between 1981 and 1989) and the Back to the Future trilogy, for instance. Secondly, male wish fulfilment was embodied by the aggressive and fighting, hard male body, in titles/series such as Rocky, Rambo, Robocop, Die Hard, Batman, Blade Runner, Tarzan the Ape Man, Raging Bull, Scarface and The Terminator. Thirdly, the 1980s presented popular horror film series that privileged male desire (about masochism and female virginity), in series such as Nightmare on Elm Street, Friday the 13th and the continuing Halloween franchise. Fourthly, the war film often addressed questions of a renewed masculine identity and the heroism of returning veterans in the aftermath of Vietnam, in acclaimed films of the decade, such as Platoon, Full Metal Jacket, Casualties of War, Born on the Fourth of July and Good Morning Vietnam. Fifthly, numerous films presented an

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9 For more information on this tendency, see Stephen Prince (2007).
10 For additional reading, see Wood (1987), Palmer (1993) and Prince (2007).
12 These films produced images that weren’t particularly progressive for women, as has been proposed by both Carol Clover (1992) and Barbara Creed (1993), and Kendrick (2009).
intensely romantic (or Utopian even) perspective on male bonding and camaraderie, in films such as *Ghost Busters*, the *Lethal Weapon* and *Beverly Hills Cop* series, *Stand By Me*, *The Blues Brothers*, *Rain Man*, *Trading Places*, *Karate Kid* and *Twins*. Sixthly, the films of the 1980s persistently restored the patriarchal role within the nuclear family unit, and embraced a ‘new, caring father’ (in a possible response to women increasingly taking to the work floor, in reality), in titles such as *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Three Men and a Baby*, *Mr. Mom*, *Ordinary People*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, and even *Fatal Attraction*. And lastly, 1980s Hollywood presented an almost unlimited horizon for a few virile new stars, Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks and Richard Gere, who presented all-American, everyday male fantasies made ‘reality’, in films such as *Risky Business*, *Big*, *American Gigolo*, *Splash*, *Bachelor Party*, *Days of Thunder*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *Top Gun* and *Cocktail*.

These are all films that have remained part of our popular viewing even today – these films have been remembered. If we look at them anew, they illustrate how the 1980s presented a cinematic landscape that was dominated by issues surrounding the (re)establishment of masculinity and patriarchy; the industry appeared fuelled and driven by, as well as aimed at, a male desire. And this, in itself, underscores Susan Faludi’s suggestion that there was a ‘backlash’ against feminism in American popular culture, under Reagan’s administration. But the 1980s presented an interesting dichotomy for the representation of women in American as well. In this post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-Sexual Revolution, post-Second Wave feminism America, women had readily and steadily been climbing up the socio/economic ladder. They were taking to the work floor *en masse*, with women eventually comprising a remarkable 47% of the workforce in the US, in 1990. The landmark *Roe vs. Wade* case had overturned all state laws outlawing restricting abortion in 1973, the Equal Rights Amendment had passed in 1972, and was presumed to insure equal pay for women, whilst Geraldine Ferraro became the first woman candidate to run for Vice Presidency, in the 1984 elections. The income women earned opened them up to a whole new range of markets

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15 The advent of the ‘new, caring father’ in the 1980s, as part of a backlash against feminism, has been addressed more specifically by Tania Modleski’s *Feminism Without Women* (1991), Sarah Harwood’s *Family Fictions* (1997) and Elizabeth Traube’s *Dreaming Identities – Class, Gender, and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies* (1992), as well as Stella Bruzzi’s *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Postwar Hollywood* (2005). I will come back to this point at length later in my thesis.

16 Select examples of studies of these films can be found in Prince (2007), Tasker (1993), and Studlar’s “Cruising Into The New Millennium: Performative Masculinity, Stardom and the All-American Boy’s Body”, in Murray Pomerance, ed., *Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls: Gender in Film at the End of the Twentieth Century* (SUNY Press, 2001).

and consumer products, promoted through many new and intricate strategies of cross-media advertising.

This might, in part, have led to, what I call, the decade’s ‘Body-as-Project’ theme (or its more general obsession with ‘healthism’). This theme was made evident by the success of the fitness and body-building videos (by Jane Fonda, Raquel Welch, Arnold Swarzenegger and Cher for instance) and the strict self-discipline invoked by the popular Ayds, Scarsdale and Atkins diets in the 1980s, the rise of the mall as the ultimate locale for all-round consumption, beautification and self-improvement, the insurgence of self-help books, the emphasis on fashion and dress in women’s magazines, and the increasing private access and demand for plastic surgery. 1980s Americans – across genders - were readily invited to mould their unruly bodies into malleable commodities, to sculpt, transform, and adapt their body over and over again. Alongside the return to traditional values and the powers and potentials of the masculine subject, then, the 1980s American zeitgeist embraced and promoted the more progressive potential of individual, (female) liberties and the concept of self-adaptation as well.

The opposition between these two lines of discourse had a polarizing effect on the representations of adult women on screens. On the one hand, adult women were seen to have returned and become reduced, once more, to their traditional roles as mothers, carers and victims in melodramas such as Terms of Endearment, The Color Purple, Beaches and Steel Magnolias. At the same time, their roles as mothers were often vilified, if not ‘evacuated’ from the home entirely, in films such as Kramer vs. Kramer, Ordinary People, Three Men and a Baby, Honey I Shrunk the Kids and Out of Africa. Alongside this, women were

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18 This theme cannot be traced to one specific source; it derives from reading the feminist works of Susan Bordo, Sandra Lee Bartky and Cressida Heyes, as well as works on makeovers and makeover media in the 1980s that involved multiple aspects of the (self-)adaptation of the body; Irene Taviss Thomson (1992) writes about it in relation to 1980s American individualism, and Myra MacDonald (1995) discusses it in her chapter ‘Refashioning the Body’, when she analyses the decade’s emphasis on self-transformation and its progressive portrayal in films such as Working Girl.

19 The connections between these videos, more progressive interpretations of the malleability of the self and the origins of makeover television have been set out at length by Vanessa Russell in her article Make me a Celebrity: Celebrity Exercise Videos and the Origins of Makeover Television in Dana Heller, Makeover Television - Realities Remodelled (2007).

20 I do not wish to deny the validity of Foucauldian readings of these aspects of American culture (see for instance Susan Bordo (2003)) here, that have successfully argued how these trends reveal certain power structures at play through bodily control over citizens, but some have suggested that these aspects can also be read progressively, especially for the individual powers of women in 1980s America (see for instance MacDonald (1995), or readings on the makeover (Heller, 2006). This provides an interesting tension – where both readings apply – that begins to open up pockets for the back and forth that I address in this thesis as well.


presented as either naive, easily domineered sexual objects or as ‘dangerous’ vamps in films such as *Nine ½ Weeks, Fatal Attraction, and Dangerous Liaisons*. These examples presented one side of the dichotomy, where women were resigned to traditional, conservative and passive roles. But the decade also produced a lieu of popular films, such as *Nine To Five, Legal Eagles, Baby Boom* and *Working Girl*, that presented ambitious, working women who were able to transform themselves, and successfully balance their work with relationships or motherhood, whilst titles such as *The Witches of Eastwick, Alien* and *Private Benjamin* presented alternative strategies and metaphors for the new strengths and powers available to women in American society. This dichotomy thus suggests that, even in this overbearing conservative landscape, contradictory voices were being raised, and embraced by audiences.

This introduces some of the context into which the teen films that I look at in this project emerged to address new, young audiences. Within a predominantly masculine and ‘male desire driven’ terrain, some representations of adult women were embracing more progressive, self-transformative and independent female attitudes on screen, and this perhaps indicates that the 1980s industry was catering to a zeitgeist deeply divided on how to interpret and reposition the role of the ‘new woman’ in society, after the Second Wave of the 1970s. But most of the discourse analyses of the trends amongst the representation of gender in the 1980s, offer strongly determined readings of the films, and, generally, reject the suggestion that there might have multiple tendencies (or innate contradictions) at play in some of these titles. On top of that, these studies fail to recognise the role that the release of (literally) hundreds of teen films might have played in this cinematic landscape. It is here that my study might provide a new angle on the dominant ideological discourse of the decade, and could contribute a new critical perspective on the representation of gender in the 1980s.

**The Teen Film Genre and the Selection of the Corpus**

After the success amongst teen audiences of high concept films like *Grease, Carrie* and *Jaws* in the late 1970s, and with the advent of cinema multiplexes in malls across the US, and the launch of the new teen phenomenon MTV in 1980, the consumer potential of the American teen was radically embraced by the (entertainment) market of the 1980s. This resulted in an

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23 See MacDonald, particularly the chapter ‘Sex ‘n Spice’, in *Representing Women* (1995).

24 These films have been embraced for their empowering, and self-transformative qualities (see for instance Rapf (in Prince, 2007) and MacDonald (1995), and there connections to 1990s feisty heroines (Tasker (1998), but I do wish to acknowledge here, that this doesn’t necessarily mean these films are successfully answering the feminist cause – rather, they present new ways of representing working women, albeit within an ultimately conservative, heteronormative and traditional Hollywood paradigm.


26 See also Justin Wyatt’s *High Concept* (University of Texas Press, 1994).
immense boom in the production of teen films during the decade\textsuperscript{27}, constituting what was to become the second, popular ‘wave’ for the genre, after the first ‘wave’ of teen films established the genre in the 1950s\textsuperscript{28}.

The first wave of teen films had catered to a new ‘teenage’ demographic that appeared post-World War II, in a 1950s America that was otherwise defined by conformity\textsuperscript{29}. In his book \textit{Teenagers and Teenpics: the Rejuvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s} (originally published in 1988), Thomas Doherty identifies four distinct subgenres that emerged during this first ‘wave’; the clean teenpic, the juvenile delinquent film, the rock ‘n roll film and the cult film. Doherty argues (and this was similarly proposed by David Considine in \textit{The Cinema of Adolescence} (1985)) that these subgenres reflected the struggles of a newly liberated (and/or lost) post-World War II generation when faced with having to ‘conform’ to their parents’ lifestyle, and post-war guilt, and often resulted in a strong rejection of authority and institution in American culture. These films, featuring teen stars such as James Dean, Elvis, and, to a less rebellious degree, Mickey Rooney and Sandra Dee, consistently developed complex discourses about adolescent identity, rebellion, race, sexuality, individuality, mobility and other American freedoms. The success of these films confirmed that popular cinema had branched into a new market and that for this generation, the representation of teenagers on film occasionally redeemed, but mostly resisted and commented on, the American political ideals of its time.\textsuperscript{30}

Interestingly, where the 1950s had been defined as a society based on conformity, in which teen film had provided a channel for countering, rebellious voices, 1980s America presented a society that highly prioritised the individual\textsuperscript{31}, but that reinvigorated its teen films to cater to a more conservative agenda. It was therefore surprising to find that little academic research had addressed this genre and these tensions, when I started my project in 2005. Part of what makes teen films particular vulnerable carriers for certain ideological discourses is

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\textsuperscript{27} Timothy Shary sets out this argument at great length, in his book \textit{Generation Multiplex} (2003).

\textsuperscript{28} For more information on the first wave of teen films in the 1950s, see Thomas Doherty’s \textit{Teenagers and Teenpics} (Temple University Press, 2002), and David Considine’s \textit{The Cinema of Adolescence} (Jefferson NC: MacFarland 1985).

\textsuperscript{29} See Taviss Thomson (1992).

\textsuperscript{30} In 2006, Considine followed up on this latter notion in his article (in Carolyn Cocca’s \textit{Get Real: Adolescent Sexuality – a Historical Handbook and Guide}), “Representations of Adolescent Sexuality in the Media”, which provides a detailed overview of different representations of sexuality across four distinct periods in media history: 1890s-1920s, 1930s-1940s, 1950s-1960s, and the 1970s-to beyond. In this article, Considine places more of an emphasis on the representation of girls and sexuality on screen that in the aforementioned book, by analysing titles such as \textit{Splendor in the Grass} and \textit{A Summer Place}. For more reading on teen films and their discourses between 1950s and 1980s, see for instance Nancy Schwartz’s “Coming of Age: A Masculine Myth” (1972), and Elayne Rapping’s “Hollywood’s Youth Cult Films” (1987), that reviewed the youth cult film genre across several decades in America, as well.

\textsuperscript{31} See Taviss Thomson (1992).
that they are neither written nor produced by the subjects they present or are attempting to address. As Timothy Shary points out, “…the teen film genre is perhaps the only film genre that is virtually never produced by the people it involves. Teens do not make films; adults do.”

In effect, and particularly for the representation of the teenage girl, this means that it is usually the ‘father’ who creates and voices these representations (as the writer/director/producer of these films), and not the ‘daughter’ herself. Timothy Shary has extensively traced the history, the evolution and the character of the teen film genre. His work focuses especially on the second wave of teen films in the 1980s, and he explores the different subgenres that the decade presented in great detail, such as the teen-science film, the teen-adventure film, and the ‘nerd’ films (teen films that present social outcasts as their main protagonists). The strength of this work, however, lies with its breadth, rather than its depth; Shary’s writing does not present close readings of particular films, or otherwise explore the underlying ideologies of the film, or the details of the frame more closely. Other early writers on teen films (including Armond White (1985), Thomas Leitch (1992), Jon Lewis (1992), Bernstein (1997), Bulman (2004), and Tropiano (2005)) again popularly, or sociologically, trace the evolvement of particular trends and sub-genres, grouping together titles and mapping generic traits, but they tend not to present close readings of the films. They also frequently preference teen films that feature teenage boys, such as Rebel Without a Cause, The Summer of ‘42, Stand by Me and Animal House.

A few recent titles do address the representation of teenage girls more specifically, including Sarah Hentges’s Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film (2005), Roz Kaveney’s Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from ‘Heathers’ to ‘Veronica Mars’ (2005), Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson’s Teen TV (2004), and Catherine Driscoll’s Teen Film (2011), but these titles focus mostly on the 1990s, and examine girl-centred teen films such as Clueless, Mean Girls and Legally Blonde, and television series such as Buffy, Popular and Veronica Mars. Again, these works do not necessarily engage with their objects in close reading, or attempt to really ‘pull’ at the representations of teenage girls in popular American culture, rather, they provide overviews of the genre and the corpus in

34 Bernstein’s book is a good example of ‘popular’ writing on 1980s teen film; aiming primarily at the nostalgic values produced by the genre, his book traces and maps audience recollections of teen films, and mixes popular fandom of the films into an overview of the genre. Many more examples like this exist, including Gora (2011), Clarke (2007), Christie (2009) and coffee table books on the lives of the bratpack actors, such as Pulver and Davies (2000).
relation to the changes in society, or changing ideas about citizenship. In this sense, these works helped me to define the genre, and informed the selection of my corpus.

The teen film genre presents a collection of films that are produced primarily to cater to teenage audiences and/or that feature teen characters in the leading roles; the films incorporate a wider range of plots and subgenres (there are teen film sex comedies, melodramas and horrors, and so on), but they are coherent in their focus on teenage ‘rites-of-passage’ issues (including, for example, the loss of virginity, the search for identity or a place within society, and struggles with schools, parents and friends), and often feature a set of recurring narrative tropes, settings, and stereotyped ‘teenage’ characters (such as cheerleaders, rebels and geeks). On top of this, it must be noted that commercial American teen films, especially those from the 1980s, tend to revolve around white, heterosexual, middleclass, suburban American (and particularly mid-western) teenagers - this has become somewhat of a genre staple in itself.

In order to assemble a collection of films for my study, I began in late 2005 to write up a list of teen films and other films that featured teenage girls that I remembered from my childhood in the 1980s. This led me to approximately 35 titles. I then surveyed friends and colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic and asked them about the films they remembered, to map what had been ‘popular’ both within and outside the United States. From the very beginning the lists from both sides of the Atlantic differed; films mentioned by my American friends, such as Little Darlings, Girls Just Want To Have Fun and The Legend of Billie Jean, for example, had not been (memorably) released in Europe. Upon consulting distribution information, via the internet and Stephen Prince’s overview of Hollywood productions during the 1980s, A New Pot of Gold, this was often confirmed; in the US, the range of teen film distribution had been wider (and had experienced longer running schedules) in the 1980s than in Europe. This was likely the result of the concept of the multiplex cinema, which, with its multiple screens often house inside a mall, targeted teen audiences in the US in ways that the fewer amounts of screens in the cinemas in Europe did not at the time.


This has begun to change, after the 1980s, as more teen films began to feature homosexuality, in But I’m a Cheerleader, for instance, and featured different ethnicities, in Above the Rim, Boyz in the Hood, Menace II Society, and Bring it On or Save the Last Dance, but the standard, especially the heteronormative sexualities, have remained. Outside Hollywood, teen films have represented a wider range of teen identities all across the world; see for instance, Shary (2006) and Pomerance and Sakeris (1997).
I next consulted the Internet Movie Database in early 2006 and, through its search engines, made lists of every American production (films funded or produced by American studios) released in the US between 1979 and 1991. I selected the films that (prominently) featured teenagers, and this resulted in over 400 titles. It was at this stage that I had to make a first round of selective decisions; I chose to eliminate television films (or ‘after school specials’, as they are often called in America) because in their style and content, they connect explicitly to a different genre and format. I also chose to not look at teen horror films, because this area had previously been explored by feminist analysis (including the works on the Final Girl by Carol Clover, and the works of Barbara Creed) and was indeed very different in content and style from the teen romantic comedies and dramas I wanted to look at. I also discarded films that sidelined the representation of teenage girls to such a degree, that their contributions with regards to image construction would be extremely minimal (this included, for instance, many of the boy-centred teen sex comedies produced in the 1980s, that presented a rather two-dimensional teen girl character, mostly as an anonymous nude body – an aspect of the teen film subgenre that I felt would already be addressed by looking at its most well-known examples, such as *Porky’s* and *The Revenge of the Nerds*). I then cross-referenced my resulting list with my previous lists, and with fan-forums dedicated to 1980s cinema, such as The 80s Rewind – Home of ‘80s Retro Movies\(^{37}\), in order to evaluate which titles had recognisably become part of the 1980s teen film canon. I also compared my list to the teen-film corpus lists of teen film overview works, such as Timothy Shary’s *Generation Multiplex* (2002), Robert Bulman’s *Hollywood Goes to High School* (2005), and, more recently, Catherine Driscoll’s *Teen Film* (2011), in order to gain a better perspective on the films that had thus far appeared on the academic radar. Ultimately, after looking into the availability (through DVD purchases, video stores, downloads, forums, and, increasingly, online portals such as Youtube), I had compiled a list of approximately 125 titles that formed the basic corpus for my study of the representation of teenage girls in American teen films from the 1980s (the complete list can be found in the filmography, under the heading ‘Selected Corpus’, at the back of this thesis).

For the selection of the case-studies that I use for close reading in this research, I first watched all of the titles in my corpus. During these viewings, I began to map recurring elements and scenes, and important differences or parallels between the films (and this was very much influenced by my readings on teen film genre too). I looked for tropes and

\(^{37}\text{This site provides an extremely comprehensive over of 1980s American cinema in general; accessed November 26, 2012. www.fast-rewind.com.}\)
trajectories on both the visual and the narrative level that engaged with the representation of the teenage girl, with the construction of her identity or image, specifically. After I had identified pivotal scenes for close analysis, such as, for instance, the makeover scene, I began to organise my arguments. This led me to the second phase in my selection process. Rather than point towards all 125 films individually, I decided I would have to select a narrower range of examples, that, nevertheless, would reflect the important trends of the decade, so that I could engage with these films in greater depth. I contracted the number of close analysis case-studies to approximately 15 ‘key’ films that, in my opinion, presented the dominant tendencies and shifts visible amongst the popular representation of teenage girls in 1980s American teen film. (This also meant, for instance, that I decided to focus predominantly on the popular films that presented the teenage girl within American society, as opposed to the few that isolated her at its edges (in delinquency, teenage pregnancy or prostitution, for instance), because I wanted to see how tensions of discourse functioned in these leading examples, rather than in titles that dealt with more resistant subject matter of itself - I come back to this in my conclusion). With this selection of 15 films, I also took into consideration that most of the popular teen films were important, valuable objects to (re)consider, because they have remained influential on the teen film genre today, and are still commonly recognised and frequently viewed. This led me to include almost all of the John Hughes films, for instance. At the same time, I selected a film like Smooth Talk, which really borders independent and art-house (even feminist) filmmaking, because it is a rich text that purposely plays with how the teenage girl had been represented before its release, exposing tropes as well as re-evaluating them. These 15 films thus present a balanced overview of what the popular representation of teenage girls in the 1980s teen (romantic) comedies and dramas had to offer; from the commercially successful (from The Breakfast Club to Say Anything), to titles that have since become ‘cult’ teen films (such as Fast Times of Ridgemont High and The Legend of Billie Jean), to films that have remained less exposed or recognised by the public (including, for instance, Teen Witch and Better Off Dead).

The purpose of this thesis, from the start, was to provide qualitative analysis through close readings, and to explore a theoretical dialogue with specific films that could potentially open up new areas of debate within feminist film theory (rather than providing an overview of quantifiable or empirical data, for instance). But these case-studies are, by no means, meant to be presented as all-inclusive or exhaustive – I recognise that, even within my own corpus, there are usually one or two titles that refute the very findings I propose in each analysis. This should, however, not become a significant issue, as long as my case-studies do reflect larger
trends, and demonstrate that the tendencies I am describing - the contradictory lines of discourse that the teen films of the 1980s opened up - always stemmed from larger, collective forces, as opposed to from singular, isolated examples. This thesis looks to these films for the moments that begin to open up areas for negotiation, that result from collectives, from overlay, from interplay, from movements in between - and this, in itself, rejects any one particular, rigid or universalised reading, of one, or all of the films in my corpus.

About the Structure of the Thesis and the Use of Theory

When I began this project, I quickly realised that, if I wanted to provide a valuable argument that might further feminist film theory when it came to the representation of teenage girls, or even just enter into any fruitful dialogue with my objects of analysis, I would have to go right back to the beginning of feminist film theory, because so little has been written about the teenage girl on film so far. As much as this thesis is nostalgic about the teen films of the 1980s, it is also, then, inherently nostalgic about the theories of representation, and feminist film theory in itself.

The thesis is divided into two main parts, both of which are introduced at greater length by a separate introduction. In the first part, I begin to look at the representation of teenage girls by exploring all that is set, structurally, in these 1980s American teen films. In the first chapter, I introduce the three principal locations of the genre, and analyse how the frame presents and confines the image of the teenage girl within these settings. In the second chapter, I turn to the article that, arguably, launched contemporary feminist film theory nearly 40 years ago, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ by Laura Mulvey (1975), to see whether the standardised constructions that Mulvey presented (where Hollywood cinema is constructed to support a man’s active ‘looking’, whilst reducing the image of the woman to a passive ‘to-be-looked-at’ object) apply to the representations of teenage girls in teen film as well. I expand this analysis of the distribution of power with regards to structures of seeing on film, by then turning to Michel Foucault’s concept of surveillance as well. In the third chapter, I turn to the possibilities for a reversed, teen girl gaze, and engage with Richard Dyer’s writings on gazing upon the male body, at Mary Ann Doane’s writings on the veil and the female gaze, at Jackie Stacey’s work on the female ‘fan’ gaze, and at Anne Friedberg’s concept of the mobilised, female gaze in the mall (that of the flâneuse). This chapter provides a good example of how, through my engagement with my objects, new questions arise that prompt me to move towards different aspects of feminist film or cultural theory (including moving from psychoanalysis and structuralist, cultural theory, to post-structuralist, post-
modern theory, for instance); my findings constantly steer my argument into new directions or approaches that I need to forcibly provoke my objects to ‘speak back’ – to really begin to stretch out, to expose and poke at these images.

In the second part of this thesis, I turn towards that which ‘moves’ within these teen films. I begin the fourth chapter by looking at the underlying narrative trajectories and stereotyped representations, and here I turn to some of the discussions proposed within genre studies as well as Richard Dyer’s writings on stereotypes. I also examine how the teenage girl is presented in her ‘rite-of-passage’; how does she become (woman?) in these films, through her onscreen relationship with her father (a reversed Oedipal trajectory), for instance, or through a recurring trope like the makeover. In this chapter, I engage with more recent observations in feminist theory, ranging from Mary Ann Doane, to Tania Modleski, Kathleen Rowe Karlyn, Yvonne Tasker and Tamar Jeffers McDonald. In the final chapter of the thesis, which is also the longest chapter, I turn towards the performing teenage girl, in dance, in gender/cross-dressing, and in tropes that emphasise her affective display, to look at possible areas for resistance amongst these representations of the teenage girl. In this chapter, I move from Mary Ann Doane and her understanding of the performance of femininity, to the performance of gender as explored by Judith Butler and Annette Kuhn, and eventually, to Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject, and Barbara Klinger’s relation of affective display to, what she has termed, the ‘arresting image’.

On the whole, this thesis presents my humble intention to create an ode, of sorts, to the relevance of textual analysis, and to the theoretical works that inspired me personally, both as a Film Studies student in the UK and in my academic research today; the writings of Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane and Richard Dyer (this project is, in a way, also my attempt to continue Dyer’s work on whiteness (1997); these teen films are so homogeneous in their depiction of race and sexuality, one of the project’s underlying aims is to expose and understand the dominant standards of whiteness in popular culture, against which everything else is set). Ultimately, then, this project is perhaps best understood as an impassioned plea for, or a reclamation, even, of, the studies of representation, of going back to the beginnings of feminist film theory to try and find new ways to move forward. I personally believe the study of film and the studies of representation are no more obsolete today, than feminism itself, or any critical analysis of culture, history, and identity. As Annette Kuhn wrote, in *The Power of the Image*:
in order to challenge dominant representations, it is necessary first of all to understand how they work, and thus where to seek points of possible productive transformation. From such understanding flow various politics and practices of oppositional cultural production, among which may be counted feminist interventions…. There is another justification for a feminist analysis of mainstream images of women: may it not teach us to recognize inconsistencies and contradictions within dominant traditions of representation, to identify points of leverage for our own interventions; cracks and fissures through which may be captured glimpses of what in other circumstance might be possible visions of “a world outside the order not normally seen or thought about”?38

Kuhn here challenges a new generation of feminist film theorists to not only analyse and explore dominant representations, but, in doing so, to find areas of contradiction and inconsistency within these representations, so that resistance and divergence may be exposed to offer possible areas of intervention. The analysis of the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American cinema does all this, for me. It allows me to re-evaluate the hidden ideologies at play within a popular genre, and popular cinema at large, to contribute a new perspective within discourse analysis, and to expose areas of contradiction and inconsistencies within a seemingly set representation that could possibly further feminist film theory, and reopen areas of debate. From within cramped and confined, strictly neo-conservative spaces, these representations of teenage girls find ways to resist; they find small spaces for movement, for openings, and create cracks. This is why I have called this project Wonder Girls, because, like wonder boys, these teenage girls are golden, successful at an early age, yet, because they pass by unrecognised by their contemporaries, they remain unaware of their own potential - their status is inherently fleeting, and miraculous most, in hindsight; when history finally gives them visibility.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the first three chapters of this thesis I examine the mise-en-scene of the 1980s teen film, and look at how the visual construction of the frame captures and presents the teen girl characters within it. The first chapter begins this exploration by looking more closely at three recurring generic settings of the 1980s teen film - the home, the high school and the mall - and considers how these locations inform the representation of the teenage girl in the frame. The chapter suggests the three locations primarily function to reinforce traditional gender lines and boundaries, to visually ‘box’ in the characters, and to ultimately confine the movements of teenage girls. In the second chapter, I continue to explore the three principal locations in 1980s teen film, and the visual constructions they present within the frame, but I do so here from the angle of power distribution, and the concurrent monopolies on looking/gazing. I first look at how the three locations act both as public and private spaces for the representations of teenage girls, and how the girls are shown to appropriate/transform the spaces into either realm. I then point out that these three locations (whether public or private) are all presented as conducive to certain structures of looking; the teenage girls in these films are either objectified as sexual subjects by their to-be-looked-at-ness, or they are made subject to authoritarian surveillance by patriarchal figures. The teenage girls are presented as passive, controlled and supervised, and this ultimately counters any transformative (or performative) powers they might have previously conjured over their surroundings. The films normalize such constructions, and thereby continue to reinforce traditional and conservative gender norms.

After considering the dominant structures of seeing in 1980s teen film in the previous chapter, and concluding that they cater mostly to a male and patriarchal gaze, I turn in the third chapter to the representations of a female, ‘teen girl gaze’ in the three dominant locations in 1980s teen film. I look at how the teen girl gaze is structured and presented from a range of different angles, and I suggest that there are in fact three prevailing ‘types’ of girl gaze that reside within the genre. The first type is a teen girl gaze directed at boys; one that would seem directed and fuelled by sexual desire. I explore the context and structure of this teen girl ‘gaze’, and look at how it recurs at different times throughout the decade. Does this ‘gaze’ allocate any activity/agency to its desiring teen girl subjects? And what does the particular character of the ‘teen girl’ bring into play, with regards to debates about female looking in film? For the second type of teen girl gaze, I turn to another, even more prevalent
type of girl ‘gaze’ presented in teen films in the 1980s, namely one directed at other girls. This gaze is, however, decidedly not sexually oriented (it is not a homo-erotic gaze) but rather ‘comparative’ in nature. How does this ‘gaze’ differ from the gaze introduced by Mulvey? And what can be concluded about this trope of girl-on-girl-looking, within the teen film genre in the 1980s? For the third type of gaze, I return to one of three dominant locations in the films, and examine the teen girl gaze in the recurring setting of the mall. There, the teen girl gaze is (re-)directed as a consumer gaze, aiming at commodities. How is this gaze visualised within the setting of the mall? How does it relate the teen girl body to the commodities it observes, and how does this gaze ultimately engage with the consumer address and power it implies?

I begin this project by looking at the most popular films that defined the teen film genre in the 1980s (featuring strong teen girl lead characters), in order to examine the dominant tendencies of the genre. In the first chapter, I therefore look particularly closely at the John Hughes films (Sixteen Candles, Pretty in Pink, The Breakfast Club, Ferris Bueller’s Day Off and Some Kind of Wonderful), and at other box-office hits such as Lucas, Adventures in Babysitting, and Can’t Buy Me Love. In the second chapter I counter these popular examples with two films that prominently address the teenage girl’s subjective experience, that are both directed by women: Fast Times at Ridgemont High (Amy Heckerling, 1982) and Smooth Talk (Joyce Chopra, 1985). In the final chapter of this first part, I venture out to include the borders of the decade, and address lesser known teen films, such as Little Darlings, Better Off Dead, Mermaids and Lambada, to see whether dominant structures could, there, more readily be replaced by alternative models.
01. Location, Location, Location….

“By the 1980s, women’s spaces at home, in classrooms, and in workplaces had become extremely politicized.”

“…Hollywood depicts adolescent girls using few spaces. Young women tend to be confined to washrooms, hallways, classrooms, and cafeterias, with little attention to the many other spatial possibilities and the complex social and cultural dynamics that shape them”.

The Three Dominant Locations: the Home, the High School and the Mall

The first cycle of teen films, in the 1950s and the 1960s, tended to present teenage characters predominantly in schools (for example, titles such as Blackboard Jungle or High School Confidential!), or engaging socially outside the home and school; in holiday resorts and summer camps (Where The Boys Are is set in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for instance, or most of the Elvis films, Last Summer and The Summer of ’42, to name but a few), or at the beach (the Gidget series starting with Gidget and the Beach Party films of the early 1960s).

Most other action in these films also took place at locations outside the home and school; at social clubs, drive-ins, drive-thru’s, city viewpoints, and, occasionally, at cinema theatres.

Lesley Speed (1998) quotes an original study by Lawrence Grossberg, entitled We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture (1992), in this light, and defines these spaces outside the home and school as ‘in-between locations’, catering to an opportunity for rebellion against authority:

Grossberg expands on the “moral and sociological indeterminacy” of youth to reveal how adolescent social activities express a reaction against authority (p. 178-179). For instance, youth since the 1950s has become associated with “space[s] of transition between… institutions,” as exemplified by the tendency for adolescents to congregate

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41 For more information, see for instance Doherty (2002), Shary (2002 and 2005), Lewis (1992), Tropiano (2005), Pomerance (2005), and Pomerance and Gateward (2005).
“in the street, around the jukebox, at the hop [and] the mall.” Such spaces, which the
onlooker might equate with “no place at all” (p. 179), constitute locations for
teenagers to assert a collective identity, establishing a physical and cultural distance
from adult institutions (such as schools and the family home).42

The physical and cultural distance from adult institutions, Speed thereby argues – provided
by the spaces and settings teenage characters traditionally inhabit in teen film – are
fundamental to whether or not the teenagers are perceived as able to engage in rebellion or
escape adult authority, and for the teen films of the 1950s and 1960s this appears to have been
an essential component of the genre.

Upon first reviewing and researching the dominant locations in the second major wave
of teen films, in the 1980s, however, I found that a striking transition had taken place. During
this decade, most 1980s American youth films presented narratives based around three
principal, ‘closed’ settings: the home, the high school and the mall. The actions of the teenage
characters, and their burgeoning sexualities, appear to have moved away from the open spaces
(and their associated opportunities for rebellion) of the beach and summer towns, viewpoints
or parking lots. Most action in the teen film of the 1980s takes place within the ‘secure’ walls
of suburban buildings instead. Early titles of the decade, such as Fast Times at Ridgemont
High, Pretty in Pink and Some Kind of Wonderful all adhere to the three dominant settings
of the home, the high school and the mall43, while later examples, such as Can’t Buy Me Love
and She’s Out of Control reinforced this construction to such a degree that, I would argue,
they affirmed these three locations as the staple component of the contemporary teen film.
This ‘reconstitution’ of the genre in the 1980s has lasted to such a degree that most of the teen
films of today still follow these primary settings. Particularly where representations of
teenage girls are concerned, our screens still predominantly show them at home, at school and
at the mall (contemporary examples range from Clueless, Never Been Kissed and Mean Girls,
to Bratz and High School Musical).

The recurrence of these three “critical sites”44 was also observed by Steve Bailey and
James Hay, who conclude that: “These sites…are spaces in which the social identities of

42 Speed, Lesley. “Tuesday's Gone: The Nostalgic Teen Film.” Journal of Popular Film and Television 26, no. 1
43 Though at times, the ‘mall’ is refigured as a smaller shopping centre or the high street, these locations still
feature (a collection of) shops and window displays prominently.
44 Steve Bailey and James Hay, “Cinema and the Premises of Youth: Teen Films and Their Sites in the 1980s and
youth find articulation.” In their article, ‘Cinema and the Premises of Youth: ‘Teen Films and their sites in the 1980s & 1990s’, Bailey and Hay look at how teen characters engage with these three locations in the genre, and how these locations inform their onscreen ‘social’ identities. Perhaps because of the broader scope of the article (Bailey and Hay look at both the 1980s and the 1990s, and do not identify smaller sub-genres, such as the sex comedies, or school dramas, or differences in representation of gender), the authors do not particularly look into reasons for the dominance of these three locations, nor do they link the popularisation of these settings directly to the contextual, neo-conservative zeitgeist of the 1980s. However, I would argue these can indeed be connected, since the advent of the predominance of the settings of the home, school and the mall did not only coincide with a changed context for the target demographic of the genre during the 1980s (by which I mean that the audience itself would now often be viewing the films at home, at school, or most commonly at the mall), but also with the fact that these settings strongly reflected the (neo-)conservative values of the time; inviting teenagers to remain supervised and act as ‘active’ citizens amongst their local communities and families - as opposed to allowing them to ‘escape’ such responsibilities, through outside locations such as holiday settings and/or travel. Additionally, these suburban settings presented the teenagers as decidedly middle class, which presented them firmly within new ‘Reaganomic’ ideals for the nuclear family. Catherine Driscoll (2011) makes a similar observation about the effects of the representation of teenagers in the cinema of the 1980s:

The US image of adolescence had become more symbolically middle class and more normatively applied regardless of class. In this context 1980s teen film has been strongly associated with ‘Reaganomics’. Ronald Reagan’s pro-business, low-tax policies and the economic recovery linked to them is understood to have enthused teen film with entrepreneurial spirit.

Driscoll hereby seems to suggest that the advent of the centralization of these locations could be tied to the ideologies of the decade, and that they narrowed the representations along particular neo-conservative political lines. However, I would add that alongside the qualities of a more general ‘suburban’ setting, the mall specifically solicited teenagers to

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45 Ibid.
46 See Timothy Shary’s book Generation Multiplex for more information on how the popularization of the in-mall multiplex cinemas changed the location for cinema viewing for teenagers in the 1980s.
appropriate strong notions of consumerism and materialism (and/or Driscoll’s idea of an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ during this decade; connecting the representations strongly to a newly attainable/purchasable level of ‘individuality’ (an idea that was strongly promoted in the American culture of the 1980s).

Bailey and Hay also reflect on the influences of these locations on the narratives/characters within the genre, and stress the importance of how the teenagers are represented ‘moving’ between the three locations:

The use of spaces such as these settings for narrative action, and the representation of a capacity to move between them and to cultivate knowledge and practices appropriate to each, becomes … a critical element in the depiction of the teenage experience. Here, the articulation of the teenager as a ‘mobile’ subject becomes linked to a sense of the teen as a kind of well-rounded individual, occupying the place of a family member, a citizen-in-training and a consumer, and developing the ability to shift between all three subject positions as circumstances demand. Adding an additional level of symbolic complexity is the tendency in many films to treat all three locations with a fundamental ambivalence, posing each as the site both of possibility and of restriction of an increasing personal autonomy and of a simultaneous conformity to social norms. Along with these sites comes an emphasis on the automobile as a means of mobility and, consequently, of potential liberation from an excessively narrow material and symbolic milieu. The continual tension between practices of freedom and practices of discipline works as a kind of technology for youth and as a means for the cultivation of a ‘teen subject’ who is both mobile and self-disciplined.

Bailey and Hay stress several important points here; that the representation of space and the ability to move between spaces is critical to the depiction of the teenage experience, that the three locations create an ‘idealised’ citizen out of the teenage characters depicted and that, through movement between the three locations (mostly by car), the characters are engaged in practices that require them to be simultaneously mobile/free/ liberated and contained/conforming. This last observation is precisely the larger tension that I wish to address in this thesis, when it comes to a ‘wider’ depiction of teenage girls in the 1980s, but

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48 Though I would suggest the entrepreneurial spirit was advocated more strongly amongst the representations of teenage boys than it was for girls, if we look at examples such as Ferris Bueller, Fast Times, and Risky Business.
49 For a more elaborate exploration of this tendency, see for instance Irene Taviss Thomson (1992) or (2010).
for now I must insist that these ideas and tensions can, firstly, again be strongly connected to
the neo-conservative value set of the 1980s (promoting idealized, nuclear citizens and
consumers), and secondly, that this observation does, nevertheless, warrant closer, particular
inspection for the representation of teenage *girl* characters, in the romantic comedy/drama
subgenre of the teen film in the 1980s. For I would like to contest their findings and illustrate
that the locations for these characters are not necessarily “treated with a fundamental
ambivalence”, nor do the girl characters demonstrate a clear ability to become ‘mobile’
subjects (they are rarely shown to drive, for instance), let alone are they presented as equally
mobile to their male counterparts. I will therefore now embark on a closer inspection of the
locations and the visual depiction of the teen girl characters within these settings, in this
subgenre, in order to explore this relation further, and to see how my findings relate to those
of Bailey and Hay.

… Hollywood has disseminated an oversimplified image of teenage girlhood that
reinforces the notion that girls participate only peripherally in the daily life of exterior
urban spaces. An analysis of …Hollywood movies… reveals a limited palette of
spaces appropriated predominantly by white middle-class American adolescent girls.51

When looking at the opening sequences of some of the most popular teen films of the
1980s, it is notable that most films begin with an establishing shot of the principal location /
the dominant setting of the film, introducing audiences straight away to the home, the school
or the mall. These films thereby suggest that, even before introducing the characters, the
settings will be key to our ‘understanding’ of the characters and the situations or surroundings
they are in. The films seemingly privilege contextual settings over character, or at least
remind us that in order to understand the characters we must understand/acknowledge and
recognise the settings they inhabit. The way these films visualize these settings is also
revealing. The opening shots often suggest an idealized, cleansed version of 1980s middle-
America suburban life. In *Sixteen Candles*, the opening shot shows a car driving up a green,
tree-lined road in a suburban neighbourhood. As the car approaches, it becomes clear that
newspapers are being thrown out of the windows, onto the lawns of the houses; thereby
establishing that in this neighbourhood, the paper-route is not run by a young teenager on a
bicycle (by physical labour), but by the ease and comfort that means provide (it is suggested a

parent is driving). As the camera pans to the right, we are introduced to the family home of the lead character Samantha (Molly Ringwald); a large house bathed in light that, through the use of a slight low angle, appears to sit proudly atop its front yard. It is a picture-book image of an American suburban house, that introduces and normalises, without question, a certain American standard of living. The solidity of the house, the weight of it, counterbalances and ‘normalises’ the introduction to the family inside, that follows.

Figure 1 - The opening shot of Sixteen Candles, establishing an idealized, middle-class suburban setting, where the papers are delivered not by the ‘traditional’ boy on a bicycle, but by a driving car.

Figure 2 – The second part of opening pan of Sixteen Candles introduces the audience to Samantha’s suburban, picture-book family home.
The second location that is introduced in *Sixteen Candles* is the high school, which is featured as the opening shot to a montage sequence running underneath the opening credits. The school is presented to us visually as framed by a leafy tree, again emphasising a picturesque quality normally associated with storybooks. The wide paths and patches of green mirror the white paths and lawns from the previous suburban streets, and the image as a whole presents a solid, linear structure that radiates a certain calm and regularity. This image of an idealised, wealthy, middle-class suburban school is repeated throughout the decade in this genre (see, for example, also figure 4, an illustration from *Lucas*) and presents the school buildings, from the outside at least, as solid, structured and constant institutions (at times even with grand, churchlike doors and entrances).
Two examples that seemingly break with this generic trope, can be found in *The Breakfast Club* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, where the emphasis on the buildings as establishing (middle-class) locales is nevertheless the same, but the constructed associations differ. The opening sequence of *The Breakfast Club* presents a black frame, with a white lettered title presenting a quote from a David Bowie song, reading: “And these children that you spit on / As they try to change their worlds / Are immune to your consultations / They're quite aware / of what they're going through...”. As the camera lingers on this text for a moment, the image is then suddenly broken, as though it were shattering glass, towards the camera, to reveal an establishing shot of a high school underneath. As we hear one of the character’s voices introduce us to the time and date of the ‘suspension day’, the spoken year “1984” appears to inform the image with an Orwellian quality. Altogether, this image suggests a more critical take on the institution of the high school, where the building, in its austere, deserted and cement-laden form, breaks the ‘very truth’ about teenagers (in the shape of the Bowie quote), and seemingly refuses to recognise their individuality or agency. This mirrors the larger ‘message’ the film as a whole attempts to convey; that the students, who were lead to believe by their surroundings that they all embodied but one ‘stereotyped’ identity, in truth, and upon closer inspection, pertain to a far richer array of identities and possibilities.

![Figure 5 - The high school in *The Breakfast Club*; an establishing shot that shatters a 'printed' opening quote by David Bowie.](image)

In *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the high school is also introduced in a less formal and idealised way; where the grounds (and the frame) surrounding the school are filled with the
chaotic movements of high school students, and the scene shows evidence they have previously ‘tp-ed’ the school (a common American ‘teenage’ act of vandalism, achieved by throwing toilet paper rolls into the trees). This introduction suggests the high school students perhaps do not take the institution as seriously as its stone and windowed façade would demand; and that the students have as valid a presence (they are able leave their mark on their surroundings) as the very authority the building implies.

Nevertheless, in both The Breakfast Club and in Fast Times, the school – in spite of a seemingly more critical undertone – ultimately proves the ‘saving’ location, where knowledge is exchanged, and advanced insight is achieved. The films’ narratives redeem the institution in the end, and thereby idealise it in much the same way as the opening shot of Sixteen Candles.

These three settings, the home, the high school and the mall (I address the introduction of the mall, which also often opens teen films, at greater length in my second chapter) are in any case universally introduced, and presented as key players in these films; they perform particular ‘generic’ roles as settings to the teenage characters that inhabit them in the frame. Roughly divided, the three different locations present settings for three different idealised ‘social identities’ of youth on screen, that are in tune with certain 1980s Reaganite values; the home is where the teenage characters interact with the nuclear family and reflect upon the self, the high school is the place where knowledge is exchanged and social relations are built up, and the mall represents the public space (standing in for ‘the rest of the world’), where the characters perform their roles as citizens on a miniature scale; where they work, sell, consume

Figure 6 - The high school in Fast Times at Ridgmont High.
and purchase, in order to develop their individual identities. As we begin to look closer, however, at the representation of these buildings, and examine the smaller compartments/cells they incorporate (the rooms, the classes, the shops, etc.), the conservative nature of their construction becomes even more clear.

Gendered Divisions

The first observation to be made about the smaller compartments within these settings, in the 1980s teen film, is that their decoration often follows a strong, traditional and conservative gender divide. This is markedly visible when looking at the mise-en-scene of the bedrooms of the leading teen characters, and particularly at the allocation of prop pieces. Most of the boys are presented as having computers in their bedroom in the 1980s teen film; in WarGames, Weird Science and Ferris Bueller’s Day Off, for example. But none of the teenage girl leads of popular 1980s teen film are presented as ‘owning’ a computer, or even having regular access to one. The girls’ bedrooms are instead filled with mirrors, dressing tables, large wardrobes, romantic iron beds layered with (floral/heart-shaped) pillows, pink wall paper, cuddly toys, clothes and jewellery, and at most a telephone or a cassette player (in Sixteen Candles, Adventures in Babysitting and Smooth Talk respectively). These props associate the teen girl characters with conservative gender connotations; the girls are aligned with an emphasis on outward appearance and looks, with dressing and makeup, with striking poses in front of the mirror, with communicating (gossiping with girlfriends on the phone) and with being asleep, or even with being in a more permanent, dreamlike state. There is often not even a desk present, or a space for them to work at (Andie in Pretty in Pink studies on her bed), which again provides a contrast with the boy bedrooms. It seems the boys in the teen films of the 1980s are ‘allowed’ regular access to knowledge and technology - they even ‘own’ grown-up and technologically advanced equipment in their bedrooms - whilst the girls are denied such privileges, as their bedrooms are kept young, pink and pretty, ‘girly’ and almost infantile in tone.

52 The closest one of the girls comes to a computer is Andie (Molly Ringwald) in Pretty in Pink, who is seen to do research on a computer in her school library. After a few moments, however, the scene shows how a boy, Blane (Andrew McCarthy), takes over her controls from another computer, and ‘hijacks’ her screen, making it evident once more that this technology ‘caters’ predominantly to (the desires of) boys. Towards the late 1980s, in She’s Out of Control, a computer is visible in the lead girl’s bedroom, but we never see her use it. In 1995, two films prominently broke with this coded tradition, but in two very different ways. Clueless presented a computer in Cher’s (Alicia Silverstone) bedroom, but this computer is linked to her rotating wardrobe and she uses it only to select and match her outfits – the computer is thereby re-appropriated for domesticated and ‘female’ use. Angelina Jolie’s character Kate in Hackers is one of the first female characters on screen (let alone the first teenage girl), who is shown to demonstrate computer literacy.
Figure 7 - Andie's pink and frilly bedroom in *Pretty in Pink*, shown through a mirror....

Figure 8 - ...compared to Samantha's typical girl bedroom in *Sixteen Candles*, where she is trying on different poses in the mirror (a 'female' tradition affirmed by the ballet pose on the wall)...

Figure 9 - ...and she only has access to a telephone to communicate with friends...
Such ‘gendered’ labels and stereotypical representations are established and repeated across the different locations. Girls are predominantly seen shopping (though they’re never shown to buy anything - I will come back to this later), trying on clothes in changing rooms and mirrors, or sitting in bedrooms and chatting with their friends. Boys are often seen on sports’ fields, playing the arcades or parking their cars. Their activities tend much more towards the ‘physically active’ than the girls. Otherwise relatively gender neutral territories, such as the school hallways, the cafeteria and the classrooms, are often subdivided too, into boy-sections and girl-sections, where boy groups walk, run, hang out, and where girl groups stand and meet. Even the character of the classes the students attend are visibly divided into less gender neutral areas: the girls are shown taking Home-Economics classes, or segregated Physical Education lessons, whilst the boys take Mechanics or (Work)Shop classes, and gather for football meets after school.

The mall too appears in these films to be divided into ‘gendered sections’. The girls in Fast Times work as waitresses in a pizza parlour, whilst the boys, across the mall, check tickets at the cinema and scalp concert tickets. This representation again connotes certain conservative observations about the gender divide, where the girls are presented as serving, offering food and care to customers, whilst the boys are in control of ‘access to spaces’ and handle the money. Even at a more seemingly insignificant level, boys are shown to be more ‘in control’ of their environment than the girls. In Fast Times, when Stacey (Jennifer Jason Leigh) can’t open her locker, she’s lucky to have Mike Damone (Robert Romanus) walk by,

Richard Dyer has also written extensively on this divide, between the physically active male and the passive ‘to be looked at’ consumer; see for instance his article “Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-Up”, in The Sexual Subject – A Screen Reader in Sexuality, edited by Screen (London: Routledge, 1992).
who just has to hit the locker once with the side of his fist to have it ‘magically’ open, leaving her to stare after him with visible admiration. This illustrates how in these films the boys are often represented as having a more powerful impact on and over their environment, as well as having ‘knowledge’ of the functioning, and the ins and outs of their surroundings, whilst the girls are portrayed as more passively dependent on (male) aids in order to get around and to properly perform their roles within these locations.

Figure 11 - Damone has power over his environment; with a quick bang he 'magically' opens Stacey’s locker.

Alongside the ‘gendered’ decoration of certain spaces and settings, and the disparate allocation of access and control over the environment, the three dominant locations are visually subdivided into smaller compartment that visually ‘box’ in the characters within them. After the establishing shots that open the films, the locations are introduced and presented to the viewer through an endless array of much smaller units/settings, such as bathrooms, bedrooms, boiler rooms, classrooms, hallways, gyms, libraries, locker rooms, parking lots, shops, diners, cars and cinemas. These locations are then subdivided into even smaller spaces, including washroom cubicles, corners, telephones booths, parking spaces, seating sections, changing rooms, showers, queues and rows. For the representation of teenage girls, these cubicles and smaller compartments are further, visually compartmentalised by extensive linear play within the frame. This appears to hold the teen girl characters captive within the frame, and places strong emphasis on the limitations of her movements.
Figure 12 – In *Smooth Talk*, Connie is boxed in by her environment.

Figure 13 - In the popular romantic teen comedy *Sixteen Candles*, Sam (Molly Ringwald) is constantly, visually confined by a linear play within the frame....

Figure 14 - ...even when she is moving through the location...
Even though a film like *Smooth Talk*, directed by a woman, Joyce Chopra, seems to use the visual construction of linear confinement to support and develop particular narrative trajectories for the lead girl (it is a rites-of-passage story, where lead girl Connie’s attempts to break with a suppressed femininity are cruelly rejected), most teen films, like *Sixteen Candles*, demonstrate no particular purpose for the construction. Instead, the imagery remains unaddressed, unquestioned and, consequently, is neutralised. It has become part of a generic visual fabric for teen films that passes unrecognised, and perhaps because of its very familiarity, this imagery has since become intricately entwined with the genre. And it has to be noted, boy characters are *not* framed in the same way. This construction seems to cater to, and support, a certain tendency to depict teen girl characters as confined, as immobile, as framed within the frame, and as passive ‘objects’ on display (I come back to this extensively in the next chapter, when I discuss Laura Mulvey’s work), with no apparent control over their environment.

If we look at another common trope of the teen film genre, where we see a girl applying or checking her makeup, two examples show that even this small action is framed within the frame, in a limiting way:
Figure 16a and b - A 'familiar' shot in the title montage sequence of *Sixteen Candles* (left) reveals a fragmented and tightly framed image of an anonymous teen girl's appearance (doubly emphasised by her applying makeup), which is similarly constructed and repeated in *Fast Times* (right).

Such shots – visual constructions catering to passive display and fetishism - are very specific to the depiction of the teen girl character in teen films, and relate their surroundings/locations to them in a particular way. I therefore want to stress that the three dominant locations aren’t, and shouldn’t, be treated with a “fundamental ambivalence”. Instead, the very way these settings are brought into the frame implies that the settings ‘manage’, control and confine the teen girl characters. The teen girls are subjugated by the locations they are in, as well as by the voyeuristic camera and it’s assumed male desire, and this, again, generally passes by unmarked and uncriticised in teen films.

**Trapped**

The characters in these films are, however, not only confined in the frame at the visual level, but they are frequently *literally* confined to certain locations by recurring narrative structures as well. As was already briefly introduced, the girls in these films are often denied independent access to new spaces, or independency of movement. Moreover, they always require some kind of ‘male’ or adult help, in order to move around; a ride home, a drop off at the mall, a date to go to the prom, or a headmaster to get them out of detention (in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, *Smooth Talk*, *Pretty in Pink*, and *Some Kind of Wonderful* respectively).
Adults can also prevent them from moving around altogether, when the teen girls are ‘grounded’ at home (or forced to stay home to help out with chores), stuck in ‘detention’ after school, or when a driving instructor fails their driving test (in Smooth Talk, The Breakfast Club, and Valley Girl respectively); but rather than rebel against such restrictions, the teen girls in these films are shown to resign to them easily. Many of the 1980s teen films delineate clear boundaries between areas where the girls can and cannot go. In Pretty in Pink, these are class related; Andie (Molly Ringwald) is from ‘the wrong side of the tracks’ and does not have access to certain parties or privileges; the school areas have even been subdivided, with the corridors inside appropriated by the wealthier teens, whilst the courtyard outside is an assigned space for those from poorer backgrounds. In Smooth Talk, the proposed division is age related, with the other side of the ‘tracks’ (or in this case, the other side of the freeway) set as the place where ‘the bar’ is, where older kids hang out with their cars. Connie (Laura Dern) and Laura (Margaret Welsh) have to ‘cross over’ to the other side, risking their lives in oncoming traffic, to get there. In Can’t Buy Me Love, the allocation of space is status related, where each group of specific teenage ‘types’ - the popular cheerleaders and jocks, the geeks and so forth - has their own table in the dining area outside, and their own corridor to walk down to get to class. Who sits and walks where, and who has access to which spaces, is of vital importance (the main character Ronald, played by Patrick Dempsey, happily hands over a thousand dollars for a chance to walk down the right corridor), and inevitably binding for life. In the end, after a brief stint of popularity, Ronald too is exiled once again to the un-cool
areas.\textsuperscript{54} I come back to this in my chapter on stereotypes, in chapter 4, but for now I want to point out that such defining boundaries, when class, age or status related, appear to follow a certain tendency for hierarchical thinking, conducive to traditional American notions about the American dream (where an individual is invited to climb the ladder) and relevant to Reagan’s renewal politics in the 1980s. The fact that the teen girls in these films are particularly ‘trapped’ by these boundaries, however, suggests again a certain conservative ‘backlash’, towards women and youth, more than it does critical commentary, because the status quo of these boundaries ultimately remains set, and fundamentally engrained, in these films.

![Figure 18 - The outdoor cafeteria in \textit{Can’t Buy Me Love}, with its different sections for different groups of teenagers, delineates who is allowed to sit or go where.](image)

These confinements and boundaries prove but the beginning - the “trappings of affluence” \textsuperscript{55} are more fundamental and deep-rooted than the surface images suggest. Most of the characters in these films, and especially the girls, never leave the suburbs. \textit{Adventures in Babysitting} seemingly provides an exception, when Chris (Elisabeth Shue) has to drive into Chicago to rescue her friend Brenda (Penelope Ann Miller), who ran away from home and is

\textsuperscript{54} This division of space according to teenage ‘type’ is a common introduction to student hierarchies, when establishing the school location in teen film. Roz Kaveney calls it “the anthropology shot” (in \textit{Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from ‘Heathers’ to ‘Veronica Mars’} IB Tauris, 2006. 3), and Driscoll refers to it as “the guided tour of highschool groups” (in \textit{Teen Film}, 59). I come back to this at greater length in chapter 4 when I look at stereotypes.

\textsuperscript{55} Steve Bailey and James Hay, “Cinema and the Premises of Youth”, 219.
now stuck in a phone booth at the bus station. Brenda’s monologue presents a moral warning to the audience, when she exclaims with increasing hysteria:

Chris, I’m really in trouble… I did it, I ran away from home… I’m at the bus station downtown… I don’t have any money, I spent it all on the cab here - Chris, I need help… Can you pick me up? Chris, I can’t call anyone else, my dad doesn’t know, and he’d kill me if he found out… Chris I’m begging you, it’s really scary here; I’ve just seen three people shoot up, a bald Chinese lady with no pants on, and there’s this old guy outside who wants his bedroom slippers… Ooh my God, there’s a guy with a gun! Chris, get me the hell out of here!56

Not only does it become clear from this excerpt that the girl was incapable of properly planning her ‘escape’, her obvious panic and fearful screams highlight the surrounding space as scary, unwelcoming and ultimately dangerous. When a homeless man consequently knocks on the phone booth window, yelling “You’re in my home!” at Brenda, the line provides one of the films’ key jokes, but the scene again reiterates that there is no space for the teenage girl in the city; even the poor, homeless man outranks her status to claim space.

Figure 19 - Adventures in Babysitting: “You’re in my home!”

When the ‘responsible’ Chris drives into the city to pick up Brenda, with the children she babysits for, she too falls from one unpredictable and perilous scenario into the next; from

56 Transcription of dialogue from the script for Adventures in Babysitting (1987), written by David Simkins.
encountering domestic violence, a car theft and dealing with the mafia, to finding herself trapped in a African American nightclub, where she and the children are forced to sing the Blues, before they are allowed to leave. In this way, the film continues to present the city as chaotic, unmappable, and ethnically ‘uncontrolled’, even for the ‘good/smart’ teenage heroine.

In contrast to the representations of teenage girls, teenage boys in 1980s teen films are shown to enter the city freely, where they do take up space and partake of urban ‘pleasures’. In *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, Ferris skips school and takes his girlfriend Sloane (Mia Sara) and best friend Cameron (Alan Ruck) to downtown Chicago for the day. There, he manages to perform in a parade, dine at a fine restaurant, visit the stock exchange, admire the city from its highest viewpoint, explore a museum, and generally roam the city, all without getting caught by his father or the headmaster of his school, hot on his trail. In *Risky Business*, Joel (Tom Cruise) enters and exits the city at will, independently, in his sports car. Bailey and Hay examined the depiction of Joel’s relation with the city in more detail, and concluded the following:

Both poles of the urban continuum are evident in *Risky Business*, a film in which the city, once again Chicago, serves as a space of both liberation and menace… However, the city also becomes the site of Joel’s sexual awakening and his first real steps away from the comforts and limits of his suburban life, epitomised in the film’s most memorable visual passage, in which Joel and Lana (Rebecca De Mornay) make love on an elevated train, an event presented in a luminous slow-motion sequence. The equation to sexuality with both mobility and urban space is important here, as it concretises the link between forms of adult knowledge and movement into a new territory, a theme which appears across a number of films and which is a critical part of the way that youth becomes conceived as a set of meaningful spaces in these films.57

This equation of sexuality with both mobility and urban space, I agree, is fundamental to our understanding of the representation of male rites-of-passage in teen film, and it is a common trope in films that feature boys in a leading role (ranging from *Rebel Without a Cause* to *Ferris Bueller*, to the more recent *The Girl Next Door*). It is, however, not common

57 Steve Bailey and James Hay, “Cinema and the Premises of Youth”, 228.
place in teen films that feature teenage girls in lead roles. Interestingly, when this ‘code’ is used there, rather than demonstrating liberation or supporting a state of sexual awakening, it acts again as a moral warning instead. In one scene in *Adventures in Babysitting*, Chris and the three kids encounter a street prostitute who reveals she is the same age as Chris; seventeen years old. When asked how she got there, the girl explains she “ran away from home”. Again, this scene equates sexuality with urban space and mobility, but since the result presents itself in the shape of a teenage prostitute, the film poses the alignment as a confrontation with the ‘realities’ of such an ‘escape’; burgeoning sexuality and the desire for an urban life (or a combination thereof) are to be punished, both morally and legally. This realm is not recognised as one of freedom and opportunity, or presented as an important component of the female rite-of-passage. Teen girls who travel to the city independently in these films, simply do not end up anywhere.

This brings us to the question of ‘independent’ mobility and the role of the car in these films. Bailey and Hay suggest that: “The automobile is perhaps the most important element in the attention to mobility in recent films …[It] has a long history as a potent symbol in films about youth. .. [and serves] as an emblem of the kind of freedom and escape… [D]riving emerges as a particular form of knowledge, as a technology for self-development and for the cultivation of appropriate adult practices.”\textsuperscript{58} The car does indeed have a long history in the teen film genre, as a symbol for freedom and escape, and it featured prominently in teen films in the 1980s. Films such as *Moving Violations*, *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, *Risky Business* and *License to Drive* all placed great emphasis on the relationship between boys and their cars, and the teen male desire to drive. It is perhaps interesting to note, then, that, as opposed to the teen boy characters, or the character of Chris in *Adventures in Babysitting*, most of the teenage girls in these films do not have cars, or are not shown to drive. Instead, they have to rely on their parents or boyfriends for rides (in *Smooth Talk* and in Amanda’s (Lea Thompson) case in *Some Kind of Wonderful* for example). In significant contrast to their male counterparts, the teen girls are generally not depicted as independently ‘mobile’; they are again reliant on men for their ‘access’ to spaces and places. With regards to Bailey and Hay’s previous observation, where an attained mobility plays a key role in the ‘freedom’ of their subject position, it is therefore crucial to recognise the difference between the representation of the two genders.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 229.
In addition, the cars the teen boys are shown to drive in these films are often expensive, sporty, flashy and new. The girl characters that do have cars, however, like Chris, Andie in *Pretty in Pink* and Watts in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, are shown to have vintage, ‘feminised’ cars instead, that often don’t run properly. Andie’s car is bright pink - it is outwardly, visibly marked by her gender. And even her propriety, or her active driving of her own car, is often brought into question in this film, when her entrance to the car is blocked by a boy, for instance, or she is driven, as opposed to driving, on her date. In *Adventures in Babysitting*, the car Chris drives is a model of a more conservative, family geared, station wagon, equating her turn as a driver visually more to that of a parent than to the role of speedy, independent youth. In her car, she is presented as the ‘mother’ rather; the stand-in mother or ‘mother in training’ she already has become as a babysitter. And tomboy character Watts in *Some Kind of Wonderful* drives and owns her own car, but this car is not only miniscule in stature (and thereby feminised), but it is also presented as a collage of auto parts in different shades and states of decay, as though it were the product of a scrap heap assembly. Throughout the film, Watts’ car is often shown not to work properly and is characterised as an unreliable means of transport. In a rather telling scene, Watts sits in her broken down car, behind the driving wheel, as a boy pushes the car all the way home. In this shot, her status as a ‘driver’ is stripped, and both the car and the driver are visually incapacitated. These ‘girl’ cars are stripped of their virile potency – they are castrated – through colour, type and/or their lack of independent (successful) mobility. These cars don’t, and literally couldn’t, compete with any of the sports’ cars that the boys drive (see Figures 20-23).

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59 In *Pretty in Pink*, Andie does drive her friend Duckie (Jon Cryer) around, because he only ride a bicycle. But Duckie is therefore excluded as a potential love interest (Duckie professes his love to Andie in the film). I would argue, from the very beginning, simply because he does not drive; he has been ‘castrated’ of the most powerful symbol of male potency, the vehicle.

60 In the final scenes of the film, Watts acts as a hired help to her love interest Keith’s (Eric Stoltz) date, by driving the couple around in a hired limousine, dressed as a ‘driver’. Her status as a driver here again caters to service and care, and is thereby again stripped of its potency. In the final scene, she leaves the car behind altogether, and walks off, to be (finally) pursued by Keith, when her status as forlorn, ‘walking’ teenage girl has been restored.
Figures 20a and b - Andie's car in *Pretty in Pink* is bright pink, and has thereby been visually feminised and castrated; its mechanical prowess is stripped away by its gendered/tailored appearance (left) and its access is commonly blocked by a boy, as seen here (right) by Steff (James Spader).

Figure 21 - In *Adventures in Babysitting*, Chris (Elisabeth Shue) drives a family car, which equates her status as a driver more to that of the family mother, than to one pursuing independence and freedom.

Figures 22a and b – In *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Watts' (Mary Stuart Masterson) car is not only tiny and takes up hardly any space at all, but also presents a scrapheap collage of different parts that doesn’t run properly, and needs to be pushed home by a boy, visually incapacitating Watts’ status as an independent driver.
Like the smaller spaces within the school and the home, the car as a location is therefore ultimately ‘gendered’ in these films, by allocation, decoration, and the accessibility to spaces it provides. As a further nuance to the observations made by Bailey and Hay, I hope to have shown in this chapter that the recurring locations in 1980s teen films sketch, shape and frame the representation of the teenage girl in a specifically confining and conservative way. It seems, on closer inspection, that the locations consistently imbue the representations of the girls with particular (neo-)conservative values, and form a strong structural basis that supports the continuance of a certain patriarchal hegemony. In order to explore the sense of “potential liberation” and the “continual tension between practices of freedom and practices of discipline”⁶¹ that teen films, and these representations, might also provide (according to Bailey and Hay), the representation of the teenage girl subject will have to be examined more closely and from a wider variety of perspectives. This chapter has retained its attention predominantly with the locations of the home and the school; but what potential freedoms might the location of the mall provide?

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02. The Gaze and Surveillance

Transforming Space...

Throughout the history of American cinema, the figure of the woman has most commonly been represented within (or as related to) the space of the home. This domestic space connected the figure of the woman primarily to the realm of the ‘private’; a realm connecting to the personal, the inwardly directed, the family-oriented, catering to the sustenance of the home (and by extension, the patriarch), rather than to society at large. But the late 1970s and the 1980s – as a direct result, possibly, of the accomplishments of Second Wave feminism in the 60s and 70s in the United States - brought the representations of women on film out of the home, and into the public workplace and commercial/trading space (examples include Baby Boom, 9 to 5, Working Girl, Broadcast News, and so on). For the teenage girl, in the 1980s (which, I argue, was the most formative decade for her depiction on screen) these three different locations were therefore inherently connected to her representation from the start, and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, they frame and capture her image in confining and conservative ways. What is interesting to note, however, is that the delineations between what is ‘public’ and ‘private’ space for teenage girls on screen are constructed in a different way than they are (and were) for their adult counterparts. Whereas for representations of adult women, the two realms remain generally disconnected on film (romance, family, motherhood, the expression of the woman’s individual, ‘true’ identity, and her private/personal successes are tied to the private realm, whilst work, societal productivity and active citizenship are confined by the outlines of the ‘public’, more uniform office cubicle), for the representation of the teenage girl, the two have always been more readily interchangeable. The ‘private’ and the ‘public’ state of settings for the teenage girl on screen appear to function in a more organic manner, in a flow of sorts, where either can be appropriated to act as the other.

If we look at the representation of the mall in Smooth Talk, for instance, the traditionally ‘public’ space of the mall is readily transformed into ‘private’ space by the leading teenage girl and her two friends; the identities that they must hide at home from their parents, are freely constructed and exposed in the ‘space’ of the mall. Upon Connie (Laura Dern) and her friends’ arrival at the mall, a montage sequence reveals how they change their identity to fit into the public realm of the mall.

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62 See for instance Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, Christine Gledhill, ed. (British Film Institute, 1987).
63 Amongst the most significantly publicised accomplishments were the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, and Roe v Wade in 1973.
clothes, dress their hair and put on make-up and accessories in an open corridor (not in a bathroom), before properly commencing their mall visit (I will come back to the transformation aspects of this sequence at greater length in chapter four and five). We then see them spending their day there; running past shop windows, whispering/gossiping amongst themselves, giggling and flirting with boys, laughing and yelling in an up-market clothing store. They perform/act as though they were completely uninhibited in/by these surroundings. Their big movements, loud giggles and excited yells in this scene suggest they are ‘outside’ – away from societal regulation - when in fact they are still within the closed, controlled environment of the mall (a fact the audience is reminded of, when a shopkeeper suddenly shushes them and sends them away, only to have them run off and burst into excited laughter further down the corridor).  

Figure 17 - Connie and her friends run, laugh and giggle through the mall, performing otherwise hidden parts of their identities away from parental supervision, in Smooth Talk.

Through their actions of re-dressing their own appearance, the girls are presented as able to transform ‘public’ space into (seemingly and temporarily at least) a freer, ‘private’ space. The mall as a ‘private’ and less inhibited space for teenagers is, again, a common trope in teen film, and continues to be used this day. The re-appropriation of mall space illustrates a peculiar duality to the character of this location; it appears to reside on the very periphery

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64 The fact that a shopkeeper sends them away presents a contradiction of sorts; there is supervision, or societal regulation, at the mall, and this does seemingly ‘steer’ the behaviour of the young girls, but the point I wish to make here is that the behaviour of the young girls is initially shown to be relatively ‘freely’ expressed and unbounded at the mall.

65 The lead girls of contemporary teen films are all shown to play with their identities more freely at the mall, in recent titles such as Clueless, Mean Girls, Bratz, She’s the Man or The House Bunny, amongst many others.
between public and private space in the teen film. This observation reiterates comments made by Bailey and Hay that I also addressed in the previous chapter, where: “…‘the mall’ carries so many connotations of conformity and mindless consumerism which are at least partly at odds with its status as the space for the realization of a kind of personal freedom and mobility…” 66 This contradiction, or tension, presented by the location of the mall in film, was also observed by Anne Friedberg, who wrote extensively on the mall in contemporary American consumer culture and cinema:

The mall is not a completely public space… It keeps the streets at a safe distance… It defers urban realities, blocks urban blights – the homeless, the beggars, crime, traffic, even weather. While it is a temperature-controlled refuge from hostile environments, it contains trees and large plants that give the illusion of outdoors. Visitors can walk from store to store without encountering wind or rain and without taking off or putting on garments at each entrance and exit. The mall creates a nostalgic image of a clean, safe, legible town centre… 67

Friedberg’s observations here, where she notes that the suburban setting for the mall itself already implies it is somewhere between urban/public and private space, between conformity and mobility, illustrates the very complexities and contradictions brought into play by the dominance of this setting. Moreover, the ‘nostalgic image of a clean, safe, legible town centre’ that she attributes to the mall, again suggests there may be a connection between Reagan’s neo-conservatism (and its accompanying nostalgia for 1950s America) and the prominence of this setting in teen film during this decade. The mall is, perhaps, the quintessential neo-conservative space, both on film, and in American culture at large. This setting, in any case, provides plentiful material for continued debate. But what I want to point out here, specifically, is that the very character of the mall, with all its dualities, lends itself particularly well to the possibility for re-appropriation and re-contextualisation by the teen girl characters that roam its corridors, because it is an in-between space.

Nevertheless, the very idea that teenage girls on film could transform/adapt their environment into either a public or private realm on demand is an uneasy one. It implies the characters would be able to exert some sort of agency, or power, over their surroundings,
through the very nature of their ‘performative’ acts – if we look, for instance, at the *Smooth Talk* scene. (The *Smooth Talk* example itself might provide a fruitful addition to another one of Friedberg’s observations, which she makes in relation to William Kowinski’s work *The Malling of America*, where she notes that his grand equation of “the mall as theatre” remains a suggestive but undeveloped one⁶⁸; in this scene, the girls transform the location (and their roles in it) through the very ‘performance’ they put on - “the mall as theatre” indeed). But I will come back to the complex issues of performativity and agency in relation to my analysis of the representations of teenage girls on film, extensively, in the second part of this thesis. For now, however, I wish to continue my observation wherein the teenage girls might be able to exert some sort of power over their environments by illustrating how this trope is manifested in film, with some slight naiveté, just to see what it opens up for these locations. I do so following a point made as well by Alison L. Bain, in her article “White Western Teenage Girls and Urban Space: Challenging Hollywood’s Representations”, where it’s stated that “…young women [on film] appropriate both public and private space, often transforming the one into the other.”⁶⁹ As Bain suggests, the ability to transform space from public to private and vice versa appears to extend beyond the mall in teen film, and examples can also be found within the other ‘public’ space common to the genre; the high school.

In *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the leading teen girls are presented progressively, as wise beyond their years and actively pursuing and undertaking sexual experiences. During Stacy’s (Jennifer Jason Leigh) first day at High School - she is fifteen – she engages her friend and confidante Linda (Phoebe Cates) in rather intimate conversation over lunch. Upon revealing she has never given a blow job before, Linda passes Stacey a carrot and teaches her how to perform oral sex, in the middle of the busy lunchtime cafeteria. In doing so, the public space is again transformed into private space, where intimate exchanges between friends take centre stage freely. In *Sixteen Candles*, a similar, but more individual/personal transformation occurs, when we see Samantha (Molly Ringwald) fill in a personal sex test during class time, while she is surrounded by other students. Upon different question prompts on a piece of paper, ranging from if she has ever touched it to whether she has ever done it, and if no, who she would do it with, Samantha writes down her answers. Her fantasies coalesce with the realities of her surroundings, when she looks over her shoulder and catches Jake Ryan’s (Michael Schoeffling) eye, before quickly, appearing shy and embarrassed, returning to her paper, and noting down his name. She then attempts to pass the test onto her friend behind

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her, by dropping it over her shoulder, at her friend’s feet. This scene suggests Samantha is able to use this public space as her own private space - as space where she is free to convey confidential secrets about herself, even if she does so in a cautious manner. These exchanges of ‘unofficial knowledge’ and peer-to-peer education again attribute a certain level of agency to the teen girl on film within the high school, where they are represented not only as able to adapt their surroundings to their needs, but also as individuals who are confident in their active pursuit/exchange of ‘sexual’ knowledge and personal development.

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 18** - In *Fast Times*, Linda teaches Stacey how to perform oral sex on a carrot, during lunch in the school cafeteria.

![Image](image2.png)

**Figure 19** - In *Sixteen Candles*, Samantha (centre left) fills out a personal sex test in class, and is unaware that Jake is watching her from behind.

All of this progressive ‘action’, however, is strongly negated by the camera’s revelation to the audience, right from the start of both scenes, that the girls, as they discuss their ‘private’ in ‘public’, are being monitored by male counterparts. In *Fast Times*, the two
girls are unaware they are being observed throughout the ‘carrot lesson’ by a group of boys at a nearby table – even though the editing of the film ensures this is pointed out to the audience right from the start. When the boys eventually cheer and applaud the girls for their ‘performance’, the girls blush and burst into giggles, appearing to recognise (and enjoy) the boys’ awareness of the content of their exchange.

In *Sixteen Candles*, Samantha is unknowingly observed - stared at – throughout, by her future love interest, Jake Ryan, as she fills out the sex-test. When she drops the test behind her, for her friend, Jake leans over and slides it towards him underfoot. Having filled it out privately and ‘anonymously’, Samantha’s answers, her moments of private self-reflection/self-knowledge, are dropped directly into Jake’s possession, without her knowledge or consent. In both scenes, the boys thereby re-appropriate the content of the exchange, as though it were intended for them. These films suggest then, that boys can, or inevitably will, re-claim the girls’ public/private exchanges for their own (sexual) gratification. This again brings many contradictory suggestions into play; on the one hand, the audience is invited to laugh and enjoy the boys’ participation, because they ‘cheer’ on the girl characters (and push forward the narrative; we ‘want’ Jake to know Samantha likes him so that we can celebrate in his romantic pursuit of her), and on the other hand, it appears to act as a moral warning of sorts too in these films, where ‘girls need to be careful with what they share in public’ because it can be taken away from them, and this could lead to their public embarrassment (a line that is also stipulated in *Sixteen Candles* by the plotline that involves Samantha giving
her underwear to the Geek (Anthony Michael Hall), as a favour to validate his reputation, only to have it be publicly auctioned off by him, at her expense). Most importantly, however, I believe these inserts and framing structures (shots of the boys as onlookers function as ‘bookends’ in the editing of these scenes) serve to reassure the audience that the actions of the girls are being supervised, and that their outward sexual explorations are always being perceived and re-appropriated within a heterosexual structure, rather than allowing them to perform inwardly, for and amongst girls only (and by extension, denying any non-heterosexual exchanges that this would imply). These scenes illustrate that the power to transform space, from public to private and vice versa in these films, is always temporary for teenage girls on film; the spaces quickly ‘turn’ on the girls, confining, monitoring and regulating them instead.

**Endless Stages, Endless Gazes....**

This brings us back to previous points made in the first chapter, about the art direction and cinematography in these films, where teen girl bodies are framed (by the locations and the camera) in a strongly confining, limited and controlled way. The ‘on-looking’ group of boys in *Fast Times* re-emphasizes how all these locations are set up to accommodate scenarios constructed around looking, seeing and being seen. The boxes within boxes, the frames within frames, the limited mobility for the girls, all function to support one structural recurrence; girls are there to be looked at, like pictures within picture frames. The hallways in the high school act as runways, the changing rooms in the mall, with its curtains, like little stages, the podium in the gymnasium becomes a theatre, and the cafeteria becomes an arena. The girls in these films are endlessly ‘revealing’ themselves; whether or not they are performing to be seen, they are always being looked at.

![Figures 21a and b - A scene in *Lucas* where cheerleaders perform for their peers illustrates that on film, the high school offers plenty of stages for girls to be gazed at.](image-url)
Furthermore, the boys in these films are always represented as eager onlookers; whether they are applauding the girl’s direct ‘performance’ (from the carrot lesson in *Fast Times*, to the cheerleading sequence in *Lucas*), observing the girl from afar (in, for instance, the classroom scene from *Sixteen Candles*, or in *Some Kind of Wonderful*), or spying on her through peepholes, to catch a glimpse of her nudity/body as she undresses/dresses/showers (a common generic trope in the more male oriented teen films/teen sex comedies from the 1980s, featured in titles such as *Private School*, *Class*, *The Last American Virgin*, *Porky’s*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, and even *Fame*, where boys peep into the dancing girl’s changing room), the boys are shown to enjoy looking at girls. Their readiness to see/look/gaze/spy on the girls is presented as ‘normal’ in teen films; the activity passes by unquestioned in these films, it is normalised because it is shown to be part of convention (both in the narrative worlds the films present, and within the genre), and the power dynamic that goes with it (whereby the boys have more active seeing powers, and the girls are just passively looked at) is consequently neutralised.

![Figure 6 - A Peeping Tom perspective, in Porky’s, illustrating a common trope in the genre where teen boys spy on teen girls, here in their locker room showers.](image)

The neutralisation of this construction, where boys are actively looking and girls are passively being looked at, on film, is not only achieved through its continuous repetition within the genre, but also, as mentioned, at the narrative level (the locations often cater to this construction, and the teen girls are often represented as ‘condoning’ being looked at), and at the level of the camera ‘eye’, that readily takes on the boys’ perspective through point of view shots - thereby equating the audience to this position. In *Porky’s*, for example (see Figure 6), the viewer is automatically placed in the teen boy position, when the shot takes over his ‘peephole perspective’ through a point of view shot, as seen through a drain opening into their
locker room, at the high school. In this way, the viewer is automatically aligned with male desire, with male active viewing, and the construction of the ‘Peeping Tom’ perspective itself is broadened out to incorporate the audience, and hence made generally acceptable.

Even when the ‘Peeping Tom’ perspective becomes character fantasy, the camera, and the audience is aligned with the male’s subjective perspective. In *Fast Times*, a mentally subjective fantasy sequence is introduced and built up through an array of looks and gazes. The male gaze is presented as omnipresent, in group or individual form, at the high school, the mall, and even at the home, when the parents are away. In the sequence illustrated in figure 7a and b, showing the girls at the home, the camera first lingers on Linda and Stacey’s bodies as they lie sunbathing in their bikinis at the edge of the pool outside Stacey’s house. They lie low on the ground, allowing two boys, Mark (Brian Backer) and Mike (Robert Romanus), to literally look ‘upon’ their bodies from over the fence.

![Figures 22a and b – In Fast Times, Linda and Stacey lie on display, as the boys look down upon them.](image)

When Linda later gets up to sit at the end of the diving board, we see Bradley (Judge Reinhold) peek at her from behind the curtain inside the house, suggesting that the boys’ observations are coming at the girls from all directions. Bradley’s peeping leads him directly, and the audience too, into (what is later revealed as) a fantasy sequence. In this fantasy sequence, Linda dives into the pool, then comes out and walks towards Bradley, as she undoes her bikini top and reveals her breasts to him, and kisses Bradley, amidst a mist of water droplets. With the camera almost directly positioned to take on Brad’s perspective, it appears as though Linda is walking towards the audience, and revealing her breasts to them. Again, this aligns the viewer with the male gaze, and the male fantasy. But it also suggests the boy is actively able to create an imagined space, in which he commands the stage, and where he is able to ‘control’ the movements of the girl he admires. Even though it is ‘only’ a fantasy sequence, all power in this scene is attributed to the male perspective and to teen boy desire.
If we look at one of the opening scenes in *Private School*, it becomes clearer how the ‘neutralising’ of such an image construction is set up in teen film. The camera from the beginning shows us a shot from an implied Peeping Tom perspective (see Figure 9a), where we see a girl dressing herself in her room, and seductively stretching out her leg. The camera not only catches her image, but also her reflection in the mirror – a mirror positioned as though her very action is aimed at being ‘seen’, as though her dressing (or the vision of her moving body) is meant to cater to someone looking. This subtly suggests the girl is performing to be seen, and thus that she condones her own external observing. When the boys climb on top of one another (see Figure 9b), in order to spy into the girls’ bathroom, the top boy peeps into the window and gazes at a girl as she takes a shower. The audience is immediately positioned to take on his perspective – we see his point of view shot of her naked body - and the boy is then shown to take a photograph of her as she steps out of the shower (Figure 9c). The doubling of the camera here (both within and behind the frame) again aligns the audience with an active male gaze, suggesting it is all-pervasive, and capable of capturing. When the girl he is spying on catches a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror (Figure 9d), a game commences in which she plays with, and ultimately caters to, his observations. This scene, which presents in fact an extremely complex array of exchanged gazes and looks, of
seeing and pretending not to see, ultimately implies that the girls in these films are either unknowingly observed, or knowingly ‘happily’ observed, by which I mean, they are shown to actively condone their own objectified, desired status. These films do not present either option (unseen or acknowledged voyeurism) as creating any ‘serious’ problems for the characters; there is no sense of victimisation, no perpetrator, no crime implied by this construction in the teen film genre.

Figures 9a-d (left to right, top to bottom) – Selected shots from the opening Peeping Tom scene in Private School.

Of course, the essence of this construction was already laid bare by Laura Mulvey in 1975. In her renowned and pioneering essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Mulvey introduced her theory of recurring structures of seeing in cinema, using psychoanalysis and semiotics as the basis for her observations. Mulvey suggested the very fabric of cinema is intricately interwoven with constructions of seeing and desire. The pleasure we (the audience) take in looking, our scopophilia, defines how film incorporates structures of seeing; and the resulting gaze that is constructed on screen to cater to our desires is, inherently, a male one, and one that contributes to the sustenance of a patriarchal hegemony. Upon analysing recurring seeing structures on film, Mulvey writes:
…[T]he look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content. In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.

This split between active/male and passive/female, wherein the female appearance is coded to connote to-be-looked-at-ness, I would like to argue, not only applies to the adult women Mulvey addresses in her article (she analyses Hitchcock’s representation of women in his films, and films featuring Marlene Dietrich, in order to establish her perspective on Classical Hollywood Cinema), but also appears to apply to the representation of teenage girls in 1980s teen film. If we look at the aforementioned examples from Porky’s, Fast Times and Private School, we see that teenage boys are the active lookers, whilst teenage girls are presented as passive sexual objects, there ‘to-be-looked-at’.

In her article, Mulvey suggested the male gaze functions at three different levels; i) within the narrative, where the male character is repeatedly shown to look at the female body, ii) within the camera eye, that readily takes on his perspective, and iii) within the audience, where the male spectator is therefore assumed to be dominant (or, more controversially, all-encompassing). This triple-layered gaze is driven, she argues, by male desires; in particular, an enquiring eye intended to explore the woman’s ‘lack’ (her absent penis symbolises a castration threat) that ultimately requires to be (re)solved. The examples from Porky’s, Fast Times and Private School all contain observed images of naked teen girl bodies, and suggest their nudity is directed at the gratification of male sexual desire. But the exploratory viewing of the female, teen girl body, in order to investigate her ‘lack’ is by extension, another aspect of the teen boy ‘Peeping Tom’ gaze.

70 Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema., Screen 16, no. 3 (1975), 11.
71 Ibid., 6-7.
In Figure 10, for example, we see a quadruple layered gaze (the three layers Mulvey introduced, and then an additional camera prop, which additionally extends and reiterates the boy’s gaze on screen) exploring the crotches of cheerleaders as they perform their routine, in *Lucas*. In this shot, the ‘extended gaze through camera’ seems, literally, to be investigating the female genitalia, in order to identify her possible ‘lack’. But in doing so, the boy and his camera are also almost literally ‘invading’ the female genitals as well – the camera not only extends the gaze, and makes it more explicit, but it also acts as a phallic prop that seems prepped and ready to enter female territory. This shot again places all dominant action (of gazing/observing, of investigating/exploring, of capturing, of invading, of phallic power) with the boy character, and the male gaze, as well as reminding the viewer that the boy does carry a phallus, as opposed to the implied female ‘lack’ within the frame.

Extensions of seeing, in the shape of (phallic) props, are commonly used in the teen film genre to amplify and reiterate the power of the gaze, making it even more explicit and confining; especially in scenes where the teen girls are unaware of their onlookers, where the boys are mere distant voyeurs, as opposed to Peeping Toms, and in scenes where the girls are not necessarily exposed or made additionally vulnerable through their nudity. In *Sixteen Candles*, we see the Geek (Anthony Michael Hall) and his friends look at Samantha through a pair of gaze extending, phallic, night goggles at the school dance, capturing her in an enclosed frame, with his very vision. In *Can’t Buy Me Love*, Ronald catches sight of Cindy’s (Amanda Peterson) distress at the mall, by looking at her through a telescope, as the camera again switches to his point of view, and presents a frame that confines her movements. In *Smooth*
Talk, Arnold Friend’s (Treat Williams) ‘dark’ gaze is stressed by the presence of his sunglasses. At the bar, where Connie and her friend Laura (Margaret Welsh) have come to meet boys, we see Arnold Friend staring at them through the window. As Connie plays a song on the jukebox and dances her way back to the bar, his gaze at her is captured and framed by the window he looks through from the outside. The window appears to double the cinema screen, a screen that fragments/confines her body within smaller, visually outlined, boxes. In this frame, Connie is unknowingly “…isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized…”\textsuperscript{72}, as the darkened male gaze upon her becomes increasingly threatening, and powerful.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image11.png}
\caption{Figure 11 - Ronald captures and frames Cindy with his sight, and looks at her through a phallic telescope, in Can’t Buy Me Love.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image12.png}
\caption{Figure 12 - The Geek captures Samantha’s image with his night-goggles, in Sixteen Candles.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{72} Laura Mulvey, ”Visual pleasure and narrative cinema.” Screen 16, no. 3 (1975), 13.
These ‘confining’ gazes and types of extended visions act, in a way, as a form of punishment for the teen girl’s appearance. Laura Mulvey argued that the female ‘lack’ discovered by the gaze can only be countered in three ways; through fetishism, whereby a replacement phallus reassures rather than disconcerts the male spectator, as present in the figure of the vamp for instance, through the ‘saving’ of the female figure within the narrative (in which she takes on her ‘rightful’ position in the patriarchal order through marriage and/or motherhood), or lastly, through sadism/punishment for her ‘lack’. For the figure of the teenage girl, the first two options, fetishism and marriage, are less obvious solutions. (Even though close-ups do tend to present fetish objects, such as earrings and lipsticks, and most narratives do conclude with her attaining a boyfriend, leading her to a prospect of marriage, but I will back to this later in this chapter and later on in this thesis). Punishment/sadism, however, is presented as a viable solution, when we recognise the aforementioned controlling ‘confinement’ of the teen girl movements and actions as such. And these films often present other ‘punishments’ as a result of the male gaze too; in *Sixteen Candles*, Jake’s gaze at Samantha at a school dance leaves her incapable of uttering even a single word – she is struck dumb - and Steff (James Spader) suspended gazes at Andie in *Pretty in Pink* make her demonstrably uncomfortable, and often forces her to flee the scene. In *Smooth Talk*, Arnold Friend’s gaze ultimately leads to an extreme form of punishment; a rape, in which Connie (Laura Dern) is forced to surrender her virginity to him.

But these are the more extreme examples. In general, the punishment is much more subtle for the representation of the teenage girl. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in teen film narrative ‘punishment’ most often works together with the settings of the film, the
three principal locations, to capture, confine and ‘possess’ the girl, so that she may cater to the teen boy’s desire and advantage. In the gentle romantic comedy *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Keith (Eric Stoltz) is in love with popular girl Amanda Jones (Lea Thompson). His gazes at her are perhaps not as aggressive and possessive as those of her unsympathetic and jealous boyfriend Hardy (Craig Sheffer), but they are shown to be powerful none the less. Keith is an aspiring artist, and his gaze allows him to literally capture and ‘possess’ Amanda, when he draws a portrait of her in his notebook, and later paints her portrait (without her knowledge) and hangs the resulting framed picture in an art gallery. But mostly, and this is the key point I want to make in this section, his gaze is supported through the cinematic techniques and especially the settings in the film, in order to confine her image in almost unnoticeable ways. If we look at a scene in which he admires her from afar, for instance, illustrated in Figures 14a to d, Keith’s gaze is first securely established in the opening shot of the sequence, and then, through a cut to an over-the-shoulder/near point of view shot, given prolonged weight for the viewer, as the camera lingers upon an approaching Amanda. An extended back and forth sequence follows, in which the unknowing, approaching Amanda is observed and contained by Keith’s gaze, and this is supported by the editing, the camera distance and the setting (note the sports’ field/chain link fence that literally holds her prisoner within the frame in Figure 14c). As pensive, non-diegetic music overlays the soundtrack, the communication of Keith’s mood even surpasses the conversation that Amanda has with her Physical Education teacher for the viewer; Amanda remains muted, confined, passive and unaware of her surveillance, throughout the scene.
The dominant locations in these films therefore are shown to play a key role in the girl’s ‘punishment’, then, by creating endless confining boxes, stages, theatres, podiums and arenas where the girls’ passive to-be-looked-at-ness is constructed and contained. But it is not just the linear construction of the settings that supports this; it is also the generic events and activities that these locations supply, that promote the male gaze. In the genre of the teen film, many specific events and activities are featured again and again, across locations, across public or private delineations, that all invite and uphold the male gaze; from the prom, with its prom-pictures, centralized dance floors, and its prom-queen elections, to yearbook photo shoots, to house parties, to sporting events (where spectators look down upon the field, and the cheerleaders perform), to their shopping and trying on outfits, or working as uniformed waitresses at the mall, girls are there to-be-looked-at by boys. It’s quite the spectacle.

The Panopticon and Surveillance

The gaze that Mulvey introduced in ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in 1975, however, only addresses half of the gazes at play in 1980s teen films. The teenage girl is, after all, a figure in transition – she is in-between childhood and womanhood, she is both and she is neither at the same time, she is daughter as well as potential girlfriend, she is in a continual process of becoming... But the gaze Mulvey analyses is essentially focussed on set, fully
grown, fully formed, female adult figures. Mulvey’s gaze is therefore implied to be inherently sexually oriented (with its psychoanalytic base); it takes place between a male, active pursuer, and a female, passive but ‘willing’ object of desire. Given that the teenage girl figure is still partially child/daughter, though, and still in transition, it would appear that it is not necessarily just a sexual gaze that controls and confines her movements, within the three dominant locations, but that she is also subjected to a fatherly, patriarchal and authoritarian gaze; one that monitors and corrects, as well as confines, her movements. If we return to the observing shopkeeper who shushes away the three lead girls in Smooth Talk, for instance, we find that this gaze is not predominantly exploring a ‘lack’, or resulting in a fetish or a ‘saving’, of the teen girl figure. The gaze here is not presented as sexual. It is rather one that ‘corrects’ behaviour, it is a gaze of surveillance, of maintaining the continuance of a particular cultural and societal code.

“Our society is not of spectacle, but of surveillance”73, Michel Foucault wrote in his book Discipline and Punish in 1975 – the same year in which Mulvey’s article was first published. It would seem fruitful, therefore, to explore this other angle of seeing, in relation to the representation of the teenage girl; after all, she may be half sexual spectacle, half-woman (she is becoming-woman), but she is also half ‘growing member of society/civilisation’, she is a ‘citizen in formation’. In Foucault’s book, we find, in Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland’s words, a “different account of vision”74. Foucault’s interests lay with exposing invisible power structures in contemporary, Western society at large; his work was devoted to understanding underlying ideologies, the hidden, ‘unconscious’ super-structures that inform our culture and society, but in a way that deconstructed the “power relationships inherent in the discourse of psychoanalysis”75. When Foucault examined the power dynamics and constructions of public institutions, Foucault invoked Jeremy Bentham’s 18th century proposal for a new prison structure, entitled the Panopticon. Foucault describes the structure as follows:

Bentham’s Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it is based: at the periphery, and annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is then pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of

75 Ibid.
the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.76

It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, or hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons…. It can in fact be integrated into any function.77

What Foucault is describing here, leading into an analysis of public institutions in Western society, is a structure – I would call it an archistructure78 – that informs a wide range of institutional buildings dependent on a particular hierarchical organization of power; where an unseen surveyor (and ultimately, possibly even just an implied one) is placed in a central tower, from where they can observe all outward cells. The mere suggestion of their constant surveillance will already invoke a sense of control and self-confinement in the movements of the ‘inmates’. This presents hugely commanding relations of power and domination within hierarchical organizations, and hence within our society. But I am interested in the point where Foucault argues this structure can “in fact be integrated into any function”, because it seems to me that his idea is formidably relevant to cinema – an industry so dependent on unseen seers, and so powerful in how it commonly reproduces (or rather just ‘produces’?) acceptable, normalised behaviour; after all, we could ask is the screen mirroring the audience, or does the audience mirror the screen? Particularly for teen film, a genre that caters to an

77 Ibid., 205.
78 The term archistructure, as much as I would like to claim it as my own, is in fact used commonly used in the street (it has an entry in the urban dictionary) to describe the art and design of buildings, and in the computer world, to describe a way a computer system is organised and integrated. I think it is interesting that these two definitions come together in one word; it makes it particularly acute in describing Foucault’s idea, as well as implying some kind of inherent ‘soul’ or character in the building-structure that raises it above mere architecture.
audience on the cusp of becoming ‘active citizens’, this needs to be further explored. But for now, I want to illustrate how Foucault’s Panopticon, its power dynamic and hierarchical organisation, appears to inform the representation of the three dominant locations, the high school, the home and the mall, in 1980s American teen film, because it is the surveying gaze that fuels the other half of the ‘looks’ on the teen girl body.

If we return to the opening shots of locations in the teen films that I analysed in chapter 1, what we notice is that the structures they imply closely represent the descriptions that the Panopticon offered. Each building, the high school, the home, and the mall, has a series of outward cells (classrooms, bedrooms, or shops), that can be accessed and looked into from a central platform (the hallways, the mallways and in all three, a central hall or staircase). If we look again at the shots that introduce the home and the high school in Sixteen Candles, for instance, we notice that the building not only fragments their cells into cells, into cells (through intricate window-paning that suggests an almost prison-like confinement), but that both buildings wrap around a kind of central, authoritative tower.

Figures 15a and b – The facades of the home and the high school in Sixteen Candles both present cell-like structures with an authoritative central ‘tower’ at its heart.
In *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the opening shot presents the Ridgemont mall to the audience, even before the title of the film appears. The facade of this building stands out clearly from the surrounding night sky, because it features a large glass front/dome that is brightly lit from within. Again, the very design of the building introduces a cell-like structure (the dome itself appears covered in cells) wrapped around a central ‘tower’. As the film cuts to the inside of the mall, the opening sequence, underlying the titles, presents a music-driven montage sequence that introduces all the different characters to the audience, through a range of connecting looks and gazes, exchanged between them. Straight away, the mall then is introduced to the audience as a location driven by seeing and being seen, where the ‘inmates’ within it are connected through vision and surveillance. The opening sequence introduces both boys and girls, and implies, rather progressively, that both genders are looking at and seeing one another. But as the music brings the sequence to a close, it is one particular boy, later introduced as Mike Damone (Robert Romanus) who is followed by the camera as he walks through the mall, eyeing up girls. He then enters and moves up in the central glass elevator, from where he, briefly, turns around over both his shoulders to look out over the whole mall. This glass elevator appears to allow him to rise up within the ‘central tower’, from where, relatively unseen, he is shown to survey the entire mall.

Figure 16 - The Ridgemont Mall facade, with its brightly lit, cell-inducing central dome, in *Fast Times*. 
Since Mike Damone is the first character to be followed at greater length in *Fast Times*, his presence at the mall is given additional weight, as well as a more powerful status, through his position as central surveyor. In Foucault’s description of the *Panopticon*, he refers to its contemporary use as follows: “The seeing-machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.” I think the mall, as it was constituted in 1980s American culture does indeed act as a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole, but within its representation on film, ‘society as a whole’ almost always takes the shape of single, individual *male*. It is surprising that Foucault makes little reference to gender in his text, when, after all, the hierarchical organisation that he addresses is essentially, in Western society, a patriarchal one.

In her article “Pretty in Pink: John Hughes Reinscribes Daddy’s Girls in Homes and Schools”, Ann De Vaney also observed recurring structures of surveillance in popular 1980s teen film:

> Another Foucauldian issue, surveillance, is at play in Hughes’ teen films. Most of his narratives are set in safe spaces and give special emphasis to safe geographies where teens are under surveillance – classrooms, gyms, locker rooms, libraries, shop

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classrooms, halls and lockers, principals’ and vice principals’ offices, bathrooms, janitor’s storerooms, teen bedrooms and kitchens.80

What she seems to be addressing here – even though she does not analyse the representations of the locations in a very detailed way – is exactly my point of analysis as well; the way these films present their locations is superficially, seemingly teen-friendly (and shows the locations to be individually appropriable, as we have seen in the opening of this chapter), but underneath that, these films present the spaces as fundamentally rooted in a Panopticon-like archistructure, catering to male/daddy’s surveillance. Because even though Mike Damone in Fast Times may be a boy/peer, most surveyors introduced in teen films are adult men. From the shopkeepers, to teachers, janitors and principals at the school, from guidance counsellors, to bosses and security guards, from parking attendants and ticket-collectors to presidents, and of course, the all-encompassing fathers; authority figures in 1980s teen film are deeply and effectively male – more specifically, they are consistently middle-class, white, suburban, Midwestern and middle-aged men.

Figures 18a-d – (left to right, top to bottom) Ray Walston as Mr. Hand in Fast Times, Paul Gleeson as Richard Vernon in The Breakfast Club, Jeffrey Jones as Mr. Rooney in Ferris Bueller’s Day Off and Jerry Orbach as Baby’s father in Dirty Dancing.

Ann Devaney suggests these figures appear primarily as “…armed against burgeoning sexuality and ‘on the lookout’ for deviance…” in these films. Even though I wholeheartedly concur (and it seems an unlikely coincidence that the fathers of the more ‘sexually’ active dancing teen girls in 1980s teen films, such as Dirty Dancing, Footloose and Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, all fulfil strong patriarchal roles in their society, as a doctor, a preacher and an army colonel respectively), I would personally add that the adult men are above all shown to monitor and refrain the girls from threatening the continuance of patriarchal rule (through their sexuality or otherwise); the way the shopkeeper in Smooth Talk urges the girls to stop giggling and flirting with boys, for instance, carries with it the connotation that they are not allowed to ‘loosely’ pursue boys. In Just One of the Guys, Mr. Raymaker refuses to submit lead girl Terry’s article for an internship at a newspaper, choosing instead to submit articles by boys, and thereby curtails her ambitions. In Fast Times, when Stacy has to have an abortion towards the end of the film, it is her brother Bradley who, in the absence of a father and a partner, drives her to and from the clinic and ‘chaperones’ the process, thereby ensuring she does not become a single mother. And in Sixteen Candles, in a rather extraordinary final scene, after Jake has come to the local church to meet Samantha, her father (Paul Dooley) is shown to give his approval of ‘the boy’ Jake, before Samantha gets into his car for a date. The sequence not only posits Samantha as a bride at the church (Jake is initially under the impression she was there to get married, and she carries her sister’s ‘forgotten’ veil), but ultimately reassures both Samantha and the audience that her father condones their union, as though he has given her away at the altar, and passed her on from daughterhood into future wife-hood, before she rides of with Jake. The film ends when Samantha’s ‘marriage’, and the

Figure 19 – And John Capelos, as the janitor in The Breakfast Club, claims he is "the eyes and ears of this place".

81 Ibid., 204.
continuance of patriarchal rule, consummated with a kiss. It is a neo-conservative scenario indeed, where the girl is allowed to date and be sexual in order to become a woman, as long as she remains within the patriarchal ideal; the boy may take her away as his bride, as long as her father has given his consent, or in this case, his thumbs-up.

Figure 20 – In Sixteen Candles, Samantha resembles a bride as she waits at the church with her sister’s forgotten veil, unaware that Jake (Michael Schoeffling) is coming to pick her up.

Figure 21 - Samantha gestures to her father: “This is the boy....”, as they walk towards his car.
The relationship between the teen girl and her father as represented in 1980s American cinema is very complex, and I shall return to it at length in chapter 4. However, what this example shows here, is that both within and outside the three dominant locations, the teen girls appear subject to controlling surveillance; and in the very fact that it is assumed to be everywhere, and accepted to be everywhere, lies again the normalisation/neutralisation of this construction. So whether the girl is looked at with desire, and confined or punished by a boy’s gaze, or observed, monitored, corrected and ‘saved’ by surveying adult men, the girls in these films are represented and maintained to “legitimate a female role that is convenient for the continuation of a certain way of men ruling.”82 Any progressive, transformative powers the teen girls may have conjured over their surroundings seem then to be outdone by an underlying superstructure that insists on conforming their behaviour to the traditional and conservative gender norms that inform the very ways these teen girls are looked at on screen.

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03. The Teen Girl Gaze

Representing Averted and Veiled Desire

Over the course of the previous two chapters, I have aimed to illustrate that the dominant structures of representation in 1980s teen film – taking the three recurring settings of the home, the high school and the mall as a starting point – cater to uphold a particularly conservative and patriarchal ideal, wherein the movements of the teenage girl (and therefore the prospective woman) remain limited and controlled. The representations of teenage girls in these films, at first sight, keep their bodies confined and ready to be looked at on screen, as either sexual objects for peeping boys, or as dutiful daughters moderated by an array of ‘powerful’ surveying father figures. In order to examine whether this decade also provided opportunities for ‘rebellion’, however, (by which I mean other alternative, more progressive models that paved the way for the teen girl ‘agency’ so visible in the 1990s - a tendency that I map out a greater length in my introduction), it is important to consider the teen girl character from a less polarised perspective. The representations of the teenage girl might continuously position her as passive, in opposition to the ‘active’ boy/male, but through the very fact that her figure often takes on the primary subject position in these films, it seems likely the film language invites the audience to empathise/identify with her as well. So where and how does this happen? The alignment that Laura Mulvey suggests to be evident, between the audience and the dominant, male, ‘active’ perspective, happens both within the narrative and in the camera, through the triple nature of the male gaze and the strong enunciation of the male point of view. But does the teen girl have her own ‘point of view’ in 1980s teen films? Do we share her perspective at times? And what do we see the teen girl looking at? How does this ‘teen girl gaze’ relate her representation to notions of desire, power and/or ‘active’ agency?

In his article ‘Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-up’, Richard Dyer explores the structures of seeing involved with looking at men, in film and photographs. In the opening of his article, he describes a common trope in cinema, where an exchange of glances and looks takes place between a boy and a girl:

We have all seen, countless times, that scene of Young Love, where, in the canteen, at school, in church, the Boy and the Girl first see each other. The precise way it is done is very revealing. We have a close-up of him looking off-camera, followed by one of her looking downwards (in a pose that has, from time immemorial, suggested maidenliness). Quite often, we move back and forth between these two close-ups, so
that is very definitely established that he looks at her and she is looked at. Then, she may look up and off camera, and we may go briefly to the boy still looking – but it is only briefly, for no sooner is it established that she sees him than we must be assured that she at once averts her eyes. She has seen him, but she doesn’t look at him as he looks at her – having seen him, she quickly resumes being the one who is looked at.\textsuperscript{83}

Within such an exchange, Dyer suggests, there is room then, albeit ever so briefly, for a returning female, teen girl ‘look’. Even though it never attains equal footing, this countering girl ‘glance’ does provide a brief break from the active, and all pervasive, male gaze. In the teen romantic comedies of the 1980s, this type of scene is a key structural occurrence, and it is here that we first encounter the teen girl glancing/looking (if not gazing) at the boy she desires, and are invited to share her perspective. I wish to argue, here, that the structural recurrence (taken collectively) of this brief instance actually indicates there might be more opportunity, more room, more space for resistance to the male gaze than Dyer proposes. It is at this starting point that we can begin to look at the teen girl gaze and its potential.

If we return to the scene in \textit{Sixteen Candles}, for example, where Jake Ryan stares at Samantha in class as she privately fills out a sex test, there is an instance of her glancing back at him that follows the exact exchange that Richard Dyer describes. The scene first establishes Jake’s gaze at Samantha, but as she is shown to consider whom she would sleep with if “she had to do it with someone”, we see her tentatively - as though in doubt, she bits her lip - glance back over her shoulder, ever so briefly, at him, and the camera cuts to a point of view shot from her perspective. As soon as she appears to catch his eye – after Samantha’s point-of-view shot of Jake, not pictured in the illustrating stills below - she averts her gaze, and rubs her chin on her shoulder, as though that were the intention for her movement. The camera cuts to a front close-up of Samantha, and as she returns to her ‘test’, appearing flustered and embarrassed, Jake’s gaze is re-established as the dominant and pervasive one:

In Sixteen Candles (read stills left to right), a shot sequence shows an exchange of looks/glances between Jake Ryan (Michael Schoeffling) and Samantha (Molly Ringwald).

The most common instance of the teen girl ‘looking’ then, seems to be bookended (like the re-appropriation of public space in the canteen in Fast Times) by ‘reassuring’ shots that affirm the real gaze and its male propriety. But it has to be noted that we do see a teen girl looking here, at the object of her affection; her desires are enunciated and communicated within this sequence, and this in itself illustrates that such ‘normalised’ constructions – here in the shape of an actual exchange – can and do support the opportunity for a counter-acting voice (even though, admittedly, it is perhaps not quite a force yet; a glance or look is after all not quite a gaze) that redeems the teen girl somewhat, even if only briefly, from the realm of an entirely passive, observed/objectified state.

Over the course of the 1980s, the teen film genre did provide some other opportunities for teen girl looking and gazing within the teen film genre. Some girl gazes even occur from a distance, and pass by unnoticed by the observed object (the boy) within the narrative, thereby
following the more voyeuristic setup that is generally associated with Mulvey’s male gaze. In *Better Off Dead*, for instance, we see ‘new girl next door’, French exchange student Monique (Diane Franklin), as she gazes out of her window at her neighbour boy Lane Meyer (John Cusack), who is unaware of her presence.

![Figures 2a - f – A selection of stills from a sequence in *Better Off Dead* that presents a female voyeuristic gaze, from out of a window above, where the boy that she observes, who remains unaware of the gaze directed at him, becomes the object.](image)

The sequence shows us a shot of Monique staring out of her bedroom window, as the camera proceeds to cut back and forth between her point of view (on Lane coming out of his house and placing ski-equipment in his car) and shots of her smiling at what she sees. Although this sequence appears to attribute a great deal of activity and power to its teen girl subject, there are several points to be made about Monique’s particular gaze that do set it apart strongly from its ‘captivating’ male counterparts (such as the one presented in the *Sixteen Candles*...
sequence). As soon as the camera cuts to an inside shot of the bedroom, after Lane drives off, the frame shows us Monique as she moves away from her viewing position at the window. As she steps back, she ‘unveils’ herself, by uncovering from the sheer fabric curtains that previously enwrapped her (see Figures 2e and 2f). In doing so, she reveals herself to the audience in a tomboy-like state; she wears a large, unfeminine shirt, and a baseball cap, and has her hair pinned up beneath it. Throughout the film, Monique is presented to the audience as a tomboy; she fixes cars, is good at sports and only came to America because she wanted to visit the baseball stadium of her favourite team. Moreover, she is also presented as foreign, and she cons her host family and school into believing she doesn’t speak English, underpinning that she perhaps doesn’t quite understand the American language/‘code’. Such narrative elements appear to account, in a way, for her gender-bending activities, and her gazing at Lane. But the figure of the teen girl tomboy is tremendously complex, and I will come back to her (and Monique) at much greater length in chapter five, when I discuss gender and performance. For now, it is important to understand that the shot in Monique’s bedroom that reveals her, after we have seen her gazing out of the window at Lane, strongly establishes her as a tomboy through her appearance and thereby disavows some of the ‘power’ that the teen girl character might have gained through the gaze, because she is a presented as an uncategorizable, undefinable, half girl/half boy.

But the ‘veiling’ of Monique also fulfils another purpose. In her writings on the masquerade and the veil, where Mary Ann Doane explores an in-depth analysis of female desire, subjectivity and its relation to the female subject/object on film, Doane introduces the vision of the close-up of Marlene Dietrich’s face in Josef von Sternberg’s The Scarlett Empress. She suggests Marlene’s veiled face becomes a second screen-like surface on film that reveals and obscures, provokes, seduces and rejects all at the same time. Doane writes:

The veil serves as a form of protection – against light, heat, and, of course, the gaze.... To take the veil is to become a nun, to seclude oneself in a convent... [The] veil is characterised by its opacity, its ability to fully block the gaze. When it is activated in the service of the representation of the seductive power of femininity, on the other hand, it simultaneously conceals and reveals, provoking the gaze.84

The complexities of the image that Mary Ann Doane introduces here, whereby the veil manages to ‘protect’ from the gaze, yet provoke it, yet also deny its bearer a sexual drive, brings into play various ideas that can be applied (albeit it loosely) to the image of Monique in Better Off Dead as well. If the veil can protect the woman from the gaze, can it not also strip the female gaze beneath it, of its powers? A protective shield would, after all, appear to work in both directions – whereas it may protect the woman wearing it from the male gaze, it can also avert the force of the female gaze away from the observed man/boy. Additionally, the veil positions Monique as a ‘secluded nun’ here, thereby reassuring the audience that her gaze is perhaps not sexually desiring in nature (even though, of course, it is, and this illustrates just how complex the imagery is). And as Monique reveals herself from underneath her veil, the audience is above all provoked to gaze at her, again, to figure out who she is and what she is, and whether she has a phallus (this is additionally motivated by her tomboy status), thereby re-establishing the ‘natural order of things’, wherein woman/girl is there to-be-looked-at. I would also personally add, that alongside the nun-imagery provoked by the veil, the white, sheer covering of Monique’s figure here appears to foreshadow her prospective ‘bridal state’ with regards to Lane; an image that re-establishes her inevitable return to a more conservative, patriarchal order. In these four ways, the shot that has Monique veiled by the sheer curtain ultimately undoes the powers attributed to her, through her gaze at the beginning of this sequence.

Alongside all of this, we mustn’t forget that Lane (John Cusack), the perceived, desired object in this sequence, is far from passive. He is observed loading sporting equipment, which doubly connects him to physical activity, into his car - a symbol of movement and virility - before driving off. In “Don’t Look Now: The Male Pinup”, Richard Dyer writes: “...women do not such much look at men as watch them...”85. Dyer thereby suggests that the female gaze/look (or queer gaze/look) must be set apart from the male gaze, because it is merely observational; it ‘observes’ men doing, achieving, moving, or otherwise being involved in activity, which counters any passivity that the ‘traditional’ gaze might induce. Dyer illustrates that the image of the desirable male, in film and photography, always connotes activity through hardness, tightness, muscularity and poses that suggest movement, if not through the representation of ‘actual’ activity on film. Because of this characteristic, the image of man can never be gazed at in the same way as woman. Unlike the female, passive object-like state (they are there ‘to-be-looked-at’, Laura Mulvey’s construction exemplified in

the previous two chapters), the male figure evades any passivity through his embodying of a perennial “potential for action”, and “promise of activity”\(^{86}\). In *Better Off Dead*, and in most other instances of teen girl looking in teen film, the boys perceived are always associated with action and activity, whether it be through their sport activities (football players watched by cheerleaders, for instance, or dancing boys observed by their girl partners), their demonstration of strength and ability (Stacey admiring Damone as he opens a locker by banging it with his fist in *Fast Times*), or their independent movement in and related to vehicles, as was suggested through various examples in chapter one.

At the very beginning and the tail end of the decade, examples of teen girl looking on screen are at their most powerful and most different, yet here too the films present structures around the teen girl gaze that obscure and redirect any possible agency that may be derived from it. In *Mermaids* (1990) we see Charlotte’s (Winona Ryder) stare intensify, as she catches the ‘vision’ of a romantic prospect through the windshield of their approaching car. In the first shot, we see the car move towards the camera and ground to a jilting halt, before the camera cuts to Charlotte’s point of view. Because we see *her seeing* the boy first - and this shot has her moving towards the camera and places her centrally within the frame - the scene establishes her as an active seer; it gives her gaze movement, focus and force, and this places the act of teen girl looking prominently at the start and the heart of the action. Her point-of-view shot then reveals that her looked-at object is Joe (Michael Schoeffling), whom she sees through a windshield that reflects a sun glare, as a darkened silhouette.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 269-270.
Figures 3a - d - In *Mermaids*, Charlotte's (Winona Ryder) gaze is thwarted and redirected in a variety of ways, including by the addition of redirection through her mother’s gaze in the frame...

Although Joe is passively standing/waiting in this moment (and his eyes, obscured through the backlight, are denied their own gaze), the dirtied windshield and glare act as a sort of veil to Charlotte’s gaze here (see figure 3a and 3b), again stripping it from some of its force. The dialogue proceeds to reveal quickly, when her mother (Cher) introduces the family to Joe, that Charlotte wants to become a nun—a line that, in an act of back-directed commentary, desexualises any weight the gaze might have had (but it must be noted that her gaze did suggest sexual desire to begin with).

The sunlight that wraps around the back of Joe in Charlotte’s point-of-view shot turns his figure into almost a two-dimensional silhouette or outline, whereby he becomes a mere suggestion of a man/figure, rather than an actual, ‘active’ representation of a man. This again undoes the powers of the gaze somewhat (it degrades the object to ‘inactive’ and therefore to an ‘unreal/lesser’ masculinity), but it also makes the figure of Joe more passive, as though Charlotte’s gaze is able to emasculate his image—and this would empower her gaze. At the same time, the shot creates a parallel between her image of Joe and that of her father, whom we have seen in a mentally subjective flashback that took place during a solar eclipse, where, in her point of view, he too stood out against back light as a silhouette only, as well. This repetition establishes a motif that runs throughout the film, where Joe is equated to the absent father that the character of Charlotte longs for, but importantly, this connection again desexualises the image in a way. The sequence is rife with contradiction; in Charlotte’s look, Joe is presented as inactive (and therefore possibly as less of a man), as vapid (a mere outline), and as a stand-in replacement for her father, but all of this endorses as well as complicates the validity of the male/sexual objectification that Charlotte’s gaze brings into play. The last aspect, of Jake as a stand-in father figure, is a particularly layered one since it provokes further analysis over various psychoanalytic aspects of the storyline, but it also
unconsciously invites a third party into the gaze-play, in the character of the mother (as would be expected in an Oedipal triangle) – her involvement is played out on the level of looking and gazing over the rest of the sequence.

As the scene progresses, Charlotte remains seated in the car, while her mother and Joe converse, and is struck silent in apparent awe of Joe (she is muted by his appearance throughout their first encounters, as though she were perhaps struck dumb as punishment for her gaze/visions of him). Her mother then leads Joe up the porch, asking him to fix the swing. When Charlotte gets out of the car to continue to observe them, her mother (now part of the scene/her point-of-view shots) is shown, in an odd re-direction of Charlotte’s gaze, to admire Joe’s behind and then turns around to ‘perform’ her satisfaction, on the stage of the raised porch; she strikes a seductive, playful and confident pose aimed at the gaze of her on-looking daughter (who replies with an eye-roll, and is thereby literally made to avert her gaze). All the while, we see Charlotte observing her mother and Joe, as she remains silent, with her face cut off on screen by the roof of the car (in Figure 3d, we see how the shot literally strips her of a mouth, thereby visually muting her onscreen). In this way, the proximity to Joe/the object, and the communicative force of the mother’s adult and sexually more confident (or ‘experienced’?) gaze, ultimately becomes the more powerful and commanding player in the scene, outranking Charlotte’s silent observation. The mother’s gaze extends, redirects and replaces Charlotte’s gaze, and in this more mature, playful and less forlorn form is attributed a voice with the force to command Joe into action and ‘active manhood’, namely to fix the porch swing. Interestingly, however, it ultimately does appear the two female gazes in this sequence are somehow emphasised and strengthened by their doubling, even if, at the same time, the gazes are denied focus, distracted and made humorous because of the multiple engagements they invoke.

The doubling or multiplication (and consequent de-stabilisation) of the teen girl gaze is a trope we find at the earlier tip of the decade too, in *Little Darlings*. In this film, a group of young teenage girls meet at summer camp, where two of the girls, Angel (Kristy McNichol) and Ferris (Tatum O’Neale) are soon taking part in a bet to see who can lose their virginity first. As their surrounding group of friends attempts to help, the girls are shown to undertake an expedition to locate potential targets. After a short trek through the woods, the girls spot a group of boys swimming in the distance, and they take out their binoculars to observe them. The binoculars, props that extend the teen girl gaze and place emphasis on their acts of looking, as well as assign them a phallus of sorts, are normally restricted to the realm of the teen boy gaze within the genre (see my examples in chapter two), but here are allocated to girl
gazing. This reversal is progressive, yet it is undermined by a cut to a singular point of view, that pulls into question who exactly is doing the looking (whose perspective are we seeing?). The very distillation of the girl gazes into one gives their gaze focus, yet simultaneously destabilises the identity of the seer. At the same time, the point-of-view shot demonstrates the sheer distance between them and their objects; the observed scene, even seen through the binoculars, is still so far away that it leaves an unsteady focus and a lack of clarity over who or what the girls are observing exactly (this in great contrast to the Peeping Tom / binocular shots that cater to male seeing, illustrated in chapter two). Additionally, the shot of the girls leaning over the rock staring through their binoculars becomes the ‘butt of the joke’ in this scene – the film invites us to laugh at the ‘incompetence’ and slight ridiculousness of teen girl looking, a quality further emphasised by the fact that the lead girl Angel (positioned at the left in figure 4b) does not spy through binoculars, but instead stands idly by, appearing annoyed by this ‘childish’, futile act.

Figures 4a and b - In Little Darlings, a group of girls observe boys from a distance at a nearby camp...

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87 Mary Ann Doane has written extensively on how the female gaze often becomes the butt of the joke in its representation. See for instance her chapter entitled “Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses”, in Femmes Fatales: Film and the Masquerade, starting at p. 26.
When the girls steal a school bus from the camp, Angel (presented as a tough, no frills, street-wise tomboy throughout the film) drives them to a local gas station in an attempt to secure ‘protection’ for her prospective sexual encounter. There, one of the girls climbs into the men’s room and pulls a condom machine of the wall, as the other girls wait outside and cheer her on. Remaining seated in the bus, Angel sees a boy she desires, Randy (Matt Dillon), arriving in the parking lot. In a rather progressive shot sequence, we see Randy approach the other girls and engage them in conversation, as he leans against the school bus and is unaware that Angel is observing him from behind. The camera shows us Angel leaning out of the driver’s seat window behind him, blowing a bubble gum bubble (an odd phallic symbol/fetish, but it extends and collapses all the same). As a cut to a close-up of her reveals her eyes move down to up, the scene strongly establishes her gaze running along the back of his body. The camera cuts back and forth between this shot and her point-of-view shot, which, through a tilt, mimics her eye movement, until her gaze rests (and the camera lingers) on a close-up of his jeaned behind. When the camera cuts back to the close-up of Angel, we see her raise an eyebrow in apparent desire and approval.
Figures 5a - h - Angel (Kristy McNichol) has an active gaze in *Little Darlings*, but it is redirected and diffused by her teen girl friends, until she is re-established on equal footing with her object of desire, Randy (Matt Dillon).

When Randy sees the other girls smiling at someone behind him, he turns around and engages Angel in a bantering introduction. At first, she is positioned higher in the frame than he is, keeping him relatively small in proportion (see Figure 5e) and this visually reinforces her powers over him. But what takes centre frame in this shot is the ‘other audience’ to their scene; the group of girls observing their encounter who look back upon them (and in a way, back towards the camera) are positioned directly in the middle of (or in between) their encounter in the frame. Aside from the chaperoning role that this connotes, the girl group redirects, fragments and re-distributes the girl gaze and its potential weight within the frame. This is further emphasised by the cut to a close-up of Sunshine (Cynthia Nixon), who winks and smiles encouragingly at Angel and playfully pretends to take a photograph of the scene.

This gesture brings various aspects of seeing into the game; it reminds the audience of the power of seeing (of capturing an actual image with a camera), yet at the same time, it also suggests that the girl’s ability to take a ‘photograph’ is mere pretend and that the teen girl can therefore perhaps mimic a gaze, but never quite grasp its full or actual potential. More importantly, the emphasis on this gesture multiplies the teen girl gaze again, through a mock doubling, and sets it apart from the solitary male gaze within the scene. In this way, the ‘playful’ act quickly strips the teen girl gaze of its focus and sexual desire (this ‘gaze’ is aimed at the success of Angel after all, and not at Randy; it suggests we need to be looking at Angel instead), thereby redirecting and fragmenting it once more.

As the camera relays its emphasis back onto Angel and Randy, who move in closer during their encounter, their positions within the frame are adjusted and they end up at an almost equal height and size in the frame (see Figure 5h), as though the balance between them were being restored. When Angel blows another large gum bubble at the close of their conversation, Randy pokes it with his finger (a phallic act that seemingly foreshadows how Angel will lose her virginity to him). As the bubble collapses, so does Angel’s ‘masculine’
gaze, her tomboy-like state (she resorts to acting like more of a ‘girl’ in scenes with him) and her agency. Randy takes the gum off his finger, and pops it into his own mouth, thereby reclaiming the ‘power’ and the other phallus between them, before walking off triumphantly.

This scene in *Little Darlings* nevertheless prominently introduces an active teen girl gaze as a desiring one, capable of capturing a close-up of a fetishised part of the male anatomy; the behind. And it invites the audience to share in the delights of this teen girl point of view. This construction and/or perspective comes back often in the genre, and gains strength and prominence throughout the decade. (On a side note, this type of ‘butt shot’ as a representation of the teen girl point of view on the male body has since become a popular convention. One could wonder what the attraction to the image of the male behind is exactly. It does not connote activity *per se*; for even though it is hard and tight, it is also round and soft. Is it perhaps the part of the male body that most reminds the female onlooker of her own; of the breasts, of the mother? And does this shot thereby involve and avert her own separation anxiety? Could this be the countering, ‘narcissistic’ (and therefore reassuring) image that opposes the replacement phalluses so often sought through fetishism, by the male gaze? In biology and evolutionary theory, a connection between the buttocks and the female breasts has long been suggested - whereby the female breasts are proposed as having evolved as a counterpart for the previous attraction to the behind\(^8\). It would be interesting to explore this further, both in psychoanalytic theory and with regards to its representation in cinema). The emphasis on girls gazing at the bodies of boys is also relayed in *Fast Times*, where one of the opening scenes shows the teen girls working at the mall and discussing the appearance/look of a male client: “He’s a fox! ... He looks like Richard Gere! He has a cute little butt – he’s cute!” Say the girls, as they groom each other and prepare a plan of action so that Stacey may “take him”. The image is not extended to a point-of-view shot, but the very existence of the teen girl look is made ‘visible’ (present) and viable through this dialogue.

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\(^8\) See for instance the work of Desmond Morris, including *The Naked Ape* (1999, originally printed in 1967).
In *Fast Times*, the girls discuss the vision of a boy, and prepare each other for action...

In *Lambada*, the teen girl point-of-view shot of a male behind is at its most sexualised, direct and uncompromised. In math class, we see Sandy (Melora Hardin) gaze at, discuss and admire her teacher’s behind with a friend, without him noticing (there is no shot that reveals a recognition of his being looked at). Sandy’s enjoyment of the image of her teacher’s behind becomes visible when she licks her lips with desire afterwards, as if to imply she wants to taste what she sees. It is a sequence that is very progressive and empowering, and that strongly objectifies the mature, male body:

![Image of Sandy and her classmate admiring their teacher's behind]

Figures 7a, b and c - Sandy (Melora Hardin) and her classmate admire their teacher's behind, in a shot sequence that invites the audience to share this point of view...
Although the teen girl gaze is seemingly split over two subjects in this sequence, if we look closer, it becomes clear that only Sandy’s gaze is directed downward, and that it is her focused and direct gaze that we share in the point-of-view shot, communicating and amplifying the direction and strength of her desire, without compromise or negation.

With regards to the representation of the teen girl gaze directed at boys in the 1980s teen film genre, it seems, then, that the construction developed rather unevenly throughout the decade. The teen girl gaze was often stripped of its powers by being veiled, averted, redirected or multiplied on screen, and it often remained heavily outranked and outweighed by its male counterparts. Most commonly it was simply ‘too fleeting’ in its presentation to bring forth any actual consequence, both within the narrative and within the filmic language. But its recurring presence across a wider selection of films does, collectively, set it apart from the fleeting and non-consequential framing of the girl gaze that Richard Dyer described; these teen girl characters are granted point-of-view shots on occasion, and these shots are shown to be fuelled by desire, and at times even as capable of ‘capturing’ their male objects in an erotic hold, through a close-up (of the face, upper body and especially the male behind). It seems then that the teen girl gaze, and the teen girl subject at large, carry with it the potential for agency, the potential for a more progressive and complex representation of female identity. I will come back to this at greater length, later in this thesis, when I address the (desiring) virgin and the loss of virginity (both the examples from Mermaids and Little Darlings explicitly present their looking teen girl leads as virgins), the self-directed gaze in the mirror and the cross-dressing teen girl on film. For now, I want to have introduced the fact that the representation of the teen girl gaze engages with the many possibilities of its own subjective state; in a virgin or tomboy form, she manages to embody both male and female traits, and through her fluctuating stages of development/becoming, she manages to slip between child and mother-like states and is thus granted departures from the constructions/adult norms that Laura Mulvey introduced in 1975. The figure of the teenage girl projects an arena for enunciated female desire that can, perhaps more readily than her adult counterparts, be voiced on screen, but that has thus far remained underexplored and, potentially, underdeveloped.

The Teen Girl Gaze: Girl-On-Girl Looking

Aside from the glances, looks and gazes directed at boys in 1980s teen films, the other most common instance of teen girl looking in the decade reveals the characters as preoccupied with the image and bodies of other girls. Here too, veiling, averting and redirecting come into play, but the girl-on-girl gaze should perhaps not so easily be equated to the gaze that Mulvey...
identified. Is it not rather different in nature, to begin with? The gazes between girls are not presented as sexually desiring in these films, they are rarely presented as potentially (let alone potently) homosexual; the popular 1980s teen films were produced by a Hollywood that was aiming at a broad, heterosexual audience and therefore was, perhaps, simply too careful and conservative at this time, to break with hetero-normative, narrative trajectories. Instead, the girl-on-girl teen gaze presented in the 1980s brings an investigative and comparative quality with it that, I would argue, is specific to the representation of gazing between teenage girls. Although this gaze does not attain the erotic holding power of a desiring gaze, it does attribute a certain active curiosity and reflective intelligence to the teenage girl who is doing the looking, and thereby engages with a different type of agency and desire than its male, objectifying counterparts. The teen girl gaze also invokes an engagement with particular teen girl affects, such as envy and admiration. I will illustrate this with an example first, before I continue to explore and define the workings of the girl-on-girl gaze.

Sixteen Candles presents a scene that exemplifies the structure of the representation of girl-on-girl looking on film, in which Samantha and her friend Randy are shown to admire the body of a schoolmate in the changing room showers after gym class. In some ways, this scene is similar to the Peeping Tom scenes we encountered in films such as Private School, because it presents a voyeuristic-like gaze aimed at a naked girl who remains unaware she is being looked at. In other ways, however, it is very different. In Private School, for instance, the audience is made an accomplice to ‘the male gaze’ from the very beginning; we are made aware of all the intricacies of the setup through a long build up (we see the boys approach the girl dormitory and carefully position themselves into an optimal arrangement for gazing, by climbing up on top of one another to gain access to a window, before we share their point of view). The scene of girl-on-girl looking in Sixteen Candles, however, begins with a sudden cut from the previous scene in a gym, where Jake (Michael Schoeffling) and another boy discuss Samantha and compare her to Jake’s girlfriend Caroline. Jake’s friend tries to convince Jake he need not be interested in Samantha, because she is “void… Maybe she’s retarded… she’s a child…She’s obviously too young to party serious.” As the two walk off screen, Jake’s friend exclaims loudly: “Come on Jake. You act like you’re hard up. You got

For more information on the conservative nature of Hollywood teen film production codes during this decade, see Timothy Shary’s Generation Multiplex (2002) or A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980-1989 by Stephen Prince (2002). The industry has developed more ‘mainstream’ queer teen films since then, that feature explicitly desiring ‘lesbian’ teen girl gazes, in films such as But I’m a Cheerleader (1999) and The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love (1995), but these were released a decade later, when the genre diversified and reached out to a more widespread audience in the 1990s.
Caroline!” And curling his hands downward in a brief, apelike gesture as he follows Jake off screen, he continues in a low voice: “She’s a... wo-man!” At the last exact beat of this comment, the camera cuts to the next shot that presents an abrupt close-up of Caroline’s (Haviland Morris) naked breasts in the shower; a shot that turns out to be a shared point-of-view shot from Samantha and her friend Randy’s (Liane Curtis) perspective. But the connection between the end of the last scene and the opening of this one, even before we have come to realise it is the girls who are looking at Caroline’s breasts, suggests that the boys have already seen Caroline’s body and her breasts too (moreover, it suggests they saw her first), and it frames any vision of her in a comparison with their opinion/vision of Samantha; where Caroline is a woman and Samantha is still a child. By having this scene introduce the teen girl gaze on the teen girl body, the films again bookends any possibly teen girl agency within an overarching, more potent patriarchal realm; the look and appreciation of the teen girl body has, after all, already been safely positioned within male ‘possession’.

The intensity of the unexpected cut to the close-up of Caroline’s breasts is accompanied by a strong comic sound effect; a “boing” that would appear to emphasise both the sudden size and the ‘bounciness’ of the breasts, as well as the surprise impact of this direct access to a female body, seen from a female point of view.

The combination of the sound effect and the suddenness of the cut encourages the viewers to be jolted back in their seat. The audience is invited to laugh then, and thereby the teen girl gaze again becomes ‘the butt of the joke’. The comic aspect of this point-of-view shot appears to ease and avert any tension that the sexual nature of this type of gaze might normally bring with it, but it also ‘allows’ the audience to enjoy and express their pleasure at the shot, and
enhances the force of impact of the gaze through the very directness of this response. At the same time, however, the omission of an establishing shot and the abruptness of the cut suggest the point of view is accidental, and therefore ‘must be’ unpremeditated - especially, again, if we compare it to the scene in Private School, where the viewer/accomplice was carefully positioned in advance to ‘secure’ the male gaze. The Peeping Tom sequence in Private School also continues to lure the viewers into suspense about whether or not the voyeurs would be found out. But in this scene in Sixteen Candles, any suspense over possible discovery is never brought into play; as though the scene carries no illegal connotations, as though this gaze is ‘obviously’ innocent and non-threatening in nature. The very validity of the teen girl gaze remains uncertified throughout the scene. As the camera stays with the close-up of the breasts, we hear Samantha say the first word of dialogue in the scene: “Unbelievable!”, a word that conveniently expresses her emotion, as well as calling into question whether what we are seeing – a teen girl gaze aimed at another girl’s naked body – is actually ‘real’ and/or ‘really happening’.

Figures 9a - d - "She's perfect... Impossible to cut up.... And supposedly she's really sweet, her brother's deaf and everybody worships her... And she's going with Jake!"

When the camera cuts to a medium close-up of the two observing girls, Samantha and Randy are positioned instantly at a safe distance from the body they are observing; in the
frame a partially blocking wall holds them at bay, and reintroduces the confining linear play so familiar to the genre (see my examples in chapter one and two). With this cut, the reverse shot simultaneously incites a comparison of sorts between the girls (thereby continuing the comparison started by the dialogue of the two boys in the preceding scene); the reverse shot introduces these girls as equal yet different to their observed body, at opposite ends of the same space. Samantha and her friend, as seers/onlookers, are represented as vulnerable in their nudity too, even though they are not completely exposed. But they are covered by wrapped around towels, as though their bodies are not ‘worthy’ of (or inviting) to-be-looked-at-ness in the same way. The (side-)lighting in the scene emphasises the three different hair and skin tones of the girls; where Caroline is blond and tanned and golden, Samantha is a redhead, with pale and freckled skin, whilst Randy has dark untamed curls, and more olive or Mediterranean skin. Even before the girls enter into a commentary on what they are seeing, then, the audience is invited to compare and contrast the three bodies on screen, and this renegotiates and repositions the gaze between the girls, to function along similar lines.

As Samantha and Randy proceed to evaluate Caroline’s body - they discuss how she must surely have skipped nine grades (and thus be much older) to have that kind of body - the camera cuts back to a wider shot of Caroline, showing her body now from her legs up, as a dark, side-facing silhouette against a white lit and steaming background (see Figure 9b). Multiple showers spray her body from both sides, creating an overtly dreamlike, ‘tunnel vision’ image of Caroline that emphasises the surrounding symmetry. This shot presents her body in the centre of the frame as though it were a prominent but flattened two-dimensional cut out. It is an image that communicates on various levels; it offers visual pleasure on the one hand (it undoubtedly does cater to a voyeuristic, sexually desiring gaze both within the camera and in the audience), and at the same time, by reducing the figure to a flat silhouette, places emphasis on the outline, rather than the content of the body, thereby denying it any implications (such as the threat of castration) that the nude female body might otherwise provoke. Caroline’s body is thus shifted into a different ‘type’ of objectified/observed state, whereby the gaze is not invited to focus on any lack or fetish, but rather on its feminine outline, form, shape and silhouette.

This type of shot recalls a tradition of imagery that most women/girl viewers, in particular, are already familiar with; the glamour shots used for advertising beauty or fashion products in printed magazines or on television. This type of photography is safely recognised as pleasing, because it caters to a different kind of ‘eye’ - a different kind of seeing - that is not sexually fuelled, but rather calling on particular ‘female’ affects used in this genre of
representation, such as envy, admiration and the desire to emulate the observed object. It seems that the teen girl gaze is repositioned to align with a different type of gaze, where the female viewer/onlooker/subject is engaged to compare herself to another female object, and positioned to admire her. The sense of glorification that informs this ‘vision’ of Caroline is made intrinsic to the teen girl gaze, throughout the rest of the scene. As the girls’ dialogue continues to affirm that Caroline is “perfect” and “impossible to cut up [because] she is supposedly really sweet, her brother is deaf and everybody worships her”, it seems Caroline’s body is placed on a pedestal at the narrative level as well, through the girls’ spoken review. Not only is Caroline’s beauty aptly placed within a ‘deserving’, almost angelic category (she is sympathetic and worthy of admiration because she has a deaf brother), she is also repositioned as a mythical, godlike creature, because she is “worshipped” by everybody. The fact that her eyes remain closed throughout the scene further emphasises Caroline’s revered image; she is presented as an isolated, disconnected statue, almost, because any active ‘contact’ (through opened eyes) is deferred. At the same time, the steam of the showers softens and diffuses her image even further, as though it were a filter evening out any rough spots or edges (as well as providing another veil of sorts). The scene thus creates an evaluative, comparative and admiring girl gaze, that impossibly contains Caroline erotically, because her body is veiled by mist, “unbelievable” and held at a distance, as well as being possibly much older and there to be worshipped. In order to redirect any last confusion that might tie this teen girl gaze to sexual desire, however, the final line of dialogue brings Caroline’s body promptly back to earth, by re-placing it firmly at a boy’s side and within patriarchal propriety once more; Samantha rolls her eyes, averting her gaze, and sighs with apparent desperation and envy: “And she’s going with Jake!”.

The complexity of the representation of the teen girl gaze in this sequence demonstrates just how many different lines of engagement are brought into play here. Laura Mulvey’s binary oppositions of active/passive, or voyeur/to-be-looked-at-ness, may be transposed onto girl-on-girl looking in film, but that would fail to address, let alone cover, the intricate dynamics of this represented gaze. Much of feminist film theory since 1975 has, in one way or another, engaged with, or reacted to, Laura Mulvey’s seminal article on the gaze. Many feminist film theorists have attempted to understand, or deconstruct the female gaze, and the female pleasures that might be derived from women looking, especially at other women – a possible gaze that Mulvey’s article does not address. Mary Ann Doane’s work on

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the masquerade and the female gaze was notably informative here, but since she engages with a construction that involves the performance of sexual identity and femininity, I will address these writings more specifically when I analyse tomboys, desire and performance in Chapter Five. Most other feminist film theorists agree, however, that the female gaze upon the female body invokes two main lines of engagement, namely ‘desire’ and ‘identification’.  

Teresa De Lauretis, in her work on films such as *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *All About Eve* and *Rebecca* conflates the two lines and suggests the films are essentially dealing with the (im)possibility of the representation of love between women, and lesbian desire. Jackie Stacey, on the other hand, in her article on the same films, ‘Desperately Seeking Difference’, separates the two lines and proposes they invite a different kind of pleasure altogether:

I shall argue that these films offer particular pleasures to the women in the audience which cannot simply be reduced to a masculine heterosexual equivalent. In so doing, I am not claiming these films as ‘lesbian films’, but rather using them to examine certain [other] possibilities of pleasure.... Interestingly, the fascinations which structure [these films’] narratives are precisely about difference – forms of otherness between women characters which are not merely reducible to sexual difference, so often seen as the sole producer of desire itself.

It is with this line of thought that I find the teenage girl gaze most commonly resides; with the fascinations about difference and the forms of otherness between women/girls, and the pleasures (or other affects) that they provoke. I believe the analysed sequence in *Sixteen Candles* calls precisely upon the recognition of forms of otherness between girls, and that it presupposes a certain familiarity with, or the ‘naturalness’ of, this construction involving admiration, curiosity, appreciation and envy. Sianne Ngai, in her article ‘Jealous Schoolgirls, Single White Female, and Other Bad Examples: Rethinking Gender and Envy’ (2001) also proposes this construction as a widespread phenomenon. However, Ngai suggests the relations and gazes between women in films such as *All About Eve*, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* and *Single White Female* cannot be easily reduced to the rather positivist notion of

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‘pleasurable’, since they rely on the innate feminisation of the particularly ‘monstrous’ affect ‘envy’. Ngai suggests the construction of this particular affective relation between women on film is essentially antagonistic and aggressive, and inevitably leads to violent destruction and images of female hysteria. Even though Ngai skilfully turns this reading upside down by suggesting such representations of envy can be reappropriated to reflect certain feminist critique, she fails to address the representation of non-antagonistic envy, as this would commonly occur, for instance, in teen films such as *Sixteen Candles*.

The representation of non-antagonistic envy between women/girls on film, has remained rather underexplored (other than in *Desperately Seeking Susan*) and perhaps can, or should, be related to notions of female fandom. Jackie Stacey, in her book *Star Gazing* (1995), explores desire and cinematic identification by “examining the multiplicity of processes connecting female spectators to Hollywood stars”.

Stacey identifies three sets of female identification processes, both within and outside the cinematic context. She identifies “Devotion”, “Adoration” and “Worship” as the more rigid, hierarchical (one-directional) pleasures released within the cinematic context, “Transcendence”, “Aspiration and Inspiration” as more fluid engagements between female viewers and stars, and “Pretending”, “Resembling”, “Imitating (Behaviour)” and “Copying (Appearance)” as extra-cinematic, creative practices, involving fantasy and self-adaptation. If we look at the scene in *Sixteen Candles* again, it seems the represented teen girl gaze relies on many of Stacey’s identified practices; in their non-threatening, non-antagonistic admiration/envy and worship of Caroline’s body/spectacle, Samantha and Randy are equalled to female ‘fans’, gazing at the glamorous, unknowing, isolated and disconnected film star. Because the viewers in the audience are familiar with this type of gaze (they are its subjects), the represented gaze on screen is more easily recognised as non-threatening – making this a very circular and continually dependent process. At the same time, of course, this recognition increases the identification (and possible admiration) between the female viewer and lead girl Samantha as well, because she appears in this gaze just like a girl in ‘the audience’ – she becomes ‘one of us’. The lines of admiration and comparison drawn by the girl-on-girl gaze in this scene (between Caroline and Samantha/Randy’s bodies, and in the cinematic context, between Caroline and the viewer’s bodies, and Samantha/Randy and the viewer’s bodies), attempting to read equality and difference between girl-bodies, may have been sparked by the boys’ dialogue, but is ultimately made ‘real’ by the very nature of the teen girl subject on screen,

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95 Ibid., 138-158.
and the implied teen girl spectator in the audience, who, in this way, is made into a different kind of accomplice to the construction of the gaze.

Gazes that explore equations measuring difference between girls may, at such times, be non-antagonistic, but even so, they are not without their force or consequence. In their investigation, their curiosity, their reflective attempts to perhaps “solve the riddle of femininity”96 presented before them, these gazes poke and pry their objects. And these gazes are connected, as was suggested by Stacey and Ngai, to envy, and to the desire to emulate; to learn, to mimic, to copy, to become, to transform, to adopt, and to adapt, towards the other. Such consequences of the female gaze are qualities that are, of course, also fundamental to our understanding of the teen girl subject; a figure that is inherently in transition, inherently in a state of becoming more like – or towards - woman. Which leads me to ask, how do these teen films present this part of the girl-on-girl gaze? How do these films propose the teen girl solves her inequality, depleting her provoked desire to become more like the other? The aspects of learning, and the desire to become more like the other, are explicitly presented in another example of the teen girl gaze, in the 1980s teen film Some Kind of Wonderful. In Some Kind of Wonderful, as was the case in Better Off Dead and Little Darlings, the girl doing the looking is presented as a tomboy; Watts (Mary Stuart Masterson) has short, cropped hair, wears ‘boy’ clothes, plays the drums and is often mistaken for a lesbian (because her appearance is ‘queer’) by other characters in the film. This aspect to her character is important, because it perhaps ‘allows’ her, in her pre-sexualised girl body, to take on male qualities, such as the more prominent, active ‘gaze’ (and again, I will come back to this more extensively when I address the performance of gender and femininity in Chapter 5). But nevertheless, when we see her looking at another girl – the object of her best friend Keith’s affections, Amanda Jones (Leah Thompson) - the structure of her gaze is re-styled and re-framed to fit the teen girl gaze, calling upon affects such as envy, admiration, learning and emulation.

In this scene, Watts enters a changing room after, presumably, a gym class. Dressed in a long male boxer short and yellowish t-shirt, we see her towelling her boyish short hair in front of an open locker. As she glances off screen to the right, her eyes appear to rest on an object of interest. The camera cuts to her point-of-view shot, a long shot, of popular girl Amanda Jones, who is grooming herself at the other end of the busy changing room. In Watts’ point of view, Amanda’s body catches the light. She is framed by lockers on both sides, by

other girls getting dressed in front of her, an office behind her, as white steam (from the showers) fills the air around her. The dense framing here appears to secure the parameters of the frame within the frame, and thereby keeps Amanda contained, disconnected, unaware and at a safe distance.

Figures 10a - d - In Some Kind of Wonderful, tomboy Watts (Mary Stuart Masterson) is caught gazing at popular girl Amanda Jones (Leah Thompson) in the changing rooms...

In the first point-of-view-shot, Amanda has her right foot up on a bench in the middle of the changing room, in a seductive pose reminiscent of images of a femme fatale (but without the fetish of the high heel). This image emphasises the curves of her body, and hides (or redirects the gaze away from) her genital area. The light from above highlights her figure, both its softness and its outline, and gives her an almost ethereal, glamorous quality. Unlike Watts, Amanda is dressed all in white, in traditionally feminine, dainty underwear and a tight and short camisole revealing the skin of her stomach. The camera (and by extension Watts’ gaze) lingers on Amanda’s body, as she pushes her chest outwards and tilts her head back to brush her long hair, while steam from the shower rooms slowly diffuses her image. The scene positions Amanda, like Caroline in Sixteen Candles, as though she were a model in an

97 The steam not only evens out Amanda’s image (like a veil), it also obscures and mystifies her, as though there was a curtain between her and Watts, bringing about suggestions of a theatre and a stage. This curtain, in can perhaps also be seen as the cinema screen, which separates the viewer from the observed star, and acts as a mirror of sorts to, whereby one is made to relate to, or copy the other.
advertisement – and even the script insisted on this: “Amanda Jones. Bra and panties, combing her hair. Perfect light, perfect pose. She looks like she’s in a French Lingerie commercial.” It seems the film was intent on insisting a connection between Amanda Jones and the women/girls presented in advertisements.

When the scene cuts back to Watts, the camera reassures the audience that she is barely looking after all; her chin is pointed down and her eyes are only half-directed, in a casual and a seemingly embarrassed way, as if trying to go unnoticed, into Amanda’s direction. We then see Watts push her own chest out in an apparent mimicking of Amanda’s pose. The camera cuts back to a closer shot of Amanda, from the torso up, and back to a close-up of Watts’ face, whose gaze now visibly quiets down, steadies and focuses in Amanda’s direction. On the soundtrack, a pensive and slow piece of music sets the tone as one of reflection and thought. When the camera cuts back to Amanda’s body, we see her brushing her long hair, and running her fingers through it. A shot of Watts, still gazing in Amanda’s direction, shows how she copies this gesture; she touches her own hair, and brushes her fingers through it, as though feeling and recognising its shortness. When the camera cuts back to Amanda, it slowly tilts down her body, from her face to her neck, her breasts, down her stomach to the top of her leg. In the subsequent shot, the camera tilts down Watts’ body, repeating the previous shot of Amanda, and reveals Watts’ hands moving down to touch her own stomach, which she proceeds to visibly suck in, before she rests her hands, one by one, still demonstrably feeling her own body, on her narrow hips.

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By repeating the tilting shot down Amanda and Watts’ bodies, and cutting back and forth between the two bodies in similarly distanced shots, the film appears to compare and contrast the two bodies (or at least invites the viewers to do so), while at the same time illustrating Watts subjective experience and reaction to her gaze. Watts, whose body is less developed and perhaps less explicitly feminine than Amanda’s, is presented to transfer her observations of Amanda onto her own body, as though she is measuring their likeness. The repeated camera movement reinforces this emulation; Watt’s desire to copy, to equate, to become more like the other, is made visible through the filmic techniques, in this poignant scene that emphasises the ways in which the girl/gaze is preoccupied with bodily ideals and difference.

Watts’ delicate exploration of her own body, and her gaze, are abruptly interrupted by another girl in the locker room, who laughs at her from off screen. The girl is then brought into the frame in a subjective point-of-view shot (she looks directly at Watts/into the camera) and loudly proclaims: “Hahaha – are those boys underpants?” When Watts replies: “(imitating fake laughter) Hahaha... Yeah. So?”, the tone of the scene shifts, as Watts’ presence and her gaze are suddenly ‘exposed’ to the other girls in the changing room. The girl answers: “So I’ve never seen a girl wearing boys’ underpants before!”, after which Watts reaches into her locker, abruptly pulls out one of her drumsticks and holds it up aggressively towards the girl,
as though it were a weapon, exclaiming: “You ever seen a girl with a drumstick up her nose?” The sharp breaking of Watts’ gaze here acts in three different ways; it appears to punish Watts’ for gazing by drawing all the attention back to her ‘flawed’ appearance (thereby restoring her to-be-looked-at-ness) and making fun of her look, in doing so it also breaks the identification process/or alignment between the viewer and her character (literally, by breaking the fourth wall) who perhaps recognise – and thereby validate - her admiring, envious girl gaze since it is similar to that of the viewer towards the star, and lastly, it ‘justifies’ Watts’ gaze by equating her to a boy/man - she has a phallus, in the shape of a drumstick, and re-establishes her masculine character with her un-ladylike, aggressive reaction.99

Figures 12a and b - A girl interrupts Watts gaze, looking directly into the camera, before Watts responds defensively.

The scene ends with Watts walking towards a full-length mirror in the changing room. She stands in front of it, and gazes up and down her own body, portraying a pensive and serious look that conveys a sentiment of judgment and critique over her own reflection. But then she grimaces in the mirror, throws her towel over her shoulder before exiting the frame, as if this mirror image has not taught her anything she didn’t already know.

99 Though it must be added that, in the context of the film, this reaction is more complex than I’m making it appear – the viewer is invited to cheer for Watts, as she defends herself against a bullying girl, and her reaction does not invite the traditional to-be-looked-at-ness – the representation of Watts is more progressive and alternative than that of, for example, Amanda Jones in the same film, precisely because she is not depicted as the popular beauty.
What lingers most from this particular girl-on-girl gazing scene, is the recognition of difference that resides in the girl gaze, and the consequent desire for emulation that this provokes. The desire to become or be more like the other is so often naturalised in this way, in the depiction of the relationship between girls. The scene plays with mirroring and doubling, where the steam, like a screen, simultaneously obscures and reveals an image of idealised femininity. But that image of idealised femininity, in the shape of Amanda, and Caroline in *Sixteen Candles*, is thereby presented as a riddle of sorts that can be solved through observation and mimicry. The fact that the observed girls are constructed to resemble advertising photography suggests that their image, their status, their body, their femininity need not only be admired, but can be copied and attained through consumption, through “acquisitive desire” (whereby a mimetic performance is enabled through the purchase of consumer goods). The teen girl gaze therefore, and its implied nature linking comparison, admiration and envy to emulation, is positioned as though it were being addressed in an advertisement, making the subject of its gaze, its own passive object at the same time. This teen girl gaze – which has an accomplice in, and is made possible through the recognition by the teen girl viewer - is henceforth set up in a consumer address; it is ready to be ‘interpellated’ (by which I mean, to be appropriated in a pseudo-individualised subjectivity towards a commercial end). And this particular ‘looking to consume in order to emulate’ gaze, with its connections to 1980s materialism and the possibilities of self-transformation

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through consumption (the 1980s popularity of seeing ‘the body as project’) is then ready to be
moved into that other recurring, neoconservative, teen film setting - the mall.

The Mobilized Teen Girl Gaze and the Mall

In chapter one I introduced Bailey and Hay’s observation about 1980s and 1990s
American teen cinema, in which they stated that the representation of teenagers could be read
as (at least partially) progressive, because the teenagers are presented as mobile subjects in
these films; they are able to shift between different roles and tasks, and move freely between
locations and identities. Bailey and Hay solidified this observation through their analysis of
the representation of the teenager and the car, whereby the automobile literally provides
teenagers with (urban, upward and/or other) mobility. I argued that this observation was
perhaps more valid for the representation of teenage boys in 1980s teen films than for the
representation of teenage girls, because boys are more readily represented as having access to
technology and fast, expensive cars, while girls are often contained by their environments and
kept passive and immobile. But how does this mobility work within the third generic setting,
the mall? How is the teen girl gaze presented there? We have already seen that in this
‘protected’ environment (chapter 2), the girls are often presented as able to roam freely,
running past shops and through the food court, and demonstrating more unbound behaviour.
Does this behaviour influence the representation of their gaze? How do the multiple
directions/distractions offered by the archistructure of the mall affect their looking? Does it
attribute a sense of mobility to the teen girl? Does this particular gaze assign her any agency,
or power(s)? And, most importantly, what do these films suggest the teen girl looks at in the
mall?

In her book Window Shopping (1994) and her article “Les Flaneurs du Mal(l): Cinema
and the Postmodern Condition” (1991), cultural theorist Anne Friedberg writes extensively on
the nature of the (female) gaze in mall. She suggests the structure of the department store (and
by extension the mall) pre-conditions a ‘mobilized gaze’, because the people within it are
subject to a huge range of visual stimuli, provided by the multitude of shops and consumer
goods, and are therefore provoked into a ‘moving’ gaze. Friedberg traces this type of gaze
back to early modernity and to the writings of Walter Benjamin:

…the origins of the mobilized gaze [can be situated and identified with a] paradigm of modernity, the flâneur – the male dandy who strolled the urban streets and arcades in the nineteenth century. As the department store supplanted the arcade, the mobilized gaze entered the service of consumption, and space opened for a female flâneur – a flâneuse – whose gendered gaze became a key element of consumer address.\footnote{Anne Friedberg. "Les Flâneurs Du Mal(l)", 420.}

…[the flâneuse’s] perceptual patterns – distracted observation and dreamlike reverie – became a prototype for those of the consumer, whose style of ‘just looking’ is the pedestrian equivalent of slow motion.\footnote{Ibid., 421.}

The teenage girl in 1980s teen film, as we have seen in the previous section, offers a “gendered gaze” particularly susceptible to becoming “a key element of consumer address”. If we look at how her gaze is presented in the mall, and at the teenage girl as a flâneuse, her perceptual patterns conform to the characteristics of the mobilized gaze Friedberg describes. In the opening credit sequence of Valley Girl, a montage sequence set to upbeat pop music presents a group of four girls shopping at the mall. The quick montage reveals a series of ‘point-of-view’ shots (even though we are left in the dark over whose point of view we are taking on) in the shape de-contextualised close-ups of bracelets in a wooden tray, tops hanging on racks, nail-polished fingers running past such items, credit cards being run through a machine, hands on a register adding amounts, and girls holding up various clothes on hangers in front of themselves (as though they were the mannequins), posing and smiling, as though their friends off screen were commenting on how these pieces of clothing look on them. In Fast Times at Ridgemont High, the opening montage sequence at the mall (again set to upbeat pop music) relays a quick succession of gazes at other teens, by connecting one look between a girl and a boy to another and to another, while intermittently showing close-ups of food and other consumer goods, and a shot presenting a stretch legging being pulled apart by two girls in an tug of war. In Night of the Comet, the two lead girls spend some time at a deserted mall halfway through the film, in a montage sequence set to Cyndi Lauper’s Girls Just Want to Have Fun on the soundtrack, built, again, out of close-ups and medium shots rapidly cut together; we see the girls try on various outfits, shoes and makeup, whilst dancing, posing and laughing with each other. In She’s Out of Control, Katie’s makeover (which assumedly takes place at a mall as well as in a range of doctor’s offices) also presents a
montage sequence, of her braces being removed, contact lenses being fitted, her trying on heeled shoes and lipstick, having a skirt fitted and going to a hairdressing salon. The shots within this montage sequence are often her point of view (including the scenes at the doctor’s offices), and the scene at the hairdresser’s demonstrates her gaze from one ‘spectacle’ to the next. The shot moves through the salon at high speed; it presents a swaying and unsteady perspective, past the various customers and exotic hairstyles on display, with the customers turning to look back into the camera (and at Katie). In Smooth Talk, lastly, Connie and her friends’ perspective of the mall is brought to the screen through a series of fast-paced shots and scenes with them in it, figuring shops and details only in passing. The camera never stays with a particular item long enough to focus on it, but it nevertheless manages to creates an impression of the array of surrounding goods, shops, escalators and restaurants.

In such scenes (which set the standard for the genre and are still common practice today), the teen girl flâneuse’s gaze is not so much presented in ‘slow motion’, but rather in ‘sped up’ time. The perceptual pattern Friedberg describes, of “distracted observation and dreamlike reverie” has transformed for the teenage girl in the era of MTV; it is a gaze that is still unsteady, unfocused and ‘uncapturing’, but not because it is dreamlike, but rather because it is fleeting, fast-paced, fuelled by quick movements and distraction, it is scattered and in a permanent state of ‘disconnect’. The lack of establishing shots, or a slower build-up of proximity that normally informs Hollywood editing, has given way to a state of rapid, perennial present/presence. There is no real sense of cause and effect here, where the gaze focuses and moves in closer, or where a window display leads to a close-up of a particular product, or where one object leads to another, or directly to a scene of purchase. The mobilized teen girl gaze, then, is ultimately presented as having no particular focus at all, and with this lack of focus comes the lack of power or control over what is there to-be-looked-at.

The female consumer’s gaze has often been ‘redeemed’ by the notion that she would have consumer power (see for instance, Doane in “The Economy of Desire” (1989)). It is striking to note then, that the teen girls in these teen films, for all their time spent at the mall, are never shown to actually buy anything. The (shopkeeper’s) hands in Valley Girl may tally up amounts, and swipe credit cards, but we never ‘see’ the shopping girls hand over a card, or pay at the register. In Night of the Comet, the teen girls only go to the mall because they can shop without paying (in this teen horror/sci-fi, the people of the world have been vanquished and survivors have turned into zombies), and even then they are caught on camera and attacked by violent male workers for ‘taking’ goods. In Pretty in Pink, Andie (Molly
Ringwald) goes to a shop to look for a prom-dress, but she discovers she can’t afford to buy it (she looks at the high price tag), and leaves downtrodden and empty-handed.

And in Smooth Talk, Connie consistently ‘forgets’ to buy a paint-roller and pan for her mother, with the five dollars given to her. On the few occasions the girls in Smooth Talk go into a shop at the mall, they only ‘pretend’ to want to buy something; a jacket, in order to draw the attention of boy buyers at the same store, and a leather bag. There, they soon proclaim they are “just looking” (and therefore not buying). Even at the mall’s cinema, we see them stand in line, but when they finally reach the cashier at the box office, they ultimately do not purchase tickets, because they are unable to agree over what to see. In these films, teen girl looking is thus not intimately connected to buying, but rather strongly disconnected from it.

So if the representation of the teen girl’s gaze denies it focus and the follow-through of a purchase, who does have consumer power in these films? In Can’t Buy Me Love, Cindy (Amanda Peterson) goes to the mall to replace the suede, white outfit she secretly borrowed from her mother, but has accidentally ruined at a party, by spilling wine over it. Since she does not have the money to purchase the replacement outfit - it costs 1000 dollars – she first tries to exchange it under a returns policy, and then desperately tries to come to an arrangement with the shopkeeper, offering ‘her services’ instead; she would work at the shop on Saturdays for as long as it takes, if he would give her the replacement outfit as an advance.

While this is going on, the scene is bookended and intercut by shots of Cindy’s neighbour boy, Ronald (Patrick Dempsey), who observes (and gazes at) her from the other end of the mall. Ronald has earned and saved 1000 dollars with his lawn mowing services and is there to buy a telescope for this exact amount. In the shop across the mall, we see him stare through the telescope at Cindy (the scene makes an interesting pun over its status as a phallic symbol; the salesman tells Ronald the telescope offers an “erect image”, and we then hear Ronald reply, over his point-of-view of Cindy through the lens, that he “can see the erection”, thereby explicitly marking his desire for her and emphasising her to-be-looked-at-ness once more). As Ronald continues to observe Cindy through the telescope, she enters the dress shop with its glass facade in the mall. He observes her distress, as we cut back and forth between Cindy negotiating with the shopkeeper inside the shop and Ronald looking at her from across the mall, and discerns that Cindy is unable to persuade the shopkeeper to let her have the outfit (not only does she not have consumer power, Cindy is unable to conclude her negotiations successfully). Upon seeing this ‘damsel in distress’, Ronald takes his money, leaves the telescope shop, and runs towards the dress shop, holding up his money outside the glass doors/window.
After enthusiastically knocking on the glass window to catch her attention, Ronald goes inside and offers Cindy the money by proposing he wants to “rent” her; he offers her the money in exchange for pretending to go out with him for a month, since this will make him popular. Cindy first suggests he is crazy, but then, looking back and forth at Ronald, his money and the replacement outfit, she accepts his offer.

In this scene, that undeniably plays with notions of ‘teen girl’ prostitution (Ronald’s “I want to rent you” line ultimately offers a similar transaction to Richard Gere’s proposal for renting prostitute Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*), the purchasing power is markedly attributed to the teen boy. Meanwhile, the girl remains dependent on his consumer power. Not only is she dependent on his financial holdings, she becomes ‘object’ to its exchange; the exchange value of the object, 1000 dollars, becomes her value, as she transforms from consumer to consumer-good, to the commodity. Ultimately, it is Cindy’s ‘service’ (pretending to be Ronald’s girlfriend) that is sold and bought at the mall – she becomes the product on display in the window, the product to be purchased. And this construction is demonstrably presented to outrank her ability and ‘desire’ to acquire and consume independently.

The fact that Cindy is equated to the product she desires (and is subsequently transformation into a commodity) plays with complex notions that involve the relaying of the female gaze and the displacement of female desire back into the patriarchal realm. It seems the window display at the mall becomes yet another screen, another mirror of sorts, in the 1980s teen film. When the teen girl gazes into it, to look for/at what she desires with her subjective gaze, she soon finds herself equated to the headless mannequin on its other side. In
her studies of the mall, Anne Friedberg observed: “The shop window succeeded the mirror as a site of identity construction...”107 And Laura Mulvey, in her work on commodity fetishism, noted a similar alignment: “One commodity acts as a mirror, reflecting and thus expressing the value of the other...”108. It seems the representation of the teenage girl in 1980s teen films upholds this rather conservative notion, whereby the female consumer subject becomes the commodity/object. But this observation is not necessarily new to feminist theory. In 1985, while analysing the role of women in a consumer society and female sexuality on display, Luce Irigaray already remarked that:

In our social order, women are ‘products’ used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, ‘commodities’... The use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualised bodies underwrite the organization and reproduction of the social order in which they have never taken part as ‘subjects’.109

A similar use, consumption and circulation of the teen girl ‘sexualised’ body is visibly procured by teen films too; the exchange of money between boys/men over the services (and/or appreciation) of the female form has become a recurring trope of the genre. Alongside the abovementioned example from Can’t Buy Me Love, set directly in the mall, other teen films offer comparable illustrations. In Adventures in Babysitting, Dan (George Newbern) gladly hands over 45 dollars to “help Chris out”, after sharing a dance with her at a party. In Some King of Wonderful, Amanda is repeatedly presented as a commodity from the very beginning – she is her boyfriend’s ‘property’, and he is presented as able to buy and sell the very ‘look’ of her. With Amanda sitting next to him in his car, Hardy (Craig Sheffer) comments to gas attendant Keith (Eric Stoltz), throwing money at him: “I’d recommend you keep your eyes and your mind off my property.... Here’s ten for the gas, and ten for the look!” Later in the film, Keith too attempts to ‘buy’ Amanda by purchasing the diamond earrings she so desires and requires to fit in with her friends. After Watts, his tomboy best friend, chooses “the right pair”, Keith spends his entire college savings on the earrings, and gives them to Amanda at the end of their date, hoping to make her his own.

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107 Anne Friedberg. “Les Flâneurs Du Mal(1)”, 422.
In the end, when Watts recognizes that she actually wanted the earrings for herself (the film thereby returns her to ‘proper’, commodity desiring and purchasable girlhood first), Keith offers her the earrings instead, and, after they kiss, he tells her she “looks good wearing his future”, before they walk off together. Examples such as these present the teen boy as the sole possessor of consumer power, and this is a power that, by extension, can ‘attain’ the girl. But the boy’s consumer power is still outranked by the consumer power of the ultimate patriarch in the 1980s teen film, the father. In The Breakfast Club, it is implied Claire’s father got her expensive diamond earrings for Christmas. In She’s Out of Control, Katie’s father buys her a giant teddy bear and a ticket to Europe for her birthday, and in Pretty in Pink, it is ultimately Andie’s father who buys the shoes and fabric (another dress) that she needs to make her prom dress. Gifts such as these don’t even require the teen girl to gaze into windows, or to go to the mall, let alone leave the home; they lead the teen girl directly into the most neo-conservative of all places, right into daddy’s arms.

In conclusion, it seems the representation of the teen girl gaze is riddled with contradiction; her sexually desiring gaze at boys is often veiled or redirected, her gaze at other girls is comparative and positions her to desire the emulation of a certain type of idealised femininity that connotes to-be-looked-at-ness, through consumerism. The gaze at the mall, lastly, is presented as distracted and unfocused. It becomes a gaze directed back at the self through the window/screen/mirror, by which the teen girl subject ‘becomes’ the object of an exchange, fuelled by male consumer power. The teen girl presents an odd subjectivity then, or as Mary Ann Doane suggests in her article ‘The Economy of Desire: The Commodity Form in/of Cinema’ - where she points out that adult female consumer power sustains a double
bind, in which, briefly put, female consumer agency ultimately aims at to-be-looked-ness and thereby upholds patriarchal relations (another way of looking at the connections between the reproduction and the commodification of femininity) - it presents “a curiously passive desiring subjectivity”.\(^{110}\) But although the teen girl gaze can be read as conservative, regressive and lacking in agency, this reading would only tell part of the story. The sheer amount of teen girl gazes presented in 1980s teen film, all be they ever so brief, splintered, unfocused or redirected, imply a character and a correlating subjectivity on screen that engages with, and acknowledges, the teen girl viewer/ spectator in the audience. On top of that, there are suggestions of an active curiosity reflected in the teen girl gaze, and qualities of learning, of emoting, of affect, of enunciated desire, and of intelligent emulation, that may indeed have paved the way for more progressive representations of the teen girl subject on film, in the 1990s and beyond.

PART TWO: INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this thesis, I looked at how the representations of teenage girls in 1980s teen films were constructed at the level of the frame; how did the more ‘static’ visual components of these films, such as the three dominant settings, and the positioning of the teen girl body within these sets, connote their to-be-looked-at-ness? How did the representation of the teenage girl gaze engage with her surroundings and the other bodies within them? Although I discovered some potential pockets of resistance in these films (including an increasing ‘access’ to the perspective of the teen girl gaze), I found that, on the whole, the representation of teenage girls conformed to the traditional, structural hegemony of Hollywood imagery, supporting patriarchal hierarchies and the subordination of the female sex on film, and thus projected strong neo-conservative values that may have been a part of the backlash against the second wave of feminism, in 1980s American culture.

In the second part of this thesis, I continue to explore this discourse by looking at the representations of the teenage girl at the level of the narratives of the films. Ultimately, films featuring teenagers explore rites-of-passage; these films are coming of age films, presenting the teen girl figure in transition, en route to becoming woman. Understanding how this element of the representation works – and exploring its relations to the contradictions and tensions this figure brings into play on film – requires looking beyond the more ‘static’ image, and towards the narrative developments and transitions. How is the teen girl’s state of transformation presented on film? Does the teen girl’s process of ‘becoming’ allow her to elude passive confinement? How do these films present her movements, her transitions, and the possible escape from all that is ‘set’? What are typical narrative trajectories for the representation of the teenage girl; how do we perceive her changing, becoming, transforming on screen? And most importantly, how does this aspect of the representation of the teenage girl engage with feminist film theory - what might this contribute?

Before I subsequently move towards an engagement with the more fluid and evasive concepts related to the representation of the teenage girl in the concluding chapter of this thesis (including notions of performance and affective display in narrative elements, gendered tropes such as cross-dressing, and recurring motifs and themes such as the mirror and the loss of virginity), I first begin by establishing the conventional storylines and characterisations of the 1980s teen film – that which is structurally ‘set’, at the narrative level - and connect these findings to the context of the American zeitgeist of the 1980s, and the history of the genre. I look at three important narrative trends (still commonly used in teen films today) that began
around this time; the introduction of stereotyped teenage characters, the standardised staging of specific relations with the father and the mother, and the popularisation of a key, recurring teen girl ‘narrative trajectory’: the Cinderella or Pygmalion-like ‘makeover’. I begin this part of the thesis by, once again, looking at the popular John Hughes films (*The Breakfast Club*, *Pretty in Pink*, *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Sixteen Candles*), as well as other box-office hits, such as *Can’t Buy Me Love*, *Lucas*, *She’s Out of Control* and *Mermaids*, before moving out to include more independent hits and obscure films, such as *The Legend of Billie Jean* and *Little Darlings*.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I then move away from looking at that which is set (both on the level of the frame and of the narrative) in teen films, and turn towards that which is in transition, in process of becoming, in movement, in order to explore the possible areas for resistance and agency amongst the representation of teenage girls. Having identified the makeover as an essential component of the transformation/rites-of-passage narrative trajectory in films that feature teenage girls in a lead role in the fourth chapter, I begin the final chapter by looking at some of these sequences once more, and at how they present an active malleability of the self, and the progressive celebration of (the onset of) femininity. What do close-ups and the persistent use of mirrors in these films add to the display of the teen girl body? And how is the teen girl body revealed (and celebrated) in movement, in performance, in dance? How does the teen girl’s appropriation of a female appearance, of ‘feminine’ characteristics, constitute a play with the masquerade – and how does this construction relate to her process of ‘becoming’? By refiguring the representation of the teen girl body as a celebration of femininity and as a performance, I present this figure in dialogue with the larger notion of the construction and performance of gender.

The 1980s teen film featured an array of tomboy and temporary transvestite films, where teenage girls are shown to take on (aspects of) the appearance of teenage boys, and other masculine traits. In this cross- or in-between ‘gender performance’, teen girls are often allocated powers normally attributed to the representation of masculine identities, including connotations of action and the gaze. How are these representations of gender constructed in teen film, and how are they ultimately ‘corrected’? What do they reveal? Do they present femininity as a more fluid construction, or as one that is strictly defined? And do these films present the construction/performance of femininity as (conservatively) innate, or as (progressively) appropriable? I engage with these questions through close-analysis of two particular case-studies; the representation of the tomboy Watts (Mary Stuart Masterson) in
Some Kind of Wonderful, and the representation of the temporary teen girl transvestite Terry (Joyce Hyser) in Just One of the Guys.

In my final section, I turn towards the instances where these films show the teenage girl’s innate embodiment of contradictory characteristics, her straddling of boundaries, without the framework of cross-dressing (or other narrative ‘excuses’); in mirror scenes where in the smallest, self-directed performances, she is shown to appropriate both male and female traits, or in scenes that present her loss of virginity, where she crosses from childhood into womanhood (the rite-of-passage scene *par excellence*), but ends up in a suspended, affective display of emotion, committed to neither realm. The teenage girl, because she is not yet adult, not child, not man, not woman, is a figure that resides on boundaries – she is both passive and active, she is both object and subject, she is both, and neither. Taking Kristeva’s notion of the abject to refigure the representation of the teenage girl as perennially, momentarily, un-appropriable, un-confineable (and possibly un-representable), I conclude by proposing a new understanding of the representation of the teenage girl. Her image has emerged as a figure that is perennially suspended ‘in-between’, connoting tensions in spite of conservative confinements, the teen girl resides on and is defined by un-set boundaries. It is there that she has the potential to become a powerful, affective image, and it is in these moments that she becomes most compelling and progressive; in both looking back and moving forward, in simultaneously remaining child and becoming woman, and in being active and passive at the same time, the representation of the teen girl in the 1980s provides us with a new perspective that might reopen, or further, debates in feminist film theory.
04. Players and Plots: Stereotypes and Narrative Trajectories

Stereotypes

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the teen film genre did not originate in the 1980s. The first wave of popular teen films that addressed, established, and represented a teen film audience found root in the 1950s. This wave of films often presented teenagers as rebelling against their parents, as coming to terms with adolescence and adulthood post-World War II, and as proposing radical breaks with the conventions of previous generations, through an increasingly outspoken engagement with sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll. These films engaged their audiences by placing strong leads, often presented as particular teen types like the rebel or the good school girl, against (or amongst) a group of others. The popularity of the genre pronounced this construction through most of the 1960s and 1970s. As Timothy Shary writes:

Most school films before the 1980s focused on one type of school character and his or her relation to others, such as the misunderstood rebel played by James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause, the sexually curious but nonetheless repressed virgins played by popular schoolgirl Natalie Wood and jock Warren Beatty in Splendor in the Grass (1961), or the outcast nerd played by Sissy Spacek in Carrie (1976).

I agree with Shary that early teen films focused primarily on singular teen types and their engagement with their surroundings. Catherine Driscoll observes: “[The] dominant strategy for teen film [is] repetition... Teen film works largely by telling us things we already know about characters and situations that we are presumed to instantly recognise....[through a] systematic use of repetition and stereotype.” The repetition of specific (singular) teenage ‘identities’ on screen over time, lead to clear definitions of typical traits; in the genre, teen types had slowly distilled, and as their represented identities became more clearly defined, the range of specific types diverged. This type of systematic use of repetition and stereotypes increasingly shaped teen film from the 1960s onwards; it informed the British youth films of the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, introducing mods, rockers and punks, as well as the popular American teen films of the 1970s, presenting a wide range of specific teen types, in

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111 For an extensive exploration of this wave in American cinema, see Thomas Doherty’s Teenagers and Teenpics (2002).
113 Catherine Driscoll. Teen Film, 85.
films such as *American Graffiti*, the aforementioned *Carrie* and *Grease*. As the principal gist of the American teen film began to shift from rebellion against previous generations and societal values, to emphasising relationships between peers and the “desire for parental control and authority”\(^{114}\), the genre more consistently presented a wider range, a *collection*, of teenage identities and often played them off against one another, as opposed to figures of authority.

During the second assurgency of teen film in the 1980s, the stereotyping of teen characters was established as an essential part of the generic ‘code’ of the teen film. Timothy Shary, Jon Lewis and Jonathan Bernstein\(^{115}\) suggest that the insurgence of stereotypes in American teen films during this decade can be linked to Hollywood’s new marketing strategies; teen films were increasingly catering to a broader range of teenage consumers in the audience at the multiplex as well. Jonathan Bernstein notes:

….the multiplex played home to a white-bread world populated by an unruly mob of alienated outsiders, rich, privileged emotional cripples, horny high schoolers, computer whiz kids, loners, stoners, princesses, cheerleaders, geeks, jocks and dweebs, all of them demanding their due in terms of attention, respect and empathy.\(^{116}\)

Bernstein thereby suggests that the varied teen types in the audience were now each ‘expecting’ to be represented on screen; a phenomenon that perhaps can be linked to the advent of MTV (a network addressing and affirming specific teenage groups through music tastes, and alternative, fast-paced programming) and the growing, diversifying teenage culture/fashion market in the 1980s. Addressed as instantly ‘recognisable’ (quasi)individuals, the teenagers visiting the multiplexes at the mall now readily encountered (idealised) reflections of themselves on screen. Having their own pocket money to spend, the teenagers were thus targeted as potential consumers, through quick alignments with particular characteristics in pre-moulded, fashioned and clearly labelled teenage identities. This context, in conjunction with the evolvement of the teen film through the aforementioned generic repetition, perhaps explains why the teen character stereotype became such a strong staple of the genre in the 1980s.

\(^{114}\) This is a trend that Thomas Doherty (2002) analyses at greater length (for example on p. 196). I will come back to this observation (and quote) later in this thesis, when I discuss the representation of the relationship with the father.

\(^{115}\) In *Generation Multiplex* (2002); *The Road To Romance And Ruin* (1992); and *Pretty In Pink* (1997).

In the 1980s, the boundaries and distinctions between different teen stereotypes were mostly made visible through the distinctive ‘looks’ of each type on film. This visual imagery was transferred from literature or early teen films (the rebel’s characteristic leather jacket, for instance, appeared to reference James Dean’s onscreen persona, while the delinquent’s tight trousers could be tied to Elvis iconography), and was further developed into specifically fashioned ‘types’, through visual and narrative repetition in the 1980s. As technology boomed and computers were made accessible to teenagers at home, two 1980s studious ‘types’, for example, (used mostly for boys, but at times for girls as well) could soon be identified; the ‘nerd’ was directly identifiable through his/her glasses, braces and old-fashioned, out-of-touch, grandfather-style clothing (as Shary suggests, it is an image “of gawky appearance, social discomfort and personal confusion…”117), whereas the closely related ‘geek’ tended to have a more childish look, often achieved through oversized clothing, and demonstrated more advanced academic and technological potential, through accessories/props such as portable gadgets, computers, laser guns, magnifying glasses, and other scientific hobby equipment.

Figures 1a - e – Recurring visual imagery confirms the stereotypical identities of the ‘nerds’ in Revenge of the Nerds (top left) and the ‘geeks’ in Lucas (top right and bottom row).

For teenage girls, the most common visually (and narratively) coded stereotype in the 1980s was that of the ‘cheerleader’. As author Megan Abbott explains: “You know her instantly. Fresh-faced, teeth gleaming, bouncing ponytail. Eyes wide in either innocence or experience... Body held tight, brimming with promises soon to be fulfilled... Few symbols of all-American girlhood have proven more enduring in the last half century than that of the high school cheerleader.” Occasionally introduced in the clean cut teenpics of the 1950s, the cheerleader featured in a range of more exploitative representations in the 1970s (including titles such as The Cheerleaders, The Swinging Cheerleaders, Revenge of the Cheerleaders, The Pom Pom Girls, Satan's Cheerleaders, and Cheerleaders's Wild Weekend). But the 1980s brought a return to more wholesome representations of the cheerleader (in Lucas and Can’t Buy Me Love, for instance) alongside the continued exploitation of her sexual potential (in films such as Porky’s and Revenge of the Nerds). Most often in the teen films of the 1980s, however, the ‘cheerleader’ is positioned at the sidelines, cheering on boys, or used as a counterpoint for the figuring of other female characters and stereotypes. The recent wave of depictions of cheerleaders in film and television, in titles such as American Beauty, But I’m a Cheerleader, Sugar and Spice, the Bring it On series and Glee, have continued to play with the contradictory aspects of this stereotype that were developed in the 1980s; she can embody both wholesomeness and promiscuous sexuality, both ‘goodness’ in her support, and the potential for ‘evil’ teen girl manipulation through powerful cliques, and so on.

![Cheerleaders in Can’t Buy Me Love and Lucas](image)

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By repeating such distinct visual imagery and coding, different teen stereotypes were frequently set off against one another in these teen films. The films thereby instantly marked the differences/boundaries between stereotyped groups, and often deepened these boundaries by defining the hierarchical dynamics between the groups; the popular jock and cheerleaders, for instance, were commonly attributed superiority in standing over the geeks in *Lucas* (see figure 1e, bottom right). It is in this sense that the 1980s most ‘established’ the generic code of the teen film/television show that we know today; through the neutralisation/naturalisation of the hierarchical relationships between the ‘the nerds’, ‘the virgins’, ‘the jocks’ and ‘the cheerleaders’, ‘the rebels’ and ‘the princesses’ and so in, in films such as *Fast Times, Porky’s, Revenge of the Nerds, The Breakfast Club or Can’t Buy Me Love*. By now, these relationships and personas have become almost invisibly universal, in the landscapes of recent television programs such as *Beverly Hills 90210, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Freaks and Geeks, The OC, Veronica Mars* and *Gossip Girl*, or teen films such as *Clueless, Never Been Kissed, 10 Things I Hate About You, It’s a Boy Girl Thing, Mean Girls* or *Bratz*, to name but a few.

Alongside the introduction of stereotyped teen characters and the suggestion of hierarchies between them, the “habit of taxonomizing teen tribes”\(^{119}\) in teen films, through a shot that pans past different social groups of teenagers to establish clear social divisions, which Roz Kaveney calls “the anthropology shot”\(^{120}\), also originated in the 1980s. This shot defines the teenage social groups by attributing particular social labels (often introduced in the dialogue on the soundtrack) to them, derived from the teenager’s stereotypical, visual appearance, and delineating clear physiological and geographical distances between them; one group only sits at *that* table, and one group may only walk down *that* corridor, or only fraternises with that *one other* group, and so on. Roz Kaveney also observes the rise of this trope in the teen films in the 1980s:

The anthropology shot is not a Hughes invention, though he uses it, more or less in *Pretty in Pink*, but his awareness of its potential is signaled by the selection of types in *The Breakfast Club* and the School Secretary’s slightly bizarre reeling off of tribes in *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*: ‘Sportos, motorheads, geeks, sluts, pinheads, dweebies, wonkers and richies.’\(^{121}\)

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\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid, 45.
Such ‘tribal’ introductions to the different stereotypical high school social groups in fact feature in a wider range of 1980s films, and even when not addressed directly in an ‘anthropology shot’, are otherwise rendered visually present. Even when unspoken (though mostly, the rules are introduced in the dialogue), the ‘rules’ around access to specific spaces for each specific group are made evident in these films. In *Pretty in Pink*, areas in the school are divided according to class differences (the corridors are for the wealthy kids, the courtyard for those from the ‘wrong side of the tracks’); in *Sixteen Candles*, “only geeks ride the bus”; in *Smooth Talk*, only the older, popular kids go to the bar across the freeway; in *Can’t Buy Me Love*, groups of teen ‘types’ sit separately at specific tables in the dining area outside; in *Heathers*, the cafeteria seating is organised to cater to the power relations of social groups; and in *Fast Times*, Linda introduces Stacy to a range of specific isolated groups (such as for instance, the group of girls that “have cultivated the Pat Benatar look”) over lunch. In short, these “guided tours of high school groups... [naming] class and ethnic diversity as well as leisure groups” introduce and reaffirm the stereotyped teen characters, and reiterate the pre-supposed social and cultural boundaries between them. If the teenagers at the high school are to be interpreted as acting out a ‘microcosm of society’ (see my discussion of Bailey and Hay in chapter 1), these societies are infused by social, ethnic and material (class) divisions – and a hierarchical organisation that is in line with the neo-conservative values of the 1980s. Moreover, these stereotypes, and the organisation of the relations between them, suggest that the hierarchical structuring of social positions is all-pervasive in American culture and popular imagery.

In his book *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (1993), Richard Dyer revisits the cultural significance of the stereotype. He proposes a reading of Walter Lippmann’s original coining of the term, that places renewed emphasis on (and confidence in) the ‘usefulness’ of stereotypes and their ideological implications. In line with Lippmann, he identifies four areas in which stereotypes function: (i) as an ordering process, (ii) as a ‘short’ cut, (iii) as referring to ‘the world’ and (iv) as expressing ‘our’ values and beliefs. Dyer stresses that what is most important when looking at stereotypes in these four ways, is that we understand and become critical of who controls and defines them. This is most evident, he argues, when we look at whose interest these stereotypes serve. Dyer seems to suggest here, that the construction of the stereotype can be a clear indicator of underlying ideology.

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By looking at the interests that particular stereotypes serve, fundamental power constructions may be revealed. If we look at the representation of stereotypes in teen films, and the hierarchical relations between presented in the 1980s teen film, the ‘ordering process’ of these short-cut stereotypes already reveals that these films narratives propose a clear separation between ethnic, class and gendered groups. But what else do they reveal?

If we take a closer look at the different categories of stereotypical representations in teen film, the delineations between them become even more apparent. Timothy Shary refers to the five basic characters of ‘school films’, which he derives from the five principal characters in *The Breakfast Club:*

![The Breakfast Club characters](image)

*Figure 3 - *The Breakfast Club* presents five principal teenage stereotypes – from right to left; the delinquent, the psychologically distraught rebel, the jock, the popular type and the nerd.*

...By the 1980s, many school films began showcasing an ensemble of school characters, as was shown in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* ... reaching an apex with the ‘experiment’ of (stereo)typecasting in *The Breakfast Club.* Both *Fast Times* and *Breakfast Club* feature the five basic characters of school films that permeate the subgenre: the clean-cut and essentially repressed (and thus occasionally aggressive) *nerd*; the *delinquent* boys and girls ‘from the wrong side of the tracks’, who either pay for their crimes or learn to reform; the *psychologically distraught rebel* who may dabble in crime but are usually looking...
for a more acceptable outlet for their malaise; the *popular* types whom everyone at school knows and who support their status through fashion, appearance and attitude; and *jocks*, usually shown as physically focused and prouder than their counterparts, dedicated to a given sport yet surprisingly emotional as well.124

The definitions that Shary provides here suggest that the characters are defined (and divided) by American ‘middle class’ norms; by social, financial, pathological, intellectual and physical standards. According to these norms, ‘living on the wrong side of the tracks’, having a fashionable appearance, functioning inside or outside ‘the system’, and demonstrating physical prowess through dedication to a particular sport, is what defines a given (pseudo) individual identity/representation. And it has to be noted here; these five primary stereotypes are not only middle-class – they are all assumed to be white, of course, and heterosexual. Shary continues to point out that these character types lead to particular narrative trajectories: “These stereotypes … are indeed not only codifications for the behaviour of each type, but also certain patterns that reveal narrative modes of acceptance within each type.”125 I agree with this observation, but would argue that these stereotypes not only inform certain modes of acceptance within the film (such as the hierarchical relations between teen types), but they inform specific narrative trajectories as well, much like the characters and their functions proposed by Vladimir Propp when analysing Russian folktales126, whereby delinquency and rebellion are always either ‘corrected’ or punished (in *Over the Edge*, *River’s Edge*, *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*, for instance), the unpopular are ultimately redeemed through the ‘alternative’ (often moral) values that they offer their surroundings, and the popular are rewarded for their achievements.

But most of these categories do not commonly apply to teenage girl types, however; Shary’s list may propose compelling categories for the depiction of teenagers on film, they nevertheless draw heavily on the representation of teenage boys. The categories do not reflect, for instance, one of the essential components of the stereotypical representation of teenage girls, insisting on how they relate to sexual experience. By reducing the cheerleader to the category of the ‘popular type’, as Shary does, more specific labels that define such girl types as either ‘virgins’ or ‘sluts’ no longer apply; and these labels are often used for teen girl

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125 Ibid., 32.
stereotypes, because they lead them to the quintessential coming-of-age trajectory, involving ‘becoming woman’ through the (symbolic) loss of virginity.

The division of girl types along lines of sexual experience is quite crucial to understanding the representation of teenage girls in the teen films of the 1980s. In films that feature boys in the lead role, for instance, the girl characters often fall in one of two categories. In the first, girls are presented as nameless, at times even faceless, Other ‘bodies’; as part of an array of overtly blonde cheerleaders and/or sorority girls, who are either already sexually experienced, or shown to be willingly pursuing sexual experience. These types are coded by, and for, to-be-looked-at-ness and potential sexual gratification (see the images of the cheerleaders in chapter one, for instance), and feature prominently in the raunchy teen sex comedies of the 1980s, such as Porky’s, Revenge of the Nerds, Risky Business, The Last American Virgin, Class and Private School. In the second category of teen girl types, in teen films featuring boys in the lead role, teenage girls are presented as good, kind and considerate, as the righteous and chaste ‘girls next door’. She is the humble yet pretty (frequently) brunette, who in due time becomes the object of the boy’s affection. In this role, the teen girl is often presented as the opposition to the blonde, promiscuous cheerleader (in films such as Teen Wolf and Secret Admirer, for instance). She is presented as the innocent, inexperienced virgin; a prospective wife for the boy, and a prospective mother for his children. This ‘dream girl’ is often still a fairly flat character; she plays second fiddle to the teen boy protagonist/hero, and is defined mostly by her abiding admiration and support for him, in films such as WarGames, Karate Kid, Teen Wolf, Secret Admirer, Ferris Bueller’s Day Off and Lucas (see Figures 4).
Within the narrative trajectories that feature lead boys, both these types of teen girl figures are ultimately defined and bound by his narrative closure. She is either secured in the prospect of a romantic union or a ‘marriage’ (in Ferris Bueller, the last line of dialogue Sloane utters into mid-air, for the benefit of the audience alone, is: “He’s going to marry me!”), or alternatively, upon discovery that her promiscuity is incorrigible, is cast aside in favour of a more suitable, virginal dream girl (in Weird Science, Secret Admirer and in Teen Wolf, for instance). This kind of polarised ‘categorisation’ of women on film is not a new development, of course. It follows a traditional line of representation for women in Hollywood that commonly dichotomised the blonde, sexual bombshell (or at certain times, brunette femme fatale) against the dowdy, plain and homely, but good ‘other’ woman.\footnote{For more research on this, see for instance Annette Kuhn’s work on the three types of blondes in cinema (ice cold, blonde bombshell and the dumb blonde) in The Women’s Companion to International Film (1994), Molly Haskell’s seminal work From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (1974), or Richard Dyer’s work on white women in White (1997) and The Matter of Images (1993).} Within the teen films of the 1980s these distinctions are explicitly brought onto the bodies of teenage girls, however, and established a trend that is still continued to this day (in series such as Dawson’s Creek and 90210, for example). But what I mean to demonstrate here foremost is that the representation of the teen girl type is inherently connected to her state of sexual experience; and this is brought into play with the constant ‘clarification’ over which side of this ‘boundary’ the girl is on (the sex test Samantha fills out in Sixteen Candles, for instance,\footnote{Figures 4a - d – Prospective wives and mothers (the kind brunette ‘next door’) in WarGames, Teen Wolf, Secret Admirer, and Ferris Bueller's Day Off.}
or the carrot lesson in *Fast Times*, the constant spoken reminders in *Seven Minutes in Heaven*, the bet in *Little Darlings*, and so on, all remind the audience that the teenage girl on screen is (still) a virgin, or, to the contrary, experienced. In *The Breakfast Club*, when Claire (Molly Ringwald) is asked whether she has ever done it, Allison (Ally Sheedy) points towards the double-bind of the answer: “if you say you haven't, you're a prude. If you say you have you're a slut. It's a trap. You want to but you can't, and when you do you wish you didn't, right? Or are you a tease?” Although John Hughes appears to be opening these stigmas up to critique here, he then proceeds to reaffirm their very validity by establishing that both Allison and Claire have, in fact, never done it, and by assuring that they, through their subsequent specific trajectories, are ultimately re-positioned securely within the patriarchal realm, with the prospect of romantic union/marriage, as a virgin ‘dream girl’, at the conclusion of the film.

To summarise, then, the teen film genre in the 1980s established a formative new trope, whereby a collection of stereotypes fuel the narratives. This trend was solidified by new marketing practices, a shift in focus away from rebellion to peer relations in the coming-of-age trajectory, and the endless repetition of certain ‘types’ inherent to the genre. Most of these teen types are coded by their visual appearance, by specific character traits and set narrative trajectories. The stereotypes are usually set off against one another, and they are organised within a hierarchical structure (both visually, and at the narrative level), emphasising boundaries and distinctions between different types. The standard range of stereotypes identified in the 1980s teen film (by, for instance, Timothy Shary) does not cover important labels attributed to teen girl characters in these films. It seems the boundaries and distinctions proposed to define them generally fall across five lines; these five lines organise them as ‘short-cuts’ within a specific ordering process. I will just briefly review them here, and how they are organised within the films, before moving on to specific teen girl narrative trajectories.

The first and most pervasive defining boundary is that of sexuality/sexual experience (with two, polarising ‘virgin’ and ‘slut’ extremes). This divide always privileges the virgin over promiscuity, in 1980s teen films. The second boundary is the girl’s financial background or class status (the poor vs. rich divide) – a line often enunciated by references to the father’s line of work, where the girl lives, the car she drives, the activities she takes part in, her holiday destinations and, most importantly, the clothes and brands she is shown to wear. Most 1980s teen films privilege and celebrate the middle/wealthier classes, such as *Valley Girl, Sixteen Candles* and *Fast Times* for instance, while films like *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* propose poorer girls redeem themselves through upward mobility; they can attain
the status of richer teens by either ‘buying’ into the look/behaviour of wealthier, popular girls (like Amanda Jones in *Some Kind of Wonderful*), or by romantically attaching themselves to a wealthy boy (Andie in *Pretty in Pink*).

The third distinction falls across social standing, and is often addressed through the popular vs. the unpopular divide at the school. This distinction - between the popular cheerleader and the unpopular nerdy girl for instance - appears generally to be driven by information gathered from the other categories; the teenage girl’s level of sexual experience, her physical appearance, her class background and her social skills all inform the reading/coding of her popular/non-popular status. The teen girl’s academic skills are rarely presented in relation to her status of popularity; moreover, they are often shown to be at odds with social success (the smart girl/nerd is never as ‘popular’ as the dumb blonde cheerleader, for example). The teen films of the 1980s generally privilege popularity (in *Valley Girl*, *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Can’t Buy Me Love*), and often present jokes at the expense of the ‘unpopular’; with laughs aimed at bigger sized students, Asian students or nerdy characters (in *Sixteen Candles*, for instance). The films do, however, suggest social climbing is possible for unpopular, virtuous/virginal teen girl types, but only through ‘magical transformation’, such as the makeover at the hand of a ‘fairy godmother’ (in *She’s Out of Control*), or becoming a witch and using magical powers to become popular (in *Teen Witch*).128

The fourth category for the distinction between teen girl types is that of the girl’s physical prowess and appearance, expressed through her successful ‘control’ of her own image (beauty) and/or her body through physical talents (especially the more ‘seductive’ and subservient ‘cheering’ and ‘dancing’). This category links to the previous three; the teen girl’s ‘control’ over her body/virginity, her ‘control’ over her body/appearance (especially by financial means), and her ‘control’ over her body/activity with regards to social standing (cheerleading, for instance) are consistently celebrated. The teen films of the 1980s always privilege physical prowess over lack of physical control (presented in a negligence of grooming, overweight characters, fumbled and floundering or loose movements, etc.), and consistently connect this kind of prowess to whiteness, and hetero normativity.

The final distinction for the teen girl type belongs to the representation of the girl’s intellect, her academic ability/ambition and her, usually related, integrity, or tendency towards

128 It is only in later films such as *Heathers*, that the relationship between intelligence/goodness and the popular/non-popular teen girl type was finally problematised, and ultimately redefined, creating another trend that was picked up on by films such as *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Mean Girls*, *Saved!*, *Never Been Kissed* and *Easy A*. Other films, such as *Bring it On*, *Clueless* and *Legally Blonde* continued the 1980s glorification of popular types.
‘goodness’. The teen films of the 1980s unfailingly reward the good, subservient, caring girl types – especially those who do not rebel against elders or authority figures, the good ‘daughters’ - and the ‘smart’ teen girl types too (in Say Anything, Lucas, Seven Minutes in Heaven, Pretty in Pink, She’s Out of Control, and many more), as long as her smartness does not interfere with any of the other distinctive categories; the smart girl/nerd must be good, she must be (made) attractive, if she is poor, she must attach herself to a wealthy boy, and so on. In truth, the smartness/goodness of the teen girl type is perennially eclipsed by categories that define her body first (as beautiful, virginal, to-be-looked-at, popular etc.). (This seems to suggest a disconnect of sorts, between the teen girl type’s ‘head’ and ‘body’; a line of thought that is made explicit in Say Anything, when Diane Court is described as “a brain trapped in the body of a game show hostess”’. The disconnect can only be ‘cured’ by romantic fulfilment (in Say Anything, Diane can only overcome her fear of flying to go study in England on a scholarship, if she has her boyfriend Lloyd by her side holding her hand/body, and similarly in both She’s Out of Control and Just One of the Guys the disconnect between the girl’s body and brain is ultimately ‘cured’ through the attainment of the boyfriend). The celebration of the teen girl type’s (academic) intelligence does increase throughout the 1980s, however, in films like Say Anything, She’s Out of Control, Seven Minutes in Heaven, The Legend of Billie Jean, Just One of the Guys, The Sure Thing and Heathers, where the lead girls are ‘qualified’ as straight A-students. (And this trend was picked up in the 1990s, where series such as My So-Called Life and Freaks and Geeks, Dawson’s Creek and Felicity, and films such as The Prince and Me, Can’t Hardly Wait, or 10 Things I Hate About You all privileged smart teen girl types). Nevertheless, the intelligent teen leads of the 1980s are rarely shown to end up in college; the films tend to position them in the arms of a boy at the end of the film instead.

These five lines of distinction comprise divisions along strict conservative moral standings, financial standings, social standings and family backgrounds, ideals of physical beauty and individualised control of the body, productivity, virtue (including respect for elders and a lack of rebelliousness) and academic excellence/intelligence in order to secure a fitting, correcting partner. If we ask whose interests are most served by privileging such representations of white, non-promiscuous, middle-class, consuming, serving, virtuous, smart and non-rebellious stereotyped girls, the answer is not the working, feminist mother of the Equal Rights Amendment of the 1972, it is not the rebellious teenager breaking away from confinement or the values of previous generations, or the ambitious, independent, freethinking teenage girl - rather, these stereotypes appear to serve the interests of the protective father; a patriarch intoxicated by Reagan’s renewal politics, the praise of the moral values of the (pre-
sexual revolution/feminist) 1950s, and the celebration of the neo-conservative, materialist ideals of the 1980s.

**The New Father (and the Failing/Absent Mother)**

In his article ‘Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era’, Robin Wood analyses the dominant trends of the American cinema of the 1980s. He writes:

> It will be scarcely surprising that [the popular Hollywood films of the 1980s] – as it were, incidentally and obliquely – diminish, defuse and render safe all the major radical movements that gained so much impetus, became so threatening, in the 1970s: radical feminism, black militancy, gay liberation, the assault on patriarchy.\(^{129}\)

Wood identifies several themes in 1980s cinema that articulate this ‘backlash’ against the radical movements of the 1970s, including, amongst others, the *fear of fascism, nuclear anxiety, childishness* and *the restoration of the father*. This last theme, which Wood argues must be understood in all senses (as a restoration of the symbolic, literal and potential father), constitutes: “the dominant project, ad infinitum and post nauseam, of the contemporary Hollywood cinema.”\(^{130}\) By tracing this ‘dominant project’ of Hollywood cinema to the 1980s, Wood’s findings fall in line with other academics studying the cinema of this decade, including Ryan and Kellner (1990) and Traube (1992)\(^{131}\), who all note the prominence of the ‘return of the father’ in this decade. Sarah Harwood places this emphasis on the father within the larger framework of the idealised nuclear family and the importance of strong family values, under Reagan. She elaborates:

> [The ideal family types presented in 1980s American cinema] are authentic inheritors and embodiments of the American Dream – white, middle-class, affluent, beautiful, mid-American, affectionate, permanently laughing/happy, untouched by external events and upwardly mobile. ... They are neither urban nor rural dwellers. ... They belong to the ... sunlit suburbs ... earthly paradises where the sordidness of history and politics cannot intrude, where picket fences are kept intact, lawns mowed and


\(^{130}\) Ibid., 213.

dogs kept on leashes ... The distinctions and nature of public and private space are crucial to establishing the stable, universal nuclear family. Untouched by the passage of social time, the domestic sphere can remain the inviolable, unalterable domain of the patriarch.132

Harwood’s emphasis on the utopian and nostalgic nature of the suburb in 1980s American cinema is one that I also addressed in my first chapter, when I looked at the three principal locations of the teen films, and analysed the generic settings of the home/suburb and the mall as untouched, ‘safe’ locations. These films represent spaces where both the past and the future may be (generationally) present, but the ‘present’ itself is consistently absent - any contact with surrounding social or political contexts were avoided, and potentially dangerous or inharmonious forces/desires kept strongly at bay, in favour of the harmonious representation of the nuclear family, and a presiding, powerful father.

Elizabeth Traube argues, in her book *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender, and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies*, that Reagan’s call for strong fathers as symbols of American masculinity was, in fact, more complex:

The authoritarian backlash of the 1980s ... left its mark on mainstream politics and culture, but it ha[d] not restored the image of the strong, disciplinary father to hegemonic status. As president, Ronald Reagan used the image cautiously, in selective contexts, and not without a trace of ‘postmodern’ irony. Standing tall against the Communists (or other appropriately ‘savage’ enemies), sternly slashing the welfare budget in order to educate the poor in self-reliance, Reagan cloaked himself in the hard, rugged, patriarchal masculinity celebrated by the New Right. But Reagan also wore the kinder, gentler face of the “overconsumptionist demiurge” (Pfeil 1985: 290). Those of the professional middle class who were assimilated to the new conservative bloc responded to the promise of abundance that the Reagan administration enacted in its ritual practices. ... During what Mark Crispin Miller (1990: 219) calls the “epoch of revision” in Hollywood, movies rehabilitated patriarchal authority along non-traditional lines.133

What Traube seems to be suggesting here, is that Reagan’s government not only reflected but also welcomed more diverse images of masculinity, and in so doing, re-established patriarchal authority across a greater variety of domains. This perhaps explains why 1980s American cinema not only welcomed the ‘return of the father’, as Wood argues, but also advocated ‘the new, caring father’.

As women increasingly entered the work place and began to work their way up the socio-economic ladder after the 1970s, men not only remained principal players in the office, but also became more significant in the parental role at the home. In her book Backlash, cultural analyst Susan Faludi argues:

...the backlash against feminism which dominated the eighties ... was symptomised by the parade of the ‘new man’, a figure who both reacted against, and occupied, traditional female spaces... The ‘new man’ gained his credentials by adopting ‘feminine’, nurturing, affective qualities and the terrain in which he staked them was the domestic scene traditionally associated with the mother.¹³⁴

Faludi analyses films of the era such as Kramer vs. Kramer, Three Men and a Baby and Parenthood, and finds in these films examples of relocated, reinvented and designer fatherhood/parenting. Myra MacDonald observes this trend as well, and links the arrival of the ‘new man’ specifically to the materialism of 1980s American culture, suggesting “the ‘new man’ and the caring father’ were commercially motivated inventions as evidence mounted that supermarket shopping was attracting more male trolley-pushers and that the increasing range of male toiletries and male fashion was having difficulty making an impact on its target market.”¹³⁶ Whether or not the phenomenon was fuelled by specific marketing strategies (although this does seem a likely convergence), the new, caring father dominated American screens throughout the decade, in films such as those mentioned above, and other profitable dramas and comedies such as Ordinary People (1980), Author! Author! (1982) and Mr. Mom (1983).

Within feminist film theory, Tania Modleski addressed the new father in an article entitled ‘Three Men and Baby M’, in which she places her (psycho-analytical) reading of the

phenomenon within a framework that suggests the 1980s at large had become an era for “Feminism Without Women”. In her reading of *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), she argues that the film “…constitutes a flagrant encroachment of the (ever multiplying) fathers onto the mother’s traditional domain.”137 This trend, she argues, in fact reached beyond the cinema screens and invaded the homes of millions of Americans through their television set, in successful sitcoms such as *My Two Dads and Full House* (both starting in 1987), that featured multiple, single fathers raising girls together. These films and series not only appropriated feminism for the male cause, Modleski argues, but actively tried to recruit and enlighten girls away from female feminism, to ultimately (re-)accept patriarchal dominance:

> [T]hey can be real fathers, ‘imaginary’ fathers, godfathers, and, in the older sense of the term, surrogate mothers. [But] the fact that in every one of the cases the children reared exclusively by men are female suggests that the daughters are being seduced away from feminism and into a world where they may become so ‘dazzled’ by the proliferating varieties of paternity that they are unable to see whose interests are really being served.138

This argument, where the image of the father as the ideal replacement for the (absent) mother served reactionary interests against feminism, was presented by Modleski, and also by Harwood, Traube and Faludi, but their studies focused on 1980s family films (featuring young children), and tended to overlook the teen films of the decade. This is odd because the figure of the father as an emerging, domestic hero features strongly in 1980s teen films, and especially in films that feature teenage girls in leading roles. The ‘new, caring father’ in these films is ideally positioned to supervise, control and rein in *developing* femininity, at the crucial adolescent stage – and it strikes me that Modleski’s argument in particular could be expanded on, and substantiated further, by taking a closer look at the representation of the role of/relationship with the father in these teen films as well.

The 1980s teen films present four primary ‘situations’ that cater to the new caring father thematic. The first (and most prevalent) situation suggests the single father lives alone with his daughter, because her mother has died (or, alternatively, abandoned them), in an apparent analogy for her disappearance from the ‘home scape’. We see this in many 1980s teen films, including *The Journey of Natty Gann, Pretty in Pink, Seven Minutes in Heaven*,

138 Ibid., 88-89.
Say Anything and She’s Out of Control. The trope has remained an extremely prevalent narrative set up for teen films featuring teenage girls, even today. The second ‘situation’ catering to the representation of the caring father in the 1980s, is created by the failing, dysfunctional and often absent(minded) mother within the home. We see this in films such as Valley Girl, Sixteen Candles, Smooth Talk and Teen Witch, where the father consoles and counsels his daughter, while the relationship with the mother is dismissed as dys/non-functional. The third situation is created in films where an overbearing, but ‘rightfully concerned’ father closely monitors his daughter’s ascending physical liberties (especially expressed through her desire to dance), and, in a gesture that reassures the audience, is shown to ultimately guide and approve the teen girl’s behaviour/trajectory. These films feature ‘convincing’ fathers that are not only strong leaders within the home, but perform authoritative paternal roles in specific aspects of American society as well; in films such as Footloose, where Ariel’s (Lori Singer) father is a reverend, in Girls Just Want to Have Fun, where Janey’s (Sarah Jessica Parker) father is an army colonel, in Dirty Dancing, where Baby (Jennifer Grey)’s father is a doctor, and in Shag, where Luanne’s (Page Hannah) father is a Senator. (I will come back to this ‘reassuring’ setup briefly in my next chapter, when I look at teen girl bodies and performance). The fourth category for new, caring fathers involves ‘adoptive’, non-biological fathers, who care for the teenage girls and demonstrate a natural, innate talent for paternity. We see this in films such as Teen Wolf, where Scott’s father plays basketball with Boof (Susan Arsitti) and gives her advice, in Uncle Buck, where Uncle Buck (John Candy) comes to babysit and, against all expectation, sorts out problems for his teenage niece Tia (Jean Louisa Kelly), in Summer School, where Mr. Shoop (Mark Harmon) is the caring summer school teacher who convinces his teen girl students to better themselves at school and refrain from having sex to early, in Welcome Home, Roxy Carmichael, where motherless Dinky (Winona Ryder) is befriended and consoled by her guidance counsellor, and in Mermaids (1990), where Mrs. Flax’s new boyfriend takes care of her two daughters and introduces them to the joys of domestic life (he cooks with them, they eat together as a family for the first time, he re-decorates a bedroom with them, etc.).

139 Contemporary teen films that feature deceased/absent mothers, leaving fathers and teen daughters together, range from My Girl, Fly Away Home, Clueless, 10 Things I Hate About You, Save the Last Dance, The Craft, Crazy Beautiful, Dan in Real Life to Chalet Girl. According to Ann DeVaney (2002), “a narrative in which a mother is absent and a daughter assumes the caretaking role for the father is a perennial strategy in melodrama and was popular in old Hollywood films – especially Westerns...” (p. 210) – and so, even though, it may have a long history in Hollywood, it is interesting to note that this the trope has since become so embedded in teen films, including comedies and romantic films as well.
Figures 5a - d - Teenage daughters find comfort in heart to hearts with their caring fathers in (clockwise from top left) Valley Girl, Teen Witch, Say Anything and Sixteen Candles.

In most of the films, the noted absence of the mother (or, as Tania Modleski proposes, the effective de-realization of the mother\(^\text{140}\)) has developed a ‘special bond’ between the father and daughter. In *Pretty in Pink* (1986), for instance, we see Andie (Molly Ringwald) tend to her single father Jack (Harry Dean Stanton) at home. In the opening scene of the film, she prepares eggs for her father in the kitchen, and repeatedly calls out to him: “Daddy, it’s 7.30!” She then comes into his bedroom to wake him up, with a cup of coffee, and says: “Here. I want you to drink this, then take a shower and get dressed. Your clothes are there. Then I want you to go see that woman about that job”, in a stern, insistent tone of voice. As she proceeds to pick up clothes from the floor, in a seemingly accustomed and motherly manner, he asks her, rhetorically, where he would be without her nagging, and then how she is, stating they haven’t talked in a while because he’s been getting home so late. After he asks “When was the last time I told you how beautiful you are?” Andie answers, “About yesterday.”, and then, upon his instruction, turns to model her outfit for her father, and guides him through how she put it together. (Jack’s question here, asking when he had last commented on his daughter’s beauty/visual pleasure, borders on the perverse, but this is promptly countered by the direct follow-up that presents the visual/narrative deconstruction of Andie’s appearance; Andie’s de-sexualised style of clothing - her layered outfit is pink,

flowery, preppy and high-collared – does not reveal much skin and is rather demure, which, in an act of back commentary, shifts the tone of father’s observation away from a more sexual gaze). After the two joke together over adding ruffles to Jack’s shirt, Andie pursues her insistence about his new job, reminding her father that he is not happy with part-time work, after which he concedes to get up. Moments later, when Andie has left the room and her father has turned over in his bed once more, she ‘knows him so well’ that she re-enters the room instantly, with a disapproving and threatening expression on her face, to which her father replies “I’m up! I’m up!!!” and finally gets up.

This scene presents Andie as the ‘ideal’ and nurturing daughter, but also as a surrogate wife/partner and mother – she speaks to her father about his work, lays out his clothes for him, and prepares his breakfast. But this double role is not presented as problematic or onerous – rather, the dynamic reflects on both characters sympathetically, and portrays their relationship as a kind of a romantic ideal, where, through their tight, loving and all-encompassing bond, domestic bliss has been successfully re-established in spite of the absent mother.

Figure 6 - The breakfast scene in *Pretty in Pink* where Andie acts a wife and mother to her father.

141 Director John Hughes seemed particularly fond of this more conservative and preppy, ‘Annie Hall’ style of dress for his teen girl leading ladies (also see Ann DeVaney, 2002). He cultivated this almost tomboyish ‘look’ for his leading girls – featuring high buttoned shirts and long wide shorts or trousers, as opposed to revealing/figure hugging dresses – throughout much of his oeuvre: Sloane (Mia Sara) in *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, Amanda (Lea Thompson) in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Sam in *Sixteen Candles* and Tia (Jean Louisa Kelly) in *Uncle Buck* all adhere to this image. For Andie’s character in *Pretty in Pink*, however, this choice has always struck me as particularly remarkable, because she is explicitly presented as the more rebellious ‘punk’ outsider in the film; for this teen girl character, the clothes she wears and makes herself are shown to be her personal trademark. But there is nothing outspoken or rebellious about her clothes; they are old-fashioned and proper in appearance, and very traditionally ‘gendered’ in their pinkness.
The depiction of the relationship between Andie and her father does play with incestuous tensions, of course, but by re-locating the child/daughter as adult/mother/wife, the threat of this taboo is quickly warded off. As Ann DeVaney points out, “[the daughter’s] changeling behaviour ... provides filmmakers with an opportunity to represent female behaviour as childlike or adultlike, without confronting the sexual tension of adolescence.”

This rejection of female adolescent sexuality (established in this scene both through the dialogue and Andie’s de-sexualised, girly and nurturing appearance) positions the father-daughter relationship safely within the domestic realm, and, by extension, positions young female subservience within patriarchal valence.

But this opening ‘situation’ nevertheless does imply an Oedipal component inherent to the represented teen girl narrative trajectory/rite-of passage. This Oedipal dimension typically plays out the relationships between the teen girl and her father/(absent)mother in two ways; in the original female Oedipal trajectory (as conceived by Freud) it presents a gender reversed form of the myth (where Andie ‘kills’ her mother, in order to marry her father), and in the more complex ‘Electra’ version (as conceived by Jung), the girl must displace her desire for unity with her mother, and overcome her as an object of rivalry to secure the affection/phallus of the father, in order to re-unite with the figure of the mother and identify herself (or re-align herself) as the ‘new’ mother instead. These psychoanalytical elements of teen girl development appear fundamental to the representation of the ‘healthy’ teen girl rite-of-passage; they lie at the root of most all teen girl narrative trajectories, including her transition from ‘daddy’s girl’ to ‘prospective wife’ through his supervision/approval of her new partner (like the final scene in Sixteen Candles discussed in chapter 2), her being ‘made-over’ into more desirable/adult femininity (and thereby becoming/replacing and identifying with the mother), and, in more convoluted ways, the ‘loss’ of her virginity (which not only involves literally reclaiming the phallus, but also re-positions the teen girl body as potential mother, securing it within heteronormative ‘wedlock’, and so on).

In Pretty in Pink, many of these narrative trajectories come together in the Oedipal trajectory that the Jack/Andie father-daughter relationship undergoes. Later in the film, when love interest Blane (Andrew McCarthy) has invited Andie to the prom - the teen film ‘ceremony’ par excellence which, appearing so often at the films’ conclusion, effectively parallels a teenage wedding ceremony – she finds herself unable to afford a new prom dress at

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143 For more information on this trajectory and its relation to the representation of women on film, see for instance Tania Modleski, The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock And Feminist Theory (New York: Routledge, 2005), 48 and 152-162.
the mall. Andie’s father Jack then comes home with a surprise gift; a second-hand pink prom dress. Upon handing it to his daughter, he exclaims: “God, it reminds me so much of your mom. You know, she always wore pink, and she looked so beautiful in it.” By making this connection between how Andie will look in the second-hand (implying someone else wore it before her) pink dress, and how her mother looked wearing pink – a comment that also recalls the opening scene of the film, in which Jack told Andie she looked beautiful, that bordered on the perverse - the film actively positions their relationship within the Oedipal triangle. This again temporarily perverts the bond between the father and daughter; the scene presents the father as actively refashioning his daughter in the image of his former lover/wife (reminiscent of Hitchcock’s Vertigo). When Andie reacts uncomfortably (she questions how he paid for the dress), the tone of the scene shifts and the two enter into a row over the fact that Jack lied about taking on a new job.

Again, this scene demonstrates that adult men are seemingly privileged and isolated in their spending power in these films (also see Chapter 3). This trait, of a father buying his daughter a dress, has become somewhat of a recurring narrative element in itself. In the recent It’s a Boy Girl Thing, for instance, a strikingly similar scene occurs, throwing the daughter into a tight embrace with her father in gratitude. But the gift of a dress has also by now, I would argue, become associated with other prominent films, such as Now Voyager, Vertigo, and especially later examples such as Pretty Woman and Indecent Proposal. In these films, a wealthy senior man buys a woman a dress in order to refashion her to his desired image, and consequently become sexual with her. The dress appears to be offered as a trade for the body of the woman; again playing with her ‘exchange value’ and her nature as a commodity – a reading that does not translate easily into the father/daughter dynamic but does open up alternative, and perverse dimensions.
Suddenly and unexpectedly, Andie shouts out at her father: “Why can’t you just forget her?” This line, apart from commenting on the nature of the absent/present mother, suggests Andie must convince her father to remove her mother from their Oedipal ‘affair’ – its intense delivery carries with it connotations of an aggressive, lovers’ dispute. The rivalry is soon resolved, however, when Andie ‘wins’, after she lectures her father in a motherly tone about the failures of the mother (thus doubly defying the mother): “Why can’t you just realise that she’s gone and that she’s not going to come back? She’s never coming back... Why can’t you accept it? ... I loved her too, you know. She just didn’t love us back. Okay she tried. She just couldn’t handle it. You can’t go on living every day in the past. She left us, daddy. We didn’t leave her.” This dialogue establishes an ‘us’ that only consists of the father and daughter unit; it thereby excludes the mother verbally, as well as delivering dismissive comments over mother’s failure to ‘handle’ domestic life. The two subsequently embrace, and Jack concludes the row tearily by replying: “I’ve just been a blind fool”, as though his obscured/misdirected vision has been corrected (his eyes are literally washed out by tears), and he now only has eyes for Andie in his life. This image is emphasised once more when we later see him put his wife’s photograph away in a drawer, and when he alone admires/views Andie’s transformed appearance (his point of view is translated into a tracking shot up her body) after her ‘makeover’; he exclaims “Look at you!”, before she informs him her date is not coming and she is going to the prom alone.
Figures 8a and b – In *Pretty in Pink*, father Jack corrects his vision, puts ‘mother’ away and only has eyes for his daughter, in a story arc that closely follows the female Oedipal trajectory.

Andie’s trajectory is not yet complete, however, for she is presented as having to resolve her relationship with her absent mother as well, before she can ‘successfully’ enter into a romantic union with Blane. This solving of the absent motherhood follows directly after the confrontation with her father in the plot. Andie’s friend and co-worker Iona (Annie Potts) is presented as somewhat of a shape-shifter throughout the film, as a woman who takes on a variety of guises:

Figures 9a - d - Iona (Annie Potts) takes on a variety of guises in *Pretty in Pink*

But when she too has found a wealthy man to date, Iona transforms into a more permanent maternal/domestic ideal (she claims she is so happy she will soon be “picking out china patterns”). When she opens the door to welcome a distraught Andie (because Blane has
“changed his mind” over taking her to the prom), Iona appears in this new, stable guise. She has rejected her punk/shape-shifter image, and has transformed into a matronly, clean-cut and stylish, ‘secured’ woman. When Andie tells her she looks great, Iona smilingly replies she looks “like a mother”. She then proceeds to console Andie, in a sequence of shots that establishes her, visually and narratively, as a replacement mother to the teenage girl:

![Figures 10a - d - Iona has transformed into a (surrogate) mother for Andie.](image)

This scene thus presents Andie as finding, and reconciling, with her (surrogate) mother before entering into her own union. The sequence concludes with Iona giving Andie the prom dress that her mother had bought for her (this was established in earlier dialogue) - a gesture that, in mimicking a mother’s passing of her wedding dress onto her daughter, brings female, generational succession into play, and the stable continuance of the family unit. When the two subsequently embrace, Andie smiles in relief; the film thereby suggests that she has now not only successfully claimed the affection of her father for herself, but she has re-united with ‘her mother’ as well (completing the Electra trajectory), and this averts her hysteria (her tears), stabilises her ‘female’ identity, and allows her to identify herself with (to accept herself as) the role/figure of the mother in her own prospective union.
In the next scene, Andie is presented in a montage sequence set to music, as she fuses the two dresses (her father’s gift-dress and her mother/Iona’s prom dress) together to create a self-designed prom/wedding dress – in a sequence that, it must be noted, attributes great creative and active agency to the teen girl. After her makeover ‘reveal’, and her father’s approval of this new appearance, she arrives at the prom alone. There, as she hesitates to walk down the long corridor that leads to the entrance, she first resolves her conflict with her friend/child, the bicycle riding, infatuated Duckie (Jon Cryer). In this scene, Duckie has seemingly accepted they cannot be an item, and, dressed in a suit (he has now become a man himself), he accompanies her ‘down the aisle’ into the main prom venue. There he hands her over - expressing his approval; “You were right. He’s not like the others” - into Blane’s arms, like a makeshift father of the bride. This scene thus disentangles the other Oedipal trajectory in the film as well, one that revolved around Duckie, and his ‘mother figure’ Andie, where either her father Jack (as Andie’s husband/his father) or Iona (as a rival mother) acted as the third party, reassuring the audience that Duckie has moved from childhood to (prospective) fatherhood too; we briefly see him secure his own new romantic prospect, a girl who flirts with him at the prom, before we leave him to pursue her. The final shot of the film, presenting a concluding kiss between Andie and Blane outside in the parking lot, establishes the principal new couple/prospective parents in their ‘wedlock’. The pink and blue cars on either side of the couple suggest a return to traditional gender divisions, and emphasise the restored, heterosexual balance that concludes the film, and guarantees the continuance of a stable, nuclear family unit.
The narrative conventions of 1980s teen film generally privileged the relationship between the teenage girl and her father as the formative and instrumental force responsible for her becoming the ‘right kind of’ subservient, prospective wife/woman. In its national, historical context, where the ‘feminist’ woman had left the home for the workplace, the representation of thriving and independent (let alone ‘single’) motherhood, and its influence on girlhood, was thus promptly disqualified. Robin Wood explains Hollywood’s reactionary stance: “if the woman can’t accept her subordination, she must be expelled from the narrative altogether... She becomes superfluous.” Many of the 1980s biggest box-office hits (including titles such as Blade Runner, and the Indiana Jones, Star Wars, Rocky, Superman, Back to the Future, Lethal Weapon, Die Hard, Beverly Hills Cop, StarTrek, Rambo, Ghostbusters, Batman and James Bond series) presented male-oriented and male-driven landscapes, that did indeed exclude the representation of prominent, independent women and mothers almost entirely. A few romantic comedies of the time, aimed at a predominantly adult, female audience, attempted to depict successful working women balancing their domestic life/motherhood with work on screen (in titles such as Nine to Five, Baby Boom and Working Girl). Tania Modleski, Barbara Creed and Myra MacDonald, however, have proposed that these films actually promoted a negative view of female success instead, and,

through their analyses of other dramas and thrillers that feature ‘working’ mothers (such as *Ordinary People*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Fatal Attraction*, and *Black Widow*), concluded that 1980s films consistently present the ‘monstrous’ side effects of female transgression outside the home; the films illustrate the threatening dangers that the cocktail of power, ambition and the desire for motherhood ‘produces’ in women.\(^{147}\)

In such studies, again, the teen films of the decade have commonly remained overlooked. Although many teen films did exclude the representation of the mother, other titles, such as *Valley Girl*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Smooth Talk*, *Teen Witch* and *Mermaids*, proposed the ‘new, caring father’ as a more convincing alternative by placing him alongside the failing, dys/non-functional, ‘monstrous’ mother. Myra MacDonald, following from Barbara Creed’s work on the ‘monstrous mother’ in *Aliens*, suggests: “Since maternal instincts are supposed to be innate, the mother who reverses the caring paradigm … earns a special place in the gallery of horrors.”\(^{148}\) The ‘monstrous’ mother has thus long garnered popularity, as a fixture in Hollywood narratives, especially in melodramas and horror films.\(^{149}\) Kathleen Rowe Karlyn has investigated the neglected/thwarted depiction of the mother-daughter bond on film, in a range of articles, as well as in her recent book *Unruly Girls and Unrepentant Mothers* (2011), and argues “While representations of sisterhood or female friendship have begun to appear with more frequency in popular culture … the mother/daughter bond, a key model of female connection remains, as Adrienne Rich has argued, invisible, unexplored or taboo.”\(^{150}\) She proposes that Hollywood films generally present: “an enduring ambivalence about mothers, motherhood and mother-daughter relations that [date] from the earliest myths of Western culture… [M]otherhood has become an increasingly charged site on which unresolved conflicts about ideologies of gender, race, and class collide.”\(^{151}\) This type of ‘ambivalence’ about motherhood on screen, and the ‘increasingly charged site’ that the depiction of motherhood presents, was also introduced and established in the teen films of the 1980s, and, I would argue, the representations of motherhood in this decade directly influenced many of the films and television series that Rowe Karlyn discusses in her book, that followed in the 1990s (including the ‘mother-daughter’ bonds in *My-So Called Life*, *Clueless*, *Mean Girls*, *Election*, *Thirteen* and *Titanic*).

\(^{147}\) See McDonald (1995) for an overview of these analyses, and also Harwood (1997) and Traube (1992).


\(^{149}\) See for instance Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).


The representation of the failing mother is presented as a ‘given’ in 1980s teen films. The mothers’ failures are consistently trivialised, presented as innate, and on occasion, laughed over by the father and daughter unit. In Teen Witch, Louise’s mother gives her an unsightly sweater as a birthday gift that demonstrates she has no insight into teen girl styles or any valid connection with her daughter’s life and desires. In Valley Girl, Julie’s parents are both liberal free-thinking hippies, but while her father is able to warmly connect and communicate with his daughter, her mother is presented as a fumbling, yoga-posing, new age eccentric who presents no adequate parenting skills. In Sixteen Candles, Sam’s mother Brenda (Carlin Glynn) is defined as a flawed mother/housewife. Although hers and Sam’s relationship is by no means presented as difficult, subtle hints do suggest she is failing in these tasks; she did not “have time to prepare Sam’s carrots” for lunch, she is unable to pronounce the surname of her eldest daughter Ginny’s fiancé properly, or control Ginny’s intake of Valium on her wedding day, and, most importantly, she forgets Sam’s birthday.

Although Sam’s father (Paul Dooley) has forgotten it too, it is he who comes to tell Sam that they remembered it after all, it is he who she confides in with her romantic troubles and who ultimately ‘approves’ of Jake in the final scene (see chapter 2). Brenda, as Sam’s mother, is kept safely on the sidelines, she is disconnected and merely of ‘trivial importance’ in Sam’s represented, daily life and narrative trajectory.

Nevertheless, in the second half of the decade, more teen films (especially the dramas/romantic dramas) began to focus on issues of conflict between teen girls and their mothers. These depictions again propose the teen girl is engaged in a formative Oedipal trajectory, but more emphasis is placed on the active disavowal of the mother’s behaviour (through rivalry and/or rejection), and the discomfort that the alignment/identification with the mother might present. These films introduce the mother/daughter bond as a particularly charged site, because it is permeated with ‘dangerous’ female affects, such as neglect, envy, spite and promiscuity. In Smooth Talk, for instance, we find an intense representation of ‘failing’ motherhood and the toxic mother/daughter bond it ‘causes’, between Connie and her mother Katharine (Mary Kay Place). Katharine is tirelessly spiteful and begrudging towards her daughter, and the two have constant arguments throughout the film (after which Connie receives consolation from her father (Levon Helm). The arguments between mother and daughter are preceded and interlaced by shots of Katharine looking at Connie – a ‘look’ that consistently emphasises the differences in their appearances: Connie is tall and slender, with long blonde hair, while Katharine is frumpier and has short brown curled hair (a look that Connie’s older sister June resembles closely).
In one scene, Katharine is on the phone in the kitchen, when Connie comes in and sits down to have breakfast. Dressed in a short pink robe, Connie, seemingly naive and unaware of her body’s impact on her surroundings, caresses her long legs, as her blonde hair is highlighted by light from the window. As her mother observes her, her words on the phone become more austere. She is just so frustrated with kids right now, she says, but “No, not with June, June is wonderful, June is an angel!” and she turns to Connie as she says this, implying the explicit fault lies with her. After she finishes her phone conversation, she yells at Connie for not having cleared away other people’s dishes before sitting down to eat breakfast: “You stink - why can’t you just pick up one dish?” and the two argue until Connie walks out. This scene (which is a typical example - other arguments ensue over Connie not helping to paint the house, not helping to buy paint rollers, not coming along to a neighbour’s barbecue, and so on) suggests that the relationship between mother and teenage daughter is not only inherently strenuous and tense, but that this dysfunction derives from the teenage daughter’s unruliness (or her unpreparedness, or her young, pre-formed feminine condition) that refuses to subscribe to subservient, adult female behaviour; she does not help around the house, and she is unable/unwilling to rein in her seductive and provocative appearance, and so in. Such concerns, about Connie’s refusal to adjust to ‘reality’, is voiced by Katharine in a later scene, when she watches Connie dance to the radio in her bedroom, and then tells her: “I look at you – I look right into your eyes and all I see are a bunch of trashy daydreams.”

Figure 13 – Connie’s (Laura Dern) appearance and behaviour are met with constant disapproval by her mother Katharine (Mary Kay Place).
Smooth Talk presents a complex and layered tale of developing femininity (it is both directed by a ‘feminist’ filmmaker, Joyce Chopra, and based on a story written by Joyce Carol Oates) that ultimately places neither blame nor redemption with the knowing, mature mother or the naive, seductive daughter. The troubles between them are finally resolved, however, in the final scene, when Connie has ‘sacrificed’ her youth/innocence/virginity for the sake of her family. After she has been ‘smooth-talked’ into what is essentially rape, by Arnold Friend (Treat Williams) – he threatens to destroy/burn her house if she does not go out for a drive with him, and insists his friend Ellis look after the house while they are gone – she returns, and is reunited with her family after they return from the barbecue. Unaware of what has (we are made to assume) happened, and in an epilogue that does not feature in the original Joyce Carol Oates story, Katharine all of a sudden apologizes to her daughter for hitting her that morning, embraces her, suggesting their battles have been resolved. The final shot shows an emotionally subdued Connie dancing with her sister June, who lives at home as an ‘old maid’ and had recounted how she lost her virginity earlier in the film, in her bedroom, suggesting they too have reconnected, in this collective acceptance and/or suffering (I am aware there is a huge discrepancy between these last two interpretations, but both do apply). The film’s conclusion thus implies that resentment between mother and daughter, the hysteria between women, can only be resolved by their realignment after the loss of virginity, after the surrender/submission to patriarchal authority has taken place. When looking at this from the perspective of the Electra trajectory, it suggests the narrative trajectory for the teenage girl can only conclude when the teen girl has conquered the phallus (although, admittedly, this is a crude interpretation of what happens in the film) and conceded to ‘become more like’/’become one with’ the mother.
Connie is ‘smooth talked’ into her rape/the loss of her virginity, under the threat of the destruction of her home, and afterwards is realigned with her mother and sister, in a collective, submissive femininity.

The narrative progression becomes even more complex when the teenage girl is presented as living alone with a single, working mother, and without a father, in *Mermaids* – one of the first important teen films that features this dynamic. In this film, set in 1963, and therefore disconnect from any direct references to the 1980s, 15 year-old Charlotte (Winona Ryder) and her younger sister Kate (Christina Ricci) are moved from town to town every time one of their ‘working’ mother’s, Mrs. Flax (Cher), relationships ends. From the very beginning, Mrs. Flax is presented as a non-domesticated (and therefore as an inadequate/failing) mother. As her two daughters watch nuns singing on television in the living room, Mrs. Flax is presented, contrarily, in her bedroom, as she selects a tight dress to wear for a date with her boss, and sings along to the sexually suggestive song ‘Fever’ in the mirror. Charlotte, who acts as the (often cynical) narrator, refers to her mother as Mrs. Flax and expands on her homemaking skills: “Mrs. Flax doesn’t believe in ritual or tradition… A word about Mrs. Flax and food - the word is ‘hors d’oeuvres’; *Fun Finger Foods* is her main source book, and that’s all the woman cooks. Anything more, she says, is too big a commitment.”
Mrs. Flax inability to cook or to eat with her family at the dinner table (an important recurring theme in the film – in a later scene she is shown not to ‘understand’ what is happening at the dinner table) is offered as a “symptom of her refusal to settle for domesticity”.

Throughout the film, Charlotte and her mother enter into conflicts over their different interpretations of femininity/female identity. Mrs. Flax’s abundant promiscuity and her reluctance to settle down as a homemaker, are set in stark opposition to Charlotte’s chaste virginity, her pursuit of Catholicism (she wants to be a nun) and her longing for nuclear family life. But neither are necessarily presented as ‘better’ than the other, both women are presented as ‘independent’ eccentrics (and the younger Katie too; she wants to be an Olympic swimmer, and is presented as a ‘fish out of water’) unable to accept, or be accepted by, their surroundings.

The ‘hysterical’ struggles between Charlotte and Mrs. Flax are presented in the film as essentially rivalling; the two compete for Katie’s affection (they even ‘argued’ over who would name her), sabotage each other’s dates, comment incessantly on each other’s clothing and behaviour, and even ‘vie’ for the affection of Charlotte’s love interest Joe (Michael Schoeffling), after Mrs. Flax kisses him in front of her daughter. In a seemingly vindictive act, Charlotte then dresses up as in her mother’s clothes (repeating the ‘Fever’ dressing sequence), mimicks her behaviour, and seduces Joe in a bell tower, losing her virginity to him.

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This transgressive, unruly behaviour is instantly punished, however, as Charlotte’s sex scene is intercut with shots of her sister Katie, who, while waiting outside for her sister, falls into a river and nearly drowns. As Katie recovers in the hospital, Charlotte returns home and rigorously cleans the house, in an act of apparent ‘repentance’ for her sins; as though her transgression can be redeemed by domestic behaviour, the scene presents her swinging back and forth between female ‘identities’. When her mother returns, the two engage in the film’s climactic argument. Charlotte suddenly throws and breaks a plate on the kitchen floor, screaming at her mother, indicating she too is breaking with domestic ideals (after the loss of her virginity). Mrs. Flax exclaims she doesn’t understand why Charlotte is trying so hard to become like her, and accuses her of trying to be the ‘mother’ when she is “just a kid”. After the two women both identify the other as ‘town whore’, Mrs. Flax hits Charlotte across the face and Charlotte moves towards the living room to sit down in silence. The balance is finally restored, and the ‘hysteria’ is overcome, when Mrs. Flax sits down next to her and the two address the men in their lives who have left them; Charlotte asks Mrs. Flax whether her father is ever coming back, to which her mother replies he is not, because he has since remarried, and Mrs. Flax asks whether Charlotte is upset over Joe leaving, to which Charlotte explains she is not, because “it is over” and “she’s fine”. When Charlotte proposes they not move and stay put for a year, she calls her mother “mom” and the argument concludes with their calm, restorative embrace.
The scene does not sit ‘easily’ amongst the other teen films I’ve discussed so far. This film, released at the cusp of the decade, marks a definitive shift towards more progressive representations of teenage girls, and independent working mothers/women. Nevertheless, the film suggests the relationship between the women is restored over specific lines of narrative development; Charlotte has lost her virginity (her chastity/religious aspirations) and is now positioned on ‘the same side’ of femininity as her mother – this realigns them not only as ostracized, ‘loose’ women, but also as prospective mothers/wives (their hysteria, and/or potential for sexual deviance has been ‘corrected’, since it is confirmed as heterosexual). At the same time, the women are now united in their rejection by men, proposing, again, that female strength and collectivity develop from suffering at the hands of men, and their ‘acknowledgment’ of this position. But lastly, the film also proposes female harmony is re-established over the consent to domesticity – Mrs. Flax accepts Charlotte’s proposal that they settle in the town. An epilogue reveals the women have moved towards a more traditional realisation of the nuclear family; they are shown on a visit to the baseball museum with Mrs. Flax’s partner Lou (Bob Hoskins), where their image (captured as such when Katie takes their photograph) closely resembles that of a nuclear family on a ‘happy holiday’. In a subsequent shot, Mrs. Flax speaks to Lou outside of his store, and as she walks away to her car and turns to wave at him, Charlotte’s narration indicates they are in fact a very good match, as a white
church towers up behind Mrs Flax, foreshadowing a possible marriage. In a final, celebratory and life-affirming scene, the three women dance and sing along to Jimmy Soul’s lines: “If you wanna be happy for the rest of your life, never make a pretty woman your wife!” as they prepare a meal together in their kitchen. The meal still consists of finger food, but as part of the choreography of the musical number, the women set the table, which indicates they will now be sitting down to eat it as a family.

Figures 18a - d - In the final scenes of Mermaids, balance is restored as images of traditional domesticity have begun to permeate the lives of the mother and daughters Flax.

The standard teen girl narrative trajectory in the 1980s teen film revolves around the rite-of-passage that concludes with (the prospect of) heteronormative union; it is a coming-of-age tale that, in one way or another, always addresses a girl’s transition into ‘proper’ womanhood and her ultimate acceptance of its subservient position within the patriarchal realm. Most commonly, the depiction of this transition adheres to the classical Oedipal/Electra narrative progression that involves specific stages in the psycho-sexual development of the teenage girl, and her relationships with her parents. But in teen film, this transition, whether catering to the eyes of the approving father or prospective husband, or in service of becoming more like/one with the mother, is triggered by a physical/bodily ‘becoming’; the precise transformative moment is perpetually ‘marked’ by a physical
transformation, either through the loss of virginity (in *Smooth Talk* and *Mermaids*, for instance, and I will come back to this later in this thesis) or by taking on a more ‘acceptable’ female appearance (as we have seen in, for example, Andie’s ‘montage sequence’-transformation into her ‘wedding’/prom dress-look in *Pretty in Pink*, or Charlotte’s transformation to become more like her mother, by dressing up in her clothes in *Mermaids*). It seems, therefore, that what most often marks ‘becoming’ in a teen girl narrative is, at its core, a physical transition that is made visible by a change/adaptation or evolution in appearance, most commonly transcribed by a makeover sequence.

**The Makeover Trajectory**

In feminist film theory, the analyses of the representations of adult women have often included readings that relate them to figures from popular folktales and myths. Such readings traced the representations of women as contemporary incarnations of, for instance, Eve, Medusa, or Pandora. For the representation of teenage girls, however, the analyses of structural narrative ‘blueprints’ based on myths, fairytales or folktales have, again, remained underexplored. This is odd because, as we have seen, the communication of teen girl-becoming insists on the clear depiction of certain ‘set’ rites-of-passage elements, especially those that are physical and that can thus be visually marked, in order to actively refigure the girl as becoming/having become ‘woman’. These elements are most clearly communicated when contained in a familiar progression – a progression that, through its very familiarity, (consciously or unconsciously) reassures the viewer of an imminent ‘safe’ resolution.

It seems to me that, while the ‘mythologies’ of Little Red Riding Hood and Alice in Wonderland inform more fantastical and/or horrific tales of girlhood-becoming in cinema (in examples such as *Labyrinth*, *Halloween* and *Freeway*, or even *The Journey of Natty Gann*, for instance), the most conventional underlying narrative structure for the representation of the teenage girl rite-of-passage on film, refigures the Oedipal/Electra myth through adaptations of *Cinderella* and/or *Pygmalion* (in either the Ovid or the George Bernard Shaw version). In both these ‘makeover’ tales of becoming, a mature ‘agent’ helps the girl transform, in order to become more successfully woman and/or ideally feminine (meaning, in most cases, more

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154 It might, incidentally, be interesting to consider, psychoanalytically speaking, why the visual rendering of this process of becoming is so important to its telling; is it because the transformation process, if it were to pass by unseen or unnoticed, would pose another, more dangerous, ‘invisible’ castration threat to the (male) viewer? And is it because of this that the very process of ‘becoming’ woman must remain explicitly signified at all times, rather than riddled or obscured?
explicitly sexualized), thereby carefully guiding and supervising the process that projects her from girlhood to womanhood. According to Tamar Jeffers McDonald, who analyses makeover films in her book *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film* (2010), the main difference between the two myths is that in *Pygmalion*, a man ‘creates’/reshapes the woman (in the original myth, it was the artist Pygmalion who sculpted his ideal woman out of an ivory statue and then fell in love with her; in the Shaw play, it is a phonetics professor who teaches the common flower girl how to speak, behave and become a ‘proper’ woman), whilst in *Cinderella*, it is the fairy godmother who magically transforms the girl into the type of ‘womanhood’ that will attract the prince. 155 Although McDonald analyses a wide range of makeover films in her book, she focuses predominantly on the makeovers of adult women (from *The Bride Wore Red*, through *Calamity Jane*, to *Pretty Woman, Single White Female* and *The Devil Wears Prada*) and does not specifically address the (historical) development of its relations to teen girl bodies. The dissemination of this particular phenomenon, I would pose, can be situated most significantly in the 1980s, and the 1990s.

The popularity of the makeover trajectory, and its debts to *Cinderella* and *Pygmalion* as a trope for the depiction of female transformation/‘becoming’, was in itself not new to the 1980s, of course. Narratives presenting female, bodily transformation and other rites of physical ‘beautification’ or ‘feminisation’ were first adapted for American movie screens as early as the 1920s, by Cecil B. Demille in *Why Change Your Wife*, and were properly institutionalised by the successes of *Now, Voyager, Sabrina, Funny Face* and *My Fair Lady* (1964). 157 It wasn’t until the box-office success of *Grease*, however, that the ‘popular’ makeover trajectory was explicitly imposed onto the body of the teenage girl, and subsequently became a staple for the ‘female oriented’ teen film as well. In the final scene of this film, Sandy (Olivia Newton-John) is transformed by her friends, from the ‘good’ and chaste, Sandra Dee-like cheerleader, into the sexually ‘liberated’, black leather wearing vixen, in order to (re)captivate the affections of her love interest Danny (John Travolta). In this film, the actual transformation process (the makeover sequence itself) remained hidden from the viewer; Sandy was merely ‘revealed’ in her final, transformed state. But the scene nevertheless established a teen girl narrative trajectory in which “the makeover is seen to

156 Ibid., 35.
render romantic love/attention possible...” – a trajectory that insists the girl must transform physically, in order meet the male’s desired image of femininity, and thereby ensure the continuance of the family unit.

In the 1980s, both the Cinderella and the Pygmalion trajectories were avidly taken on by a wide selection of teen films, ranging from Weird Science (in which two boys create their ‘ideal girl’ on a computer) as a reworking of Pygmalion, to films like She’s Out of Control (in which a ‘nerdy’ girl is transformed into a popular beauty queen, aided by her stepmother) as Cinderella. It was during this decade that, in my opinion, the makeover trajectory (I will refer to it by this name, since under this term it encompasses both the Cinderella and the Pygmalion varieties) became the teen girl trajectory par excellence, because it seemed to connect not only with the ideological discourse of the teen films of the time – and I will explore this further in the next few paragraphs - but it also catered to the teen audience’s desire for visually, clearly ‘typed’ identities (a particular aspect of teen culture that was propagated by marketing strategies and MTV, at the time). The repetition of teen girl makeover sequences in the 1980s teen film consequently established the formative style and structure of the sequence that we can still recognize in films/television today, in films such as Clueless, Jawbreaker, She’s All That, Mean Girls, The Princess Diaries, Josie and the Pussycats, What a Girl Wants and The House Bunny, to name but a few.

In her essay ‘Now I Am Ready To Tell How Bodies Are Changed Into Different Bodies – Ovid, The Metamorphoses’, Kathryn Fraser breaks down the makeover trajectory into specific ideological elements:

[These are] the main themes informing the Cinderella-cum-makeover narrative in all its incarnations: 1) the presentation of the self as a ‘problem’ in need of external expertise; 2) the idea that transformation will improve a person’s life and life chances; 3) the democratization of beauty: everyone has the ability to transcend their appearance; 4) the aim being to become more attractive to the opposite sex – heteronormativity; 5) consumption/self-commodification; 6) passing/class-transcendence and celebrity emulation or identification; 7) that the self is malleable, plastic.

159 Ibid., 178. (Clarifications relating to an in-text example have been removed from this quote).
The observation that the makeover trajectory involves notions of self-commodification, self-malleability, the democratization of attainable beauty and a strong heteronormative insistence proposes an ideological stance that, I would argue, is inherently conservative and American; it reflects aspects of the American dream, especially its propagations of individual ability, with and through consumerism. More importantly, I would argue, it perhaps indicates why this narrative trajectory became so popular in the 1980s; these themes connect specifically to the prevalent values of the American cultural and political zeitgeist of the time, including, for instance, the predominance of the Body-As-Project/’healthism’ ideal, as evidenced by the success of the fitness/body-building videos by Jane Fonda, Raquel Welch, Arnold Swarzenegger and Cher in the decade[^160], or the popular rise of the mall as the ultimate locale for ‘individual’, all-round consumption, beautification and self-improvement. Before I move on to how this contextual setting might have shaped and shifted the style and structure of makeover sequences, however, I first want to explore Fraser’s first theme of the makeover trajectory, that presents the self with a ‘problem’ that requires external expertise to be corrected, and its relations to the makeover, teen girl trajectory in 1980s teen film.

In her work on the medical discourse in women’s films of the 1940s[^161], Mary Ann Doane suggested the unmarried woman in these melodramas was often presented as ‘dysfunctional’ by cause of a pathological affliction. In Now, Voyager (1942), for instance, spinster Charlotte Vale’s (Bette Davis) condition is diagnosed by a psychotherapist as requiring immediate treatment. Mary Ann Doane writes:

> [In *Now, Voyager*] the woman’s illness is registered as an undesirable appearance. Charlotte (Bette Davis) in the beginning of *Now, Voyager* wears glasses, clumsy shoes, an unattractive dress, and is presented as being overweight, with heavy eyebrows and a harsh hairstyle. .... The woman’s ‘cure’ consists precisely in a beautification of body/face.\[^162^\]

In this film, it is the male doctor, who, by means of directing Charlotte’s makeover, guides the beautification of her body/face. Like *Pygmalion*, he adjusts and shapes Charlotte into a ‘corrected’, desirable femininity; and offers an outside, more ‘valid’ expertise on femininity

[^160]: The connection between these videos and the origins of makeover television has also been proposed by Vanessa Russell in her article *Make me a Celebrity: Celebrity Exercise Videos and the Origins of Makeover Television* in Dana Heller, *Makeover Television - Realities Remodelled* (2007).


[^162]: Ibid., 41.
that redirects it, above all, to cater to the male gaze. The post-makeover Charlotte is promptly revealed as ‘cured’, because she undertakes a physical love affair with the male lead of the film (it is suggested she loses her virginity to him) and, ultimately, offers the ‘right kind of’ motherhood to his daughter as well. In this sense, the makeover cure proposed by Now, Voyager adheres to Fraser’s analysis of the Pygmalion/makeover myth itself, which, she argues, is inherently misogynistic because it is based on:

...the construction of a female subjectivity as something akin to a disorder, and the presentation of male desire and/or male intervention as its remedy.... [It presents the construction of an ideal femininity, whereby the post-makeover/’made’ woman is:] above all else, passive. She is immobile and essentially decorative... She has no thoughts of her own, no ambitions nor desires. She exists for male desire and for reproduction, not as an autonomous, desiring subject in her own right.\textsuperscript{163}

In truth, the representation of Charlotte Vale’s femininity in Now, Voyager is perhaps more complex than Fraser’s interpretation of Pygmalion would suggest here, but I wanted to lay out these analyses, because there are elements of both that apply to the teen girl makeover in 1980s teen film as well. I will illustrate this with an example.

Arguably the most remembered and significant teen girl makeover of the 1980s featured in John Hughes’ The Breakfast Club.\textsuperscript{164} In this film, five teenage types, a jock, a princess, a criminal, a basket case and a brain, are kept in detention at their high school on a Saturday. Allison (Ally Sheedy), the ‘basket case’ (a label that notably identifies her as mentally disturbed from the start), is introduced in the film as an isolated, non-socialised, non-conforming teen ‘rebel’. Dressed in a ragged black sweater and old worn out sneakers, with wild hair covering her face, she presents strange eating habits and hygiene issues (she crushes cereal onto a sandwich, chews her fingernails and uses the dandruff from her hair to illustrate a drawing with falling snow) and does not communicate easily with the other students. Throughout the film, she is presented to the audience as a creative but troubled mind. She describes herself as undergoing psychological treatment; at first, she claims she is a “nymphomaniac”, having slept with her ‘therapist’, but then she admits she is in fact a virgin

\textsuperscript{163} (Fraser is here speaking of Ovid’s Pygmalion and Galatea) Ibid., 185-186.

and a “pathological liar”. When the others ask her why she was called into detention, she explains she simply “had nothing better to do”. Later in the film, Allison empties out her purse in front of two of the boys. She admits she carries so many belongings with her, because her home life is “unsatisfying” (implying she intends to run away). When jock Andy confronts her with this situation, she explains that her parents “ignore” her (which reminds the viewers of the opening of the film, when her parent(s) drove off when she attempted to say goodbye to them). In these ways, Allison’s problems are consistently identified as deeply pathological to the audience. Even though the other students express they have problems as well (one is even suicidal), and the film revolves around the discovery that they share many of their issues, it is only Allison who, it is suggested, undergoes psychological treatment, and whose subjectivity needs to be ‘corrected’ before the conclusion of the film.

In one of the final scenes, the wealthy ‘princess’ Claire (Molly Ringwald) – visually presented as an opposite to Allison, she is exceptionally well-groomed, and wears pink, diamond earrings, and heeled boots - looks Allison up and down, expressing critical judgement, before pulling her out of frame and leading her into the film’s makeover sequence.

Figures 19a - d - In The Breakfast Club, Allison and Claire are presented as visual opposites, until Claire sees a makeover opportunity in Allison.
In the next shot, we see Claire put eye pencil onto Allison’s eyes, as she demonstrates how to hold her face (“Go like this”) to make sure the pencil doesn’t hurt her. With this gesture, Claire’s middle-class expertise on the ‘right kind of’ female appearance is thus explicitly deemed more ‘valid’ than Allison’s lower-class/rebellious interpretation of it – a line continued by the dialogue that follows, when Claire’s opinion overrules Allison’s; Claire tells Allison she “looks so much better without all that black shit on [her] eyes”, to which Allison replies, “hey, I like that black shit”, while Claire keeps adjusting her makeup. Allison then asks her why she is being so nice to her – expressing a sincere gratitude towards her actions - to which Claire smilingly replies: “Because you’re letting me!” This scene thus suggests that Allison’s appearance (and, by connection, her pathologically disturbed nature) can be ‘fixed’ by re-examining and re-adjusting her femininity towards the ‘correct’, wealthier and more clearly marked (or more traditional) display that Claire provides.

In the scene that follows, we cut to a shot of jock Andy (Emilio Estevez), whose eyes suddenly fall upon ‘a spectacle’ (he stares off screen with visible awe), and then to his near point-of-view that ‘reveals’ the renewed Allison. Allison’s hair is now pulled back, by a white decorated hair band, and her face is made-up to emphasise a natural, rosy-cheeked beauty. Her black sweater and dark scarf have been replaced by a high-buttoned, white lace, armless blouse. The shot is accompanied by the onset of a light romantic score, and the two begin to walk towards each other. During her tentative approach, Allison briefly exchanges glances with the seated Brian (Anthony Michael Hall – the brain), who first stares at her with an open mouth and then confirms his approval with a smile (to which Allison mouths: “Thank you.”). When Andy and Allison face each other, he asks: “What happened to you?” to which Allison replies: “What-why? Claire did it.” She thereby vocally attributes the transformative ‘agency’ to the established, ‘other’ feminine identity within the group. When she subsequently asks Andy “What’s wrong?” he replies that: “Nothing’s wrong. You just look so different. I can see your face.” With this response, Andy not only readjusts her diagnosis (nothing is wrong anymore), but also suggests the makeover has revealed her ‘true identity’, because he can now “see her face”. A doubtful Allison asks: “Is that good or bad?” to which Andy answers: “That’s good, that’s real good”, leading Allison, through a visible sigh of relief at this male confirmation, into a large, inviting smile.
Because this scene so specifically presents the final ‘reveal’ of the made-over Allison as a target for the male gaze (of both Andy and Brian), it redirects its purpose; it appears as though the entire transformation was intended for the approval/desire of the prospective, heterosexual suitor. This is corroborated by Allison’s new image; she is presented as a virginal, summery bride - not only does she wear white lace, she also approaches Andy with the steady, focused pace and tread typically associated with the image of the bride walking down the aisle. Allison’s subsequent union with Andy, and her successful entry into the social/patriarchal realm, is legitimised by the final scene outside, as the teenagers wait for their parents to pick them up. Allison is now wrapped in Andy’s blue sweatshirt (she is draped in the colours of his sports’ team, and, by extension, in the security of his wealth), and, after they kiss, she rips the emblem patch off his sports’ jacket and holds it up to him, as if to claim his ‘token’, his ring, as evidence to their union.

This makeover scene has divided audiences over the years. Many have critiqued the ‘Stepford’-like transformation of Allison, claiming it robs her of her ‘individual’ identity and voids her rebellious, ‘feminist’ nature. Others have suggested Allison is ‘merely choosing’ to expose her femininity and her ‘prettiness’; this scene shows her breaking out of her

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traumatised shell and opening herself to the world while, in an act of female friendship, she “lets Claire help her”\textsuperscript{166}. What I find most interesting to this scene, however, is the consistency with which it repeats both Mary Ann Doane and Kathryn Fraser’s observations about female (adult) makeovers; the teen girl subjectivity in transition is constructed here as a disorder/mental illness, and only male desire is presented as its remedy (and this is true for Claire’s storyline as well, who, after having revealed she is a virgin, is reined in by her romantic union with John Bender (Judd Nelson). The teen girl trajectory is thus again resolved by the taking on of a more sexualised femininity (discarding youthful transgressions and becoming ‘the mother’), in order to be appropriated safely into a patriarchal and heteronormative hegemony (marrying ‘the father’). Nevertheless, it has to be noted that there are some aspects of female agency/resistance to this scene as well. The teenage girls are presented as able to transform themselves/each other, and, in doing so, are able to break out of one stereotypical mould, even if it be only into another. Other makeover scenes of the decade, such as those in \textit{Pretty in Pink} or in \textit{Teen Witch}, also promoted this sense of ‘creative’, active, self-transformation (in \textit{Pretty in Pink}, Andie makes her own dress for prom, and in \textit{Teen Witch}, Louise (Robyn Lively) gives herself a makeover in a school washroom – she reveals hip clothes underneath her other, unfashionable clothes, redoes her hair and makeup, and comes out looking revamped – and uses her own magic to transform herself into a ‘popular’ girl later on in the film). Although the girls in these films are never entirely ‘independent’ (Allison is aided by Claire, Andie is aided by her father, Iona and Duckie, and Louise by her mentor, Madame Serena) and their resolutions still involve their entry into a heterosexual union, these semi-‘self-transformation’ examples do stand in contrast to the more typical makeover format developed in the 1980s, namely the makeover montage sequence that insists teen girl transformation relies on consumer/material actions.

In \textit{She’s Out of Control}, nerd-girl Katie (Ami Dolenz) shares a special relationship with her father Doug (Tony Danza), who buys her a teddy bear and a ticket to Europe for her 15\textsuperscript{th} birthday. While celebrating her birthday with her family at a club that evening, Katie admires a highly sexualised (through her dress and movements) female dancer there, who is lifted into the air by a boy. The dancer visibly leaves her father speechless at the sight - struck mute in assumed desire – and results in Katie asking her father why, now that she is getting older, she can’t be more like her (the dancer).

\footnote{See for instance the cast and crew debates in ‘Behind the Scenes’ - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jVn76gyw_U&feature=related, accessed November 26, 2012.}
When her father leaves on a business trip a few days later, his new girlfriend Janet (Catherine Hicks) asks Katie whether she is sure she “really wants to do this”, and, upon receiving an affirmative response, drives Katie and her cheering younger sister off at speed. The scene leads into a fast-paced montage-sequence, set to music, where we see Katie abandon her ‘nerdy’ characteristics one by one. In the first shot, an orthodontist holds x-rays of Katie’s teeth against the lens of the camera, and then examines them, before suggesting “they are not supposed to come off for another two months”. After Katie looks to Janet, Janet turns towards the doctor and insists resolutely: “Yank ‘m, Doc. Yank ‘m now!” The sequence then shows Katie enter a hairdressing salon, exchange her glasses for lenses at the optometrist, turn to makeup (she puts on lipstick and blows out a kiss midair), learn to walk in heels, have the length of a new skirt tailored, and undergo a facial treatment – all under the watchful eyes and guidance of Janet, who instructs the hairdresser, reassures Katie not to worry, gives Katie a thumbs-up for her attempts at walking in heels, and decides on the length of the skirt (she tells the tailor: “Higher. Higher. Even higher.” And then pulls the skirt down firmly herself, saying, “Not that high.”)
Compared to the makeover scene in *The Breakfast Club*, this particular sequence makes the process of transformation explicitly visible (a trend that since then has become almost ubiquitous, if we look at the expansive ‘processes’ featured in makeover television or the increasing length of makeover sequences in films such as *Pretty Woman*, *The Princess Diaries* or *The Devil Wears Prada*). Rather than presenting the mere before and after (as was the case in *Grease*, for instance), this film illustrates and visually ‘marks’ all stages in feminine transformation/becoming - as though visual pleasure may be derived from ‘knowing’ and understanding the transformation, because such a ‘clarification’ refutes any possible (castration/transgression) threats implied by an un-‘set’/moving transition. But perhaps more significantly, it positions this staging of feminine becoming, the makeover, within the realms of consumerism and materialism. Situated at the mall (or an equivalent), Katie’s body is positioned amongst ‘purchased’/acquirable services and goods. It is only at the hands of external experts and through the consumption of specific products (note the L’Oreal product placement) that Katie’s transformation is rendered ‘magically’, instantly possible (and again, alongside other 1980s films such as *Earth Girls Are Easy*, where a musical makeover number voices specific brands such as Maybelline, Revlon and MaxFactor, this established a by now familiar trend). This sequence thus insists on the “…emergence of a particular brand of femininity – one forged through consumerism” and imposes this ‘type’ of femininity (one based on conservative gender divisions, fetish imagery and the weakening

167 I understand this is a very complex argument I’m posing here, but the abundance of fetishising objects (such as the high heels and the lipstick) and close-ups do invite a psychoanalytical reading of what is an incredibly dense and tightly cut together sequence, involving the revelation/exploration of a specific sex/sexuality.

168 Kathryn Fraser, “Now I Am Ready To Tell How Bodies Are Changed Into Different Bodies”, 178.
of female independent, free movement\textsuperscript{169}) onto the body of the ‘becoming’ teenage girl. Meanwhile, the sequence’s constant emphasis on parental supervision, offered both by the shots of the male doctors and the reactions of the securely heterosexual ‘fairy godmother’ Janet, continue to reassure the audience, while the very way the sequence is structured, presenting an array of fast-paced consecutive close-ups, only hint at Katie’s physical transformation, and delay the full ‘reveal’ until it can meet its intended target: the male gaze.

The final, full ‘reveal’ in \textit{She’s Out of Control} not only reaches the lusting male gaze of Katie’s potential, prospective partner, but it also specifically indulges the father’s gaze as well. After Doug returns from his business trip, he enters the house to find no one there to welcome him. His youngest daughter runs upstairs and leaves him to answer a continued frenzy of phone calls, in which boys ask for Katie, and eventually, the ringing doorbell. When he meets a boy there, asking whether Katie is ready, Frankie Avalon’s song “Venus” sets in on the soundtrack (a song that adds to the incestuous dimension of the scene, by offering lyrics such as “Venus if you will, please send a little girl for me to thrill, a girl who wants my kisses and my arms...”), as we follow the father’s wide-eyed stare move up towards the top of the stairs. In another by now familiar visual trope of the makeover, the transformed girl is ‘revealed’ in slow-motion while coming down the staircase (a trope that not only maximizes female ‘spectacularization’ through the staircase’s characteristics for display, but one that also implies change and transformation through its emphasis on differentiated levels, and that suggests the ‘new’, improved woman is coming down from heaven\textsuperscript{170}).

\textsuperscript{169} For more information on how high heels, corsets and traditional female clothing contained and weakened the female body, see for instance the work of Susan Bordo in \textit{Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body} (1993).

\textsuperscript{170} This trope is discussed by Jeffers McDonald in \textit{Hollywood Catwalk} (2010, p. 98-99), who also incorporates Doane’s analysis of the staircase as stage/display from \textit{The Desire to Desire} (1987). The trope, where a camera tracks up the body of the teen girl as she comes down the stairs and reveals her new image, is also presented in \textit{Teen Witch} and \textit{Pretty in Pink} (where the camera tracks up Andie’s body), and since then, most famously in \textit{She’s All That}. Its use has also been explicitly parodied in \textit{Date Movie} and \textit{Not Another Teen Movie}.
Like Allison in *The Breakfast Club*, the transformed Katie is revealed in this scene dressed in white; she wears lace-like fabric that emphasises its own whiteness through its layering, and connotes an image of a bride, as well as that of a coquette ‘virgin’ (in contrast to Allison’s appearance, Katie’s post-makeover appearance is not demure but explicitly sexualised; it is reminiscent of Madonna’s look in ‘Like a Virgin’, a popular video-clip released five years before). Katie ‘floats’ down the stairs; she moves her hands gracefully, and ever so slightly, up and down as though her movement were subtly choreographed to resemble a bird’s flight. The sight leaves father Doug open-mouthed and dumbstruck. His expression mirrors his reaction to the sexual dancer in the club that Katie admired, but also indicates his onset panic at the realisation this girl/woman is his ‘former’ daughter. Meanwhile, the other prospective suitor at the door broadens his smile with glee.
This scene invites the viewer to laugh at the opposite expressions of the two gazing males. There is a humorous tone to this scene, achieved through its explicit showing of the different lines of reaction that the teen girl’s transformation (and her simultaneously implied sexual awakening) provokes. In doing so, the film becomes momentarily self-reflective; it appears to play with an acknowledgement of its own effects, as if it is winking and nudging at the viewer. Amongst this self-reflexive quality (or ironic commentary even), the scene somehow celebrates Katie’s transformation and her onset sexuality as well, as the transformation that she herself instigated (she might have been passive in its undergoing, but it occurred upon her demand and affirmation) has lead her into a new ‘performance of femininity’, and allows her to achieve her desired result.

But even though She’s Out of Control plays with such tensions (it hints at an incestuous attraction between the father and his daughter, and introduces a teenage girl who is actively pursuing and relaying her own sexuality onto her body), the film ultimately anchors this tightly within an extremely conservative framework. After Katie’s reveal, Janet immediately enters the scene and, holding onto Katie’s shoulders, suggests in a motherly tone, “Doesn’t she look beautiful, Doug?” – realigning Katie’s image with one subject to parental approval and pride (while simultaneously pointing towards her own ‘failings’ as a ‘mother’ – she fails to understand Doug’s ‘true’ parental reaction). The rest of the film plays out the effects of Katie’s changed appearance, and her blossoming sexuality, on the father/daughter dynamic; Katie learns from her father that she must cherish her own innocence, guard her (academic) potential, and not use her beauty as “a weapon” (he holds her face up to a mirror as he says this). In the final scene, she leaves for Europe, tearfully hugging her father who has ‘saved’ her from an evil suitor intending to rob her of her virginity. At her side, she suddenly finds neighbour boy Richard, a suitor her father had always approved of. As she glances at Richard with renewed interest, both smilingly wave at her father (as though they are embarking on their honeymoon), before the plane takes off.

She’s Out of Control is a good example of a film that embodies much of what I have attempted to address in this chapter; it presents stereotyped teen girl identities (‘types’ that are delineated along conservative lines), a new caring father, a dead/absent as well as a ‘failing’ mother, and it resolves the girl’s ‘becoming’ woman in an Oedipal / Cinderella-like trajectory, concluding with the representation of the teenage girl/woman as the ‘good daughter’ and as the ‘good prospective wife’, in a romantic union that father approves of. The film also presents a montage makeover sequence that has, since the 1980s, developed into somewhat of a staple for teen films featuring teen girl ‘becoming’. The style and structure of the sequence -
it features a rapid succession of fetishizing close-ups, it relates the girl’s transformation explicitly to consumerism, and it concludes with ‘a reveal’ on a staircase that caters to the male gaze - supports a particular ideology that was in line with the political and cultural zeitgeist of 1980s America. It follows a strong (neo)conservative discourse; one that celebrates self-improvement/malleability, consumerism, materialism and commodification, heteronormativity, strong values for the nuclear family, and a backlash against feminism (or, more bluntly, it thrives on strong undercurrents of misogyny), and it does all this in service of the continuance of male ruling. Nevertheless, the makeover trope, albeit in some cases more than others, and albeit perhaps inadvertently, brings with it a celebration of the female image as well, and herein lie, perhaps, some opportunities for resistance. Such sequences present teenage girls as actively involved with and pursuing their own ‘becoming’, their own transformation, their own sexuality, their own ‘break’ from the tightly set, typifying and confining moulds. They allow the teenage girls to ‘move’. Moreover, the makeover suggests the teenage girl can willingly take on specific aspects and/or change the feminine role they have so far presented. Through the very fact that these transformations are ‘staged’ like performances in these films, they imply that the teenage girl is an ‘actor’ who can ‘dress up’ in femininity, as though femininity itself were an adaptable, fluid guise that can be taken on and performed, by and at will; as though the construction of the feminine image were a masquerade. And in doing so, these films play with the notion that all gender construction is, in fact, a performance. In my next and final chapter, this is precisely what I will turn to. I will look at gender as performance (including both Judith Butler’s work on this and Mary Ann Doane’s notion of the masquerade), at instances of unconfinable movement, and at other potential areas for agency and rebellion, amongst the representation of teenage girls, in 1980s American teen film.
05. Revealing Girlhood (Tropes of Transition)

Dance and the Performing Teen Girl Body

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the makeover trajectory is a common trope for teen films that represent teenage girls in leading roles, because this trajectory explicitly enunciates her physical rite-of-passage, her process of ‘becoming woman’. We have also seen that the very way this makeover is often presented, ultimately (re-)affirms particular conservative values about gender and normative power structures. Makeover sequences advocate traditional, hetero-normative subjugation, because they present an assumed, ‘inevitable’ transition into the sexualised, passive, constrained adult female image, catering to the male gaze. We have also seen that this process is strictly supervised by ‘corrective’ powers on film, and it is often fuelled by consumerism and materialism. Nevertheless, dismissing these instances of transformation as mere reproductions of an assumed willing submission into patriarchy, would fail to recognise the sense of self-transformation, of agency, of joy and play that these sequences invite and propagate. It would fail to recognise exactly why these scenes are so popular with their target audiences, and why they have become so all-pervasive. The makeover sequence (even if, at times, it does so in spite of itself) does celebrate the girl’s ability to take on different incarnations of ‘femininity’, both temporarily, and more permanently, through makeup and dress, and thereby brings into play aspects of female ‘agency’ derived from creating and controlling one’s own image that are ultimately empowering, and possibly, liberating.

Such elements are particularly evident in scenes where the teen girl reinvents/creates her own image unsupervised (in contrast to the makeover scenes previously analysed, from She’s Out of Control or The Breakfast Club for instance). Let’s look, for example, at a montage sequence set in the school bathroom in Teen Witch, where Louise (Robyn Lively) transforms her own appearance before entering the school dance. Louise first makes sure she is alone by waiting for others to leave and looking over her shoulders. She then strips out of the dowdy outfit her parents have provided for her, reveals hipper clothes underneath and puts on other items of clothing and accessories she has brought with her in her bag. Louise then redoes her makeup and her hair, before posing in the mirror and smilingly approving of her new image and blowing herself a kiss in the mirror (see Figure 1a-f). As is common in a montage sequence such as this, the short scene presents a series of fragmented ‘movements’ set to upbeat music on the soundtrack, through close ups that emphasise the character’s
moving and malleable body, and illustrate the character’s transition into a more ‘successful’ and controlled version of the self (it is similar to both the training montage sequences in *Rocky* or *Flashdance*, for instance, or the longer makeover montage in *She’s Out of Control*). But in this sequence, Louise is not supervised or mentored by another character or trainer; on the contrary, she ensures she is alone before transforming (like later in the film, when she performs a magic spell on herself to become more popular and beautiful), and it is only her own gaze that must be pleased or convinced by her image in the mirror. Her approval is ultimately confirmed, after she visibly checks herself out in the mirror, smiles in a pose that suggests “you are ready!”, and blows her own mirror image a kiss (and note that we see her ‘in’ the mirror at this point, we see her through her own eyes, as the reflection aiming back at her). The film’s audience is invited to smile here, to enjoy Louise’s adept transformation skills, her ensuing sense of accomplishment/victory and her ‘self-loving’ reward in the shape of the blown kiss. In this way, the sequence presents a small celebration of the teenage girl’s independent ability to transform, her ability to create and construct her own interpretation of femininity that meets her satisfaction, and her ability to please herself. It is a complex scene, because it suggests an innate embodiment (and doubling) of the gaze that, through a mirror image, reconforms set ideas about spectatorship and representation. I will come back to this at length in the third and final section of this chapter, when I address a mirror scene in *Smooth Talk*, but for now I want to use it to illustrate how sequences such as this one are able to interlace the represented teen girl body with notions self-malleability, with play, with movement and with an active performance of femininity.
1980s teen films provided many scenes such as this one, that celebrate the teen girl’s ability to transform herself, and that provide the teen girl with a sense of ‘active power’ as a reward. In *Mermaids*, we see Charlotte (Winona Ryder) dress up and pretend to be her mother, making her sister (and the audience) laugh when she mimics her mother’s tone of voice, and ultimately successfully seduce her love interest Joe in this dress-up. In *Night of the Comet*, the two sisters Regina (Catherine Stewart) and Samantha (Kelli Maroney) try on a range of different outfits and beauty products whilst dancing around the empty mall, in a joyous, fast-paced montage sequence set to Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun”, before taking on a gang of boys in a fight. And in *The Legend of Billie Jean*, teen girl fugitive Billie Jean (Helen Slater) transforms herself into a media ‘icon’ inspired by the spirit of Joan of Arc, who she admired in a film. Off screen, she has cut her long, blonde hair short, and has
traded in her patterned summer dresses for a more masculine, authoritative appearance, that includes arm-muscle baring tops and cargo-trousers, and a single earring. She reveals her new image to a prospective love interest, in a scene set to the rock beats of the film’s principle theme song, Pat Benatar’s “Invincible”. Through her (re-)presentation and recreation of her own image, she has independently redefined her own femininity, and is now ready to strike back against her attacker and the persecuting media, and lead her peers into revolt with a video manifesto.

These are broader narrative examples, but if we look at two other transformation sequences more closely, their workings reveal how and where exactly they invoke a sense of agency and play, and the celebration of the malleable, appropriable female image. In *Smooth Talk*, lead girl Connie (Laura Dern), and her two friends Laura (Margaret Welsh) and Jill (Sara Inglis) make-over their own appearances, after they have arrived at the mall in an early scene in the film. Their transformation is presented in a montage sequence, with a series of close-ups set to James Taylor’s upbeat “Is That The Way You Look” on the soundtrack. The sequence presents rapid close-ups that cross-cut between the bodily transformations of Connie and Laura; Connie puts in an earring, her head tilted back; bracelets are pulled from a pocket and slipped onto a hand (Connie); more bracelets are pulled from a bag and slipped on (Laura); Connie applies blush to her cheeks with a brush (presumably looking into a mirror off screen); a shirt is pulled off a shoulder, revealing skin and a marked absence of a bra strap (Laura); two hands pulls down a zipper of a blue body suit, revealing a yellow camisole underneath, and then open the top of the suit wider, revealing (and releasing) the girl’s visible

Figures 2a and b - In *The Legend of Billie Jean*, Billie Jean (Helen Slater) creates a new image for herself off screen, but is revealed as transformed, from vulnerable ‘girl’ to powerful ‘icon’.
breasts underneath (Connie) towards the camera; a red belt is pulled tightly around the suit and ‘locked’ shut, accentuating the waist (Connie); Connie shakes her hair out in profile, looking into a mirror off screen, and pulls up her collar; a knot is tied to shorten a t-shirt (Laura); Connie applies eye make-up with an applicator, again looking into a mirror; a necklace is fastened onto a neck, and re-positioned (Laura); and finally, Connie applies lipstick to her mouth, and presses her lips into a kiss in the air (see Figures 3a-f).

Figures 3a-f - A selection of stills from the self-transformation montage sequence in *Smooth Talk* illustrate how close-ups are used to interlace and actively reveal the bodies of Connie and Laura.
This montage sequence breaks with the spatial and temporal organisation of the rest of the film. With the speedy succession of a great number of shots, it creates a playful puzzle out of the teen girl transformations it displays. It reduces the two teen girl bodies to (fetishised) fragments through close-ups, yet it also makes the two bodies larger than just one, by weaving these individual shots together as though they were of one body, in the montage. The sequence is reductive and deconstructive, as well as constructive and collaborative. And by connecting the individual, moving body parts to the beats of non-diegetic music, the sequence makes them appear as though they were choreographed in a dance. In this way, the teen girl bodies are celebrated for their movement, for their potential, for their activity, for their detail, and for their sexuality. But most importantly, the sequence proposes that the girls are actively revealing their bodies (this is especially visible in stills 3c and d, where two hands open the suit towards the camera to reveal/release breasts underneath) both for the camera, for the prospective male gazes they might encounter at the mall, for one another and for themselves (by the implied use of mirrors). There is a sense of sensuality to these close-ups, particularly in the shot of the unzipping of the piece suit, that suggests a blossoming and an emerging sexuality; the girl’s bodies are overwhelmingly ‘present’ in these shots, and the transformation reveals these bodies in action, as they are becoming ‘ready for action’. This is made even more explicit in the shots that follow the montage sequence; we see the girls admire their own appearances in a reflection as a group, and smile and hug each other in delight. They are subsequently shown to ‘play with’ and enjoy their new appearances in the mall – particularly Connie, who, in one of the next scene, leans seductively (and proactively!) across an escalator in order to be ‘seen’ by a group of boys, before bursting into laughter with her friends after, over her success at getting them to admire her. The three girls are rewarded, then, for their active self-transformation in a variety of ways, and are shown to enjoy not only their own abilities to transform, but the playfulness of this process and the fruits of the ensuing display of their newly acquired image and sexuality.
But it is important to note that the film not only connects the rewards of the girls’ self-transformation to their attaining a desired result with the male gaze. The admiring men on the escalator lead to no explicit narrative consequence; this sequence demonstrates the teenage girl’s ability to transform herself for her own pleasure and sense of play. This is suggested by the final shot of the montage sequence, where Connie approves her own appearance by blowing out a kiss in the final shot of the montage sequence. The pressing of the lips into a kiss ‘mid-air’, aimed at a mirror image, is incredibly common to the representation of the teenage girl (as mentioned, it is also featured in Teen Witch, in Pretty in Pink, as well as in Some Kind Of Wonderful and She’s Out Of Control, and in later films such as Clueless, to name but a few examples). Aside from the affirmation of the self that this appears to suggest, it also illustrates a sense of play over the ‘practicing’ of the kiss, and of seeing (or imagining) what the kiss might look like, when directed at a (future) romantic interest – again, this suggests and internalised, embodied male gaze – but it is not aimed specifically at anyone else in these scenes, it is a voluntary act that expresses a sense of practice and learning, a sense of investigation, and ‘fun’, for the benefit of the teenage girl alone\textsuperscript{171}.

\textsuperscript{171} Although it must be noted, it might benefit the fantasies of the spectator as well, beyond the screen. But my point here is that, within the frame, it is explicitly directed back at the teenage girls themselves.

\textbf{Figures 4a-d - In Smooth Talk, the girls admire their appearances after the self-transformation montage sequence, and ‘play’ with their new image in the mall.}
In contrast to this scene in *Smooth Talk*, where the fragmented close-ups in a makeover montage sequence come after we have already been introduced to the characters in full, another common trope for teen film is to introduce a principal character through this very device. If we look at the opening credit sequence of *Pretty in Pink*, for instance, we see that a sequence similar to the one analysed above, is used to introduce us to Andie (Molly Ringwald). Here, the montage sequence has a different effect. Rather than illustrating the teen girl’s transition from a set point into an active, blossoming sexualised image, it establishes the character from the very beginning in process and *as a process*, of ‘becoming’ her appearance. Under the credits, and after an establishing shot that sets the action inside a house on the ‘wrong side of the tracks’, we see a girl dressing for school, in a montage sequence cut to the film’s title theme “Pretty in Pink”, by The Psychedelic Furs. Before we see Andie’s whole face, let alone her whole body (this comes in the next scene, when we see her prepare coffee in the kitchen and attempt to wake up her father to get him ready work), a range of close-ups introduces us visually to her actions, her ‘skills’, her dressing of her body. We see a white stocking being pulled over a right foot with pointed toe; two hands as they grab a pink belt from a bed; the two hands as they zip up the back of a pink skirt covering light pink underwear; a floral stocking being pulled over a white stocking on a left foot; a right hand opening a drawer, filled with necklaces, earrings, and jewellery, before searching through it and picking up a brooch; a close-up of flower earring in a left ear lobe, and a hand that hooks a second earring into the pierced hole next to it; a hand reaching for a pink cardigan that hangs on a hanger inside the door of a closet; an extreme close-up of an eye, as mascara is applied to the lashes with an applicator; followed lastly by an extreme close-up of the mouth, as a brush applies pink lip-gloss onto pouted lips, before the lips are pressed together to blow a kiss into air.
Figures 5a-f - A selection of six stills from the opening montage sequence from *Pretty in Pink*, introducing the audience to its principal teen girl character Andie, through a range of close-ups that show her dressing.

These nine shots all present fetishised imagery\(^{172}\) of course - from the phallic mascara brush to the piercing earring, from the pointed foot inside a stocking, and the lip-gloss applicator, to the shiny surface of the lips, the dazzle of the jewellery, and the zipping tight of the skirt that contains and conceals the (lack of/castrated) genitalia - but my point here is not to illustrate that these shots are conservative, objectifying or confining. They also celebrate the construction of teen girl femininity, by defining our lead girl character *as such*. It introduces us to Andie as a teenage girl both represented *as* a construction, and as *able* to construct, create and perform this construction herself (her creative abilities to make clothes and create her own look form an important theme in the narrative of the film). This montage

\(^{172}\) Fetishised imagery counters the possible castration anxiety posed by the image of the woman on screen, according to Mulvey in Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.
sequence submerges the viewer in a detailed breakdown of the build-up of Andie’s quirky, trademark visual style and femininity (even if this style is ultimately conservative, layered and stereotypically gendered). On top of this, although the movements are kept small and limited within the length (which is short) and the distance (the close proximity) of the shots (incidentally, this could be seen as part of a wider cultural ‘rule’ keeping women’s movements small and contained), I would like to argue that these close-ups could also be read along the lines of possibility, of a potential for agency/resistance, because of this very length and distance. These close-ups conceal as much as they reveal, and vice versa. Since we do not see the completed action in this scene, only fragments of it, the scene provides us with an inventory of what the teen girl body does, what it possibly has done already and what it can/might do in the future. The girl’s actions are suspended ‘mid-air’ (the sequence cuts them together, each one in medias res, so to speak) without showing us the opening and closing of the action. These shots therefore carry a sense of possibility with them, of not revealing where they started, or where they have lead to, or could lead to. After all, there is no final reveal shot or mirror image to confirm the teen girl’s full appearance here, and so the viewer is provoked to construct the teen girl’s image out of these details, out of these possibilities, out of her movements and small activities. This sequence thus presents a fragmented visualization of a process of ‘becoming’, of dressing, of constructing and performing gender, where the viewer is invited to imagine the teen girl’s completing of the process beyond the length of the shots, beyond the confines of the frame, beyond the boundaries of the film even, and therein exactly lies one of the teenage girl’s potential for agency on screen. (And, I would argue, this is specific to the representation of teenage girls, as opposed to women in general, because it is so intricately connected to the subject’s status as being in a, or being a, larger, unset, undefined process of ‘becoming’.)

Both the sequences in Smooth Talk and in Pretty in Pink set the girl’s dressing/transformation process to (non-diegetic) music. These sequences therefore imply, as mentioned above, that such movements are choreographed (they appear choreographed because they are cut to the beats of the music). This enunciates the construction of femininity as a performance, and brings with it larger connotations about the role of performance and play in relation to the construction and performance of femininity. In a decade that popularised the teen dance film (I will come back to this later), it is striking to note that even in films that do not deal with dance directly, teenage girls are so often shown to dance, pose

173 See also the Foucauldian analyses of Western culture and the construction of the image of women, in the writings of Sandra Lee Bartky (1988, 1990) or Susan Bordo (1993).
or exercise to music (examples include *Mermaids*, where the women dance in the kitchen at the end of the film, *Sixteen Candles*, where Samantha (Molly Ringwald) strikes a range of poses in her bedroom mirror while listening to the radio, or *She’s Out of Control*, where Katie (Ami Dolenz) dances and exercises to music in her room). The combination of dance and performance with the act of dressing (and by extension the appropriation/performance of femininity) is articulated most explicitly in the opening scene of *Adventures in Babysitting*, where we see Chris (Elisabeth Shue) mime and dance to The Crystals’ song “And Then He Kissed Me” in her bedroom, as she gets dressed in the morning. (This type of scene has since, also, become a common trope for the representation of teenage girls within the teen film genre; similar scenes occur in the television series *My So-Called Life*, and in films such as *Bring it On*, in *Crossroads*, in *Chasing Liberty* and in *Easy A*, to name but a few.)

At the first vocal notes of the song, Chris jumps into the frame, from off screen, in front of a large mirror. We see her in her reflection in the mirror. She is dressed in an oversized blue night shirt and dances wildly, shaking her hips and her head to the beats, as she mimes along to the music and points at herself in the mirror. She dances towards a dressing table, sits down and sprays on perfume while smiling at her reflection (we see a double reflection in the frame, one large and one small, in two different mirrors). She then kicks up her legs, and shakes back her blonde hair. She drops to her knees in front of her closet and leans back, before opening the doors and grabbing a dress on a hanger inside the left door, and caresses it to her body, as the camera tracks forward to a close-up of her face. We next see her putting on the dress (the camera tracks up her body as the dress is pulled up) and she zips it up in the back, before she pirouettes around the room to yet another mirror. On the dresser in front of this mirror stands a framed black and white photograph of a young man. She first serenades the picture frame, then grabs it, cradles it to her chest, and kisses it (as the refrain, “And Then He Kissed Me”, is voiced on the soundtrack). Chris picks up a big teddy bear and dances with him ballroom style around the room, before dropping him, and grabbing one of the white curtains at the window, and placing the end over her head as though it were a bridal veil. She holds her hands together in front of her, in supposed prayer, and walks ‘down the aisle’, towards the camera (literally acting out the words of the song, where “he will make her his bride”), as the veil is stretched and slowly glides of her head. She jumps up onto the bed, and mimes into one of the bed posts, before lying back on the edge of the bed, her face upside down in the frame, as the song fades out, and the camera cuts to outside.
In this scene, Chris’s ‘performance’ bursts with energy, with jumps, pirouettes and movement demonstrating the youthful agility of her body, whilst it simultaneously contains in its choreography ‘the mundane’; her daily routine. This already creates an interesting juxtaposition, which is furthered by a constant doubling of her image (through the various mirrors) and the elements of play-acting within the performance; Chris *pretends* to be the performer of the song, she *pretends* to worship her wardrobe/dress, she *pretends* the photograph is the actual man in it, she *pretends* her teddy bear is a dance partner, she *pretends* to get married, and she *pretends* the bedpost is a microphone. But there is no visible audience there to applaud this act/performance; Chris is seemingly performing for herself, by herself and of herself (although this does, of course, invoke the viewer’s sympathy and joy). The playfulness and joy over her control of her body, its styling, its movements and its potential actively seep over into her concurrent ‘performance’ of femininity as well; her putting on her dress, spraying perfume and shaking back her hair become part of her playful act as well, and Chris is represented as a body able to both deduce and produce pleasure from this performance of femininity\(^\text{174}\).

There is something subversive about (the performance of) dance and the representation of the teenage girls on film, and in spite of the conservative overtones of the teen film genre in the 1980s, the decade produced a wide range of teen dance films, incorporating both teenage boys as well as girls, and teenagers across different ethnicities, in

\[^{174}\text{A similar observation is made by Yvonne Tasker about dress up sequences for adult women on film, in her book Working Girls, when she states: “Dressing up, in both ‘everyday’ and surreal outfits, functions as a celebration of consumption and of the performer’s pleasure in costume and body.” (Routledge, 1998, p. 182)\}
Fame, Flashdance, Footloose, Breakin’, Breakin’ 2 – Electric Boogaloo, Beat Street, Girls Just Want To Have Fun, Fast Forward, Shag, Dirty Dancing, Salsa and Lambada.\textsuperscript{175}

Figures 7a - d - The 1980s introduced dancing teen girl bodies in a range of different films, from (left to right, top to bottom) Dirty Dancing, to Flashdance, to Girls Just Want to Have Fun, to a Flashdance homage (a copy of the training sequence, set the same music) in She’s Out of Control.

It seems as though popular films about teenage rebellion have, consistently since 1980, given way to films about teenage dancing; Rebel Without A Cause has been replaced by Footloose, and, more recently, the even cleaner-cut and conservative High School Musical series. But perhaps the depiction of dance offers a different kind of rebellion to the representation of teenagers. The subversive potential of the representation of dance on film has remained relatively underexposed to date, but Jade Boyd, in her article Dance, Culture, and Popular Film: Considering Representations in Save the Last Dance (2004), explicitly addresses the tensions that dancers on screen bring to the floor. She argues that “although very few mainstream narratives contain elements of resistance to conventional norms, some do exist. Teen-dance films ... contain such elements.”\textsuperscript{176} Boyd suggests these representations

\textsuperscript{175} This is a subgenre that has seen an enormous resurgence recently, as titles such as Save The Last Dance, Take The Lead, How She Move, Make It Happen, the recent Fame and Footloose remakes, and the huge box-office successes of the Step Up (2006-), Honey (2003-), Bring It On (2000-), Center Stage (2000-), High School Musical (2006-) and Street Dance (2010-) series, or the So You Think You Can Dance (2005-) or America’s Best Dance Crew (2008-) television phenomena, have all shown.

of (teenage) dancers need to be read more progressively, where we analyse them “as communicating subjects.” Relating her observations to a long tradition of reviews that promote the critical and radical potential of dance, she argues: “The dancer as a live subject is not straightforwardly reduced to an object of visual pleasure. ... [D]ance in particular, because of its subjective presence, has the power to subvert social norms in a way that is exclusive to such an art form. [I]t is therefore deductible that] Dance in film can ... effectively disrupt the male gaze...”

If we take these observations about dance on screen, and look at the opening scene of *Adventures in Babysitting* again, it seems the element of play, of performance and of dance, can indeed disrupt the establishment of a confining, stilling male gaze. Chris’ movement and her subjective presence constantly drive her ‘performance’ (both of the song, and her femininity) forward, and towards her own ends, rather than mere to-be-looked-at-ness. In an extended analysis of *Save the Last Dance*, Jade Boyd explores the tensions presented by the depiction of dance on screen. She argues the film offers an expressive, wilful and independent teen girl lead (which, Boyd argues, can be ascribed to earlier teenage girl leads in dance films such as *Dirty Dancing* and *Flashdance*) who ultimately transforms into a heterosexual, passive subject. But nevertheless, Boyd suggests, “the dancing within teen-dance films [also serves] as a medium for physical empowerment, an expression of personal or social identity and individuality, and a method of activism or self-assertion. Adversity is embodied, felt, realised and, in many cases, circumvented....”

I think for the typical representation of straight, white, suburban teenage girls in 1980s teen films the notion of ‘adversity’ perhaps slightly overstates the premise of their struggles (in comparison to the adversity facing the teenage black hip-hop dancers in *Breakin’* or *Save The Last Dance*, for instance), but it can still be transposed to the feminist cause, because, as Boyd concludes, “[these] woman protagonists are strong in the sense that they move, they dance, they are active rather than passive, they are talented, they are successful, and they are usually fairly independent...” Thus, the aspects of dance that promote the physical prowess, the expression of personal identity and self-assertion for teenage girls, can be used to ‘circumvent’ conservative and hegemonic imagery, resulting in a rebellion of a different kind, a re-appropriation of the ‘active’ representation of girls/women. This seems to count

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177 Ibid., 68.
178 Ibid., 70., my paraphrasing in brackets.
179 Ibid., 78.
180 Ibid., 80.
181 Ibid., my italics.
especially for the case studies described previously, where the teen girl dancing/performing is intricately linked to her dressing up in femininity, and infuses this action with agency.

To illustrate this with one final example of a scene depicting teenage girls dancing, I want to briefly turn towards a sequence that was fundamental to the very conception of this thesis, because of its seemingly ‘obvious’ exploitation of the teen girl image. It is now possible to see this scene in a new light (or to read it ‘against the grain’), and to see how it presents two sides of the discourse. In Teen Witch, a teen romantic comedy about a teenage girl who discovers she has magical powers, the popular (but, stereotypically, rather ‘dumb’ and catty) cheerleaders that principal character Louise (Robyn Lively) looks up to, break into a song and dance-number early in the film. (The film presents a range of ‘musical’-like scenes, including rap songs, music video style montages set to non-diegetic pop music, and a performance of a pop star as well, but most of the numbers are embedded and justified by the narrative – this one is the only number explicitly unannounced in the film). In a sequence that recalls the peeping Tom sequences in films such as Private School and Porky’s, the camera lingers in the locker room after a PE class, to show the girls as they undress from their gym clothes, take showers, and get dressed again. The girls are not naked, but their bodies are dressed in tight, swimsuit like dance/exercise costumes, and at times, their nudity is implied behind the towels they dance with.

At the beginning of the scene, one of the cheerleaders suddenly enters the locker room and exclaims: “Hey cheerleaders! I’ve got a new cheer! So fab!” She then turns on a cassette deck, launching the rock beats of a pop-song, and mimes along with the first line of the song, whilst shaking her body vigorously to its rhythms, exclaiming “I! Like! Boys!!” She begins to dance around the locker room, and two other girls join her in the choreography. A track across the locker room reveals the other cheerleaders have joined in, and they all proceed to perform an extensive routine to the “I Love Boys” song, by Elizabeth & The Weirz, for the camera, in a style that recalls early musical showgirl numbers, and even Busby Berkeley films\(^\text{182}\). The girls’ dance around the locker room includes movements where they pull out an array of items of clothing from the lockers, and throw these around the room, movements that suggest they are ‘putting on their makeup’ (holding up one hand as though it were a compact mirror), pirouetting and high kicking in and out of the showers, dancing under the hand dryers whilst drying their hair, and performing a range of visual puns that play with the appearance

\(^{182}\) Busby Berkeley films have been notably criticised for objectifying its anonymous female ‘objects’, because they create a spectacle out of their “to-be-looked-at-ness”; in for instance the writing of Martin Rubin, Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle (Columbia University Press, 1993), 70-73.
of their bodies. Here too, the routine by which the girls construct their ‘performance’ of femininity becomes choreographed, and part of the dance performance/spectacle. The girls appear to perform for the eye in the camera, because the sequence constantly breaks the fourth wall (and thereby markedly caters to an assumedly male gaze within it), but this is intercut with repeated shots of Louise looking on and smiling, suggesting it is her gaze that is being catered to with this performance instead (or, as well), as opposed to any male gaze that the peeping Tom aspects of the scene’s construction would imply.
Figures 8a-1 - A selection of stills from the musical number “I Like Boys” in Teen Witch, shows the cheerleaders’ dance routine; it includes movements mimicking their putting on makeup and dressing and a range of visual puns that play with the malleability of their bodies.

Although this sequence presents the scantily clad cheerleaders as a range of sexualised anonymous bodies that provoke to-be-looked-at-ness (because they are confined by the arrangement of the set and the framing within the frame, they are filmed in angles that emphasise the sexual/fetish qualities of their bodies, they re-establish their heterosexual intention/purpose by the miming the words of the song “I Like Boys”, and cater to culturally established male fantasies about ‘what cheerleaders get up to when they are alone in the locker room’), there is more to this sequence than mere exploitative imagery. The sequence combines active, expressive bodies – the girls dance intensely in unison, with great speed and agility – with a female gaze (Louise’s), with a range of movements that incorporate female dressing and celebrate the performance of femininity and female sexuality, with a collection of visual puns (four in total) that explicitly play with the malleability of the teen girl body; the puns suggest it can be made taller (see image 8j) and stretched (see image 8k), and that it can have parts disappear, when a three headed girl body behind a towel only

183 Dance, of course, also directly celebrates and references sexuality; Sherril Dodds defines “the dancing body as sexually unleashed …. [and as] a site of provocative sexuality.” (Dance On Screen: Genres And Media From Hollywood To Experimental Art. (London And New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 40.), whilst Sarah Hentges concludes that for the teen girl body “… dance acts as a means toward a sexual and social awakening…..” (Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence On Film. (McFarland & Co Inc Pub, 2006), 78). In this sequence, such sexuality goes both ways – it caters both towards the male gaze, and functions as a blossoming/awakening sexuality within the girl’s process of becoming.
presents two sets of legs underneath, or act and move as one, when six girls hold together their towels and move up and down behind it, to create wave like comedic effects, before pretending to tumble down and fall apart (these last two ‘puns’ are unpictured). This sequence thus combines aspects of the montage sequence, with its ‘open’, intercut, movement shots and possibilities for off screen action, with the construction of femininity (the dressing/making up of the female body) that is staged as a performance, with an active physical display of movement, with a playfulness that accentuates the malleability of the teen girl body (as seen in the puns). And because it disrupts (it is disconnected from) the narrative of the film, unlike the other musical numbers, the scene alludes to the staging of music video clips, invoking references to the performances of Madonna, or Cyndi Lauper’s ‘Girls Just Wanna Have Fun’ as well. All of this accumulates to pronounce a sense of acknowledgement and joy for (and over) the teen girl body that actively defies the very conservative and passive imagery its other undercurrents simultaneously project. Containing the themes that Richard Dyer identifies in his article ‘Entertainment as Utopia’ (Dyer explores the utopian solutions that musicals offer to ‘dystopian’ realities by distilling distinct aspects of entertainment that the genre presents), these teenage girls display energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and community on screen, and they do so over, and with, the very image of femininity that they are constructing and projecting. There is thus a kind of self-reflexivity to this performance that creates a second level of commentary, of distance; it plays with an awareness of its own construction, and the effects of femininity, that places this representation of femininity as a utopian solution to the very conservative forces that have conceived it. These girls are ready to ‘play’ with femininity, in a ‘playful’ way – and the audience is invited to rejoice in their ability to do so.

Mary Ann Doane has written extensively on the performance of femininity on screen (1991), with regards to its relation to female spectatorship. She reappropriates Joan Riviere’s concept of the masquerade to identify “why a woman might flaunt her femininity, produce herself as an excess of femininity, in other words, foreground the masquerade.” The masquerade, she continues “constitutes an acknowledgment that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask – as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity.” Doane’s observations revolve around a psychoanalytical reading of both the spectator’s relation to the

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186 Ibid.
image of femininity, and the layering of the image itself (or the creation of a distance between layers of the image and its agent, and the image and the spectator), and therefore walk a decidedly different tangent than my analysis attempts to here. But, nevertheless, Doane’s theorising of the (adult) masquerade does provide an important framework for me, to point out the differences between the representation of women and teenage girls, in relation to their performance of femininity. When Doane addresses the masquerade, she relates it specifically to the onscreen image and persona of Marlene Dietrich, who, as a femme fatale, offers an image of womanliness that can be worn and removed, and used to control the masculine. Doane argues that the masquerade has been associated with manipulation; a woman who uses femininity in excess, she proposes, is often seen as “evil incarnate”. This is where I wish to point out an essential breaking point, between the representation of women and teenage girls. As we have seen, the interaction between the teenage girl and her image/construction of femininity often includes a playfulness that both explores and exploits its potential. But there is an inherent naiveté to her engagement with the sensuality/sexuality of the feminine image; hers is a ‘knowingness’ that is different from the adult woman’s deeper understanding or familiarity with its tricks. Teen girl femininity is, in its process of becoming woman, represented as learning, as trying on. It is blossoming and exploring, it is more actively producing (the new) than it is re-producing (the familiar) or, interestingly, vice versa; it is more actively re-producing (an assumed image of femininity) than it is producing (a known understanding of femininity). The teen girl’s performance of femininity on screen is, as I have attempted to show, inherently ‘playful’, and therefore does not function in the same way as its adult masquerading counterparts.

Let us look at a scene in Some Kind of Wonderful, to extrapolate this observation further. Early in the film, Amanda (Lea Thompson) is sentenced to two weeks detention by her female gym teacher, over cutting classes to spend time with her boyfriend. We then see she isn’t present in detention, but instead, we see her talking to her Driver’s-Education teacher Mr. Saunders, in the hallway of the school. We see Amanda in profile from the left, facing Mr. Saunders on the right. Her voice is much higher in tone, and more melodic than elsewhere in the film, as she giggles without direct invitation, flips and twirls her hair and bats her eyelashes. She tells her teacher: “It’s incredibly nice of you not to make me sit down there with those guys. I felt kind of weird being the only girl …” to which he replies “well, I suppose it wouldn’t matter if you served out your detention in my office.” Amanda/Lea

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187 Ibid.
Thompson then uses her voice even more softly and poses, seductively, while gently adjusting and stroking her teacher’s tie, with her face down but looking up at him so as to emphasize the size of her eyes: “… I was kind of wondering if I wouldn't have to serve detention at all, if I promised I'd never, ever do it again?” After a beat and a quick look around, her teacher replies: “Well, we’ll keep this just between you and me…” Amanda then concludes “Oh, you're incredibly sweet, Mr. Saunders. And I love the way you wear your hair…” A visibly charmed Mr. Saunders touches the patches of hair on the side of his bald head and replies “Really?” Amanda continues “Yes, it’s great - all the girls say it.” The teacher responds with an unassuming: “No”, to which Amanda replies: “Yes, it’s true. You’re the best Driver’s-Ed teacher there is!” When Mr. Saunder thanks her, Amanda seals the transaction with “Thank you! Very much…”, before walking off triumphantly and leaving her teacher behind, smiling broadly in her wake, and turning around to re-examine (or admire) his reflection on the mirror like surface of a fire extinguisher.

Figures 9a - d - In Some Kind of Wonderful, Amanda ‘performs' femininity, in order to get out of detention.

The character of Amanda’s ‘performance’ here is very specific to that of the teenage girl on screen (similar scenes are featured in films such as Clueless, Cruel Intentions, Pretty Persuasion and Saved!, to name but a few); it invites us to smile at her triumph over her
teacher, to admire her emerging feistiness, and experience joy at her ability to produce/perform an excess of (seductive) femininity in order to get what she wants. But this performance is more innocent than that of the ‘femme fatale’ or Marlene Dietrich’s onscreen personas, because it is reliant on the teen girl’s active and playful taking on of a specific aspect of femininity temporarily, as opposed to her display of its innate, and ‘set’, embodiment. The distance between this type of masquerade and its performer/agent (or, as Mary Ann Doane might argue, her non-identity) is in flux then – it is, in itself, in movement. Like the choreography in the dance sequence analysed above, it is here exposed as a construction and celebrated as an expression of self-assertion, as an articulation of the malleability of the self, as an ode to the joys that the performance of gender (or femininity) can and may bring. This, in itself, engages with an agency and a resistance that resides at the intersections of a preoccupation with the ‘body as project’ (a prominent theme in 1980s popular culture), the malleability posed by the process of constructing femininity, and the qualities of ‘becoming’, and ongoing active transformation, inherent to the representation of the teenage girl. At these junctions, nothing is quite set, yet.

The Tomboy and the Temporary Transvestite Teen

The 1980s was a decade preoccupied with identity construction; it advocated the purchase of clothing and makeup at the mall, the use of fitness videos to shape the body, and mainstream plastic surgery. In Hollywood, the popularity of this thematic was made visible by the sheer range of films produced over the decade that dealt with the transformation of identities, the metamorphosis of bodies and the construction of appearance and gender. After the success of the mother-daughter body swap in Disney’s Freaky Friday in 1976, a range of films featured body switching narratives (although predominantly male ones) in the early 1980s, including All of Me, Like Father Like Son, Big, Vice Versa, 18 Again! and Dream a Little Dream. Another familiar ‘identity switching’ subgenre, the cross-dressing or temporary transvestite film, which was previously made famous by films such as Sylvia Scarlett and Some Like It Hot, also made a notable return in the 1980s, when films such as Victor/Victoria, Yentl and Tootsie all became major box office hits. (The 1980s even provided a mainstream racial ‘cross-dressing’ film called Soul Man, in which a white man goes to Harvard disguised as a black man, in order to retain a scholarship.) At the same time, traditional gender roles were opened up, re-examined and at times even reversed in films that featured caring father (titles such as Kramer vs. Kramer and Mr. Mom), working women/mothers (Baby Boom and Nine to Five) and those that presented androgynous, fighting women as action stars
The decade thus appeared to be infused by, and reflected, changing attitudes about bodies, gender and sexual difference.

For teen films, these attitudes translated into both the re-establishment/re-configuration of clear-cut, traditional gender divisions (through stereotyping and the allocation of specific locations and props, as we have seen in chapters one to three) on the one hand, and the popularisation of the makeover trajectory, where the transformation of identity (the rite-of-passage) is linked to consumerism (addressed in chapter four), or the celebration of the construction of gender and the malleability of the self, in scenes that choreographs such moments as a performance (see the first section of this chapter), on the other. Another way in which 1980s teen films addressed the refiguring of traditional gender norms, however, was presented in narratives about gender-boundary crossing figures. For the teen girl, in particular, this included a strong prominence of the figure of the tomboy, and the temporary teen transvestite. Both these figures explicitly acknowledge (or take as their starting point) the idea that gender identity is constructed through a repeated and learnt cultural ‘performance’ of dress and behaviour, a theory that was developed by feminist and political theorist Judith Butler in her works *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), but that perhaps can also be traced back to Simone de Beauvoir’s famous saying that “One is not born, but rather becomes woman”\(^1\)\(^\text{190}\). For the representation of the teenage girl on film, these figures play part in narratives that again reflect the coming-of-age trajectory, where the girl ultimately becomes (heterosexual) woman. In this part of my thesis, I will take a closer look at the tomboy and the teen temporary transvestite, in two case-studies, *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Just One of the Guys*, to examine how they present the teen girl identity in transition. Do these films present a progressive or conservative discourse on the construction/performance of gender and sex? How does *Some Kind of Wonderful* present the tomboy figure? And on what bases does the temporary transvestite teen girl in *Just One of the Guys* adopt masculine traits and transform into womanhood? How do these films present the differences between sex and gender (or the body and performance)? How do these teen girls move, and evolve, and ‘become’ woman? And, lastly, can we find opportunities for agency in these films, or, rather, did they reinforce a policing of traditional gender norms?

The tomboy figure was, in itself, not a new construction on film – the girl who prefers to dress as a boy, play sports and act like “one of the guys”, featured prominently in titles as

\(^{189}\) For more information on these representations of androgynous women, see Yvonne Tasker’s *Spectacular Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1993) and *Working Girls* (London: Routledge, 1998).

diverse as Little Women, Calamity Jane, the Gidget films and television series and in The Bad News Bears, amongst others. Particularly in the 1970s, the tomboy was made “synonymous with childhood and sexual immaturity,”\textsuperscript{191} because, as Kristen Hatch argues “her status as a pre-sexual child spoke to adult concerns about children’s place in an increasingly sexualised American culture.”\textsuperscript{192} At the same time (starting in the 1970s and continuing in the 80s and 90s), the tomboy figure was taken on amongst the representation of adult women; especially in performances by actresses such as Jodie Foster, or the action heroines played by Geena Davis and Linda Hamilton, that followed Sigourney Weaver’s character in Alien. As both Hatch and Judith Halberstam have suggested, the tomboy became a poster child for the feminist movement\textsuperscript{193}, because it was this ‘character’ that opened up masculine powers and actions to the representation of women on film. Nevertheless, as Hatch, Barbara Creed (1995) and Yvonne Tasker (1993 and 1998) have all proposed, the tomboy has always predominantly functioned to ultimately reinforce traditional gender norms and heterosexuality, because she is, by nature, a transitory figure from which springs a supposedly ‘natural’ evolution into heterosexual womanhood.

I find it interesting that the figure of the tomboy, from the 1970s to the 1990s particularly, was so readily transposed onto the bodies of both children and adult women on screen, when, in my opinion, its very construction seems so intricately entwined with a state of adolescence. Yvonne Tasker makes a similar observation when she defines the tomboy as follows:

…”the image of the ‘tomboy’ captures a sense of immaturity – of both a freedom from responsibilities of adult life and a sense of incomplete development. A mapping of transgression that can be contained, the tomboy signals a composite of experience and innocence – of capabilities and energies together with sexual naïveté.”\textsuperscript{194}

I agree with this definition, and it fascinates me, because I think it applies to the tensions that inform the representation of teenage girls on film in general; immaturity and freedom, combined with incomplete development, experience and innocence, combined with sexual naïveté... But what it illustrates here is that the tomboy, as a figure, is all-encompassing; both


\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 83.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 80, see also Judith Halberstam’s work Female Masculinity (Duke University Press Books, 1998).

\textsuperscript{194} Yvonne Tasker, Working Girls (Routledge, 1998), 84.
ends of most spectrums apply. Yet I would add to Tasker’s observation that this results in the
tomboy’s state of being permanently ‘in between’ (childhood and adulthood, masculinity and
femininity, experience and naiveté) rather than at both, or neither end. The teenage girl, and
the tomboy especially so, is the ultimate transitional figure. She is neither boy, nor man, nor
child, nor woman. And yet, she may act as all of them, because the rules do not apply yet. By
being ‘in between’, she is in a state of permanent flux, and therefore able to perform across
boundaries, and/or set regulations; the tomboy is attributed a specific and peculiar type of
agency on screen, because she falls perennially between and beyond categories. Yvonne
Tasker hints at this as well, when she argues for the prospective agency of this representation,
by connecting the tomboy to the figure of the ‘feisty heroine’:

The refusal of an opposition between a masculine woman and a feminine woman,
which is also a refusal of the tomboy’s successful Oedipalisation, in part depends on
the employment of a related stereotype of popular cinema, the ‘feisty heroine’. She is
characterized within movie discourse as a woman with a strength and spirit that is
defined as atypical… If the tomboy is an ambivalent, transitional figure, the feisty
heroine is both clearly adult and clearly described as heterosexual. 195

I would argue this connection might be far stronger than Tasker implies; is not the tomboy the
direct precursor for the adult feisty heroine? Does she not ‘become’ her? Does the tomboy not
open up the paths for this “atypical strength and spirit”, when it comes to the representation of
women in popular film? 196 Let’s take a closer look at the representation of the tomboy in
1980s teen cinema, at the tensions she embodied on screen, and at how this figure embodies a
performance of gender that opens up pockets of agency on screen.

The 1980s introduced a number of tough teenage girl tomboy figures to its audiences,
including Natty Gann (Meredith Salenger) in The Journey of Natty Gann, Angel (Kristy
McNichol) in Little Darlings, Monique (Diane Franklin) in Better Off Dead, and Watts in
(Mary Stuart Masterson) in Some Kind of Wonderful. (Interestingly, many other teen girl

195 Ibid., 82.
196 I would even argue that the feistiness inspired by the predominance of the tomboy in 1980s teen film, played
an important part for the emergence of the progressive teen (and young adult) feisty heroines of the 1990s (and
beyond), in films such as Pump Up The Volume, Reality Bites, Clueless, Ghost World, 10 Things I Hate About
You, The Invisible and even the recent Hunger Games, or television series such as My So-Called Life, Buffy the
Vampire Slayer, Dawson’s Creek and Felicity. This would again illustrate that the tensions presented in the
representation of teenage girls in 1980s teen film acted as a catalyst of sorts, opening up opportunities for the
representation of more diverse, literate, articulate and strong teenage girls (and women) in the 1990s that
followed.
leads in the 1980s were also suggested as being ‘tomboyish’ through their specifically gender-neutral names, such as ‘Sam’ (Molly Ringwald) in *Sixteen Candles*, ‘Chris’ (Elisabeth Shue) in *Adventures in Babysitting*, ‘Andie’ (Molly Ringwald) in *Pretty in Pink*, ‘Ferris’ (Tatum O’Neal) in *Little Darlings*, ‘Alex’ (Jennifer Beals) in *Flashdance*, ‘Billie’ (Helen Slater) in *The Legend of Billie Jean*, and ‘Terry’ (Joyce Hyser) in *Just One of the Guys.* These four tomboys, who are shown to readily pick fights, gaze at boys, and who survive independent travels and physical ordeals, are all presented as ‘outside the realm’ of parental supervision – they are all parent- and/or especially father-less. Natty, Monique and Watts are parentless through abandonment, foreign exchange and neglect, whilst Angel in *Little Darlings* has a single (and it is suggested promiscuous and dysfunctional) mother. It is thus subtly implied that the lack of parental supervision, and patriarchal supervision in particular, has lead to ‘gender confusion’ for girl bodies in transition – because they have had to become tough and boyish, to fend for themselves, in lieu of their absent fathers. This also points towards an unresolved or ‘broken’ Oedipal narrative trajectory (as Tasker suggested above) as the cause for the tomboy’s current state, whereby the usual ways towards ‘becoming’ adult/woman have been hindered, and these teenage girls have remained suspended in an in-between state ever since. But it is this very in-between state that interests me most.

In the opening sequence of *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Watts (another gender neutral name) is introduced exactly as such, as suspended in-between. The very first shot of the opening credit sequence begins to expose her, but it only shows us specific parts of her, and delays a complete reveal. We first hear and then see a pair of faceless hands, in close-up, running drumsticks quickly on a cymbal, over (and in correspondence with) the opening music. The hands extend from bare arms, and are gloved, with a sweatband (or fabric tape) around the wrist, as though these were the hands of a fighter. The camera then cuts to another shot of the drummer’s frenzied hand movements, and moves up the body to reveal a white t-shirt covered by a men’s waistcoat, and a couple of army-tags hanging from the drummer’s neck. As the camera moves further up we get a brief glimpse of the neck, and a short glimpse of a face in profile to the right, that promptly turns away from the camera (we see short blonde hair, and a silver earring in the shape of a cross). This invites the viewer to either lean forward to check whether this face is indeed that of a girl (as her softer facial features suggest), or lean back and assume it must be a boy. The two opening shots thus raise explicit question marks over this character’s gender, playing with audience expectations by keeping her in an either/or state. But they also place an emphasis on the character’s action over any clarity of his/her gendered identity (in fact, it conflates the two into one; the drumming action
becomes his/her identity here) – and the shots give this action additional vigour, by making it seem as though the character is literally starting and creating the title sequence music – this character is the force driving the film into action.

Figures 10a and b - In Some Kind of Wonderful, Watts (Mary Stuart Masterson) is introduced through her actions, as a non-gender specific drummer.

The scene promptly cross-cuts to introduce us to the two other main characters of the film, Keith (Eric Stoltz) and Amanda (Lea Thompson), who are presented in more traditional gender roles; Keith walks across train tracks, and fixes a car in a garage (placing him firmly in a man’s role, where he handles machinery and becomes associated with vehicles and movement), whilst Amanda, shown initially from behind, in a shot that emphasises her long, flowing hair, is being kissed and slowly undressed by a boy in her bedroom (this places her as a passive object of sexual desire). The sequence keeps returning to shots of Watts’ body (we see her legs, her hands, her arms, and shots of her drumming from above), before cutting back to either Keith or Amanda. This parallel editing thereby keeps Watts’ identity, and her gender, ‘suspended’ between the more clearly marked introductions of Keith and Amanda; the film creates a space for her that resides in-between these two gendered poles.
This opening scene of course hinges on the revelation that tomboy Watts is indeed a girl (as we catch better views of her face, her softer features become undeniable). And she is consequently shown from above to drum on a kit that features a red painted heart on one of the drums, which, rather transparently, marks this instrument not as one of beat or (masculine) aggression, but as one ‘of the beating heart’, of feeling, emotion and love. Still, the revelation that Watts is biologically a girl counters (assumed) audience expectations, because the actions (of frenzied movement, drumming and kicking) are not normally attributed to the representation of girls on screen; her being girl is ‘surprising’ and unexpected, if not ‘unnatural’. By setting up this surprise effect, enabled through the close-ups that delay an immediate full reveal, however, the film appears to acknowledge such expectations and explicitly celebrates their reversal. It not only creates a space for Watts’ in-between gender identity, but it makes the sequence revolve around her non-conforming identity; it positions this tomboy at both the start and ‘at the heart’ of the film’s action.

The in-between gendered identity of Watts, however, does not remain suspended in her own space for long; the very next scene that (re)introduces her properly, immediately addresses questions over her sexuality, and emphasises the divide between her outer appearance and her inner female body/biology. The scene presents Watts and Keith arriving together at their high school. Watts’ tiny and worn car, driving recklessly and at great speed, approaches the camera and swirls into a parking space of the school. A closer shot reveals Watts as the driver, and Keith as the passenger, which reverses a common, traditional role division in teen film. The camera cuts to the driver’s door opening, and shows a black, flat pointed and laced shoe with studs, step out. The shot then tracks up Watts’ body (it is similar to the post-makeover ‘reveal’ shots in *Pretty in Pink* and *She’s Out of Control*, and also recalls the fragmented opening shots of Andie’s body in *Pretty in Pink*; by which a girl
character is identified through her ‘dressed’ body); it reveals her white sport socks, bare calves, and knee-length, cropped jeans, with drumsticks protruding from the pocket (these are a phallic symbol, of course, especially here, where they are posited at the level of the ‘lacking’ genitalia), a hand dressed in a finger-less, ruffled red leather glove, a white untailored t-shirt with army tags hanging from the neck, and a black leather jacket. Watts’ clothes are marked as both punk (through the studs and leather), and as masculine. This shot thus conflates masculine dress on a girl with counter-culture rebellion; and by positioning her at these boundaries the scene further justifies her appearance; her rebellious character is the reason for her ‘unnatural’ gender performance.

As soon as the camera reaches Watts’ face, she takes off her sunglasses, exposing her feminine eyes to the camera, and revealing her short blonde fringe that sticks out from underneath a black cap. In the ensuing dialogue, a seemingly proud Watts, admiring her own parking skills, asks Keith to imagine what she could only do (as in, be capable of) if she’d get her driving license back. When he asks her whether she has any books on her for school, she replies she forgot them and points out that she never studies. The essence of Watts’ androgynous characteristics in these introductions appear to stem from a duality then, created by both the codes of dress and the behaviour she ‘performs’ (which the viewer would be inclined to place in the realm of the masculine; the waistcoat, army tags, drumming, reckless driving, the supposed criminal activity that caused her license to be revoked, her refusal to study and carry her books), in combination with the features of her body, or more specifically those of her face, which, always exposed last, reveal her true ‘nature’ as feminine.

This juxtaposition between Watts’ outwardly gendered ‘performance’ through dress, and her innately sexed, physical body, is reiterated by the subsequent scene inside the school, which also immediately addresses the question of her sexuality. As Keith and Watts chat and walk through the school (including a mention of how their cross-gendered hobbies, she drums, he paints, make them such good friends), their banter is disturbed by bully Duncan (Elias Koteas), who obstructs their route by lifting up his leg and blocking the way. “How long have you been a lesbian?” he asks Watts. When she replies, “Excuse me?” he explains: “Well, you have a little too much up front to be a guy, so you must be a lesbian!” Watts responds with “I beg your pardon?”, before Duncan (slightly off screen) appears to grab the

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197 This also brings forth the idea that the mind/face and the body can somehow be disconnected in these films; a common trope in teen films - in Say Anything Diane is described as “a brain trapped in the body of a game show hostess” – but this would invite a more ‘existential’ discussion, about identity on screen, than I wish to bring in here; I want to focus on where the performance of gender is split between the body and the performance (or the inner and outer body), rather than the split between the mind and body.
sides of her jacket and open them up, exposing her breasts in the t-shirt underneath, and continues: “You know, a little too much ‘breastage’ up here!”, whilst gesticulating with his head and eyes at Watts. Keith quickly seizes Duncan in Watts’ defence, and the two enter a physical altercation, before a school teacher interferes and the fight comes to a close.

Without Watts actually answering any questions over her sexuality, the film immediately addresses the issue of her ‘queer identity’. The scene proposes the assumption of her homosexuality is ridiculous, by placing it in the words of the school’s ignorant and insulting/assaulting bully, and thereby invites the audience to disassociate themselves from such thoughts. At the same time, however, the scene reinforces this line of thought, by explicitly pointing the viewer’s attention towards the disconnect between Watts’ appearance and her physical nature, her body. Duncan has to open Watts’ jacket (her code of dress) to expose her hidden, natural breasts underneath, against her will, and explicitly words that because she is a girl dressed as a boy, she therefore must be a lesbian (reiterating the assumption that heterosexual girl bodies ‘perform’ their gender traditionally, by dressing ‘as girls’). The act of opening the jacket here is presented as a brutal one; it is an act that ventures on the sexually obtrusive, since it is uninvited, and holds the object (Watts) firmly and literally in its grip, whilst exposing her directly to an unwarranted male gaze that sizes up her breasts. The act makes Watts a victim to a game that she, as a tomboy dressing in male clothing, has ‘decided’ not to play. In spite of Watts’ assumed rebellious nature and gender-bending performance, however, she is not presented as strong or active enough to fight of her tormentor; it is still Keith who has to jump to intervene and defend her, by seizing the bully and challenging him to a fight. The scene thus oddly presents homosexual stereotypes, based on cross-gendered appearances, as misjudgements at the narrative level, but meanwhile visibly confirms stereotypes related to a ‘biological’ nature, through the very action in the same scene. (Yet in doing so, it must be noted, it brings forth questions about the relation between the performance of gender and sexual desire as well).

Watts’ biological, innate, heterosexual and feminine nature continues to perforate her outward tomboy performance throughout the film, much like the breasts that prodded through her t-shirt. In a scene where she helps Keith prepare for his date with Amanda, and tells him to “pretend I’m a girl... I mean, pretend I’m her”, in order to practice his kissing, close-ups

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198 This plays with Judith Butler’s notion of the *heterosexual matrix* (which she presents at length in her book *Gender Trouble*) as well, in which, simply put, Butler argues that heterosexuality is constructed to remain stable and coherent, it is ‘normalized’ in our society, through a strict ‘heterosexual matrix’ by which men and women are dichotomized in a gendered appearance that ‘matches’ their sexual desire/sexed body. In other words, any shift in outer appearance (if woman looks like a man, for instance) ‘must’ indicate a shift in inner desire as well (a woman who looks a man ‘must’ like women), in order for heterosexuality to remain secure.
show that their bodies’ physical reactions soon cannot be contained by their ‘performance’ during their embrace; her legs tighten around his body, their kiss deepens, his hands curl intensely into her jeans, and, after she pushes him off abruptly, her voice quivers, and he accuses her of “blushing”. Throughout the film, close-ups linger on her (often delayed) expressions that, although explicitly not directed at other characters in the film, communicate her ‘true’ emotional state to the viewers. Her ‘natural’ female passivity and heterosexual desires become most visible when she walks away from Keith in the final scene, having driven him around on his date, dressed as a male limousine driver, and assumed he has fallen indefinitely for Amanda, and tears stream down her face faster than she can wipe them away.

The film thereby insists that Watts’ female, bodily (re)actions break through her outward, tough tomboy appearance, and that these communicate, or give away, her ‘true feelings’ (both heterosexual, and conservative) to the viewer, as well as eventually to Keith. Both Watts and Keith’s characters are ultimately confirmed then as, underneath it all, conforming to traditional gendered stereotyping; Keith demonstrates his masculine, physical strength by beating both bullies in the film (he comes to blows with Amanda’s boyfriend in one of the final scenes, to defend her honour as well) and ‘getting the girl’ twice, whilst Watts admits in
the final scene that she secretly wanted the diamond earrings he had purchased for Amanda for herself all along (indicating she is interested in jewellery, and a more traditional female appearance after all). When Keith replies that she looks good wearing his future, they walk off together, in a final shot that visually locks their heterosexual union securely in an embraced, conjoined walk.

Figure 13 - The final shot of Some Kind of Wonderful visually locks Keith and Watts together, as they walk off as one, ‘safely confined’ in a heterosexual union.

The teen girl tomboy is presented as contradictory construction then; it enables the representation of the teenage girl to partake of certain ‘male’ activities and freedoms – which, in this film, include smoking, dressing, speaking and behaving more freely/rebelliously, instigating physical contact (both amorous and aggressive contact), driving, arguing, drumming, and gazing (see the locker room scene analysed in chapter three) - and the figure thereby breaks with the boundaries that typically confine the representation the teenage girl. Yet at the same time, the construction of the tomboy suggests this ‘performance of gender’ is a guise that cannot conceal or contain the teenage girl’s physical ‘true’ nature. The tomboy’s innate femininity must ultimately be accepted/acknowledged in order for the teen girl on film to complete her narrative trajectory, ‘become woman’, and attain the comforting security of a heterosexual union. This analysis is in line with Barbara Creed’s observation, whereby: “The liminal journey of the tomboy… is a narrative about the forging of the proper female identity... Passivity and propriety are essential preconditions for the transition from active,
virile femininity into passive, feminine conformity.” And this would confirm yet again that these 1980s teen films and representations are ultimately conservative, rather than progressive, when it comes to the way they portray women on film. But we must not forget that a film like *Some Kind of Wonderful* still opens up a space and possibility for the representation of active, virile, teen girl femininity, to begin with. And Watts never transforms out of her tomboy code of dress and behaviour (as is common to the rites-of-passage genre, if we look at the makeover sequences that transform Allison in *The Breakfast Club*, Katie in *She’s out of Control*, or Laney (Rachael Leigh Cook) in *She’s All That*). Watts may ‘become woman’ by embracing and expressing her heterosexuality more clearly – she also remains suspended in her tomboy appearance, and that is where we leave her, as she walks off with Keith in unison.

As opposed to the gender-boundary crossing tomboy figure that is often presented as having developed (or stagnated) their performance of gender prior to the film’s start, the temporary teen transvestite film incorporates the active process of ‘becoming other-gendered’ into the narrative. In the teen film, this transformation interweaves with a more general process of teen ‘becoming’. In contrast to the typical makeover sequence, the transgender transformation involves not only a physical/visual transformation, but also the adoption of a different behaviour, style and movement. This incorporates more of a choreography and controlled movement that we have seen may attribute agency to characters, in the previous section that looked at the performance of dance. These scenes explicitly foreground the complete ‘performance of gender’, and reveal it most actively as such; as a culturally devised, performed and appropriable construction.

These narratives engage most explicitly with Judith Butler’s observations about gender, which she defined as neither masculine nor feminine by nature (although the body’s sex may be male or female), but instead, as a culturally informed masculine or feminine performance, that is learned and constructed through a repetition of acts. In her essay ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, Butler explains:

> …gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the

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stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.\textsuperscript{200}

The temporary transvestite film highlights this ‘illusion’ by showing that any cross-gendered performance may provide as convincing ‘an illusion’ as its straight counterparts, as well. These narratives contest gender fixity then, both within the text and towards the viewer\textsuperscript{201}, because they invoke a discourse on the malleable distance between sex and gender that stems from actively revealing and foregrounding the masquerade. As Annette Kuhn has observed,

\ldots crossdressing may be understood as a mode of performance in which – through play on a disjunction between clothes and body – the socially constructed nature of sexual difference is foregrounded and even subject to comment; what appears natural, then, reveals itself as artifice.\textsuperscript{202}

This revelation of its own artifice opens up tiny cracks in the solidity of the represented image of gender on screen, and this, in combination with the teenage trajectory that relies on a liminal and suspended state of transformation and becoming, provokes new pockets of agency. Additionally, I would argue, the recognition of gender’s ‘artificial’ construction within the realm of the representation of adolescence again emphasises a sense of ‘play’ with regards to identity formation; it suggests that joy (and, literally, laughter) may be attained from the exposing of this construction.

In Just One of the Guys (a film directed by a woman, Lisa Gottlieb), popular high school student Terry Griffith (Joyce Hyser) wants to become a journalist. When her article fails to convince her journalism teacher that she deserves a summer internship at a local newspaper (he advises her to be realistic about her future, and “try modelling instead”), she claims his sexism is preventing her talents from being recognised. If she would have been a boy, she argues, she would have been recommended for the internship. With her parents away on a holiday (we do not see them throughout the film) she registers at another school as a boy, to resubmit her article for the internship there. Terry is established at the very beginning of


\textsuperscript{201} Chris Straayer, “Redressing the “Natural”: The Temporary Transvestite Film”, in Barry Keith Grant, ed. Film Genre Reader III (University of Texas Press, 2003), 402.

the film as traditionally/conservatively girl/woman. The first shot of the film shows her feet resting on her bed, as she is sleeping, in her pink room. The camera begins to move up and along the feminine contours of her resting body – she is dressed in delicate underwear - and ends on her closed eyes, insinuating an unseen viewer exploring her to-be-looked-at-ness. The exposition proceeds to establish her heterosexuality, her desirability, and her successful performance of femininity; she has attained a college attending boyfriend (with whom she has a sexual relationship), who picks her up to drive her to school, while other boys, and even teachers, find her physically attractive and continue to approach her (although she dismisses them because she is ‘taken’). She dresses in light pink and figure revealing clothing, takes care of her brother and is presented as both a good girlfriend and a bright student. The film suggests from the very beginning that Terry has her sexual rite-of-passage behind her; she is safely locked in a heterosexual union, and has ‘become’ woman, both sexually and within the home (she acts as a sensible sister/parent to her brother, and no longer requires parental supervision herself).

Figures 14 a-f - In Just One of the Guys, Terry (Joyce Hyser) is introduced as 'successfully' and traditionally girl - her sexual rite-of-passage is behind her, she has already attained a heterosexual union.
At the same time, within these same scenes, Terry’s femininity is not defined as passive either; the film’s exposition underlines her sprightly independence, her outspoken journalistic ambitions and unwavering focus on her work, her feminist stance (she overhears two of her male teachers speaking of her body and expresses disgust, she argues aggressively with her teacher for not treating her fairly in comparison to the two boys he proposed for the internship, she complains angrily over his suggestion that she “model” instead, and she tells off her boyfriend for not listening to her problems and not realising she isn’t in the mood for sex), and she reads the newspaper at the breakfast table, in accordance with a traditional depiction of fatherhood, as opposed to motherhood. The film appears to accentuate her active, strong outspoken character and connects this to her outward appearance; in spite of her girly, pretty to-be-looked-at-ness, she is a tomboy, a feisty heroine, within.

Figures 15a and b - In *Just One of the Guys*, Terry is not as passive as she seems; her looks are deceiving, she explicitly denounces the men in her life who judge or use her for them.

This sets the representation of Terry apart not only from the other girls in the film, but also from contemporary representations of teenage girls in 1980s teen films. The film’s premise resides on a teen girl representation that, on the one hand, establishes Terry as having already ‘become (heterosexual) woman’, with the appearance of her body readily catering a to-be-looked-at-ness, whilst on the other hand, her inner character, her acting, moving performing body, refuses to be reined in by passivity.

The scene in which Terry transforms into a boy, begins with her at home, standing in her lewd and sex-crazed younger brother Buddy (Billy Jayne)’s room, which is draped with pictures of naked women. She exclaims that “It’s as if women’s lib never existed!” and that if a guy had turned in her article, it would have been put forward for the internship. On
expressing this desire to be a ‘guy’, Terry exits the room. The scene then cuts to her brother hearing the doorbell. When he goes to answer it, he opens the door to find a boy outside; a slouching figure, eyes turned down, the face covered by dark sunglasses and a baseball cap, in an army jacket, who, with hands in pockets, asks in a low voice: “Is your sister home?” When her brother turns inside and yells “Terry!”, Terry looks up, smiles, and in doing so, gives her true identity away. After her brother expresses his amazement (“Now you’re wearing my clothes?” and “Who do you think you are? Tootsie? Yentl?”), he soon begins to instruct her on how to perfect her ‘performance’. Standing in front of a full-length mirror, Buddy tells Terry that her ‘stance’ is all wrong. Physically ‘adjusting’ her pose with his hands and legs (in an odd reconfiguration of the Pygmalion myth), he tells her to drop her hands and to stick her hip in. Pulling and pushing at her body, and kicking out her leg, he tells her to move her feet apart, because “guys take up space”. He teaches her how to walk in a manly way (shoulders hanging forward, and arms swaying to an inaudible rhythm, while bouncing up and down with the body), and then instructs her to “scratch her balls”, demonstrating various techniques in which to do so. When Terry asks him, “Maybe my balls don’t itch?” he replies: “All balls itch. It’s a fact.” When Terry then grabs a pair of white sports socks, and places it down the front of her trousers, Buddy compares her newly attained ‘package’ to his own, and then tells her: “Look, you got balls now – use em!”. In another elliptical edit, the camera cuts to a close-up of Terry in sunglasses, and tracks back to reveal her hair has been cut short and she is fully dressed and standing ‘like a boy’, outside her new school.
It is interesting that this temporary transvestite transformation scene excludes a visual confirmation (or any transparency) of the physical metamorphosis itself; in both instances (the first being when Terry has dressed up as a boy to appear outside the door, and the second, when she has cut her hair and bought her own male clothing to appear outside the school) the ‘makeover’ has taken place off screen, and, we are made to assume, was instigated...
independently by Terry, unsupervised. Again, the film thereby creates an open, unseen space, in-between cuts, in which the teenage girl is able to act and transform herself; it implies, even if it does not show, her ability to actively create and construct her own desired image. The sudden cuts into the ‘reveal’ shots work to surprise the audience at Terry’s adaptation skills, then, but they also marginalise this part of the transformation; her physical, visual transformation is a given, it’s ‘easy’, it’s not of interest. The key aspect that will inform Terry’s act, and drive her guise forward, is a coded performance that must be studied, learnt and adopted; how to stand, move, walk, behave and gesticulate like a boy. (This provides an interesting parallel to Terry’s own introduction, in which her ‘passive/girly’ appearance is countered by the way she acts, behaves and performs her femininity, as a feisty, tomboyish girl.) This part of her transformation cannot be independently produced, but must be supervised and ‘taught’ by an actual boy/man in a scene that plays to laughs, because this ‘boy’ does not really know how to act like a man yet. So again, this scene works on a range of contradictory premises; on the one hand, Terry instinctively ‘knows’ how to dress like a boy, but not how to perform as one (and the guising of her body is not enough), she must be taught how to perform like a man by a man, but he is not really a man yet, and she can mimic her brother’s movement and behaviour, but it isn’t until she assume a prosthetic/stand in phallus (in the shape of the ball of socks), that she has the balls to appear truly ‘male’. Within the narrative of the film, Terry’s subsequent performance is represented as entirely convincing to her surroundings. As a boy, she drives, drinks beer, admits (s)he is not a virgin to new friend Rick (Clayton Rohner), gives Rick advice on how to behave towards women and deal with bullies, and she is provided with point-of-view shots through handheld cameras, that simulate her mobile gaze across a male locker room, and inspects naked male bodies.

As opposed to the tomboy figure in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, in *Just One of the Guys*, it is not the teen girl’s body that gives her ‘true nature’ away, but rather, it is her inherently feminine and heterosexual behaviour (a performance that comes more ‘natural’ to her) that perforates her performance as boy. In a scene where we see Terry walk down the corridors at school, she overhears a girl worry about what to do with her earring now that its back has come off. Terry instantly replies you can fix it by placing a pencil eraser at the back instead. Walking off, the camera lingers on Terry’s face to reveal to the audience that she ‘realises’ she has just inadvertently broken the boundaries of her performance. In a wide shot that also shows the surprised girls behind her, Terry subsequently turns around to explain, while laughing in a low voice, that (s)he has “sisters”, thereby providing an apparent ‘valid’ excuse for demonstrating such female ingenuity. But the film seems to rely, and play with, Terry’s
two identities exposing one another. The film constantly reminds the audience of her double identity, by using mirrors and reflections to double her presence on screen. Terry’s ‘true’ heterosexual inclination is also constantly reaffirmed for the audience. Not only is she shown at length to re-dress as ‘female’ Terry at her home, or on dates with her boyfriend, but in scenes with her schoolmate Sandy (Sherilyn Fenn), who has developed a crush on ‘male’ Terry, she consistently dismisses this seemingly heterosexual, but secretly homosexual affection, to comic effect. More importantly (and typically for this subgenre), whilst dressed as a boy, Terry falls in love with her new friend Rick. Her seemingly homosexual, but secretly heterosexual desire for him cannot be contained by her performance as a boy. It is expressed through gestures and acts that happen ‘naturally’ and inadvertently. Again, unlike the scenes in Some Kind of Wonderful where the body itself reacts (by blushing, crying, arousing and so on), here it is Terry’s instinctive feminine ‘performance’ that expresses her true desire. In a scene in the boys’ bathroom at school, when they are alone to discuss the after effects of a consternation with a bully, Terry reaches across and gently tugs Rick’s hair behind his ear with a graceful, delicate touch, only to have Rick look up at her in surprise, and Terry stare at her own hand in acknowledgement of its independent movement. The body does not react, but rather, it acts, against her performance, against her will.

Figures 17a and b - In Just One of the Guys, Terry's female 'nature' is exposed through her instinctive, heterosexual 'actions'

In these ways, the film plays with the boundaries that separate an outwardly gendered appearance, from both the studied and an embodied ‘performance of gender’. The film suggests gendered behaviour is appropriable, it is a construction, it is a malleable guise, yet at
the same time, its inherent, set sexuality performs in and of itself. The parties within this heterosexual matrix\textsuperscript{203} may change on the surface, but underneath heteronormativity remains constant and all-pervasive.

But the film does provide more pockets for agency than its surface, and narrative, structures suggest. In the climactic scene of the film, Terry and Rick dance together, with their female dates, at the prom. The girls dance separately, as the ‘boys’ engage in a symmetrical, choreographed dance together, in which they mirror each other’s movements. Dressed in similar black tuxedoes, they imitate Chuck Berry’s foot slides, cross paths, point at one another and swing their arms wildly into the air in unison. It is a joyous scene that both confirms Terry’s transformation as a boy is complete (she literally acts, behaves and dances like Rick), but that at the same time communicates to the viewer that this friendly partnering confirms both their seemingly homosexual and their heterosexual compatibility. The scene reaches its climax when bully Greg (William Zabka) interferes and Terry attacks him. After the bully lifts Terry up and drops her, and her brother, into the sea, Rick comes to their rescue, and finishes the fight by beating the bully. When a confused Kevin (Terry’s boyfriend) arrives and approaches Terry on the beach, Rick asks Terry, “Who is this guy?” to which Kevin answers “I’m Terry’s boyfriend. Who are you?” Within the context of the film, where Terry’s ‘true’ identity has not yet been revealed, Rick learns in this moment that Terry is ‘gay’. Lifting his hand into the air, as though it were a proclamation of his innocence, he claims he’s “just a friend”. When Terry tells Kevin they have to break it off because she is in love with someone else, Rick presumes (s)he is talking about her homosexual love for him, and, again with a raise of hands, says: “Whoa, thanks, but no thanks!” (With this gesture, but the film, and the character, swiftly reject the possibility of homosexual relationships on screen).

When Terry grabs Rick by the arm and pulls him away from the beach, to talk to him privately, she takes him to a dark, secluded part of the beach, surrounded by plants (an explicitly ‘natural’ environment). She takes off her tie and collar to talk to him, discarding parts of her male clothing, but otherwise still explicitly mirrors his appearance. As Terry begins to explain that she should have told him sooner, and that he must be confused, Rick interrupts her, smiles and says: “Terry, I know. You’re gay.” He shrugs his shoulders as if to say that it doesn’t matter. When Terry replies she is not gay, Rick looks over his shoulder, gesturing back to Kevin, and answers: “Now I’m confused.” Terry replies sternly, but still using her masculine tone of voice, “I’m a girl. I’m a woman!” to which Rick replies: “Right,

\textsuperscript{203} See Judith Butler’s \textit{Gender Trouble} (New York: Routledge, 1990).
and I’m Cyndi Lauper!” Terry continues, revealing her actual, feminine tone of voice, “I’m a female, I swear”, holding her hands to her chest. When Rick shakes his head and begins to walk off, she grabs him by the arm, firmly pulls him back, and, after a brief beat, rips open her jacket and shirt with both hands, revealing her naked breasts to Rick. The camera first shows this ‘reveal’ from behind to emphasise Rick’s wide-eyed reaction and showing how Terry’s arms are holding the jacket wide open, and then cuts to a frontal, medium close-up, that shows Terry’s naked, breasts in full, at the centre of the frame. After Rick turns and walks off in disbelief, Terry runs after him, back towards the crowds, grabs him and kisses him in front of the other students, in a “paradoxical kiss”204 (it appears ‘homosexual’ to the surrounding students, but at this stage, it is both knowingly ‘heterosexual’ for the characters involved, and the viewers in the cinema).

Figures 18 a-d - Terry becomes a boy, and gay, before revealing her female body underneath and sharing a seemingly homosexual, paradoxical kiss with Rick.

204 The “paradoxical kiss” is introduced as a genre-trademark for the temporary transvestite film, by Chris Straayer (in “Redressing the “Natural”: The Temporary Transvestite Film”, 410-417), who claims it is always paradoxical because it either shows a truly ‘heterosexual’ kiss dressed to look like a ‘homosexual’ one, as is the case here, or a truly ‘homosexual’ kiss, dressed to look like a ‘heterosexual one’, such as is the case, for instance, in the kiss between Daphne and Osgood in Some Like It Hot.
The culmination of Terry’s temporary transvestism thus has her first successfully become man (demonstrated by her perfect mimicry of a male dance performance, and her instigating a fight with another man), before queering this performance once more (she becomes a ‘gay’ man), and then revealing her true ‘nature’ (her female/girl body) and her active pursuit of its desires, by pulling Rick into a paradoxical kiss. The scene shifts its gendered identities back and forth, and thereby denies it a stable rooting, revealing, I would argue, their artifice. The shot in which Terry reveals her own breasts, in particular, stands in stark contrast with the scene in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, where the bully opened up Watts’ jacket against her will, to expose the hidden breasts underneath. Because Terry is still dressed in male clothing as she bares her natural body, the shot actively reveals the artifice of the construction of gender; here, Terry is both male and female at the same time. This revelation of the artificial construction of gender cracks open the passivity attributed typically attributed to the representation of the teenage girl on screen. There is an intense force to Terry’s gesture here, a sense of active and deliberate revealing, and a demonstrable pride over the teen girl body’s features that counter much of the conservative currents the film also produces, and especially the partial eroticism invoked by the female nudity on screen. This shot oddly recalls the earlier transformation scene - where Terry had added a bundle of socks to successfully create the bodily appearance of male genitalia – because it does not expose her missing penis, but celebrates the propriety of breasts instead; the shot projects not what the teen girl body lacks, but rather, what it ‘has’. By actively using and ‘performing’ these aspects of the teen girl body, in conjunction or juxtaposition with the ‘performance’ of gender through dress and behaviour, this teen girl is attributed a sense of agency on screen; it is an agency that relies on a shifting tension between the natural body/sex, and the performed gender/masquerade, and that positions the subject in an unfixable and constant cycle of ‘becoming’.

The film ends on a decidedly conservative note; Terry dresses in pink again, cries tears over her unsuccessful attempt to win Rick, writes an article about her experiences and her true feelings and wins the internship. In the final scene, she is awaited by Rick, who tells her she “looks very good in a dress”, and that from now on, *he* will suggest where they go on their date and *he* gets to drive them around, re-establishing a more traditional role division within their prospective heterosexual union.
But Terry’s temporary transvestism has allowed for her original ambition to be fulfilled; her article was approved, her teacher apologised for misjudging her, and she has ended up with the internship that she wanted, at the newspaper. Her conventional and passive to-be-looked-at-ness may have been reined in by Rick, but her active and vocal feistiness, it is suggested, will remain with her in her work as a journalist.

Both the tomboy and temporary transvestite teen trajectories on screen ultimately reject a polarised reading; through these ‘drag’ performances, these representations emphasise the very construction and performance of gender itself. These roles allow the teen girl to take on levels of action normally attributed to the representation of masculinity, and an action derived from their ability to actively deconstruct and reconstruct their own appearance and behaviour, which destabilises the representation of femininity itself. These films may discipline and regulate the ‘queer’ (or possibly lesbian) body back towards a heterosexual norm, but they suggest the blurring of gender boundaries can be sustained by the teen girl
body; that *anything* can be written onto the body of the teenage girl. It is through the layering, shifting and adapting performance of femininity *transposed* onto a body so intricately connected to an emerging, unset sexuality, that the teen girl both ‘becomes’ and remains suspended ‘in-between’ at the same time. Barbara Creed writes:

> The narrative of the tomboy functions as a liminal journey of discovery in which feminine sexuality is put into crisis and finally recuperated into the dominant patriarchal order – although not without first offering the female spectator a series of contradictory messages which may well work against their overtly ideological purpose of guiding the young girl into taking up her proper destiny.  

I would argue that for the representation of teenage girls on screen, these contradictory messages have a way of seeping into the cracks of their representation and do more than ‘work against their overtly ideological purposes’; for teenage girls in permanent a state of becoming, they can, in fact, open up areas of resistance that their child, or adult, counterparts, fail to offer.

**The Mirror, the Loss of Virginity, the Abject and the Affective Image**

With this discussion of the representation of the teenage girls in relation to performance, there is an aspect of performance that has thus far remained overlooked. Alongside the performance of movement, in dance, and the performance of femininity or gender, in dress and sexual desire, there is a performance of emotion and of expression that we see in the close-ups of the teenage girl on film. These close-ups of emotion and expressions are affective and beguiling – and the scenes that present them at their most affective, somehow expose the very essence of the enigmas posed by the teenage girl on film as well; these scenes thrust contradictions to the surface and suspend them in the close-up of the teen girl’s face. This section will look at two ways in which the close-up of the teen girl presents this, and at what this aspect of ‘her performance’ might offer our understanding of the construction of her representation.

The first recurring trope (or scenario) in which the close-up of the teenage girl on film becomes affective because it embodies tensions and invites further reflection, occurs when the teenage girls is shown to interact, alone, with a mirror. The representation of teenage girls in

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teen film (and, I would argue, in popular cinema in general) almost always features a scene in which they look into a mirror; as we have seen in the scene in *Sixteen Candles*, for instance, when Sam (Molly Ringwald) tries on a range of poses in front of the mirror, in *Mermaids*, when Charlotte (Winona Ryder) makes herself over to look like her mother in a mirror, in *The Adventures of Babysitting*, when Chris (Elisabeth Shue) performs a musical number partly in front of a mirror, in *Teen Witch*, when Louise (Robyn Lively) admires her newly made-over appearance in a mirror, or in *The Legend of Billie Jean*, when Billie (Helen Slater) stares at her reflection in a broken mirror on the street, and in *Heathers*, when mean girl Heather (Shannon Doherty) ponders her own image in the mirror, sighing deeply. The mirror is the singular most recurring prop in these teen girl rite-of-passage narratives, and it not only functions to frame and contain the girl’s to-be-looked-at image (as I proposed in my second chapter), but it also provides an essential illustration of, and reflection on/of, their processes of ‘becoming’. Moreover, the scenes that depict the teen girl looking at herself in the mirror double the representation of the teenage girl within the frame, and therefore appear to engage directly with their own construction. Such scenes both expose and mark an important phase in the teen girl’s rite-of-passage, in her process of becoming woman, and at the same time, reveal this trajectory as non-progressive, as suspended.

The scenes that present the teen girl body in relation to the mirror provide pivotal moments where the audience is made witness to the teen girl’s identity formation, as well as the performance/construction of her femininity. Jacques Lacan famously identified the mirror stage, where the infant first sees him/herself reflected in a mirror, as an important moment in the development of identity and subjectivity for the human individual. Lacan argued that it is a scene of both recognition and of misrecognition, of seeing oneself and identifying this reflection as the self (where the mirror unifies), and seeing oneself as other (or as the other would) at the same time (where the mirror fragments and disconnects). This duality, of both constructing and deconstructing one’s identity of self, plays an important role in films that feature teenage girls; as I already mentioned, the scenes that show her looking in the mirror visually underscore this aspect of her trajectory by literally ‘doubling’ the teen girl in the

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206 Much more explicitly so for the representation of teenage girls than for the representation of teenage boys, I would argue; although the mirror is featured in films that feature teenage boys (including *Weird Science*, *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*), it usually merely illustrates their ‘cosmetic’ actions of shaving, of combing their hair, or applying aftershave, in preparation for school or for a date – the mirror, as a prop, in these scenes is not as explicitly connected to their ‘performance’ of masculinity, or identity formation, as it is in the films that prominently feature teenage girls. Nevertheless, this is an area that could warrant further investigation.

frame, when we see both the girl and her reflection in the frame at the same time. The complex dualities invoked by the representation of mirrors in relation to the figure of the woman have been analysed at length and in different ways; John Berger proposed that the woman looking in the mirror presents an innate doubling of the gaze, because she becomes both ‘the surveyed’ and ‘the surveyor’ at the same time; Jenijoy La Belle contended that the girl/woman looking in the mirror is always faced with a complex temporal layering (it invokes an added temporal dimension), because she sees herself in the future, in the present and in the past at the same time; and Mary Ann Doane suggested the depiction of a woman looking in the mirror presents a doubling, because it invokes both her actual and her virtual image in the frame (her imagined other in the mirror that exists only in a virtual, mentally constructed form). These dense layers of doubled distance, time and subjectivity complicate and suspend the imagery reflected by the mirror. Rather than have this stage ‘set’ identity formation, then - as Lacan suggested it does in life, in early childhood - in film (as well as the other arts), in relation to the depiction of female adolescence in particular, I would argue, the mirror scene defers it; the construction suspends and destabilizes the formation of identity on screen. Let us look at an example that illustrates this point further.

In *Smooth Talk*, we see blonde teenage girl Connie (Laura Dern) admire her reflection in the mirror, during her morning ritual in the bathroom. As she stands in front of the mirror, we see her reflection in the mirror full face (in a framed ‘close-up’ from the chest up), and the back of her shoulder and angled profile looking into the mirror, on the right side of the frame. With towels wrapped around both her head and chest, and soft pop music playing in the background that Connie herself had started by pressing on a tape recorder (she ‘set’ the scene), she stares at her face in the mirror and touches it lightly and carefully with a finger as if to reposition it ever so slightly. “Hi…” she says, in a soft voice, as she fiddles with the thin gold necklace around her neck and stretches it sideways. Her voice becomes sultrier, as she asks: “How you feeling tonight? ...Good?” She looks at her reflection in the mirror, and

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210 Since the face is the only part of the body that is not accessible to the subject’s direct own gaze, Mary Ann Doane refers to the mirror as presenting the subject with a “virtual image” of the face. The idea of a “virtual image” in reference to a mirror image is, of course, true by definition; we do not see direct rays of light bouncing of an object, but rather reflected, diverted rays of light that accompany an illusion of a second self, existing in the world of the mirror, in mirror-image, outside the body. Film itself already presents us with such a ‘virtual image’ as well; a two-dimensional image from another time, that provides the illusion of a ‘being’, an existence, an Other, living and breathing in an assumed three-dimensional world beyond the screen. So to present a mirror image on the screen creates a doubling of a doubled distance already; it pushing the object/subject even further away. For more reading, see Mary Ann Doane, “Veiling Over Desire”, in *Femmes Fatales: Film and the Masquerade, Theorizing the Female Spectator* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 47.
begins to visibly run her tongue past her teeth. She breaks this ‘image’ for a moment with a small giggle, in a seeming reaction to the explicit, over the top nature of this gesture. She starts again, “Hi…”, and looks her reflection up and down, “Looking for fun?” After a beat, her face frowns and she remarks: “Oh no…”, as if that definitely did not work, or turn out as she had wanted it to. “Hi…” she repeats, in a slightly stronger, more definite tone of voice. She licks her lips and makes a slight sucking sound, whilst raising an eyebrow, and repeats a phrase with different emphasis: “How are you? ... How are you? …” She moves her face to the left slightly and appears to admire her reflection ever so slightly, before softly repeating; “How are you?” After another brief smile, she speaks again: “Hi.”

Figures 20a-d - In Smooth Talk, Connie tries on different versions of a prospective performance of femininity, and evaluates its result herself.

This scene shows Connie as she prepares herself for a possible future seduction scenario, and doubles her performance of femininity, by reflecting it back at her, in a mirror. We see her trying on different voices and bits of dialogue, and holding up her face with her finger, subtly re-directing it into an exact, more ‘convincing’ angle, or appropriate pose. Connie is presented as able to practice, perfect and play with her performance, in order to ‘become’ more sexually seductive; she is actively ‘becoming’, in order to ‘become’ woman. It is a scene of learning, of creating and of investigating the performance of femininity, in which
Connie explores ‘the riddle posed by femininity’. It is a scene that lays bare the masquerade because it places both its agent and its performance into the same frame, and creates an explicit disjuncture between the two (this is especially evident in the instances where Connie ‘breaks’ her performance by giggling or frowning in reaction, exposing the illusive/elusive character of the act she is performing). At the same time, it as if Connie is trying to see in the mirror what a future man might see; she is seeing herself ‘through’ the eyes of a prospective male gaze, and thus, for this moment, without cross-dressing or a being a tomboy (or being otherwise marked by a diverging gendered role that would justify her taking on masculine traits), she embodies both a male and female subjectivity. On top of that, she is, as a teenage girl, presented as actively able to evaluate her own performance - the repetition in this scene and the conscious, yet intimate, constructions of a particular bodily image, suggest she is not only aware of the image she must uphold and perform in order to attract or seduce a man, but also that it is she herself who needs to be ‘seduced’, and convinced, by the right performance; she is therefore neither straight nor queer. (These last arguments strongly invoke an observation made by Dana Heller as well, who argues, in her book on makeover television and the formation of identity, that the genre presents “A circuit of desire … in response to the problem of feminine identity or selfhood. By becoming objects of desire, woman can be the paradoxical subjects of desire – if they desire to be desired”211; I would propose this scene presents Connie in a circuit of desire too, where she desires to be desired, and therefore both desires to perform and desires to receive a ‘desired/desireable’ femininity simultaneously.) And by seeing both her constructed self in the mirror, and her natural/performing self in the frame, we, the viewers, have access to both Connie’s ‘passive’, objectified image in the frame (her two-dimensional reflection aimed at ‘visual pleasure’) and her performing, and actively reflecting and creating self.

With all this doubling, which is amplified by the very fact that we are seeing a teenage girl in a rite-of-passage story about her becoming woman, Connie’s identity formation is thus suspended rather than resolved by this mirror scene (interestingly, we also never see her content enough with her performance to finish her practicing and leave the scene, the camera just cuts away, as Connie continues her performance). This is a scene, then, that resists a single defining analysis and that tugs at (or collapses even) the confining boundaries that normally uphold the representation of men and women on screen. With its curious blend

between passivity and activity\textsuperscript{212}, its interplay between ‘being’, ‘performing’ and ‘becoming’, and its continuing circuit of desire, this scene incorporates all of the complexity proposed by the mirror’s doubling (as proposed by Lacan, Berger, La Belle and Doane), and thus creates an image that is \textit{in itself} in permanent state of becoming.

But what I find particularly fascinating here is that this scene becomes so ‘affective’ (it expresses, performs and communicates the teenage girl’s identity and emotional expression powerfully, and, in its almost ‘disconnect’ from the rest of the film, becomes especially memorable), because it plays with these boundaries; it shows the teenage girl’s performance, of femininity, of emotion and expression, straddling back and forth across what are assumed to be, strictly dichotomous lines. In doing so, the scene renders these lines unfixed and fluid, and this allows the affective display to become more freely and actively vocalised, in its ‘suspended’ state. (This was an instinctive observation at first, but eventually became my final argument for this thesis; I will first extrapolate this observation further over the course of the next few paragraphs, and will then come back to this point theoretically, at the conclusion of this chapter).

In this scene from \textit{Smooth Talk}, the mirror presents a visual element, motif or trope, that invites a construction that explicitly suspends the ‘termination’, or fixation, of the teenage girl’s identity on screen; here the teenage girl remains suspended between the dichotomous \textit{male} and \textit{female} constructions of identity on screen, between activity and passivity, between being object to and subject of the gaze. This is, however, not the only recurring instance of transgressing boundaries (through performance, through movement) in teen film. In scenes that show the teenage girl undergo the loss of her virginity (an event that connotes the teenage rite-of-passage \textit{par excellence}), the boundary between \textit{childhood} and \textit{womanhood} is transgressed within its narrative trajectory. The loss of virginity has often been deemed to mark the conclusion of the teen girl’s rite-of-passage\textsuperscript{213}; it is the instance where the girl’s

\textsuperscript{212}Mary Ann Doane has suggested this is inherent to the masquerade more generally, in “The Masquerade Reconsidered” in \textit{Femmes Fatales} (1991) on p. 48, but I would argue it is, in this instance, explicitly amplified by the girl’s state of becoming.

\textsuperscript{213}Timothy Shary has argued that the loss of virginity was “the most common plot of youth sex films throughout the early 1980s” (\textit{Generation Multiplex}, 2002, p. 226), but I would propose this was true mostly for films that featured teen boy leads, in titles that ranged from \textit{Goin’ All the Way!}, to \textit{The Last American Virgin}, to \textit{Losing It}, to \textit{Risky Business}, to \textit{Secret Admirer}, or the Geek’s (Anthony Michael Hall) plotline in \textit{Sixteen Candles}. Films that featured the teen girl’s loss of virginity were decidedly less common in the 1980s – the teen girl’s ‘completion of her rite-of-passage’ was instead usually marked by a concluding kiss (in the John Hughes films, such as \textit{Some Kind of Wonderful}, \textit{Sixteen Candles}, \textit{Pretty in Pink} and \textit{The Breakfast Club}, it is the heterosexual kiss that confirms the teen girl’s successful entry into the patriarchal realm). Nevertheless, the decade did present a few films that dealt explicitly with the teen girl’s loss of virginity; such as \textit{Foxes}, \textit{Little Darlings}, \textit{Fast Times at Ridgemont High}, \textit{Smooth Talk}, \textit{Shag} and \textit{Mermaids}. Other films show the teen girl having sex, in \textit{Say Anything},
adolescence, which ‘symbolically’ commenced with the first menstruation, ‘symbolically’ concludes. The loss of virginity signals the teen girl’s entry into a sexualised, fully formed ‘adult’ femininity that no longer carries the mere ‘potential’ for heteronormativity or submission into patriarchy, but that is now properly contained in a conquered body. Amanda Maxfield writes, in her article ‘The Quest for External Validation in Female Coming-of-Age Films’, that “the loss of virginity and subsequent heterosexual activity does not merely signal biological entry into adulthood; it constitutes a male acceptance of the female into her place in patriarchal society – namely as sex object and eventually as child bearer.” Maxfield thereby establishes the loss of virginity on film as the ultimate indicator for the girl/woman’s entry into adult womanhood, and, by extension, patriarchy and prospective motherhood. It is precisely for this reason, I would argue, that the label of virginity - or the stereotype ‘virgin’ - carries so much weight in teen films, and, possibly, in cinema at large. The virgin (and, possibly even, the figure of the teen girl more generally) has not crossed this boundary yet, and she therefore must be clearly ‘marked’ as such to avoid any threat that this might pose. (Tamar Jeffers McDonald has concludes, similarly, that “making ‘visible the invisible’ is what the virgin stereotype is there to do; the stereotyped female virgin figure (subject to varying codes in film depending on genre, and perhaps on star) is constructed to (re)present this boundary, to offer reassurance about the possibility of being able to tell who has had sex and who has not.”)

The scenes in 1980s teen film that present the teen girl’s loss of virginity, we might assume then, ought to clearly mark and make visible the teen girl’s entry into adult femininity, to resolve her trajectory of ‘becoming’ woman and to (re)establish her within the realm of patriarchy. But, on the contrary, the scenes in 1980s teen films that present the teen girl’s loss of virginity again suspend and defer categorisation; they expose the blurring and unfixing of boundaries, thrust contradictions to the surface, and linger on affective close-up of the teen girl’s face that suggest this ‘performative act’ can only be translated into emotional expressions that provoke and reveal the beguiling and bedevilling tensions that infuse the representations of teenage girls. Let us look briefly at three few examples of how 1980s teen films represented the narrative trajectories of the teen girl around this event.

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214 Amanda L. Maxfield, “The Quest for External Validation in Female Coming-of-Age Films”, in Alexandra Heidi Karriker, ed. Film Studies, Women in Contemporary World Cinema (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2002), 146

In *Fast Times*, Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh) is urged to lose her virginity by her friend Linda (Phoebe Cates). Her first sexual experience takes place at “The Point” (a half inside, half outside dugout next to a football field) with an older boy she has picked up in the pizza parlour where she works, who believes that she is 19 (her performance of an ‘older femininity’ is, remarkably, what allows her to transgress the boundary in the first place). The visual depiction of the loss of virginity on screen is intensely connected to Stacy’s subjective experience of the event. The camera lingers on her face, as though we are expected to ‘see’ her transgression into adult womanhood made visible there; yet the tight, extended close-ups of Stacy’s face reveal her eyes squint in pain and discomfort instead. Stacy’s sexual initiation leads not to successful heteronormative romance in this film, but back to female social bonding with her friend Linda, to whom she explains it really hurt and was over so quickly. Subsequent experimentation eventually leads her to an abortion (an act that suggests Stacy is ‘removing’ the evidence of the sexual act having taken place, she removes her fertility and potential for motherhood), and to a post-script that reads she is now happy in a romantic, but non-sexual relationship.

**Figures 21a- d** - In *Fast Times*, Stacy’s (Jennifer Jason Leigh) loss of virginity and subsequent sexual acts closely focus on her subjective experience of such events; resulting in her active rejection of sexual, adult femininity.
In *Little Darlings*, two 15 year-old girls from opposite sides of the tracks, rich girl Ferris Whitney (Tatum O’Neal) and working class tomboy Angel Bright (Kristy McNichol) enter into a bet at summer camp over who can lose their virginity first. As Ferris unsuccessfully, but romantically, attempts to seduce an older camp counsellor (Armand Assante), Angel enters into a burgeoning relationship with teenage boy Randy (Matt Dillon). At night, the two go out to a boat house, and, after a first failed attempt that leaves Angel in tears, on their second visit, eventually have sex. The film presents the conversation that leads them up to the event, and the talk that results from it, as the two get dressed, but the film does not show the act itself. In the construction of the scene, the film presents mirroring close-ups of Angel’s expressive, emoting face both before and after the event, that, as opposed to clearly distinguishing her ‘successful’ crossing over into adult femininity, instead relay her subjective experience in a single, suspended, emotional state.

Figures 22a-d - In *Little Darlings*, the loss of Angel’s virginity is preceded and followed by close-ups (and dialogues) that relay and suspend her emotional experience of the event, rather than establish her successful entry into adult femininity.
The fact that Angel has not successfully ‘transgressed’ into sexual, adult womanhood, is made explicit in the dialogue that follows the loss of her virginity, in which Angel expresses her heightened, intensely affective emotional state: “It wasn’t what I thought it would be. God, it was so personal, like you could see right through me....” When Randy asks her what is wrong, and that if she hadn’t wanted to do it, she should have said so, because there are plenty of other women around, Angel replies in a close-up (lingering on the tears in her eyes): “I’m not a woman, Randy”, and eventually remarks: “What am I supposed to do now? I don’t know anything... God, I feel so lonesome.” Rather than have the sexual act mark a development in her trajectory, in her rite-of-passage, then, the scene expressly states Angel still is “not a woman” and suspends her emotional reaction to/expression of the event, making this larger, and more affective, than the act itself. Even though Randy offers to keep up his relation with her, Angel dismisses him and, without revealing she has ever had sex (she denies it has ever taken place), forfeits the bet to Ferris (who hasn’t have sex but leads the other girls to believe she has). The conclusion of the film shows us that she has resorted back to female social bonding instead, as she reconciles with her mother, and embraces her new “best friend”, Ferris, in a freeze-frame close-up that lingers, suspended, underneath the closing titles.

In the concluding scenes of Smooth Talk, my last example, we see Connie (Laura Dern) return home after the loss of her virginity. She was ‘smooth-talked’ (at first seduced and then threatened) into her own rape, by Arnold Friend (Treat Williams), and had left the house, seated next to him, in his car. The film never shows the actual rape/intercourse, but in two near-silent shots (in which we hear only a few diegetic, nature sounds), reveals the empty car in a field, as the camera pans across the field and surrounding nature. The pan implies a mysterious point-of-view shot, invoking Connie’s imagined, subjective, emotional escape into her surroundings, during the rape. In a significant break with the short story by Joyce Carol Oates, on which the film is based (the story ends with Connie’s rape and suggested murder in a field), we next see Connie as she is driven back home by Arnold. As she gets out of the car, he tells her what happened: “I offered you a ride, and you took it”. After responding mutedly that she never wants to see him there again, we see Connie slowly walk towards her house, alone and isolated, on a path struck by a setting sun. The scene stays directly with her emotional state, through close-ups of her face, as she walks home; her expressions appear numb and downtrodden, and bewildered, as she makes gestures with her shoulders and hands that suggest she is shaking off what has happened to her body.
As Connie arrives back at the house, she is reunited with her family, who had left for a neighbour’s party earlier that day. She reconciles with her mother outside, who apologises for hitting her earlier that day, and embraces her. This scene suggests that the problems between them that were central to the rest of the film, have now been resolved, and that Connie indeed has entered crossed a boundary entering a landscape where she can unite with, and be accepted by, adult femininity. But the camera then cuts to a shot that shows Connie sitting alone in her bedroom, in a solemn and reflective state. When her sister approaches her, Connie reveals a man came to the house today, and asked if she wanted to go on a ride, and that she went. As her sister moves in closer, she asks her, befuddled, “Connie?”, to which Connie replies that maybe it never really happened at all, because she doesn’t know anything anymore, and then states it didn’t happen. She quietly asks her sister to dance, and the two get up and dance together. It is a powerful and complex ending that suggests Connie’s loss of virginity has lead to her renewed embracing of female solidarity and social bonding; in renouncing it has ever taken place, Connie can resort back into ‘childish’, non-sexual dancing with her sister.

These scenes that feature the loss of virginity for teenage girls strongly reject the sense that the act has allowed them to cross a boundary and complete their rite-of-passage, or marked their successful entry into a submissive femininity or patriarchy. It could be argued...
that these films ‘reduce’ the representation of the loss of virginity to conservative, moral warnings over ‘what happens if the teenage girl has sex too early, or out of wedlock’, but I feel there is more to it than that. These scenes hinge on the teen girl’s suspended emotional state; they affectively, and actively, communicate what the loss of virginity was like for her, what it felt like, for a girl. They somehow suggest that the masquerade invoked by this performative act (the loss of virginity) can be rejected and thrown away, to reveal an actively emoting, suspended femininity underneath that is rewarded by the comfort provided by social bonds between women, both in friendships and in family. Crossing the boundary between childhood virginity into adult, sexual femininity does not transform the representation of the teenage girl. Rather, it is in these instances, in these close-ups, that we find the teenage girl borne back into the past, free to become a ‘pre-/non-sexual’ daughter, sister, or friend once more.

One of my main points, from the beginning of this thesis, has been to explore the tensions that the representations of teenage girls in 1980s teen film offer us, and what these might contribute to feminist film theory. I have discovered throughout that these representations present an innate embodiment of contradictory forces on screen; the resistance of the teenage girl lies in her construction’s ability to remain suspended ‘in-between’, rather than fall into any one confining, and defining, category. This leads me to Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject. Kristeva was interested in the formation of subjectivity and psychosexual development. In her book Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1984), she states that abjection is a necessary stage in psychosexual development that occurs right before identity formation (the permanent ‘setting’ of identity) in Lacan’s mirror stage. Abjection entails the subject’s horror when faced with the threat of the breakdown of a presumed unity; a breakdown of the boundaries between self and (m)other, between subject and object, between inner and outer, between life and death, that is thrust to the surface when we see a corpse, for instance, or an oozing wound. The abject, then, is that which reminds the subject of a boundary, but which, at the same time, obscures this boundary and makes it more ambiguous. Kristeva writes: “[the abject is that what] disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”

In her book The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (1993), Barbara Creed uses Kristeva’s notion of the abject to analyse the powerful objects of horror in films such as Alien (1979). She describes both the gender-boundary crossing Alien itself,
which contains both phallic appendages and feminine features, and the fact that the Alien ‘impregnates’ men, as characteristics of the film’s abjection of women. In her article on ‘Lesbian Bodies’, Creed argues that Kristeva herself proposed that woman presents the ultimate abject body:

Julia Kristeva distinguishes between two kinds of bodies: the symbolic and the imaginary or abject body. In *Powers of Horror*, she argues that the female body is quintessentially the abject body because of its procreative functions. Unlike the male body, the proper female body is penetrable, changes shape, swells, gives birth, contracts, lactates, bleeds. Woman’s body reminds man of his ‘debt to nature’ and as such threatens to collapse the boundary between human and animal, civilized and uncivilized.\(^{217}\)

But I would argue that, even more so than the adult woman, it is the malleable adolescent girl who, by offering the mere potential, the mere possibility of all these aspects of female identity, resides most powerfully on boundaries. Her body can still be redeemed from woman’s ‘abjection’ (because her becoming of this heterosexual role, her setting in this order, remains to be determined); even if her body is already showing the signs of its potential onset, and carries all its bodily signifiers, it has not yet been marked as such. Because of this ‘potential’, the teenage girl offers an abjection that is even more explicit than that of her adult counterparts.

In the article ‘Baby Bitches From Hell: Monstrous Little Women in Film’\(^{218}\), Barbara Creed analyses the representation of female children who become hysterical and horrific, in horror films like *The Exorcist* and *Carrie*. In her analysis of these films, Creed highlights the necessity for a visual confirmation of ‘boundary’ crossing for these abject girl characters; with the advent of their first period, the first sign of blood, the girls move from innocent to guilty, from naïve to corrupt and manipulative, from virginal, to monstrously and sadistically sexual. But the representation of teenage girls offers a composite between male and female identities on screen, between child and woman identities, that continuously (both visually and narratively) straddles boundaries, and that therefore befuddles, bewilders and beguiles even

more, precisely because there is no one singular confirmation of boundary crossing; she exposes the boundaries itself as unmarkable, as unfixable – and in doing so, she threatens identity, system and order, and all that is set, quite because she herself isn’t. The representation of the teenage girl offers us an inherently transgressive, transitory, and liminal figure on film.

The reason why I am extrapolating this point to such an extent is because I want to illustrate not only that Mulvey’s active/passive paradigm does not apply to the representation of teenage girls on film, as it does for the representation of adult women, but because it underscores that the teen girl’s being in-between, in flux, creates a suspended identity of ‘becoming’ on screen that has an unconfined, active power to affect the viewer. This brings me to the final point I wish to make in this thesis, which, as I mentioned briefly before, involves the teenage girl’s suspended state of ‘becoming’ and the powers of affect that might result from the tensions she presents.

When it comes to the representation of the teenage girl, there is an aspect to her agency on screen, to her potential for resistance that needs to be addressed in this thesis. The close-up of the emoting teen girl face presents a ‘performative image’ that lingers long in our memory: Watts’ tears as she walks away from Keith in Some Kind of Wonderful, Allison’s smile as she discovers her makeover is met with masculine approval at the end of The Breakfast Club, Billie Jean’s determination that “Fair is fair!” in The Legend of Billie Jean, Sam’s shocked, screaming reaction when she finds out her underwear has been auctioned off, in Sixteen Candles, or Connie’s expression as she walks home after her rape in Smooth Talk. The teenage girl, in her face (and through her performing body as well), presents a uniquely effective ‘affective display’ on film, that forms a critical facet of our experience. In her article ‘The Art Film, Affect and the Female Viewer; the Piano Revisited’, Barbara Klinger recalls what she remembers most strongly about Jane Campion’s film The Piano; its affective impact. As she returns to the film, she identifies certain scenes where the visual and narrative ‘expressiveness’ of Ada’s character and trajectory reached a heightened intensity that lingers long in the viewer’s mind. The final shot of the film, a dream image in which Ada’s body hangs suspended above her sunken piano on the bottom of the sea, Klinger argues, presents what she calls an arresting image. The arresting image, Klinger explains, is common to the art house genre in particular, but can be found in an array of other media forms, including commercial films.\(^{219}\) The arresting image, she suggests:

...occurs when a film stops to contemplate an exquisitely composed, significantly evocative and/or uncanny image. The forward motion of the narrative slows down or temporarily halts, allowing this spectacle to capture fully our attention… Its ability to stoke emotions in the audience that have been building through the film is part of its peculiar allure… Just as it forestalls easy interpretation, its emotional effects are both intricate and obscure...  

This definition of the *arresting image*, with its emphasis on the slowing down of the narrative, on its spectacle that intensely captures our attention, and its forestalling of easy interpretation, for me immediately connected to the scenes that present the teenage girl in a suspended state of ‘becoming’, such as the mirror scene in *Smooth Talk* or the close-ups of the face after the loss of virginity, that suspend a clear development in the teen girl’s trajectory and offer contradictory lines of discourse.

In her article, Klinger explores how affective, *arresting* images of women on film are riddled with “contradictory impulses”\(^221\); where in part they celebrate a victorious femininity and the end of the struggle for identity, and, on the other hand, they continue to express the battle of female will against the powers-that-be\(^222\). These inconsistencies should not be underestimated, Klinger argues:

Rather than reject these films for their contradictions, we might consider their ‘messy’ ideologies as lying at the core of their affective impact. By blurring clean ideological lines, they lure the viewer into an epistemological quest, a protracted attempt to clarify and resolve their contradictions.\(^223\)

These arresting images achieve affecting power *because* they thrust the contradictions to the surface and refuse to resolve them. In sustaining this tension, the images animate the clashes and anomalies that bedevil female subjectivity … The representation of female subjectivity, shaped by collisions between past and present, between oppressed and liberated versions of the self, is incongruous, uncomfortable and moving.\(^224\)

\(^{220}\) Ibid., 24.
\(^{221}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{222}\) Ibid., 36.
\(^{223}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{224}\) Ibid., 36.
To me, this is a key observation that theoretically underpins my own instincts about what the tensions, the contradictions, in the representation the teenage girl can offer feminist film theory; the fact that arresting images achieve their affective power because they thrust contradictions to the surface and refuse to solve them, is what makes them quite so moving. If the teenage girl presents us with the purest example of ‘becoming’ on film, and if this ‘becoming’ suspends an abjection state where transgression is continuous, the close-up of the teen-girl face and her suspended, enlarged and emphasised ‘display of affection’ allow us to attribute a new kind of power, and agency, to the female form on film. It is precisely because the girl’s representation is perennially elusive and contradictory, that the teen girl’s display of affection, the arresting image she presents, becomes most affective.

The teenage girl’s suspended ‘becoming’ is her identity, her femininity. Hers is an image that cannot be fully contained, because it is always in movement, in transgression, in state of ‘becoming’, always resisting categorization. I think it is here that feminist film theory could (re-)claim her; within an extra-temporal and extemporaneous realm of possibility, where play and deviancy is still possible, or tolerable even, and at a stage where “the gender role already carved out for her by a patriarchal culture”\(^{225}\) can, possibly, still be evaded. Forever elusive, forever in transition, forever thrusting contradictions to the fore, the representation of the teenage girl provides a particular kind of agency on screen; a resistance amongst the representation of femininity that cracks (or stretches) open all that is supposedly set. The image of the teenage girl on film can no longer remain overlooked; it is from her perspective and with her in mind that we might be able to finally circumnavigate the passivity that is still so commonly attributed to the feminine form on film.

\(^{225}\) Barbara Creed. "Baby Bitches From Hell: Monstrous Little Women in Film", 20.
CONCLUSION

“Those girls created themselves.”

The 1980s provided an interesting landscape for the representation of gender in American popular cinema. Amongst the representation of adult men and women on screen, male wish fulfilment was generally privileged and traditional power divisions were upheld. Even though some films increasingly presented women taking to the work floor and gaining more independent strengths, the main undercurrents in popular culture and discourse enunciated a backlash against the new liberties acquired during the Second Wave of feminism, as has been argued by Susan Faludi in her book *Backlash*, and in other analyses of ideology in the cinema of the time. The representations of teenage girls have often been overlooked in these analyses, and this is odd, because its numbers were considerable (both in the amount of representations and the commercial value her image provoked within the new teen entertainment markets), and this image was speaking loudly, and from all corners, to a new, post-Second Wave generation of children and teens.

Inspired by the essays in the collection *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice*, this thesis has taken a closer look at the representation of teenage girls in 1980s teen film, focusing predominantly on the teen romantic comedies and dramas that the decade produced. On the whole, its findings have illustrated that these images were, as Ann De Vaney proposed, highly conservative in nature. The three dominant settings of the high school, the home and the mall emphasise a sense of confinement and the lack of mobility for teenage girls within the frame, and uphold traditional gendered divisions in the allocation of props and activities. In these settings, the to-be-looked-at-ness of teenage girls is consistently accentuated, conforming to the classical Hollywood construction that privileges the male gaze and female,

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226 This is discussed in Yvonne Tasker’s *Working Girls* (1998); the feisty heroines Tasker analyses in the films of the 1990s, such as *Thelma and Louise* and *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Tasker poses, stemmed from powers attained amongst the representations of women in the 1980s.
228 From Wood (1987) to MacDonald (1995) – also see the introduction of this thesis.
passive objectification (as was proposed by Mulvey (1975)). Even when the teenage girl is not subjected to sexually desirous gazing, she is positioned under male surveillance, reassuring the audiences that any possible deviance, or liberties, will be quickly reined in. In these ways, the interests of the patriarch (the father, or the prospective husband) are sustained. Teenage girls are increasingly assigned their own gazes in these films, but these have little power over their subjects, because they are fleeting, veiled, fragmented, or comparative in nature, and ultimately redirected (at times even back at the teen girl’s own body). Within the setting of the mall, the teenage girls are shown not to have any consumer power of their own, and are often reduced to the state of commodities themselves. Through these structural recurrences, the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American teen films become imbued with strong neo-conservative values that emphasise materialism, consumerism, Christian norms and certain power divisions to ensure the continuation of a certain male ruling, and this supports the observation that the dominant discourse in these films played an important role in the backlash against feminism.

These currents are further endorsed by the narratives of these teen films that present the teenage girls in a limited array of stereotypical characterizations (delineated along highly conservative lines), and that strictly follow a set of linear trajectories. In these storylines, the teenage girl often shares a special relationship with her father, a troubled relationship with her absent or working mother, while her rite-of-passage into adult, sexually contained womanhood is often visualized through a makeover transformation (and secured by a prospective marriage). Nevertheless, from within these confines, the representation of the teenage girl does offer some potential for resistance. Some aspects of the teen girl gaze and her transformative powers invoke a sense of agency that belies the solidity of these images’ set constructions. Through specific elements of the performing teen girl body – as an agent in her own transformation/makeover, in dance and movement, in gendered constructions that blur the boundaries between male and female identities (in shape of the tomboy or a temporary cross-dresser), in embodied male gazes in front of the mirror and during scenes that transgress her loss of her virginity – contradictions are consistently thrust to the surface. These contradictions become visible not so much through singular examples, as though a collective of sequences that highlight, readjust and suspend specific instances in the representation of teenage girls. Within these instances, the image of the teen girl itself is exposed as an abject-like figure that is defined most by a perennial ‘in-betweenness’, and it is from this position, and in such moments, that she attains her unique affective powers.
Such suspended moments of contradiction carried potential pockets of resistance that, in my opinion, opened doors for the incredible proliferation of the more progressive media images of teenage girls that followed in the 1990s. These images emphasised the teen girl’s subversive and powerful potential, in titles as diverse as *Pump Up The Volume*, *Foxfire*, *Election*, *Hackers*, *Manny and Lo*, *Gas Food Lodging*, *Girls Town*, *Fly Away Home* and *Don’t Tell Mom the Babysitter’s Dead*. These films can often be placed within ‘strands of influence’ that run, most evidently, from the second wave of teen film in the 1980s, through the 1990s, to popular American teen films today. As Kimberly Roberts writes: “Veronica Sawyer’s teenage ‘power’ in *Heathers* (1989) is a direct precursor of the 1990s popular feminist groundswell known as *girl power*, a structure of belief and a set of consumer practices that centre on the individual teenage girl’s power to effect change in her universe.” A film such as *Heathers*, I would concur, has had a widespread effect on the depiction of teenage girls that came after. The film featured diary-writing expressed in a voiceover, and celebrated Veronica’s outspoken, embodied morals, her active sexuality and strong survival instincts. In doing so, the depiction of Veronica heralded a renewed emphasis on the teen girl’s subjective, intellectual reflection, in *My So-Called Life*, for instance, or the teen-girl rebellion against school cliques that drives *Mean Girls*, the clever teen girl outsider’s sleuthing and active sexuality in *Veronica Mars* (where the lead girl is aptly named Veronica), the cynical attitude of Olive (Emma Stone) in the recent *Easy A*, and even Katniss’ (Jennifer Lawrence) fighter and survivor spirit in *The Hunger Games*. In a similar ‘strand of influence’, the Valley girls that featured prominently in 1980s teen films such as *Valley Girl* and *Fast Times* gave birth to a generation of newly empowered teen girl blondes in *Clueless*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Jawbreaker*, *Bring It On*, *The Hills*, and *Legally Blonde*, to name but a few, whereas the makeover, witchcraft and dance/performing artist tropes that gained notoriety in 1980s teen film, have since translated into empowering retellings in *The Princess Diaries*, *Never Been Kissed*, *The House Bunny* and MTV’s *Plain Jane*, *The Craft*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and Willow’s (Alyson Hannigan) character in *Buffy*, as well as *Save The Last Dance*, *Hanna Montana*, *Center Stage*, *Step Up* and *Make it Happen*.

I do not wish to propose, however, that the representations of teenage girls since the late 1980s have consistently become infused with a rebellious, subversive and progressive discourse; the representations of teenage girls in the 1990s have, for instance, been criticised

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231 And also in more recent ‘progressive’ examples, such as *Ghost World*, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* films, *Aquamarine*, *Juno*, *Bandslam*, *Wild Child* and *Nancy Drew*.

for their neo-liberal nature and the anxieties over individualisation that they present\(^{233}\). Alongside this, more recent representations of teenage girls, in cross media-phenomena such as the *High School Musical* and *Twilight* series, films like *Bratz* and *A Cinderella Story*, or television series such as *90210* and *Gossip Girl*, have presented a backlash of their own, as they returned to a more traditional dichotomy, where they either present teenage girls as naive and unthreatening girl-children, whose only purpose is securing a heterosexual relationships, or as sexually manipulative, dangerous young ‘women’ whose powers must be dismantled at all costs. This demonstrates that the representation of teenage girls remains an area of discourse subject to swift and effortless (re)appropriation. As Gateward and Pomerance have observed:

> It is the girl who is the most profound site of patriarchal investment, her unconstrained freedom representing the most fearsome threat to male control. That her capabilities are unexplored and that her potentialities as an adult female are undeveloped are therefore values in themselves, to be appropriated and colonized at the expense of spirit and some considerable expense of capitol.\(^{234}\)

This observation reiterates the urgency for further analysis and study of this construction; the representation of teenage girls is easily appropriated and infected, and it is for this reason that feminist film theorists, film scholars and cultural analysts alike must keep her image closely in check.

There are many possible areas within the study of the representation of teenage girls, where additional research might contribute to more fruitful discussion and debate. Further studies could address the representations of more ‘deviant’ teen girls identities within the scope of this project, for instance, including the representation of pregnant teenage girls, teenage prostitutes, dangerous babysitters, or female juvenile delinquents in 1980s teen films (possible case-studies that have remained relatively side lined in this project). I would also like to continue to work on an argument that came to me towards the end of this project, which presents how key aspects of Carol Clover’s Final Girl (the surviving teenage girl popularised in 1970s and 1980s commercial American horror films, that could be identified by her tomboyish competence in practical matters, her sexually unavailable or virginal state,


and her relentless fighting spirit and survival strengths)\(^{235}\) overflowed the boundaries of the horror genre in the 1980s, and began to appear across other subgenres in 1980s teen films, as well – including, for instance, in more progressive titles such as *Heathers*, *The Legend of Billie Jean* or the relatively unknown film about a teen girl’s self-constructed punk band, called *Ladies and Gentlemen: the Fabulous Stains*. The Final Girl of the 1980s was, after all, another influential precursor for the girl power provoked by series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Alias*, and *Dark Angel*, and the recent *The Hunger Games*. I also feel that the representation of teen girl’s active sexuality, and especially the complex lines involved in the depiction of the loss of her virginity, have remained somewhat overlooked and sidelined in this project. Tamar Jeffers McDonald’s recent anthology of essays, *Virgin Territory: Representing Sexual Innocence in Film* (2010), has provided fertile groundwork in this area, but its relation to the representation of the teenage girl, specifically, could still be further developed. Alongside all this, the evolutions of the representation of teenage girls could be mapped and traced more carefully throughout film history and other cultural outlets, such as literature, pop music, art, celebrity, sport, and television – as well as spread out more widely, to incorporate the representation of queer teen girl identities and, of course, the representation of non-white teenage girls, in American culture and in the rest of the world (Indian culture has a longstanding tradition of presenting sprightly, feisty teen girl heroines, for instance, that are bound by a completely different set of confines than its American counterparts, and might provide valuable comparisons).

We need to keep addressing, analysing, debating and entering into a dialogue with the representations that surround us. In a world that is radically globalising, where tensions are consistently shifting to form new political arenas and alliances, and all this is increasingly defined by and through its media, constructions of identity, and how we relate to them, how we come to understand them, are too crucially influential to be ignored; the imagery that surrounds us must be constantly negotiated, poked at, stretched out, torn apart, and exposed, even if the resulting findings prove contradictory, complex and defy a singular reading. As Laura Mulvey wrote:

> History is, undoubtedly, constructed out of representations. But these representations are themselves symptoms. They provide clues, not to ultimate or fixed meanings, but to sites of social difficulty that need to be deciphered, politically and

psychoanalytically … even though it may be too hard, ultimately, to make complete sense of the code.\textsuperscript{236}

It is through the journeys, then, and not the destination, that we arrive at new questions, new discussions and new ways of understanding how we might (re)construct more progressive, forward-thinking images in the future. The study of the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American teen film has provided me with such journey. What began as a personal interest, developed into prolonged academic research, and ultimately provoked me to redefine how I understand representation as well as the purpose and value of feminist film theory itself. The figure of the teenage girl provides us with a unique construct that presents both an easily filled vessel, yet that also, somehow, creates itself, in the instances that arise on film, precisely when and as she remains transitory, undefined and appropriable. Now that important filmmakers are increasingly turning their attentions this figure (from Sofia Coppola, in The Virgin Suicides and her soon to be released The Bling Ring, to Sally Potter’s forthcoming Ginger and Rosa, Joe Wright’s Hanna, Lone Sherfig’s An Education, Floria Sigismondi’s The Runaways, Andrea Arnold’s Fish Tank and Kimberly Peirce’s upcoming remake of Carrie), the representation of the teenage girl is sure to continue to provide fruitful tensions and areas for debate that might resurrect, and possibly further, the field of feminist film theory; as the teen girl lingers and thrives amongst onscreen representations that are articulated by, and through, the very enigmas she presents.

\textsuperscript{236} Mulvey, Laura. Fetishism and Curiosity (Indiana University Press, 1996), 11.
ABSTRACTS

Nederlandse Samenvatting

De representatie van tienermeisjes op film is tot nu toe redelijk onopgemerkt gebleven binnen de onderzoeksgebieden van film studies en de feministische film theorie. Dit proefschrift probeert dergelijk onbetreden terrein aan te vullen door de representatie van tienermeisjes in jaren 80 Amerikaanse tienerfilms (een belangrijke en invloedrijke ‘golf’ binnen het genre) te analyseren, en om de representaties van tienermeisjes in films zoals Little Darlings (1980), Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982), Smooth Talk (1985), Just One of the Guys (1985), Pretty in Pink (1986) en Mermaids (1990) verder te onderzoeken. De dissertatie gebruikt tekstuele film analyse en de feministische film theorie om 15 verschillende case studies (deze representeren een geselecteerd corpus van meer dan 125 films) te onderwerpen aan drie hoofdlijnen van onderzoek: het bekijkt ten eerste in hoeverre de representaties van tienermeisjes in Amerikaanse tienerfilms van de jaren 80 onderdeel uitmaakten van een neo-conservatieve, culturele tegenbeweging op de tweede golf van het feminisme van de jaren 70; ten tweede probeert het onderliggende en tegendraadse stromingen bloot te leggen, om zodoende de resistance (actieve weerstand) binnen de representaties te laten spreken – het lijkt erop dat dergelijke stromingen wellicht hebben geleid tot meer progressieve beelden van tienermeisjes in de jaren 90; en ten slotte onderzoekt dit proefschrift wat het tienermeisje op zichzelf (een aan verandering ondergaand personage dat permanent in ontwikkeling is) kan toevoegen aan de feministische film theorie, die zich tot nu toe voornamelijk heeft gericht op de beeldvorming van volwassen vrouwen, met als doel om nieuwe discussies binnen dit onderzoeksveld aan te wakkeren.

Het proefschrift bestaat uit twee delen. In het eerste deel begin ik mijn analyse van de representatie van tienermeisjes door te kijken naar alles dat gestructureerd is en vast staat binnen de frames van de Amerikaanse tienerfilms uit de jaren 80. Het eerste hoofdstuk opent met een analyse van de drie meest terugkerende locaties in de tienerfilm - het ouderlijk huis, de high school en de mall – en neemt in beschouwing hoe deze locaties de representatie van het tienermeisje beïnvloeden. Het hoofdstuk stelt dat deze drie locaties voornamelijk worden ingezet om traditionele man/vrouw rolverdelingen te benadrukken en in stand te houden, om visueel de tienermeisjes binnen een kader te zetten, en om zodoende de bewegingsvrijheid van het tienermeisje te beperken. In het tweede hoofdstuk wordt het onderzoek naar de drie terugkerende locaties voorgezet, maar ditmaal vanuit een optiek die de machtsverdeling
binnen het frame in acht neemt; wie kijkt en wie wordt bekeken? Ik onderzoek eerst in hoeverre de drie locaties als privé of publiek domein worden ingevuld door de tienermeisjes, en of/hoe ze deze ruimtes zich eigen kunnen maken en deze naar behoeftte kunnen aanpassen. Ik laat vervolgens zien dat deze drie locaties (hetzij privé of publiek) bepaalde structuren van kijken tot stand brengen; de tienermeisjes in deze films worden ofwel neergezet als passieve, bekeken seksuele objecten (hierbij haal ik Laura Mulvey’s theorie omtrent de mannelijke _gaze_ en _to-be-looked-at-ness_ aan), ofwel als passieve, gecontroleerde subjecten onder het toeziend oog van de sterke patriarchale figuur (hierbij wend ik mij tot de culturele theorie van Michel Foucault). De tienermeisjes worden in deze films altijd neergezet als passief, gecontroleerd en ‘in de gaten gehouden’, en uiteindelijk ontkracht dit de actieve, transformerende rol die zij binnen hun omgeving uitoefenen. De films neutraliseren dergelijke constructies, en houden zodoende conservatieve en traditionele verhoudingen in stand.

In het derde hoofdstuk richt ik mij op de representatie van een vrouwelijke, ‘tienermeisjes’ _gaze_, binnen de drie terugkerende locaties in Amerikaanse jaren 80 tienerfilms. Ik analyseer hoe de de tienermeisjes _gaze_ wordt gestructureerd en weergegeven vanuit verschillende perspectieven, en ik suggereer dat er in feite drie hoofd types van _girl gazes_ kunnen worden onderscheiden binnen het genre. Het eerste type is een tienermeisjes _gaze_ gericht op jongens, die gedreven lijkt door seksueel verlangen. Hoe wordt deze _gaze_ vormgegeven en gestructureerd, en in welke context kan deze plaatsvinden? Verandert deze _gaze_ gedurende het verloop van het genre in de jaren 80? Biedt deze _gaze_ een actievere rol (agency) aan het verlangende tienermeisje? En wat kan het specifieke karakter van het tienermeisje toevoegen aan de discussie over het vrouwelijk kijken in de cinema? Voor het tweede type van tienermeisjes _gaze_ concentreer ik mij op het veelvoorkomende gegeven van meisjes die naar andere meisjes kijken. Dit type _gaze_ is niet seksueel georiënteerd (er is binnen deze films geen sprake van een homo-erotische _gaze_) maar is meer ‘vergelijkend’ van aard. Waar verschilt deze _gaze_ van de _gaze_ geïntroduceerd door Mulvey? En wat biedt dit terugkerende genre element, waarbij meisjes-naar-meisjes kijken, de representatie van tienermeisjes in jaren 80 tienerfilms? Voor het derde type _gaze_ keer ik terug naar de locatie van de _mall_. Hier wordt de tienermeisjes _gaze_ als consument gericht op koopwaar. Hoe wordt deze _gaze_ gevisualiseerd binnen deze setting, en wat zegt dit over de dominante Amerikaanse ideologie van de jaren 80? Hoe verbindt deze _gaze_ het lichaam van het tienermeisje met de producten die zij observeert? Hoe verhoudt zich dit tot concepten als _consumer address_ en _consumer power_ – is binnen deze representatie ruimte voor mogelijke _resistance_?
In het tweede deel van mijn proefschrift vervolg ik mijn onderzoek naar de onderliggende ideologie van de representatie van tienermeisjes in Amerikaanse jaren 80 tienerfilms door te kijken naar de ontwikkeling die zij doormaken binnen de verhaallijnen van de films en de transformaties die zij daarbij ondergaan. Uiteindelijk bevinden deze tienermeisjes zich allemaal in een rite-de-passage; het zijn *coming-of-age* films die het tienermeisje neerzetten als ‘in ontwikkeling’, als *en route* tot het vrouw worden. In tegenstelling tot een analyse van de meer statische aspecten van de filmbeelden (die ik in het eerste deel van het proefschrift heb bekeken), wend ik mij hierbij tot aspecten van de representatie van het tienermeisje die meer beweging met zich meebrengen en die wellicht ook duidelijker tegenstrijdigheden, spanningsvelden en mogelijke vrijheden voor het tienermeisje blootleggen. Hoe wordt de transformatie van het tienermeisje tot vrouw weergegeven op film? Kan ze middels ‘dit proces’ ontsnappen aan een passieve, beperkende onderdrukking? Ik analyseer hierbij drie belangrijke narratieve trends die populair zijn geworden binnen het tienerfilm genre van de jaren 80 (en tegenwoordig nog steeds veelvuldig worden gebruikt); de introductie van tiener-stereotypen (personages die vaak zijn ingedeeld naar conservatieve lijnen, zoals bijvoorbeeld klasse, uiterlijk en seksuele ongeremdheid); de steeds terugkerende verhouding met de vader en de moeder figuur (de scenarios geven de voorkeur aan een hechte relatie met de vaderfiguur en plaatsen de ontwikkeling van het tienermeisje tot vrouw vaak binnen een omgekeerd Oedipoes complex); en ten slotte introduceren deze films een essentieel narratief genre element, de Assepoester of Pygmalionachtige *makeover*.

In het laatste hoofdstuk bekijk ik de *makeover* opnieuw, maar ditmaal vanuit een optiek die de kracht van de zelftransformatie van het tienermeisje (de actieve kneedbaarheid/plooibaarheid van haar identiteit) centraal stelt. Hoe beïnvloeden de vele *close-ups* en het gebruik van spiegels de representatie van het lichaam van het tienermeisje? Hoe wordt het ‘actieve’ lichaam weergegeven (en toegejuicht) terwijl het in beweging is, in een *performance*, bijvoorbeeld al dansend? Hoe draagt het aannemen van een bepaalde vrouwelijke uiterlijke verschijning bij aan het spel met de *masquerade* (een concept van Mary Ann Doane) – en hoe verhoudt zich dit tot de ontwikkeling en transformatie van het tienermeisje tot volwassen vrouw op film? Door de representatie van het lichaam van het tienermeisje anders te lezen (als een ‘optreden’/*performance* en een toenuiching van een ontluikende vrouwelijke identiteit), wordt dit figuur een concept dat deel uit kan maken van grotere discussies omtrent de constructie en *performance* van gender. De tienerfilms van de jaren 80 presenteerden bijvoorbeeld ook een groot aantal *tomboys* en tijdelijke ‘travestie’
films, waarin tienermeisjes (verschillende aspecten van) het uiterlijk van tienerjongens aannemen, of andere mannelijke trekken zich toe-eigenen. Middels een dergelijk complexe gender performance krijgen de tienermeisjes krachten die normaal gesproken worden toegewezen aan de representatie van jongens/mannen op film, waaronder bijvoorbeeld een actieve gaze en vrije lichamelijke beweging.

In het allerlaatste deel kijk ik naar de momenten in de films waarbij de tegenstrijdige kenmerken van het tienermeisje (ook zonder een narratieve context zoals ‘travestie’) haar permanent grenzen doen overschrijden; in spiegelscenes waarbij ze in kleine, op haar zelfgerichte en door haar zelf geregisseerde performances laat zien dat ze zowel mannelijke als vrouwelijke rollen in zicht heeft, of op de momenten dat zij haar maagdelijkheid verliest, waarbij ze de lijn tussen kind en volwassen vrouw oversteekt, maar toch in een emotionele tussenfase, doordrenkt van affectieve display (Barbara Klinger), blijft hangen. Het tienermeisje dat nog geen volwassene is, geen kind is, geen man is, geen vrouw, is een figuur dat zich uiteindelijk altijd in een grensgebied bevindt – ze is passief en actief tegelijk, ze is zowel object als subject, ze is het allebei en geen van beiden. Aan de hand van Julia Kristeva’s concept van het abject (waarbij de kracht van een object voort kan vloeien uit diens tussen-status) kom ik tot de conclusie dat de representatie van het tienermeisje het beste kan worden gedefinieerd door haar ‘staat van wording’; zij is permanent ongrijpbaar en wellicht zelfs un-representable. Juist hierdoor kan zij ontstijgen aan een traditionele, conservatieve en passieve invulling, en een belangrijke bijdrage leveren aan debatten binnen de feministische film theorie.
English Summary

The representation of teenage girls on film has often remained overlooked by both the fields of film studies in general, and by feminist film theory more specifically. This thesis tries to fill these research gaps, by exploring the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American teen films such as *Little Darlings* (1980), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Smooth Talk* (1985), *Just One of the Guys* (1985), *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and *Mermaids* (1990). It uses film analysis and feminist film theory to subject 15 primary case studies (representing a selected corpus of over 125 films) to three principal lines of enquiry: it firstly explores whether the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American teen film constituted part of a neo-conservative cultural backlash against Second Wave Feminism; it secondly exposes undercurrents of resistance amongst these representations, and suggests such ‘pockets of agency’ may have opened up new possibilities for the more progressive images of teenage girls that followed in the 1990s; and lastly, this thesis looks at what the figure of the teenage girl on film in itself (a transitory figure that is perennially in state of ‘becoming’) may offer a feminist film theory that has thus far focused predominantly on the images of adult women, thereby aiming to spark new areas of debate within this field of study.

The thesis is divided into two main parts. In the first part, I begin my analysis of the representation of teenage girls by exploring all that is set, structurally, in these 1980s American teen films. The first chapter begins by looking more closely at three recurring generic settings of the 1980s teen film - the home, the high school and the mall - and considers how these locations inform the representation of the teenage girl in the frame. The chapter suggests the three locations primarily function to reinforce traditional gender lines and boundaries, to visually ‘box’ in the characters, and to ultimately confine the movements of teenage girls. In the second chapter, I continue to explore the three principal locations in 1980s teen film, and the visual constructions they present within the frame, but I do so here from the angle of power distribution, and the concurrent monopolies on looking/gazing. I first look at how the three locations act both as public and private spaces for the representations of teenage girls, and how the girls are shown to appropriate/transform the spaces into either realm. I then point out that these three locations (whether public or private) are all presented as conducive to certain structures of looking; the teenage girls in these films are either objectified as sexual subjects by their *to-be-looked-at-ness* (I here turn to the writings of Laura Mulvey and the concept of the male *gaze*), or they are made subject to authoritarian surveillance by patriarchal figures (this observation is informed by the works of cultural...
theorist Michel Foucault). The teenage girls in these films are thus always presented as passive, controlled and supervised, and this ultimately counters any transformative (or ‘performative’) powers they might have previously conjured over their surroundings. The films normalize such constructions, and thereby reinforce traditional and conservative gendered norms and divisions.

In the third chapter, I begin to look for undercurrents of resistance against the dominant discourse that informs 1980s teen film, by looking more closely at the representations of a countering, female ‘teen girl’ gaze. I analyse how this teen girl gaze is structured (what contexts allow for it to take place?) and suggest that there are in fact three prevailing ‘types’ of girl gaze that reside within the 1980s teen film genre. The first type is a teen girl gaze directed at boys; one that would seem directed and fuelled by sexual desire. I explore the context and structure of this teen girl gaze, and look at how it develops throughout the decade. Does this gaze allocate activity or agency to its desiring teen girl subjects? And what does the particular character of the teen girl figure in itself bring into play, when it comes to debates about female looking in film? For the second type of teen girl gaze, I turn to another, even more prevalent type of girl gaze presented in teen films in the 1980s; one that is directed at other girls. This gaze is not sexually oriented (it is not a homo-erotic gaze) but rather ‘comparative’ in nature. How does this gaze differ from the gaze introduced by Mulvey? What does it offer feminist film theory? And what can be concluded about this specific trope of girl-on-girl-looking, within the teen film genre of the 1980s? For the third type of gaze, I return to one of three dominant locations in the films, and examine the teen girl gaze within the specific setting of the mall. Here the teen girl gaze is (re-)directed as a consumer gaze, aimed at commodities. How is this gaze visualised and constructed, and how does it engage with the dominant ideologies of 1980s America? How does this gaze relate the teen girl body to the commodities it observes? Does the implied consumer address and consumer power offer these representations potential areas of resistance?

In the second part of this thesis, I continue to explore the ideological nature of the representations of teenage girls within 1980s teen films, but I now turn my attention to the narrative trajectories and the transformations they undergo. Ultimately, films featuring teenagers explore rites-of-passage; these films are coming-of-age films, presenting the teen girl figure in transition, en route to becoming woman. Understanding how this element of the representation works – and exploring its relations to the contradictions and tensions this figure brings into play on film – requires looking beyond the more ‘static’ image, towards areas of movement, development and possibility. How is the teen girl’s transformation into
womanhood presented on film? Does the teen girl’s process of becoming allow her to elude passive confinement? I examine three important ‘teen film’ narrative trends that were popularised in 1980s teen film (and that are still commonly used in the genre today) in order to answer these questions; the introduction of stereotyped teenage characters (divided along conservative lines such as class, physical appearance or promiscuity), the recurring relations with the father and the mother (the scenarios favour the relation with the father and often present the teen girl’s development into womanhood as part of a reversed Oedipal trajectory), and lastly, these films introduced a key teen girl narrative ‘trope’, the Cinderella or Pygmalion-like makeover to illustrate her process of ‘becoming’.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I start by looking at some of these makeover sequences once more, but I now examine how they present an active malleability of the self, and a progressive celebration of (the onset of) femininity. How do close-ups and the persistent use of mirrors inform the display the teen girl body? How is the ‘active’ teen girl body revealed (and celebrated) in movement, in performance, in dance? And how does the teen girl’s appropriation of a female appearance, of overtly feminine characteristics, constitute a play with the masquerade (a concept introduced to feminist film theory by Mary Ann Doane)? How does this relate to her process of ‘becoming’? By refiguring the representation of the teen girl body as a celebration of the construction of femininity and as a performance, I enter this figure into a dialogue with larger debates about the construction and performance of gender. The play with such lines and concepts can also be found in the tomboy and temporary transvestite films that featured prominently in the 1980s American teen film genre, where teenage girls are shown to take on (aspects of) the appearance of teenage boys, and other masculine traits. In this cross- or in-between gender performance, teen girls are often allocated powers normally attributed to the representation of masculine identities, including connotations of action and the gaze.

In the final section of the thesis, I turn towards the instances where these films reveal the teenage girl’s innate embodiment of contradictory characteristics, her straddling of boundaries, without the framework of cross-dressing (or other narrative ‘excuses’); in mirror scenes where in the smallest, self-directed performances, the teenage girl is shown to appropriate both male and female traits, or in the scenes that present her loss of virginity, where she crosses from childhood into womanhood (the rite-of-passage scene par excellence), but ends up suspended in an affective display (as introduced by Barbara Klinger), committed to neither realm. The teenage girl, because she is not yet adult, not child, not man, not woman, is a figure that resides on boundaries – she is both passive and active, she is both object and
subject, she is both, and neither. Taking Julia Kristeva’s notion of the *abject* to refigure the representation of the teenage girl as perennially, momentarily un-appropriable and therefore un-confineable (and possibly un-representable), I conclude by proposing that therein lie the very undercurrents of resistance that the representation of the teenage girl can offer us. Her image emerges as one that is perennially suspended ‘in-between’, connoting tensions *in spite of* conservative confinements; the teenage girl resides on and is defined by un-set boundaries. It is from this perspective, and with her in mind, that we might finally be able to circumnavigate the passivity that is still so commonly attributed to the feminine form on film, and reopen, if not further, fruitful debates within the field of feminist film theory.
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