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

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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.





Figures 1a to f - In *Teen Witch*, even before she has attained her magic powers, Louise is able to transform her own image - in a montage sequence set to upbeat music – that concludes with her approving of her own image in the mirror, before entering a school dance.

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 mimicks 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.



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'.

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

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.



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.

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 alone¹⁷¹.

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.

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 imagery¹⁷² 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 contained¹⁷³), 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.





Figures 6a-1 - In the opening scene of *Adventures in Babysitting*, Chris (Elisabeth Shue) dances around her bedroom, miming the song “And Then He Kissed Me”, as she gets dressed and ready for her day.

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 femininity¹⁷⁴.

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 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*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.”¹⁷⁶ Boyd suggests these representations

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.

¹⁷⁶ Jade Boyd. "Dance, Culture, and Popular Film." *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004), 74.

of (teenage) dancers need to be read more progressively, where we analyse them “as communicating subjects”¹⁷⁷. 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. [It is therefore deductible that] Dance in film can ... effectively disrupt the male gaze...”¹⁷⁸

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*¹⁷⁹) 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....”¹⁸⁰

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...”¹⁸¹ 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

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 films¹⁸². 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-l - 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 sexuality¹⁸³, 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’¹⁸⁴ (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.”¹⁸⁵ 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.”¹⁸⁶ Doane’s observations revolve around a psychoanalytical reading of both the spectator’s relation to the

¹⁸⁴ Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia." Originally published in *Movie 24*, in 1977, reprinted in *Hollywood Musicals, the Film Reader*, Steve Cohan ed. (New York, Routledge, 2002).

¹⁸⁵ Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Film and the Masquerade, Theorizing the Female Spectator*. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 25.

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 masculine¹⁸⁷. 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"¹⁸⁸. 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. Saunder, 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

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 26.

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. Saunder. 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

(*Terminator* and *Aliens*¹⁸⁹). 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”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).

¹⁹⁰ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.

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,”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.”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 movement¹⁹³, 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 naiveté.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 naiveté... But what it illustrates here is that the tomboy, as a figure, is all-encompassing; both

¹⁹¹ Kristen Hatch, “Little Butches: Tomboys in Hollywood Film”, in Mary Celeste Kearney, ed. *Mediated Girlhoods* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 76.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 83.

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

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

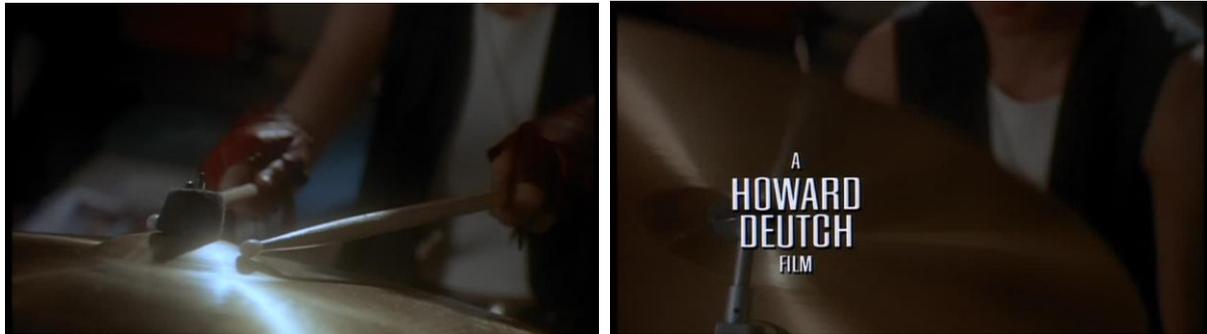
¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 82.

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 led 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.

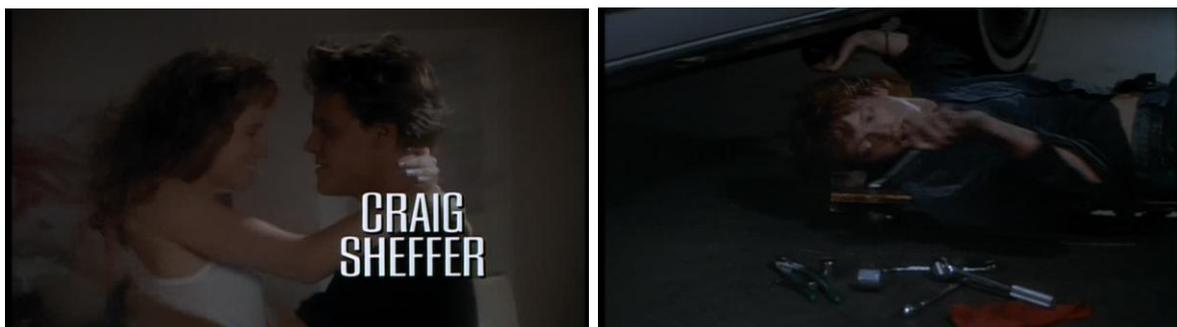
In the opening sequence of *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Watts (another gender neutral name) is introduced exactly as such, as suspended in-between. The very first shot of the opening credit sequence begins to expose her, but it only shows us specific parts of her, and delays a complete reveal. We first 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.





Figures 11a-d - The opening sequence of *Some Kind of Wonderful*, clearly marks the gendered identities of Keith and Amanda, whilst keeping Watts suspended in between.

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 feminine¹⁹⁷.

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

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’¹⁹⁸). 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

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.



Figures 12a-d - In *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Watts' innate heterosexual nature perforates her 'performance' of an in between gender status/tomboyhood, throughout the film.

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.”¹⁹⁹ 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

¹⁹⁹ Barbara Creed, “Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts”, in Elizabeth Grosz, ed. *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (Routledge, 1995), 96.

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.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 viewer²⁰¹, 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,

...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.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

²⁰⁰ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”, *Theatre Journal*, 40 No. 4, 1988, 519.

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.

²⁰² Annette Kuhn. *The Power of the Image: Essays On Representation and Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 49.

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.





Figures 16a-h - In *Just One of the Guys*, Terry transforms into a boy through a series of elliptical cuts that exclude the process of her physical transformation but lay emphasis on her learning to perform, act and move like a boy.

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 matrix²⁰³ 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 tuxedos, 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, gesticulating 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,

²⁰³ See Judith Butler's *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 conjuncture 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.



Figures 19a-d - *Just One of the Guys* ends on a conservative note; Terry is returned to her traditional feminine, and emotional appearance, and accepts the more passive role she must play to be in a successful heterosexual relationship with Rick.

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.²⁰⁵

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 Object 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

²⁰⁵ Barbara Creed, “Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts”, 88.

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 narratives²⁰⁶, 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)²⁰⁷. 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

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.

²⁰⁷ Lacan, Jacques, "The Mirror-Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", transl. by Alan Sheridan in *Écrits: A Selection* (W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1977) (text originally from 1949).

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 time²⁰⁸; 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 time²⁰⁹; 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)²¹⁰. 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

²⁰⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (BBC and Penguin Books, 1972), 45-55.

²⁰⁹ Jenijoy La Belle, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), discusses this at length throughout her work, but illustrates it with an example on page 76.

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 off 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

²¹¹ Heller, Dana, ed. *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*. (IB Tauris, 2007), 182.

between passivity and activity²¹², 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 *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 *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 *male* and *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 *par excellence*), the boundary between *childhood* and *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-passage²¹³; it is the instance where the girl’s

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

²¹³ Timothy Shary has argued that the loss of virginity was “the most common plot of youth sex films throughout the early 1980s” (*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 *Goin’ All the Way!*, to *The Last American Virgin*, to *Losin’ It*, to *Risky Business*, to *Secret Admirer*, or the Geek’s (Anthony Michael Hall) plotline in *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 *Some Kind of Wonderful*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Pretty in Pink* and *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 *Foxes*, *Little Darlings*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Smooth Talk*, *Shag* and *Mermaids*. Other films show the teen girl having sex, in *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.”²¹⁴ 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.”²¹⁵)

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.

Valley Girl and *Heathers*, for instance, but these films do not explicitly mark the teen girl’s ‘loss of virginity’ in the way that the abovementioned titles do.

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

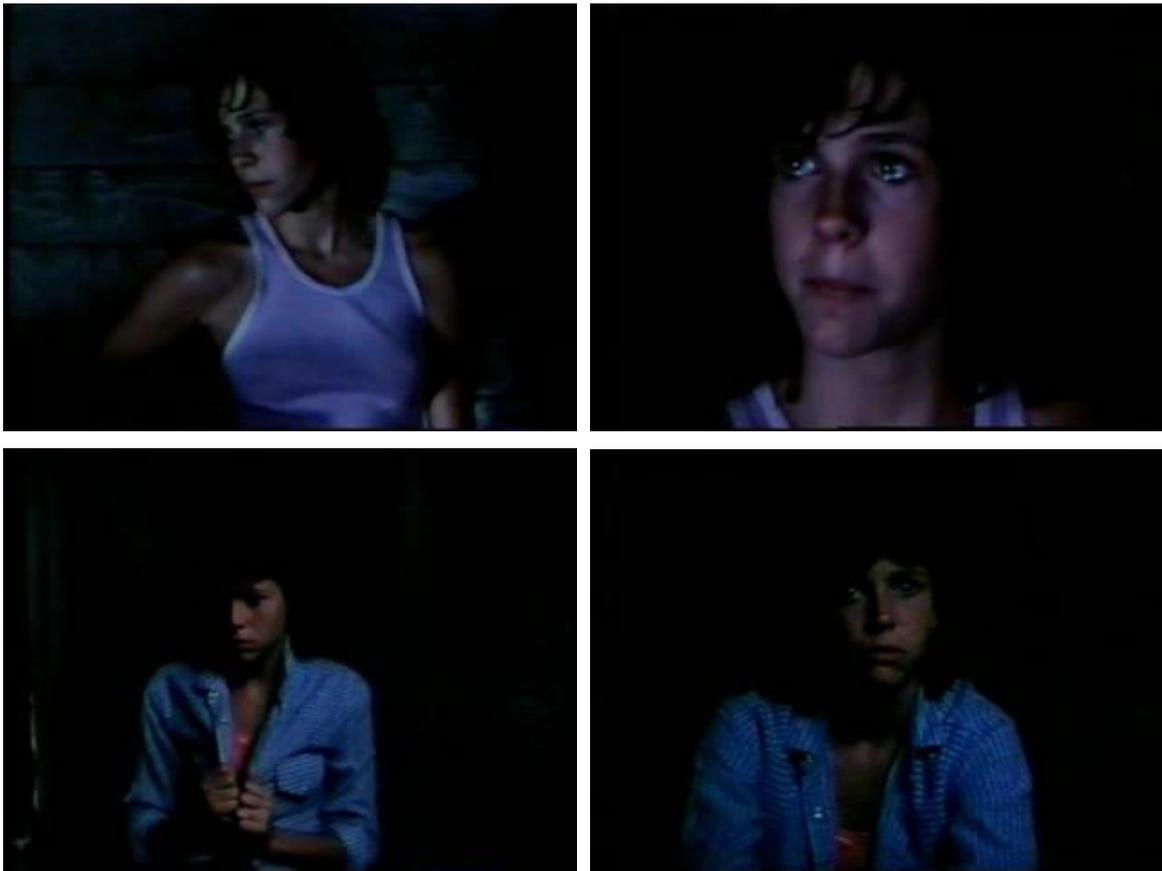
²¹⁵ Tamar Jeffers McDonald, PhD Thesis on “Filmic Strategies For Representing Virginity In 1950s Hollywood” (University of Warwick, 2005), 55.

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.



Figures 23a-d - In the concluding scenes of *Smooth Talk*, the film stays closely with Connie's emotive, reflective and expressive state, as she reconciles with her mother and sister.

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 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 led 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.”²¹⁶

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,

²¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 1982), 4, my paraphrasing between brackets.

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

²¹⁷ Barbara Creed, “Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts”, 454 - Creed references Kristeva’s observations (1982), 102.

²¹⁸ Barbara Creed. "Baby Bitches From Hell: Monstrous Little Women in Film." *Paper delivered at the Scary Women Symposium*, (UCLA: January, 1994). Online access November 26 2012, at <http://old.cinema.ucla.edu/women/creed/creed1.html>

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 films²¹⁹. The *arresting image*, she suggests:

²¹⁹ Barbara Klinger. "The Art Film, Affect and The Female Viewer: The Piano Revisited." *Screen* 47, no. 1 (2006), 27.

...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...²²⁰

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-be²²². 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.