Tuesday's gone: The nostalgic teen film

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The transition and indeterminacy in youth culture are echoed in the specific social habits of characters in Dazed and Confused.

Teen movies are fundamentally concerned with reversing age-defined privileges. The nostalgic teen film is distinctive in the genre because it augments the ostensible themes of rebellion and anti-authoritarianism with an adult perspective. Whereas most teen films emphasize an adolescent point of view, the nostalgic teen movie reveals tensions between youth and adulthood at the level of narration, which can be seen as the site of a quest to contain adolescence. The containment of youth's affinities with excess, transition, and immediacy in critically acclaimed films such as Stand by Me (Rob Reiner, 1986) and American Graffiti (George Lucas, 1973) is evident in the foregrounding of a writerly voice, a sense of narrative inevitability, and the subsequent con-
Gone

By LESLEY SPEED

The rites-of-passage film can be differentiated from other teen films in terms of thematic ambition. For example, Raffaele Caputo observes that the Australian coming-of-age film (which is synonymous with the rites-of-passage text) has been linked in the past with issues as diverse as national identity, the Australian film industry, and the emergence of new sexual attitudes (13-14).

The rites-of-passage film’s emotional appeal is evident in the often positive critical response to the genre. The tendency for some critics to indulge in sentimentality is evident when they incorporate their own lyrical passages into a review. Gerald Nachman, for instance, notes that Stand by Me “has many sublime moments—the four [protagonists] tip-toeing along a trestle, . . . ducking out of the way of a train at the last instant; roasting potatoes around a campfire and howling with glee when guess-who’s potato falls in the fire”; Sheila Benson compares the film to the adventures of “Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.” Some writers also seem unsure as to whether the nostalgia film is intended to appeal to adults or adolescents. For example, Benson comments that “Stand by Me is far too fine to be kept for over-17-year-olds alone.” Generally benign critical responses reflect the emotional appeal of the films.

In its emphasis on distant events, the nostalgic teen film seems to express a desire for moral and ideological security. But vaguely articulated objections to the rites-of-passage film are also evident in some quarters. Adrian Martin argues that “[i]f you wish to love the teen movie, . . . you will . . . have to accept that even the most respectable, literary, humanly uplifting teen drama like Stand by Me [has] a big, glorious scene where a

cerement of ideology. An exception to this nostalgic paradigm is Richard Linklater’s Dazed and Confused (1993).

Rites of Passage in Narrative

The nostalgic or rites-of-passage teen film is set in the past and structured around the protagonist’s acquisition of greater maturity. Often, the narrative depicts the protagonist’s experience of a trauma as the catalyst for his or her development. The acquisition of maturity is equated with greater understanding of past events, and a new capacity to face the future.
grossly fat boy barfs all over his parents and teachers” (67–68). Similarly, Wayne in Wayne's World 2 (Stephen Surjik, 1993) comments in an affected tone, “[I] feel like I’m in a John Hughes rite-de-passage movie.” Implicit in these remarks is an opposition between the rites-of-passage text and “other” teen films. The nostalgic teen film can be further examined in its use of narrative and syntax.

In The American Film Musical, Rick Altman’s theoretical model for analyzing film genre is termed a “semantic/syntactic approach” (96). A genre is composed of both a semantic and a syntactic axis, the semantic referring to the “common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets” that constitute “semantic elements which make up the genre,” whereas the syntactic axis comprises “certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable place-holders,” or the “lexical choices” (95) that are implicit in a text’s construction. The semantic level concerns the units that comprise a text, while the syntactic dimension combines the units to form structures of theme and value.

Adrian Martin applies Altman’s theory to the teen film, arguing that in “any themes of generational difference and historical distance. Here, the syntactic dimension is designed to contain and dominate the semantic details of the narrative. Perceiving adolescence from a distance, the nostalgic text is less concerned with historical detail than with attaching significance to the past. Here, youths’ concerns tend to be restricted to the semantic and contained within a syntax that privileges nostalgia and fetishizes historical distance. The rites-of-passage film is inclined to disavow the immediacy and, at times, the vulgarity of youth culture.

The sense of looking back on a past adolescence may be created through several narrative devices, of which one of the most obvious is first person narration. The nostalgic voice-over serves to situate events in the past and emphasize a subjective point of view. In Stand by Me, the plot is framed by the voice-over of a middle-aged man who recalls an adventure from his adolescence. His recollection concerns four boys’ unauthorized hiking trip to view the body of a dead boy. During the journey they argue, share intimate secrets, camp out, and contend with difficulties such as an encounter with leeches. After viewing the corpse and being warned off by some older boys, they start to return home. Although the weekend contains several new experiences, the adolescent characters do not attribute inordinate significance to the exploits.

This might be considered a typical adolescent adventure, punctuated with schoolboy jokes and a tense confrontation with some older teenagers. But the voice-over in Stand by Me works to imbue the events with greater significance, in light of the narrator’s middle age and the recent death of one of his childhood friends. Here, the retrospective voice-over imposes a syntactic reading on distant events and past youth. At the same time, the emphasis on sentimentality draws attention away from the teenagers’ “tasteless” humor. It is thus possible to overlook the boys’ defiance of authority, their morbid desire to look at a corpse, and the excess of the recollected eating competition. At the end of the film the adult narrator seals his interpretation of the past with the comment, “I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. Jesus, does anyone?” Retrospective narration serves to extract youth from the immediacy of toilet humor and aimless pranks, idealizing the past in light of middle-aged nostalgia.

Another device for investing adolescence with a larger significance is the final cataloguing of the characters’ achievements. Like a high school yearbook, but privileged with years of insight, the narrative coda lists the later achievements of central characters. American Graffiti is the first noted teen film to employ this device, and its moralistic purpose is clear. The
body of the film encompasses one night in the lives of a group of high school graduates in 1962. Most of the narrative concerns the characters driving around town, listening to the radio, and engaging in various social encounters. Finally, one of the central characters becomes disillusioned after a car race because he wins by default, when his opponent crashes. At the end of the film, a loosely structured narrative is imbued with greater significance through a coda.

We discover that the character of Curtis, who might be viewed as the protagonist, becomes a writer in Canada (and implicitly a pacifist). The youth in the car race ends up dying in a road accident, a fate with obvious moral implications. One boy finds employment below his original aspirations, while another goes missing in action in Vietnam. No information is provided about the female characters, yet several feature in the narrative. This type of coda represents an attempt to explain a person’s adult trajectory through the seemingly impulsive actions of adolescence. The excessive and arbitrary aspects of youth behavior are thus repressed through an emphasis on the significance of later achievements. Significantly, later teen comedies seek to reverse the sombre and moralistic tone that finally prevails in American Graffiti. Animal House (John Landis, 1978) bestows outlandish careers on its male protagonists, and female characters are included in the coda to Fast Times at Ridgemont High (Amy Heckerling, 1982).

By contrast, a more recent youth film, Dazed and Confused, distances itself from the rites-of-passage tradition. Set in 1976, the film depicts the last day of term at a suburban high school. Encompassing a large number of characters, Dazed and Confused eschews the traditional privileging of a single character and avoids the sense of inevitability that characterizes the resolution of American Graffiti. Although a few characters, such as Pink and Milch, receive marginally greater screen time than others, narrative significance is distributed in an egalitarian fashion, across both sexes, different age groups, and a variety of subgroups within the school. For example, the emphasis on Pink is almost balanced by the significance of Jodi, another senior. The absence of a classical narrative economy from Dazed and Confused is linked to the film’s deviation from the rites-of-passage paradigm.

In contrast to the containment of adolescent spontaneity in Stand by Me and American Graffiti, Dazed and Confused emphasizes mobility and immediacy. The emphasis can be examined in light of the progression experienced by a trio of intellectuals in Dazed and Confused. Cynthia, Mike, and Tony are the only characters in the film who allude to more long-term concerns than driving fast and smoking pot. Although far from being ostracized, the trio is set slightly apart from their peers by virtue of their intellectual preoccupations and degree of social reticence, apparently a result of self-consciousness. The process through which the characters set aside their inhibitions in Dazed and Confused reflects the film’s privileging of immediacy.

While making plans for the evening, Cynthia observes that everything they do seems to be for the future. At this point she and her two companions recognize that what they really want is “some good, old, worthwhile visceral experience.” Yet the trio are initially too self-conscious to abandon themselves to the pleasures of “get[ting] drunk, get[ting] laid, or get[ting] in a fight.” pastimes that they ridicule. Their decision to go to a beer party instead of their usual card game is thus characterized by a note of sheepishness that is linked to the idea that they are surrendering to “base” inclinations. The trio end up engaging in the same activities that they earlier scorned. Mike gets involved in a fight and is shamed when he loses; Tony becomes romantically attached to a female freshman; and Cynthia daringly reciprocates the advances of an older male whom most of the other girls avoid.

The transitions of Cynthia, Tony, and Mike are depicted sympathetically; they progress from self-conscious rationality to spontaneous acts of abandonment. While the hedonistic exploits of most other characters might be attributed to typical adolescent recklessness, the trio of intellectuals is aligned with a more rational justification of activities such as beer drinking and impulsive flirtation. Thus Cynthia, Mike, and Tony provide a focus for the broader emphasis on immediacy in Dazed and Confused. The theme of immediacy can be linked to the theme of transition, which in addition to being a concern of Dazed and Confused is also central to some major theories of youth as a social and cultural phenomenon. The following examination of theoretical and cinematic configurations of youth as transition will also draw attention to aspects of youth that are repressed in the nostalgic rites-of-passage film.

Adolescence as Transition

The nostalgic teen film’s assertion of a retrospective, and potentially conservative, adult perspective can be foregrounded by considering a theoretical association between adolescence and freedom. The linking of adolescence with freedom and a resistance to controlling authorities has been highlighted in sociocultural terms by Erik H. Erikson and Lawrence Grossberg. In his influential postwar model of youth psychology, Erikson argues that adolescence constitutes a “psychoso-
societal moratorium” that can be understood as a “delay of adult commitments” for the purposes of allowing identity formation (157). The social dimension of Erikson’s ideas is echoed and developed in Grossberg’s analysis of youth as a social phenomenon. Grossberg explains that with the baby boomers, “[s]ociety had to develop strategies to ‘program’ the mobility, the ‘otherness’ and the uncertainty of youth.” But this effort to contain adolescence was historically unsuccessful, and it actually contributed to the perception of youth as being “apart from . . . social institutions” (178). The opposition between youth and adult authority is mapped across values of mobility and experimentation versus constraint.

Grossberg expands on the “moral and sociological indeterminacy” of youth to reveal how adolescent social activities express a reaction against authority (178–79). For instance, youth since the 1950s has become associated with “space[s] of transition between . . . institutions,” as exemplified by the tendency for adolescents to congregate in “the street, the jukebox, the hop [and] the mall.” Such spaces, which the onlooker might equate with “no place at all” (179), constitute locations for teenagers to assert a collective identity, establishing a physical and cultural distance from adult institutions (such as schools and the family home). As revealed by Grossberg, the spatial orientations of youth stem from social and historical factors, and have come to form the basis of youth cultural trends such as mall culture and street gangs.

The transitional and spatial aspects of adolescence are reflected in Dazed and Confused. Here, what might appear to be a relatively unstructured narrative is consistently organized around characters’ gravitation toward “spaces of transition.” For instance, the centrality of the car in Dazed and Confused is typical of the emphasis on space and transition. At one level the emphasis recalls instances of car fetishism in a variety of Reagan-era teen films, including Risky Business (Paul Brickman, 1983), Fast Times at Ridgemont High, and Porky’s (Bob Clark, 1982). But in Dazed and Confused the historical setting predates 1980s materialism and suggests the countercultural legacy of a decade in which “the chemical/sexual freedoms of the 60s [are] redacted into thoughtless hedonism” (Savage 21). The car in the teen genre is central to an association between adolescent identity and spatial mobility.

In Dazed and Confused the car is a locus for character interaction and hedonistic behavior, stemming from the vehicle’s juxtaposition of stasis and movement, interiority and insulation. Between the school, the park, and the amusement arcade, the characters in Dazed and Confused affirm an investment in transition by transforming automobile travel into an elaborate activity. The process of driving is a social act here, with car travel facilitating links between suburban homes and providing opportunities for social encounters inside and outside vehicles. Grossberg’s attention to transition and indeterminacy in youth culture is echoed in the specific social habits of characters in Dazed and Confused.

Other aspects of mise-en-scène in the teen genre also reflect an emphasis on spaces of transition. As in American Graffiti, Fast Times at Ridgemont High, and Porky’s, the protagonists of Dazed and Confused consistently gravitate toward spaces of public amusement: diners, drive-ins, amusement arcades, and sports grounds. Such locations are neutral and familiar places in which to congregate, being conveniently removed from the constraints of the family and school. For instance, the sequence in Dazed and Confused of a party in a public park depicts the characters purposefully loitering. The park is appropriate for a party because its isolation protects against intervention by authorities and its size allows the gathering to sprawl. The emphasis on youth’s spatiality in Dazed and Confused can be understood in terms of Michel de Certeau’s linking of the contemporary consumer with a tourist, whose trajectory through cultural and/or urban space represents an alternative form of mapping (91ff.).

In the absence of a “proper” space of its own (Certeau xix), youth in the teen film, as in real-life mall culture, establishes an affinity with spaces of transition. In Dazed and Confused, the characters’ use of a succession of borrowed spaces becomes a structuring principle of the narrative.

A linking of youth with transition is evident in the writings of Erikson and Grossberg and in a variety of teen films. The indeterminacy of youth that is affirmed by Grossberg can also be contrasted with the emphasis on inevitability and closure that I have revealed in the nostalgic teen film. While rites-of-passage films share semantic elements with the larger teen genre—such as the centrality of cars in American Graffiti and the unauthorized adventure in Stand by Me—these films do not permit such concerns to dominate the text. Instead, the nostalgic teen film can be viewed as the site of a depiction of youth from a perspective that is outside youth. Here, the implicit adult perspective can be linked to a marked conservatism, which I will explore in terms of cinematic spectatorship and ideology.

The larger teen genre is never entirely free of a degree of contradiction: The films are produced by adults while seemingly presenting an adolescent point of view. But only in the nostalgic teen film does an issue of conflicting narratival perspectives become explicit: here, the theme of authority is not restricted to the diegesis, becoming
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inscribed in the text’s construction and narration. The rites-of-passage film is engaged in a quest to re-stage a past youth while affirming the mastery of the implicit or explicit adult narrator. The often-conservative project of revising youth from a postadolescent point of view is achieved by means of narrative authority.

**Narrative Authority**

The idea of narrative authority is derived from Hegel and developed by Hayden White, who explains that “the value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (qtd. in de Lauretis 128). Teresa de Lauretis observes that White’s analysis of narrative authority recasts “the... relationship binding authority, historicality, and narrative... in the terms of a slightly different triad: law, desire, and narrative” (128–29). She demonstrates that the archetypal quest narrative is constructed around a male “social contract, his biological and affective destiny—and... the fulfillment of his desire” (133). An association between narrative authority and a privileged age group is central to the nostalgic teen film.

The nostalgia film’s articulation of authority is evident in the role of the writer in *Stand by Me* and *American Graffiti*. Each film has a protagonist whose sensitivity is articulated as “writerly” in light of his adult career. In both films, the adult writer has a privileged perspective that enables him to penetrate the meaning of adolescence where few others can. In *Stand by Me*, the middle-aged writer ruminates on the life and death of a boyhood friend, concluding that his friend’s drive to “make the best peace” was his downfall. The final lines of this reminiscence are presented in written form, on the screen of a personal computer. Although *American Graffiti* has no explicit narrator, a link is established between Curtis’s later profession as a writer and his idealistic pursuit of a fantasy woman within the narrative. Whereas other characters are seemingly condemned to sell insurance or go missing in action, the narrative privileges Curtis as the character who pursues ideals and successfully discovers the identity of a mysterious radio announcer.

In each case, the male writer’s quest for an ideal mastery prompts him to seek the meaning of events. This privileged perspective can be extended to the auteur as the creative force behind a film text. With nostalgic teen films, it is common for the director or writer to have a personal investment in the text. *Stand by Me* is based on an autobiographical story by Stephen King, and auteur George Lucas has stated that *American Graffiti* is partly autobiographical. The nostalgic teen film is the work of a usually male adult who is engaged in reflecting on the era associated with his youth. In this light, it may be argued that *Stand by Me* and *American Graffiti* are not necessarily intended for youth audiences at all, but for adults whose experience of the film would involve reminiscing on a past youth.

*American Graffiti* and *Stand by Me* seek to naturalize their investments in nostalgia. Through the use of voice-over and the coda sequence, disconnected experiences are drawn into a more-or-less classical narrative structure. At the same time, the mystifying effects of nostalgia are sufficiently restrained as to avoid any significant
formal innovation. The films are conservative in their preoccupation with the past and in their containment of youth culture through the imposition of an adult perspective. Despite an ostensible allegiance to a genre that is targeted at youth, the nostalgic teen film is fundamentally informed by an adult perspective.

In *Stand by Me*, for example, the disciplinary implications of the boys’ return home are disavowed through the intervention of the adult narrator. As each boy walks toward his home, the narrator interjects to reveal what happens to each character in later life, as if to disavow his own past disobedience by drawing attention to more recent events. By contrast, the scene in *Dazed and Confused* in which Mitch returns home after an all-night party emphasizes an investment in immediacy rather than the consequences of his misdemeanor. Mitch’s mother meets him in the hallway and insists on questioning him; he evades her questions by going into his bedroom and rolling his eyes dismissively. The scene ends with Mitch putting on headphones and closing his eyes. This sequence from *Dazed and Confused* foregrounds comedy in the interaction between the nonchalant Mitch and his mother, with the final close-up of the teenager’s face alluding to the possibility of shutting out authority through the pleasure of music. Against the conservatism of *Stand by Me*, *Dazed and Confused* effaces a nostalgic depiction of the past through placing an emphasis on immediate pleasures.

**Spectatorship and Dispossession**

The contradictions of the nostalgic teen film can be further explored in terms of film spectatorship. The type of spectatorship that is encouraged by this cycle of films can be understood as a form of dispossession for the adolescent spectator. In her book *Lost Angels*, Vicky Lebeau formulates a theory of cinematic spectatorship that concerns the dispossession and occupation of the spectator. This theory of spectator dispossession is developed through a survey of a theoretical association between the mass/youth audience and the female spectator. Lebeau situates spectatorial dispossession in relation to a long-standing theoretical tendency to depict the spectator as unable to refuse a film’s ideological effects. For instance, she draws attention to a model of the (mass) spectator “who stays too long, who asks too much, . . . like a sister who doesn’t seem to know when she isn’t wanted, who carries on playing long after the game is over” (20). Such a foolish, demanding spectator is paradigmatic of the mass audience, and particularly the female spectator, who is depicted as being “dazzled, fixated, by what she has seen” (Lebeau 22).

Lebeau traces the lack of distinction between female spectator and screen image through a number of theories, including Laura Mulvey’s seminal model of cinematic spectatorship. Where Mulvey argues that the film spectator identifies with the male protagonist, Lebeau points out that “the female spectator has no choice but to witness her ‘stolen’ image, sexualized and implicitly degraded in the name of a cinema made over to the male spectator” (34–35). Although writers such as de Lauretis and Mulvey herself have added to and modified Mulvey’s original theory, Lebeau argues that the wealth of theory in the wake of “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” inherits a model of “the absence of exclusion of the woman” (35). Thus
feminist film theory is implicated in the depiction of an inordinately dependent cinematic spectator, who is "at once overwhelmed by and dissociated from cinematic fantasy" (48).

This analysis of female spectatorship forms the basis of Lebeau's theory of spectatorship as dispossession. The depiction of a dependent female spectator is fundamental to a spectatorship that revolves around dispossession and occupation. Lebeau substantiates this argument by highlighting a dilemma for feminist theories of spectatorship at the point of cinematic identification: "[W]hat can . . . appear as a feminist injunction against identification . . . seems to derive . . . from a loss of distinction between the spectator and the image . . . and . . . from an assimilation of the effects of cinema to a type of usurpation or (pre)occupation of the spectator" (23). Lebeau argues that female and, implicitly, mass spectatorship is a form of occupation in which the subject identifies by passing "through the other's no less fantastic identifications, through the other's fantasy of itself" (54).

This type of spectatorship is experienced as an exchange, but it equates to a masquerade "in the name of someone else's desire—a desire taken on as the [spectator's] own." Cinema's much-theorized specularization of the woman is "felt as a form of occupation which alienates the female spectator from her 'self.'" The woman's visibility becomes a sign of the fact that she has become a mask, carrying the other's desire" (54). This is a theory of spectatorship that disputes the possibility of distinguishing between an essential identity and the process of apprehending a film text. The viewing subject's dispossession of autonomy and the idea of spectatorial occupation can usefully be applied to the youth audience for a film that purports to represent adolescent concerns but privileges an adult perspective.

The nostalgic teen film is principally concerned with redeeming a past youth for a baby boomer generation that has outlived its monopoly on adolescence. It is the paradoxical aspect of the nostalgic teen film—the juxtaposition of idealized youth and idealizing adulthood, past pleasure and present nostalgia, teen culture and its containment—that works to draw the adolescent spectator into an identification based on dispossession. Like Lebeau's female spectator, the adolescent viewer of the films is requested to "give up the pleasures" of his or her own narcissism and observe the preoccupations of the (adult) narrational authority. The adolescent spectator's refusal of this spectatorial position may tend to reinforce the adult audience for the nostalgic teen film. In this way, the rites-of-passage film seems to "behave like Narcissus" (Lebeau 85) for adulthood. The conservative forms of nostalgia seen in Stand by Me and American Graffiti can be seen to reflect the difficulty of articulating an authentic and convincing relationship to the past. But Dazed and Confused reveals that contemporary depictions of past youth may deviate from this conservative paradigm.

Revisions of History

Nostalgia is essentially a reflection of the perspective from which the past is viewed. The elements that are emphasized in the nostalgia film are a projection of narrational authority that is engaged in a revision of the past. For instance, American Graffiti and Stand by Me can be seen to engage in a typically retrospective view of the 1960s, in Timothy Corrigan's terms. This is a perspective that highlights "the generational turning point where [the] historical home [of the 1950s] shatters along various fronts and individuals find themselves on the outside resisting or, later, disillusioned" (35). American Graffiti and Stand by Me can also be situated within a larger cycle of cultural texts that look back to the 1960s, from Apocalypse Now (Francis Coppola, 1979) and Full Metal Jacket ( Stanley Kubrick, 1987) to Oliver Stone's JFK (1991) and television's The Wonder Years. In American Graffiti, the characters' futures are understood in relation to the Vietnam war, whereas Stand by Me dramatizes the failure of ideological action in contemporary society. But these films also seek to conceal the ideological and the social, through naturalizing a retrospective stance as the voice of the individual writer.

Corrigan's omission of the 1970s from his account of viewing the past seems to emphasize how few recent films have focused on this decade. In sociohistorical terms, the view of the past in Dazed and Confused places less emphasis on a "shattering" or "disillusioning" "turning point" than films depicting the 1960s. The absence of a traumatic collective shift—social or cultural—in Dazed and Confused is reflected in the film's lack of a structuring rites-of-passage progression, although a collective dimension is suggested by the inclusion of a large number of characters. Instead, continuity is highlighted in the film's positioning of characters' rituals and beliefs in relation to the 1960s and, implicitly, later decades. The legacy of the 1960s is embodied in a teacher who attempts to politicize her students, but the students are more interested in celebrating the last day of the term than in political action.

Yet the film ultimately affirms the lasting value of liberal beliefs inherited from the 1960s. The teacher's sloganeering is juxtaposed with signs that the teenagers have fundamentally inherited some of the counterculture's values. For instance, Pink's refusal to
sign the declaration requiring abstinence from drug use is based on a refusal to compromise his civil liberties. The prevalence of marijuana use among the characters reflects the popularization of recreational drug use since the 1960s, and the camaraderie that exists in the film among intellectuals, footballers, “stoners,” freshmen, and seniors reflects a liberal desire for the dissolution of social hierarchies. In Dazed and Confused, the ideological legacy of the 1960s is sustained by 1970s youth at the level of the commonplace and in the sphere of leisure.

Unlike Stand by Me and American Graffiti, the sociohistorical dimensions of Dazed and Confused are not restricted to affirming the significance of the 1960s. The film’s 1990s viewpoint is suggested by a sequence in which three teenage girls discuss television’s Gilligan’s Island from a feminist point of view. In 1976, feminist theory had not yet begun to consider male objectification, but this scene concludes with one girl’s assertion that the “sexy” Professor in Gilligan’s Island is a suitable object of pleasure for female spectators. This scene from Dazed and Confused underscores the film’s 1990s perspective, which is here engaged in interpreting the past. Historical and social continuity is conveyed in Dazed and Confused through the role of ideology, and reinforced by the linking of adolescence with transition. Indeed, the film’s last scene affirms a sense of perpetual motion through images of Pink and his friends speeding down the highway. The conservatism of depicting a historical turning point while concealing the ideological dimension, in Stand by Me and American Graffiti, can be contrasted with the fusion of ideology with everyday culture in Dazed and Confused.

The nostalgic teen film reveals a conflict between adult narrational authority and an adolescence that is equated with fluidity and transition. In its emphasis on an adult perspective, the rites-of-passage film is at odds with the larger teen genre. My examination of the nostalgic teen film reveals that devices such as the narrative coda, voice-over narration, and the figure of the writer contribute to a privileging of the adult perspective in narrative and in terms of spectatorship. This narrative authority, which distinguishes Stand by Me and American Graffiti from Dazed and Confused, also contributes to a conservative concealment of ideology. In its fixation on the 1960s, this conservatism emphasizes personal trauma over social and ideological factors.

WORKS CITED

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