

Outsider Nostalgia in *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City*

During the 1990s, American popular media evidenced a wave of nostalgia for the decade of the 1970s. While this nostalgia was not as conspicuous as the 1950's craze of *American Graffiti* (1973), *Happy Days* (1974-1984), and *Grease* (1978) twenty years before, *Billboard* magazine noted that "Over the last eight years, that glorious yet harshly criticized... period has been the basis for more compilations, song covers, books, movies, and television shows than any other musical movement" (Flick). The 1990s interest in the 1970s produced films including *Boogie Nights* (1997), *A Night at the Roxbury* (1998), *54* (1998), and *The Last Days of Disco* (1998).

In his groundbreaking work *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, Fred Davis asserts, "A sociology of nostalgia...is concerned with tracking down the sources of nostalgic experience in group life..."(vii). David M. Shumway further states, "Commodified nostalgia involves the revival by the culture industry of certain fashions and styles of a particular past era" (39). As the titles indicate, each of the previously mentioned Seventies-nostalgic movies is disco-themed. We might therefore theorize that a primary source of group nostalgia from the 1970s is the musical movement of disco.

While such a theory would account for many of the 1970s nostalgia films, it would not account for all. *Dazed and Confused* (1993) and *Detroit Rock City* (1999) are the exceptions to the rule, a small rebellion against the institutionalized nostalgia of the disco-themed films. *Dazed and*

Confused examines the day and night of the last day of school in 1976, as experienced by a group of Texas teenagers. *Detroit Rock City* chronicles the adventures of a group of Cleveland youth as they journey to a concert in the eponymous metropolis. These films not only do not use disco as a source of nostalgia, they actively reject it. In so doing, these two films are further set apart from the pack by being nostalgic from the outsider's perspective. This essay illustrates the outsider nature of these films, and examines how each fits into Davis's "sociology of nostalgia." It will thus aid scholars in understanding the multiplicity of perspectives that can be brought to bear in nostalgic cinema.

The outsider nature of the two films may be quickly established. Each is a "rock movie," and both take their titles from rock songs. If it stopped there, this might be more evidence of insider status than outsider status. However, it is the kind of rock employed in each film that makes each outsider films, since the genre, in both cases, is heavy metal. "Dazed and Confused" is the title of a 1969 song by Led Zeppelin, perhaps the premiere British heavy metal band of the 1970s and, some say, of any era. "Detroit Rock City" is the title of a 1976 song by KISS, perhaps the most controversial of American heavy metal bands.

Heavy metal is unique even among rock's sub-genres. It has thrived for more than thirty years, while producing almost no "number one" singles. The soundtracks of *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* include fifty songs that are heavy metal or its guitar-centered musical relative, Southern rock. Examples of musicians of the former genre on these soundtracks include AC/DC, Ted Nugent, Black Sabbath, and of course KISS; of the latter, ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Black Oak Arkansas. Their fifty songs make up the overwhelming majority of tunes in the films – no other genre comes close. Furthermore, of the fifty, none reached the number one position on Billboard's top 40 from 1976 through 1978, the years covered by the two films (Bronson xiv-xvi). Genre enthusiasts might counter that metal is primarily an album-oriented genre, and so should not be expected to produce hit singles. Even so, the fact that fifty songs from more than twenty different groups could not produce one chart-topper in three years is telling. Perhaps as telling, the best-selling album of the period was the soundtrack to *Saturday Night Fever*. Clearly, heavy metal was not the popular favorite of 1970s youth.

Unlike punk, another 1970s-spawned genre, heavy metal has also never been a favorite of the rock press. Most critics simply ignored it. The few critics who defended the genre praised it in ambiguous terms, at best. Noted rock writer Lester Bangs admitted, "As its detractors have always claimed, heavy metal is nothing more than a bunch of noise.... It's a fast train to nowhere...." (335). This bluntness came in an article not for an obscure underground magazine but for *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*. Fellow critic Robert Duncan, in his biography of KISS, said of his subjects, "When I first saw KISS I thought they were the most ludicrous rip-off to come down the pike in many a moon...." (166). Again, these admissions come from supporters of the heavy metal genre.

If, then, heavy metal is neither the music of the masses, nor of the cognoscenti, who is it for? In his companion book to the PBS documentary of the same name, *Rock and Roll: An Unruly History*, Robert Palmer notes, "Above all, metal was the cult of the white male adolescent, providing a rite of passage for each new generation" (286). In each movie, most of the characters are white adolescents. The majority of the teens, and the main players, are also male. *Detroit Rock City* focuses on four white male adolescents (WMAs). *Dazed and Confused* has a larger ensemble, but still primarily focuses on Mitch, a rising freshman WMA, and Randall "Pink" Floyd, a rising senior WMA. There is only one significant role for a person of color in *Dazed and Confused*: Melvin, an African-American football player. There are no significant roles for people of color in *Detroit Rock City*. In *Yearning for Yesterday*, Davis notes that males are apt to be more nostalgic than women (55), and that adolescence is the predominant focus of their nostalgic fantasies (56-57). As Davis observes, "It is almost as if the depth and drama of the transition were such as to institutionalize adolescence in the personality as a more or less permanent and infinitely recoverable subject for nostalgic exercise" (59). Therefore, as objects of exercises in nostalgia, the adolescent characters are perfect.

In addition, these WMAs are not part of the hip culture of New York, Los Angeles, or any "in" spot. *Dazed and Confused*, filmed on location in Austin, Texas, never names the small city in which it is set. *Detroit Rock City*'s protagonists are natives of Cleveland, Ohio. The choice of settings reinforces the outsider status established by the heavy metal music. It should be emphasized that these WMAs choose heavy metal as a means of

expressing to others their romanticized outsider status; but the same music becomes an effective means of evoking nostalgia. As Davis states, “[G]enres, styles and concepts that in one epoch strike one as leagues removed from nostalgic sentiment can, at a later time, capture it to a turn” (88).

We have seen that the subjects—male adolescents—are perfectly suited to nostalgia, and that the heavy metal genre marks these adolescents as outsiders. What of the films themselves? As “rock” movies, the temptation might be to class them, with so many of their predecessors, in the exploitation genre described by Pam Cook. Exploitation films offer “alternatives to the dominant representational systems” (56). As we have established, this can certainly be said of both films’ soundtracks. On the other hand, Cook also maintains that the archetypical exploitation film rejects “critical notions of ‘quality’” (85) in favor of, among other things, “substantial degrees of sex and violence” (63). Neither film emphasizes sex or violence. There are two fistfights in *Detroit Rock City* and one in *Dazed and Confused*, but the violence never escalates. There are no real gunfights (though a few shots are fired in each film, no one is hit) and no serious injury or death occurs. Sex is implied in both movies, but never shown on-screen. Neither film thus fully embraces the exploitation genre. Nor, in genre consideration, is it enough simply to slot both films into the “coming of age” category so strongly established by *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *The Graduate* (1967), despite the fact that *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* center on periods of major transition for their young protagonists. Both Nicholas Ray’s and Mike Nichols’ films were specifically designed to be pictures of then-contemporary late adolescence or early adulthood, not as looks back into the past.

Even if the two films could be classified as exploitative coming-of-age, Cook provides a basis for still considering them as films of nostalgia. According to Cook, “Film texts do not necessarily simply use memory in a functional manner, they also embody memories—those of the filmmakers themselves, for example” (99). This strongly echoes Davis’s contention that “[N]ostalgia must in some fashion be a personally experienced past...” (8).

It is clear that these movies are expressions of personal pasts for their directors. Richard Linklater, director of *Dazed and Confused*, stated, “For

me, *Dazed* was like a good night.... Take Mitch, who was really me.... That was kind of like every interesting thing that happened to me in my freshman year..."(*Mr. Showbiz*). Adam Rifkin, director of *Detroit Rock City*, declared, "The whole thing was my Midwestern youth as a rock 'n' roller perfectly captured" (*Yahoo*).

The two directors also began their directorial careers at about the same time. Linklater directed his first feature in 1991. Rifkin made his feature debut in 1988. Chronologically, this places them as part of a new generation of nostalgia directors. Vera Dika defined a first wave of modernist nostalgic filmmakers, foremost of whom were Peckinpah and Altman, who, according to Dika, "dismantle[d] Hollywood films" (15) with such movies as the revisionist Westerns *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971), respectively. Dika states that this wave was followed by the post-modernists, including Carpenter, Coppola, Scorsese and Spielberg, who responded to "already dismantled classical American cinema" (16) by re-inventing and remaking traditional American film genres. While it may be too soon to class Linklater and Rifkin together as part of a "Third Wave," it can be argued that *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* are the beginnings of what Paul Grainge calls "... a new kind of engagement with the past, a relationship based fundamentally on its cultural mediation and textual reconfiguration in the present" (7). Unlike previous waves, the primary new engagement is in what they leave out. Lesley Speed states, "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" (8). Neither *Dazed and Confused* nor *Detroit Rock City* uses these devices. Each film's perspective remains personal, but is the personal perspective of remembered adolescence, as far as that can be achieved. This was the stated intention of the directors. In fact, Linklater said, "When I was making the movie, I regressed completely.... My whole mind was like a 15, 16, 17 year old. Anyone over their early 20s seemed just slightly cartoonish" (*Dazed and Confused* DVD). Rifkin was even more direct: "I got to recreate my youth with this movie" (*Detroit Rock City* DVD).

Of course, neither director claimed to be making a documentary of his own past. In Davis's view, this is as it should be, since the nostalgic expe-

rience is a result of a certain tension between two opposite poles of the past. While the natural focus of nostalgia is the “positive affects of being,” these recollections are often bittersweet. “The hurts, the annoyances, disappointments, and irritations... are filtered forgivingly through an ‘it-was-all-for-the-best’ attitude or, at the very least, one patronized under some ‘great human comedy’ metaphor” (14). What keeps the evocation of times past from straying from nostalgia into a purely idealized Never-Never land is that “[I]n the end the memory of them is constrained by, at minimum, some nagging unspoken sense of the way things actually were then” (9). Davis later refers to this as “the constraint of a lived past on nostalgia and nostalgia’s inability knowingly and recklessly to obliterate it (or to fabricate another past in its place)...” (48). We may then ask whether *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* fulfill their nostalgic function by providing, first, a sense of how things really were in the past; second, a focus on positive affects of being; and, third, a corresponding filter of hurts.

The Way Things Really Were

The sense of how things really were is possibly the easiest to answer. Davis was writing at a time when nostalgia was quite prevalent on the nation’s theater screens. He cites two films of the period, *American Graffiti* and *The Sting*, as examples of a cinematic nostalgic style “... which eschews the visually vaporous and existentially distanced and opts instead for a heightened, almost obsessive realism that strains to capture *exactly*, in minute and exquisite detail, how objects looked then, how people spoke and dressed then...” (88-89). Cook states that this attention to detail establishes a special connection between the filmmaker and the audience by engaging the audience in a game of recognition, in which the audience gets “points” for good memories and bittersweet feelings for positive aspects of the past that are lost (99). This style is apparent from the opening shot of *Dazed*: a custom GTO “muscle car” cruising through a high school parking lot full of other period cars, as Aerosmith’s “Sweet Emotion” plays. Certainly, both car and music are details of the period. The music may be diegetic, since the car certainly has a radio, or it may not. There are no direct visual or aural cues to tell us. Regardless, Oldies music is, according to Shumway, “the most important ingredient in the production of the affect of nostal-

gia.... the tea-soaked madeline of the masses...” and notes that movies use them “to evoke the fiction of a common past” (40). But the visual and aural subjects and the way in which they are presented render the shot even more nostalgic. As Jon Savage notes, the classic car and the “cruising motion” of the camera echo the opening shot of *American Graffiti* (20). As Shumway further notes, *American Graffiti* deliberately blurred the line between diegetic and non-diegetic music: “Music doesn’t come from particular places in the film’s space; it pervades that space” (41). Thus, *Dazed and Confused* connects directly to what Dika and Jameson agree is the inaugural youth nostalgia film (89) and, by invoking the earlier cinematic scene, draws the viewers further back into their pop culture memories. (Lesley Speed, in noting the centrality of the car in *Dazed and Confused*, suggests a connection to 1960’s counterculture [4].) However, the *American Graffiti* connection is far more obvious. Furthermore, the car has been central to American adolescent dreams in every era since the 1950s as a means of freedom, an expression of rebelliousness, and a symbol of teen status.)

The attention to detail does not stop with *Dazed and Confused*’s opening sequence. Accessories inside those period cars include CB radios and 8-track stereos. The cars pull into service stations which sell gas for \$.60 per gallon (exemplifying Cook’s bittersweet recollection of good things lost). Furthermore, Bicentennial murals and decorations are found throughout the school. The kids have bean bag chairs in their rooms, where they put on paisley shirts and jeans so tight they have to lie down to zip them up. Of course, every youth, male and female, has hair past the collar, if not past the shoulders.

Yet one of the most intriguing details in *Dazed and Confused* is found in the superimposed words that end the credit sequence. The words read, “Last day of school, May 28, 1976, 1:05 P.M.” In her discussion of the film, Speed disparages *Dazed and Confused*’s lack of attention to the collective, with the exception of the large ensemble (7). The use of the utterly specific time detail, while leaving the location completely blank, suggests that the collective is intended to be the entire audience, regardless of their location. It also subtly continues the outsider theme; the superimposed words literally set the film in the middle of nowhere. Further, the prominence of the “Last day of school” line serves to expand the audience be-

yond those who can remember May 28, 1976, to anyone who can relate to a last day of school. This connects the specific nostalgia for the 1970s to a general nostalgia for any last day of school, even if it happened only yesterday.

Detroit Rock City is no less attentive to detail. As with the Linklater film, cars still have 8-track stereos – though not, in a neat bit of geographical and time detail, CBs. The closet of one protagonist holds *Planet of the Apes* and *The Partridge Family* board games. A downtown theater is showing a Kung Fu movie festival. Convenience stores have racks full of 1970s comic books, and 1970s *Hustler* magazines behind the counter. Qiana and polyester disco styles are worn by all the pretty and popular kids in school – which does not include our outsider heroes in their KISS tribute garage band. In their only nod to insider icons, the basement where the band practices has a poster of Farrah Fawcett-Majors on the wall. More important, the basement contains a mind-boggling array of KISS merchandise. As Cook notes, collecting can be a form of fetishism: “These objects both bring the adored star or celebrity closer, and possess a magical quality that has the potential to transform lives” (115). Our heroes clearly hope for both effects; the outsider teens fetishize an outsider band.

Like *Dazed and Confused*, *Detroit Rock City* also uses words superimposed onscreen to place itself in time. In the latter’s case, the words “Cleveland, OH, 1978” locate the movie geographically as well. This spatial specificity, on the one hand, has a certain limiting effect. On the other hand, the geographic grounding helps to counterbalance the title sequence that follows the opening scenes of the movie. In a pop-art explosion, KISS posters, newspaper clippings, magazine covers, concert footage, broadcast news reports, and television commercials are intercut with at least 35 other icons of the 1970s. These range from the Patty Hearst Symbionese Liberation Army photo to the *Charlie’s Angels* (1976-1981) episode-opening silhouette. Cook notes the association between nostalgia and fantasy (3), and this sequence could act as a textbook example of that symbiosis. Since the sequence ends with a ringing telephone and Jam, one of the protagonists, awakening with a start, the implication is that it is a fantasy; literally, Jam’s dream. Still, even the outright fantasy is dominated both by the media period detail and, of course, Jam’s personal obsession, the rock group KISS.

Positive Affects of Being

The second major point, according to Davis, is a focus on the positive affects of being. Here much depends on how one defines “positive.” In *Detroit*, our heroes enjoy practicing in their garage-band, Mystery. The whole focus of the film is a road trip to see their idols in concert. Along the way, the protagonists indulge in some high-speed driving and pick up a pretty, teenaged hitchhiker. Certainly road-tripping to a much-anticipated concert is a common experience for most teens. The idolization of KISS, again, renders it an expression of the protagonists’ outsider identification. In *Dazed*, the teenagers cruise around town, with occasional fast-food breaks. When they stop at a local game room – in the last pre-video-game years – they play foosball and pinball. They converge at the “moon tower” (an outdoor lighting structure left over from a construction project) for a huge, though clandestine, outdoor party. While not positive as adults might define it, certainly all these activities fall into an adolescent category of fun that was common during this time period.

Interestingly, while romance or, more bluntly, sex is the primary focus of innumerable teen movies, including such controversial examples as *Porky’s* (1982) and its sequels and *American Pie* (1999) and its sequels, young love is almost an afterthought in the subject films. Two of the four heroes in *Detroit* do lose their virginity, but the other two must subsist on a single kiss apiece. No one in *Dazed* is explicitly shown or stated to have had sex, although it is hinted at having occurred twice, and there’s a respectable amount of kissing (and, of course, recurring discussion of sex). What is a constant and overwhelming emphasis in both movies is the consumption of alcohol and marijuana. Every teenage protagonist in *Dazed*, and all but one in *Detroit*, drinks beer, smokes marijuana, or does both. This mild substance abuse is a form of rebellion, of self-proclaimed outsider status, for the teens. At the same time, the avoidance of sex emphasizes the adolescent nature of the protagonists. Not quite ready for adult relationships, they are holding onto the behaviors of youth.

These small rebellions may, however, be seen merely as the pastimes of the protagonists, more-or-less thoughtless responses to the boredom in their lives. A far more important positive aspect of both *Dazed and Confused* and *Detroit Rock City* is the conscious moral choices that reflect

who the protagonists *are*. Again, Davis: “The rhetorical formula seems simple enough: if, as my nostalgic evocation of the past tells me, I was lovable and worthy then despite adverse or dangerous conditions, I am likely to prove lovable and worthy now despite the anxieties and uncertainties of the present” (36). *Detroit*, being more an adventure (if not fantasy) movie than *Dazed*, gives its four heroes ample opportunity to demonstrate their worthiness in dangerous conditions. Hawk, the leader of the group, overcomes his stage fright at an amateur-night strip contest. Jam, the hen-pecked drummer, stands up to his domineering mother in front of her anti-KISS protest group. Lex, the bassist who always follows and never leads the action, on his own invades a chop shop and outwits two hoodlums to recover their stolen car and their newfound hitchhiking friend. And guitarist and admitted physical coward Trip faces down a shotgun-toting robber in a convenience store. As Cook admitted, “I don’t like [violence], but the illusion of ‘being there,’ the risk involved, is a real turn-on” (175). Just as the audience vicariously embraces outsider status by identifying with the protagonists, so the audience is vindicated when the boys face their own worst weaknesses.

Few of our protagonists in *Dazed* have such dramatic occasions to prove that they are worthy. Yet virtually all have an opportunity, however brief, to show a lovable side. With twenty-four significant roles in the movie, space prevents listing them all, but a few should suffice. The perpetually stoned Slater shows a thoughtful side with a long and oddly logical monologue about the relationship between George Washington, marijuana, and the dollar bill. Melvin, a senior football player, demonstrates generosity when he lets a freshman keep the change from an errand. Wooderson, a twenty-something high-school graduate with a dead-end job and a thing for high school women, comes to the rescue when a kid he does not even know is being viciously beaten. And Simone, a perky blonde with no apparent ambition beyond being the girlfriend of Randall “Pink” Floyd, shows a clear eye and a refreshing honesty when she deflates Pink’s pretensions of persecution, pointing out “You guys are kings of the school!”

Simone’s momentary deflation of Pink in no way diminishes him as a person. In fact, he is probably the most “heroic” of all the characters in the film, along with Mitch, who can be seen as a Pink in training. Pink demonstrates compassion in taking the freshman Mitch under his wing; courage in

breaking up a fight; consistency in refusing to sign a no-alcohol pledge, when all his friends are signing it and imbibing anyway. Davis sums up this aspect of nostalgia neatly: “In short, people want to think well of themselves” (36). As a representative of our own adolescent struggles, Pink allows us to think well of ourselves.

Furthermore, Pink is a reflection of another intriguing aspect of Davis’s thesis: “We are all familiar with the scenario... that ‘beneath it all’ we are something more intriguing, more sensitive, more complex, more daring. In short, that we are not like ‘all the others’... nostalgic recall evinces a strong partiality for this genre” (40). As the star quarterback, Pink spends most of his time with, and seems closest to, his friends on the team. Yet he is also intelligent enough to trade witticisms with the class intellectuals. He is laid-back enough to be accepted by the class “dopers.” He is practical enough to relate to the class “greasers.” And, as mentioned, he is compassionate enough to form a bond with the incoming freshmen. While all the teens connect briefly with others outside their clique, Pink is the one character who bonds with all. He is a “renaissance teen.” In fact, Pink thus seems to contradict the outsider status that we have ascribed to the characters in both films. Even Randall “Pink” Floyd, though, is still stuck in the same anonymous small town. Though he can relate across his peer group, he cannot rise above it.

In contrast, the concept of relationships across the social strata of high school is not explored at all in *Detroit Rock City*. With the exceptions of Beth, a classmate of Jam’s who finally reveals her crush on him, and Christine, the aforementioned hitchhiker from another school (“Beth” and “Christine Sixteen” being titles of two KISS hits), the four boys are not shown to have any significant relationships with any other teen. The closest thing that the foursome has to an interaction with any peers is this mocking line from a pretty and popular (but, in the film, nameless) classmate: “Don’t stare too long, boys, or you’ll go blind.” In the film, the members of Mystery are suffering through perhaps the cruelest outsider status of adolescence. Not even recognized enough by their peers to be persecuted by them, the four boys are simply and completely ignored.

Their idols, KISS, are vilified by adults and ridiculed by popular teens. The name of the activist group M.A.T.M.O.K., Mothers Against The Music Of KISS, sums up the adult perspective. Though this group is a creation

of the film, similar protests dogged the band throughout its heyday. The insider teen perspective is expressed by one of *Detroit Rock City*'s disco fans: "A bunch of guys who make bad music, dress like freaks, and wear more makeup than all my sisters combined." It is interesting to note that both the "reactionary" adults and the "cool" teens react in the same way to KISS: they destroy their recordings. Jam's mother throws his LP copy of *Love Gun* in the trash; the disco fans toss an 8-track copy of the same album under the wheels of a truck. It is probably over-analytic to look for Freudian meanings here. Still, these reactions are visual cues to the peculiar conflicts faced by the outsider.

Emphasizing the peculiarity of these boys and their obsession, though it may not suggest hidden depths, does neatly point up the "sweet strangeness" part of nostalgia. Davis says, "It is as if by harking back to those (probably recast) times of sweet strangeness, we assure ourselves that, just as we then felt odd, different, alone, and estranged, and yet managed somehow to emerge from it all intact and possibly even enhanced, so shall we again" (41). Most of us have felt that strangeness at some time during adolescence, even if we were in fact insiders of the highest degree. The emergence from that awkward stage is an important part of other teen nostalgia films. Shumway points out that *American Graffiti* and *Dirty Dancing* (1987) both focus on the transition point between high school and college (41). But neither *Dazed and Confused* nor *Detroit Rock City* even allude to this transition. Though set on the last day of school, all of the primary characters are still in high school in *Dazed and Confused*. *Detroit Rock City* is set in the middle of the school year. The characters have yet to emerge from the "sweet strangeness," and they seem in no hurry to do so. Pink at one point does ask his friends to shoot him if he ever refers to his teen years as the best of his life. Still, Pink and the rest of the teens in both films seem intent on staying in the moment, strange as it may be.

Filtering of Past Hurts

The emphasis on strangeness in *Dazed and Confused* and in *Detroit Rock City* brings us to the third of the three major elements of nostalgia: the filtering of past hurts. Filtering, in the sense of straining out the coarsest elements, never occurs in the two films. In *Dazed*, incoming freshmen are

subjected to brutal hazing. The girls are rounded up by female seniors, who force the youngsters to suck on pacifiers while playing “Air Raid” on a hot asphalt parking lot. This game has the participants stand up until the person in charge screams “Air Raid.” At that instant, the girls have to throw themselves on the lot as quickly as they can. Then, the senior leader screams “Get up!” On command, the younger girls have to scramble back to their feet. After a few rounds of this, the girls are forced to lie on the asphalt, where the seniors cover them with ketchup, mustard, flour, and whipped cream. One particularly brutal senior verbally berates the new girls, calling them “bitches,” “sluts,” and other even less savory terms, throughout this whole process. Next, the seniors put dog collars on the younger students and make them “propose” to senior boys. Finally, the seniors “clean up” the new high school students by putting them in the back of open pick-up trucks and driving through a car wash.

The initiation of boys is less complex, but more painful. Every rising senior boy who cares to makes himself a wooden paddle (much attention is paid to the time and care the seniors put into the customization of their paddles). The new seniors then use their custom weapons to beat every incoming freshman at least once during the summer, for as many “licks” as the older boy decides to give.

Things are better for rising sophomores, juniors and seniors in the world of *Dazed and Confused*, but they too have their trials. They are stopped by police, have parents disrupt parties, lose fist fights — even have adults pull guns on them. Still, the implication is that the worst is over for them.

The pains endured by the heroes of *Detroit* are more varied in nature. Each of the four members of Mystery has his own trials to endure.

For Jam, the primary source of pain is his mother. She drags him out of his friends’ basement rehearsal, screaming all the while. She forces him to wear polyester clothes of the period that reflect her tastes, not his — because she has purchased them for him. She shows up at his school and screams at him, by full name, over the PA system, thus humiliating him in front of the entire school. She destroys his KISS records and his KISS concert tickets. In her worst act, she tries to destroy his friendships and his dreams of being a rock drummer by dragging him off to boarding school.

For Trip, the primary source of pain is his own lack of thought. It is his carelessness that is in part responsible for the loss of the first set of tickets. Though he wins another set for the group in a radio contest, in his euphoria he hangs up without giving all the necessary information – and they lose the second set. An ill considered plan to get yet a third set results only in Trip receiving a physical beating.

For Hawk, the primary source of pain is his dreams of the spotlight. As the leader of the group, he is driving when Trip tosses a piece of pizza out the car window. The ejected pizza splatters on the windshield of a car full of disco fans. The enraged disco teens force our heroes' car off the road. Hawk is then manhandled by two older and much bigger boys, simply because he was driving the car. Later, Hawk attempts to earn the money for more KISS tickets in an amateur night strip contest. Unfortunately, he humiliates himself by vomiting onstage of a nightclub full of older women. Still later, and against all odds, Hawk is given a chance at what most boys his age would consider a dream date. A much older, yet still lovely, woman (played by former *Playboy* centerfold Shannon Tweed) takes him back to her car for a sexual encounter – and Hawk prematurely ejaculates.

Finally, Lex's problem is just the opposite – it is his position outside the spotlight, as the “fourth man” of the group, which causes his pain. He allows the band to practice in his basement bedroom, and Trip spills bong water in his bed. He lets the others talk him into taking his mother's car to Detroit, and the car is stolen. He tries to sneak into the concert through the backstage area, and he is thrown out literally onto a pile of garbage.

In neither nostalgic depiction are these various agonies smoothed out. However, the painful initiation is situated as a rite of passage by which Mitch and his female counterpart Sabrina enter the world of high school. The mishaps of the older teens are resolved, or at least put on hold, by dawn. And it is through facing their pains that the four garage-band teens grow as young people and, finally, reach their Shangri-La – the KISS concert. Thus the pain is indeed subsumed by “It was all for the best.”

Furthermore, these plot points illustrate a primary difference between the two films. Cook notes that in many nostalgic fictions, “The past is presented as a site for a complex imaginative encounter, combining fantasy, emotion, and critical judgment, to which the knowledge that it can never be

fully retrieved is essential” (11). This could have been written specifically for *Detroit Rock City*. The trials and triumphs of the film become increasingly fantastic. Few teens will foil armed robberies, sleep with Shannon Tweed, turn junkyard guard dogs against chop-shop hoodlums, or lose their virginity in a church confessional. The fantastic nature of the plot is mirrored by Rifkin’s flamboyant style of both montage and mise-en-scène. The director uses no less than twenty point-of-view shots in the film, including one from the POV of Gene Simmons’s tongue, and employs Dutch tilts with abandon. He also creates a thought visualization scene: Trip imagines his friends explaining the downside of armed robbery. In the editing room, Rifkin uses numerous splits, wipes and dissolves, but also employs frequent jump cuts.

On the other hand, the trials of *Dazed and Confused* are highly realistic, as are the “immediate pleasures” noted by Speed (6). Linklater’s filmmaking style is correspondingly straightforward. The cinematography, with the exception of one shot, is solidly in the third-person observer mode. There are neither jump cuts nor transition effects in the editing. In short, Linklater used what audiences have come to accept as the Hollywood classical narrative style to reinforce the naturalness of his story.

Had either of these art works come into existence as simply the reminiscences of an individual, they could be dismissed as what Davis terms First Order or Simple Nostalgia: “...that subjective state which harbors the largely unexamined belief that things were better (more beautiful) (healthier) (happier) (more civilized) (more exciting) *then* than *now*” (17-18). As motion pictures, though, they move into the public realm. Obviously, in order to make money, the film must arouse feeling – preferably nostalgic — in as many people as possible. Thus, though the feeling may be the same, the film must tap into collective nostalgia: “that condition in which the symbolic objects are of a highly public, widely shared, and familiar character” (122). And, as Davis also notes,

... What is most striking and interesting about contemporary nostalgia... [is] that not only is it propagated on a cast scale by the mass media, but the very objects of collective nostalgia are in themselves media creations from the recent past... Or, as a cynic might put it, nostalgia exists of the media, by the media, and for the media. (122)

The whole of *Detroit Rock City* is permeated with the second part of this concept. It is the obsession with KISS that drives the entire movie. Of course, more people have experienced, or at least heard of, KISS, than have experienced high school in a small Texas city. It should follow that *Detroit Rock City* is a better example of collective (simple) nostalgia than *Dazed and Confused*. On the other hand, the numbers argue against this view: according to the Internet Movie Database, *Dazed and Confused* grossed nearly twice as much during its first run as *Detroit Rock City* did during its initial release.

We might say that *Dazed and Confused* was successful through its evocation of a more “realistic” nostalgia. *Detroit Rock City*, on the other hand, was less successful because of its more fantastic nature. We might also note that, even in nostalgia, KISS is still a very polarizing, love-it-or-hate-it band. But an even more important clue to the difference in success between the two films may be found in the last shot of each. *Detroit Rock City* ends on a freeze frame of Jam, who has just caught a drumstick thrown by KISS drummer Peter Criss. *Dazed and Confused* ends with the only POV shot of the film: a view through the windshield of a car, which is not immediately obvious as a period auto, speeding down an open road. In her discussion of female modernists and postmodernists and nostalgia, Ellen G. Friedman notes, “They... remain outlaws outside the canon because there is little in the backward, Oedipal glance for them. Instead, they aim their gaze unabashedly and audaciously forward” (177). The films are both devoted to nostalgia of the outsiders of their era. Rifkin freezes the outsider in a “backward glance.” Linklater emphasizes Friedman’s forward-looking, outlaw gaze. The romantic idea that our protagonists and, through them, we the audience are still rebels, not rebels of yesterday, is a strong part of *Dazed and Confused*’s greater appeal.

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