

One Big Happy Family? Subverting Reaganism in Peggy Sue Got Married

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Abstract

While much critical analysis has been done on films made during Ronald Reagan's two terms in the White House (1980-1988), that have been labeled "Reaganite cinema," Francis Ford Coppola's *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986) has received limited attention. Most scholars have focused on how the film promotes traditional family values, i.e. the reinstatement of the nuclear family headed by a strong, patriarchal father figure, as ensconced in Reaganism. Indeed, the distinct "pro-family" trope reasserting marriage as a worthy institution gets a neat cinematic treatment in the film. However, a closer analysis reveals that the film also reflects Reagan's championing of "new patriotism," as well as the reactionary backlash against women's rights causes and the appropriation of sexual expression only within the contexts of marriage and procreation. In addition, because Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner) makes the seemingly fatalistic choice of reuniting with her estranged husband Charlie (Nicolas Cage), despite the fact that independent relationship alternatives are available, the film suggests that even a conservative's approach to social issues might be far more nuanced than what the mythologized Reagan storyline suggests. This paper compares *PSGM* with Robert Zemeckis's 1985 film *Back to the Future*, examines its attempts to reunite the nuclear family, how reflects the "greed is good" mentality that was prevalent during Reagan's presidency, and how it seems to both promote and challenge Reaganism. The subversive deconstruction of Reaganism may not be readily apparent, but it becomes evident as the film is viewed more than a quarter of a century after its release.

Introduction

While much critical analysis has been done on films made during Ronald Reagan's two terms in the White House (1980-1988), that have been labeled "Reaganite cinema," Francis Ford Coppola's *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986) has received limited attention. Most scholars have focused on how the film promotes traditional family values, i.e. the reinstatement of the nuclear family headed by a strong, patriarchal father figure, as ensconced in Reaganism. Indeed, the distinct "pro-family" trope reasserting marriage as a worthy institution gets a neat cinematic treatment in the film. However, a closer analysis reveals that the film also reflects Reagan's (1989: online) championing of "new patriotism," as well as the reactionary backlash against women's rights causes. Because Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner) makes the seemingly fatalistic choice of reuniting with her estranged husband Charlie (Nicolas Cage), the film suggests that even a conservative's approach to social issues might be far more nuanced than what the mythologized Reagan storyline suggests.

Robin Wood (2003) claims that this "Reaganite entertainment" provides reassurance in numerous ways. First, it reflects a reassuring nostalgia for the 1950s and a return to its simplistic suburban values in an attempt to overcome, or "cover up," the social upheaval and revolutions of the 1960s, such as Vietnam and Watergate. Second, these films work to restore power to the white, patriarchal father at the expense of gendered or ethnic others. Many films, for example, feature the return of women to traditional gender roles, i.e. a woman's place is in the home. Third, they are films that attempt to overcome the perceived weakness of the Carter-era and restore America to its "rightful" place as an omnipotent world leader.

Susan Jeffords (1994: 25) cites 1980s action films, such as the popular *Rambo* films (Kotcheff, 1982; Comsatos, 1985; MacDonald, 1988), which feature male "hard-body" heroes who embody patriotic values that characterized Reagan's presidency. Reagan viewed America as one big "family," and Reaganite cinema, according to Kinder (1989: 4), "is the restoration of the family to its former status as a strong ideological State Apparatus and the reinstatement of the father within this patriarchal stronghold." Finally, the main characters in these films often travel back in time to the perceived "golden years" of the 1950s and return to the present with a renewed sense of purpose and self-confidence.

These time-travel films reflect Reagan's belief that "tampering with the space-time continuum was not dangerous but beneficial...it was...absolutely necessary for happiness and comfort" (Nadel, 1997: 20-21), even if it meant bending the truth so much as to "rewrite" history. Like a movie, Reagan's assurance that his economic policies would eventually lead to a balanced budget was completely illusory. He asked the American people to be like moviegoers who, in pursuit of short-term rewards, accept the illusory and illogical space-time continuum of film. Reagan worked his magic as America's favorite storyteller, improvising a narrative about the present and the future rooted in America's mythic past.

Comparing Reaganism in *Peggy Sue Got Married* with *Back to the Future*

Peggy Sue Got Married seems to resemble *Back to the Future* because of its "use of an imagined past to escape from a bitter present" (Crowdus, 1994: 91). In fact, Carter

(2000: 257-266) claims that both films are symptomatic of the American “cultural impulse to internalize the power of time” as well as America’s “deeply-rooted chronophobia.” They “reverse the arrow of time,” reflecting the “American passion for the new” as a symptom of a deeper collective urge: the desire to escape time altogether” (ibid.). However, the main difference lies in the fact that Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) was transported into the past in the 1985 incarnation of himself, whereas Peggy Sue awakens in the past—1960—in the 17-year-old incarnation of herself but with her 42-year-old mind still intact. Unlike Marty, Peggy Sue actually knows her future: an adult life filled with compromise and disillusionment.

The passage of time in the film must be viewed in terms of how its various constructed cultural, historical, biological, and personalized dimensions converge and interact. As Dika (2003: 144) contends, *Back to the Future* and *Peggy Sue Got Married* are similar in the way they “find a past that is flawed and that ultimately yields no security.” Both films offer a nostalgic look at a seemingly “simpler” era in American culture. We must remember, however, that time is not synonymous with change, order, or sequence. For Marty and Peggy Sue, their trials of personal redemption necessitates being redeemed from time.

Like *Back to the Future*, *Peggy Sue Got Married* creates, as Babington (1998: 94) posits, an “intensely nostalgic atmosphere that pervades the film.” However, as Bawer (1992: 37) rightly points out, the film is much more than a “sentimental journey into the past” because “the idea of time travel...is itself absurd.” As a postmodern text, the film also mixes genres: it is both a romantic comedy and melodrama. Ideologically, it seems to choose “monogamy over multiplicity and diffusion in the sexual sphere” (ibid.). For example, despite Peggy Sue’s one night fling with the bohemian Michael Fitzsimmons (Kevin J. O’Conner), she chooses Charlie, the only man she’s ever dated. The “mistakes” that Peggy Sue made with Charlie have, after all, “given Peggy Sue her children, and she won’t change that” (Dika, 2003: 143). Some critics have read the narrative as being simply nostalgic and, therefore, conservative. However, the film’s coherence as a text stems also from acknowledging the potential ways of seeing how the film undermines the Reagan cultural fantasy that there is a stable, idyllic past to which the United States can easily or simply return.

Peggy Sue’s time travel back to 1960 occurs before the feminist movement and the sexual revolution. Even though Peggy Sue is given the opportunity to imagine a different kind of life, in the end she reasserts her identity as a wife and mother. The message seems to be that it is okay for Peggy Sue to give up her dreams to be a dancer and Charlie’s dream to be a singer because in doing so, it reunites the family and awards them with “middle-class success: money, stability, security” (Young, 2008: Online). In particular, marriage is imagined as a woman’s most important accomplishment.

The film also reflects the Reagan ideological rhetoric in a similar, yet different, way as *Back to the Future*. Whereas *Back to the Future* was about legitimatizing the strength of the father’s role and re-envisioning history, *Peggy Sue Got Married* attempts to reinvigorate the case for family and marital values at a time when 1980s America was experiencing a decline in such values and institutions. Reagan based his presidency not only on economic reform and military might, but also on

reestablishing “traditional” family values: men as heads of households and breadwinners, women in charge of childrearing.

So important were family values to Reagan—ironically, the first divorced man to become U.S. president—that it was the focus of his December 20, 1986 radio address to the nation, in which he stated: “...the family today remains the fundamental unit of American life” (Reagan, 1986: Online). And by looking back to family values of the 1950s, one finds that for women, at least, whatever was valued most was not “individualized self-improvement and independence of thought, but obedience” (Stone, 1994: Online). In fact, up until the early 1960s, “the old family values still held...They included religious piety, obedience to parents and superiors, hard work, optimism about future upward mobility, and the deferment of gratification in coping with sexual passion” (ibid.). These elements find a prominent home in *Peggy Sue Got Married*, even as they are challenged by the 42-year-old protagonist.

Peggy Sue only had two options: either she reconciles with Charlie or she starts life anew without him. As Corliss (1986: 9-17) puts it, Peggy Sue is somewhat like George Bailey (James Stewart) in Capra’s (1946) *It’s a Wonderful Life*: “She receives the gift of second sight. But Peggy Sue’s flashback convinces her that she must treasure what she has lost, not what she has achieved.” However, she is unlike George, “who never doubted his love for Mary” (Levy, 1991: 243). Instead, Peggy Sue is filled with doubt and uncertainty about both her marriage and her future. Maio (1988: 193) claims that Peggy Sue “doesn’t even have the same comfort” that Capra gave George, who “is at least shown what a miserable place the world would have been without him.” The “only comfort Peggy Sue is given is that of a possible reconciliation with Crazy Charlie, the Appliance King” (ibid.). With Peggy Sue, the film confronts the illusory separation of the American family from the marketplace, as couched in Reaganomics and the championed attitudes of *laissez-faire* capitalism. But the film also seems to highlight—if not champion—the indispensable dimension of consumerism.

Peggy Sue’s journey into the past is very different from Marty’s in *Back to the Future*: she is given another chance to realize her teenage dreams, whereas Marty was fighting for his very existence. The problem is that Peggy Sue avoids the riskiest and most potentially rewarding choice in her extraordinary opportunity—which becomes a contentious point for some of the film’s sharpest critics. Once she finds herself stuck in 1960, instead of panicking like Marty does in 1955, Peggy Sue begins to cherish every moment with “the adolescent enthusiasm that has been stifled in her mid-life soul” (ibid.), such as eating breakfast with her family and watching TV with her sister. For Corliss (1986), the message is clear: “The movie is a plea to treasure life’s ordinary gifts.” This certainly is in tandem with Reagan’s persistently sunny speeches about the nation’s future.

Like *Back to the Future*, the film also serves simultaneously as an endorsement as well as a subtle critique of the artificial and symbolic class of life embodied in Reaganism. For Levy (1991), the film stresses “the values of family...over personal fulfillment...[and] is conservative in its ideology, favoring marriage...over divorce, and family life over singlehood.” However, by digging deeper into the film’s texts and contexts, we can envision how the critique of family values portrayed in *Peggy Sue Got Married* moves well beyond the polarizing gender and sexual politics of the

1980s into a broader examination of the troubled relationships the American family has with consumerism and capitalism as championed during the 1980s.

Reuniting the Nuclear Family

The rhetoric of Reagan and the New Right in the 1980s resurrected the traditional American family version, but it also effectively sheared away some of its most traditional elements, such as the extended family model, its economic emphasis on shared labor, and patriarchal hierarchy where women and children had been relegated to subordinate roles. Within the fantasy text, the film attempts to resolve this social and political displacement. But we are distracted from this ideology due to the ambiguity of Peggy Sue's time travel. Was it just a dream? But if so, how could Michael have written a book dedicated to her if she had not actually gone back in time and slept with him? In making sense of the choices, we can see many imaginary discourses, although intricately subtle in many instances, that go beyond the evident nostalgic connections between the 1950s and the 1980s in the film.

For Bawer (1992: 37-38), the film not only "seeks to demystify the future, it deromanticizes the past." That is, "Peggy Sue comes to learn...that she was mistaken to think that life, back in high school, had offered her an infinite number of choices. It didn't, according to the guiding philosophy of this film, for life has brought Peggy Sue to where she is now, and was never going to take her anywhere else" (ibid.).

Peggy Sue's interaction with Michael Fitzsimmons warrants further analysis. Consider Bartosch (1987: 3-4), who claims that "Peggy Sue's liaison with Michael" is "a 'gift' to the women in the audience and a small gesture toward the yet-to-emerge sexual revolution and the collective libido." And Caputi (2005: 25) claims that because he portrays a "renegade beat who despises the decade's [1950s] mainstream," he represents the "disaffection for the decade." So when Michael tells Peggy Sue that "he will one day 'check out of this bourgeois motel, push myself away from the dinner table and say, 'No more Jell-O for me, ma!'''" he "draws attention to those who sought refuge in the beat culture," for whom "the strictures of the dominant culture spelled a spiritual death from which it was necessary to escape" (ibid.). Peggy Sue's extramarital tryst—and therefore transgression—"becomes a fantasy bribe for funneling Peggy Sue's sexuality into the marital/procreative framework." (Bartosch, 1987). Despite the fact that Charlie is devastated when he finds out about Michael, he ultimately forgives her, thereby reasserting his devotion to Peggy Sue. *Peggy Sue Got Married* pulls the earlier decade forward as a back text into the 1980s by giving Peggy Sue her autonomous, self-directed voice to speak her own experience by challenging authority and refusing to be an obedient teenager in 1960.

Non-conformity stretches only so far as *Peggy Sue Got Married* seems, in some respects, to promote "traditional" family values. However, what it ignores ideologically is just as important—the "unsaid" text reveals and reflects, as did *Back to the Future*, Reagan's reliance on "forgetting" the past. As Coontz (1992, 2000: 23-41) acknowledges: "Families have always been in flux, and often in crisis." Despite this film's attempt to create a nostalgic, rosy tint on the 1960s American family, "there was no golden age of family life" (ibid.), particularly for women. In fact, as McWilliams (1996) states: "Women who failed to conform to the June Cleaver...role of housewife and mother were severely criticized" and "often denied the right to serve

on juries, convey property, make contracts...and establish credit in their own names” (McWilliams, 1996: Online). In short, a woman had to depend upon a man in order to survive and prosper in the “American Dream.”

When Peggy Sue first enters her childhood home, she is overwhelmed with nostalgia and enjoys reliving her relationship with her parents and sister, with whom she watches *American Bandstand* (Bonaduce, 1957-1989) on television. As Clarke-Copeland (2007: Online) points out, popular television shows of the 1960s “reflected good, old fashioned ideas of family values. Controversy was not up for discussion.” Furthermore, Peggy Sue’s mother, Evelyn (Barbara Harris), fulfills the June Cleaver (Barbara Billingsly) “perfect mother” ideal. But she is very much unlike Marty’s mother in *Back to the Future*. However, unlike June Cleaver, she does not question the authority of her husband—to a point.

Reagan’s (1983: Online) demonization of the Soviet Union as an “evil empire,” or the appropriation of “welfare queen” (Fialka, 1976: Online) to characterize the abuse of government benefits, emboldened many segments of his constituent base to deploy their own tools of rhetorical assault in “culture war” (Teixeira, 2009: Online) issues that spanned the racial, ethnic, and cultural minority spectrum. Rather than be aimed at bridging ideological gaps in public issues, the culture war rhetoric solidified an identity wholly antagonistic to the prevailing sociopolitical culture, and which preferred division and enmity over collegiality. On the other hand, there have been small ripples suggesting the type of mature political thinking as detailed in the film’s scene description above. Indeed, the secular paths of conservative and liberal can converge in the aggregated experiences that constitute one’s emotional, intellectual, and philosophical maturity. It is the ultimate capacity that the choice between conservative and liberal is a false one, a pseudo-war fomented by those who stand to profit by the manufactured conflict.

Unfortunately, Peggy Sue’s mother cannot be viewed as an independent, self-actualized, modern woman. This becomes quite apparent in the scene in which Peggy Sue is having breakfast with her family and asks her mother to sit down and join them, to which she responds: “You want me to sit?” She is completely taken aback by this simple request, so accustomed to her role as a housewife who *serves* her family. Still, however clichéd this nostalgic image of the “ideal” American family may be, it remains a stubborn relic, a national symbol that has yet to be retired as threadbare and somewhat unrealistic (Benfer, 2001: Online). Americans still want to believe that the nuclear family and traditional family values are an integral part of what makes America strong.

We must remember, however, that Peggy Sue has come from 1986, a time when the American nuclear family and traditional family values were seemingly in peril—despite the Republican Party’s and the Christian far-right’s pleas to restore the nation’s family values. Peggy Sue’s own marriage and family had collapsed. The sanctuary from the brutalities of the outside world had been compromised. Reassuring comfort was couched in easily definable and readily solvable explanations of how and why the stability of the family would rectify all of America’s social, economic, and cultural ills. Perhaps Peggy Sue’s decision to reunite with Charlie is simply the most pragmatic solution when faced with the inevitable death of her hopes and dreams. And shouldn’t we expect her to choose the path that will ensure the birth of her future

children? For Bawer (1992: 38): “The film...takes on the theme of fate vs. free will and comes down strongly on the side of fate.” However, Bawer is clearly suggesting a different take than Levy’s view of the film’s fatalistic philosophy. Beth is quick to tell her mother, “Dad’s been here everyday,” to which Charlie adds: “Because I love you...and I need you, Peggy Sue.” But lest we get caught up in the nostalgic romance in this scene, Peggy Sue sees Charlie for whom he really is: a man who has been utterly defeated by his philandering ways.

In addition to Peggy Sue’s emotional epiphany, there is also the restored sense of orderly time that ultimately makes room for the redemption of the traditional American family. Charlie tells Peggy Sue: “I would cut my right arm off for another chance.” And that is exactly what the message of this movie gives us: another chance for America is possible, but only if “the family” retakes its rightful place as a world power under the loving guidance of Ronald Reagan, who believed the family was the essential core of national exceptionalism. Even though Peggy Sue tells Charlie, “I need some time,” we can be sure that she will ultimately forgive him and reintegrate her family.

Marchant (2007: 319-323), furthermore, makes an interesting—and sympathetic—point in how the film “sheds considerable light on the primary reason Peggy Sue and Charlie are contemplating divorce as adults”: simply put, because “they married so young, they missed out on a lot of what life has to offer.” However, the film has been harshly condemned by several feminist critics who see Peggy Sue’s inability to change her future for the “better” as a slap in the face to the progress made by women since the women’s rights movement began in the 1960s. Once again, Reagan’s 1986 message echoes with dominating cogency: “...the family...remains the fundamental unit of American life” (Reagan, 1986: Online). Indeed, it must be maintained at all cost, even if that means “forgetting” or “ignoring” its shortfalls and failings.

Arising from the film’s enigmatic tone is an awareness of the artificiality of the conservative-liberal divide: maturity versus immaturity, selflessness versus selfishness, disinterested truth versus power at any price. In 1980, there were Reagan Democrats who crossed the ideological divide, hoping for a statesman able to breach the political gridlock that frustrated both sides of the aisle. Twenty-eight years later, many independent voters—including those who had described themselves as Reagan Democrats—cast their ballots for Obama, hoping for a prudential judge of national affairs. The question remains whether, in the larger sphere, individualism can trump selfishness.

Greed is Good?

Gordon Gecko’s (Michael Douglas) oft-repeated quote, “...greed is good. Greed is right,” in Oliver Stone’s 1987 film, *Wall Street*, accurately reflects Reagan’s pro-business presidency and the bull market of the 1980s. When the 80s came to a close, the decade was often summed up by the media using Gecko’s words. But what does this have to do with *Peggy Sue Got Married*, a film that seems to be saying that the family—as long as it is headed by a man—comes first? By taking a closer look, we find that Peggy Sue is selective in how she describes the past 25 years to Richard.

In addition to revealing her personal history with Charlie, she enthusiastically reports technological achievements and product developments. Sure, it's great that men have walked on the moon, but Peggy Sue seems more excited about the possibility of making Richard and herself rich using her knowledge of future commodities, such as running shoes and digital watches. While Richard is at first taken aback by this information, he quickly jumps on the moneymaking bandwagon.

Materialism is the safe haven removed from the psychological and emotional stresses of relationships, fidelity, sexuality, and uncertainties about the genuine forces of love. And for Peggy Sue and Richard, it seems that greed *is* good. However, it is important to note that while Richard—a man—does in fact become wealthy in the future, Peggy Sue's decision to return to 1986 and reunite with Charlie prevents any chance for her to profit financially from her "trip" back in time.

For Peggy Sue, the lifting of her repressed memories was limited to her own particular circumstances. All of the excitement had seeped out by what Peggy Sue left out of her description of the past 25 years: the social turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the fight for women's and civil rights. Does she try to warn Martin Luther King that he shouldn't go to Memphis on April 4, 1968 or face assassination? No. For Bartosch (1987: 3-4), in *Peggy Sue Got Married* the "movements of history become defined solely in terms of technology and commodities—twenty-five years of social, political, and economic history become repressed." Just like Marty in *Back to the Future*, instead of using this unique time travel opportunity to intervene in history, Peggy Sue does nothing: "She acts historically only in a business and a personal context" (ibid.). She only succeeds in fulfilling her destiny and helping Richard achieve his.

While not appropriating the tone of Gordon Gecko's turbocharged exultation in *Wall Street* about the goodness and the rightness of greed, *Peggy Sue Got Married* echoed the more affable, personable tone of Reagan's message that one's self-interest was justified, especially for the purposes of empowering the individual to reap for his or her family the symbols and manifestations of the American Dream and economic success. Absent of irony or satire, the film engendered a gentler yet still disturbingly skewed view of Reaganism, and a championing of capitalism with no worries about wider social or ethical responsibilities.

Challenging Reaganism

Peggy Sue Got Married promotes a Reagan-friendly ideology in the way that it is pro-marriage/anti-divorce, and in how it promotes "traditional" (i.e. male-based) family values. The film reflects, in part, the ideology of the radical Right, the so-called "Moral Majority" (Wuthnow & Liebman, 1983) and its evangelical, Christian-based, lobbyist agenda—a group with so much political clout that it gave Ronald Reagan two-thirds of the white evangelical vote in his 1980 defeat of Jimmy Carter. In this context, the film completely ignores the group's, and Reagan's, efforts to outlaw abortion, its opposition to the women's rights movement, the Equal Rights Amendment, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, and its attempts to demonize homosexuality and view AIDS as a "just" punishment for being gay. Underneath the film's nostalgic veneer, *Peggy Sue Got Married* represents—perhaps inadvertently—a

compelling endorsement of Reagan's, and the country's, political swing to the right, while ignoring the most important economic, political, and social issues.

Feminist critics have also been especially harsh on the film (Maio, 1988; Kinder, 1989: 2-11; McCreadie, 1990: 31-32). As a grown, mature woman, Peggy Sue's potential outside her marriage with Charlie is given little attention, though we do learn that she runs a successful bakery. By choosing to stay with the obviously imperfect Charlie, the film seems to reverse the gains made in the women's rights movement. *Peggy Sue Got Married*, like *Back to the Future*, underscores Reagan-centric ideology in suggesting that the nuclear family must be preserved at all costs, even at the expense of a woman's freedom and happiness, and of missed opportunities to escape the dull, quotidian, pre-determined bourgeois life. As in *Back to the Future*, the promise of *Peggy Sue Got Married* carried the broadly proven popular appeal of positioning the cinematic image of youth perched precariously on the border between childhood and adulthood. On the surface, the film served an ideal platform for arguing that the nuclear family should—and could—be preserved.

However, nothing really gets resolved in this film, and we are left with a depiction of just how far removed from ideal Peggy Sue's marriage really is. The certainty is that status and popularity, as well as reconciliation—whether one is a teenager or an adult—is or can be derived from being fully socialized into the principles of a highly competitive market society. She fails to achieve a different reality that would include implicitly the halt to time, the opportunity for her to find a totally satisfied sense of perfection with the same degree of courage embodied by Richard and Fitzsimmons. Maio (1988: 192-193), for example, laments over the fact that unlike Marty McFly, a “successful” male time-traveler, the female Peggy Sue appears to be “passive in and little enriched by her re-exploration of the past.”

Yet, these same fatalistic elements—that Peggy Sue has no power at all over her past nor her future—of which some of these critics and others lament (Levy, 1991; Bawer, 1992)—constitute potentially subversive challenges to the Reagan rhetorical peroration about the American Dream being equally accessible to all who aspire toward it. Critics can turn these lamentations into incisive and deeply critical commentaries that can expose the utter incoherence of Reagan's promise that contemporary Americans could, in effect, have it all—both in terms of healthy families and economic prosperity.

In fact, it is impossible to reconcile the Reaganesque rhetoric because it is not only women who are powerless in *Peggy Sue Got Married*. Men also take comfort in materialism as their safe haven from the emotional and psychological stresses of family relationships, the tensions arising from surviving economically in an always-volatile business world, and of proving their professional worth. Morris (2000: 122-123), who describes the men as weak, insubstantial, and immature, claims they “have their sights set on realistic goals: home and cars, barbecues every weekend.”

Reagan's success at forging a new political coalition was predicated on his strongly optimistic orientation toward the future, which ironically, would not resemble the harsher antagonistic tone taken by today's neoconservatives who have appropriated their own mythological version of Reagan's legacy. What often is overlooked is the oversimplification of that optimism, which carried over into Reagan's policies, and

which failed to address the still-entrenched problems of a market economy unapproachable for millions of Americans. Reagan's plain eloquence was easily twisted into a protective rhetorical code for self-serving interests. Individual interests are manifestations of being free, but they do not constitute the whole of our liberty. Reagan was so out of touch with reality that he failed to stress the collective nature of our political governing and our personal obligations within this process.

Peggy Sue seems initially to be somewhat empowered—particularly in her relationship with Charlie: she knows his future weaknesses and failures, and she is “in charge” sexually. However, despite waking up a high school teenager again, she is still the same person: a 43-year-old, burned out, on-the-verge-of-divorce, woman. Peggy Sue is able to retrace her steps in the past, but she remains the same subordinated woman.

Admittedly, searching for those subversive anti-Reagan elements in *Peggy Sue Got Married* must be centered almost exclusively on these limited fatalistic contexts. Dunn (1986: 17), on the other hand, gives a more positive—if not distinctly Reaganesque—slant in his review of the film, claiming: “As an exploration of personal dreams and wishes, it reveals that what we are is often the best of what we could possibly have been.” Because Peggy Sue goes back to her old life and is willing to forgive her philandering husband, the film re-legitimizes the traditional notions of American family life as a social institution. However, I do not accept Dunn's premise that it represents our “best” potential.

Conclusion

Peggy Sue Got Married refuses to view the turbulent 1960s and 1970s as a period of healthy self-doubt and self-interrogation. Instead, it attempts to offer us solace in its fatalistic, nostalgic depiction of a “better” past, which never really existed. Unfortunately, Peggy Sue will never reap the full benefits of pleasure from a sense of timelessness, being only connected to her intuitive, instinctive, subconscious experiences for the extremely limited purposes of making sense of the shortcomings in her marriage. Still, this fatalistic realization reveals that in order to achieve anything approaching the Reaganesque vision of the American Dream requires individuals to settle for mediocrity and lowered expectations when it comes to a stable family and independent career-driven wealth.

However, the prevailing analysis can be extended. On the surface, the film gratifies a broadly defined audience willing to accept a nostalgic depiction of a time as believable yet uncomplicated entertainment. On the other hand, because the film skips over so much social, economic, and cultural territory, which surely anyone would have been confronted with had he or she been in Peggy Sue's circumstances, one wonders if the best to be hoped for in a world influenced by Reaganesque ideals about family and capitalism amounts to settling for a lot less life-sustaining value. The subversive deconstruction of Reaganism may not be readily apparent, but it becomes evident as the film is viewed more than a quarter of a century after its release.

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