**Peggy Sue Got Married**
and invited Charlie to dinner

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This film's title comes from a Buddy Holly song of the same name from the 1950's. In the sequel to the song "Peggy Sue," Holly sings that Peggy Sue has gotten married. In the film, Kathleen Turner stars as Peggy Sue Bodell and Nicholas Cage plays her husband Charlie. Francis Ford Coppola, not the original director, assumed the project at some point in praaaogress.

The film begins as Peggy Sue Bodell (nee Keicher) prepares to attend her twenty-fifth year high school reunion. On the TV in her bedroom we see a commercial featuring her estranged husband "Crazy Charlie" Bodell, the Appliance King. Peggy Sue and Charlie, married as high school sweethearts, are separated and facing divorce. As one of their high school classmates succinctly states it at the reunion, Peggy Sue and Charlie "married too young, so they blame each other for what they've missed - he fools around and she gets depressed." (Men act, women emote!) Charlie has been having an affair with a younger woman named Janet. Peggy Sue is getting her life back together: she owns and operates a bakery and is raising the kids.

A high school reunion takes an explicit look back at the past. There, we revive memories and measure life not only against others' lives but against our own hopes, dreams, and expectations. Twenty-five years prior, "You have your whole life ahead of you." Peggy Sue experiences very mixed emotions at the reunion, reflecting on the past, present, and future.

In light of the failure of the marriage and the pending divorce, she perhaps has regrets about her original choice to marry Charlie right after high school. Charlie's youthful dream of becoming an entertainer has turned grotesque as he has become an obnoxious TV pitch man and pseudo-celebrity. The script underscores Charlie's grotesqueness and failure. While Peggy Sue gets voted Reunion Queen, as she had been Prom Queen in high school, Prom King Charlie gets replaced by Reunion King Richard Norvic, class nerd turned millionaire computer whiz, inventor, author, and all around success story. Charlie's unplanned appearance at the reunion upsets Peggy Sue. At this point, Peggy Sue seems in no doubt about going through with the divorce.

Looking back, Peggy Sue says, "If I only knew then what I knew now, I'd do a lot of things differently." Before you can sing, "Peggy Sue, Peggy Sue, pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty Peggy Sue," she gets this proverbial second chance. The flood of memories and emotion causes her to pass out. She wakes up in 1960, having passed out giving blood at school. She retains her twenty-five years of knowledge and experience. After trying to orient herself to what has happened, she realizes she has been given the opportunity to relive her life and make different choices.

What does she do differently? Not much. She keeps Charlie at a distance while she tries to figure out how she feels about him and decides what to do about their relationship. She confides in Richard Norvic and they become business partners - they will make a fortune developing the products of the future that Peggy Sue knows will be successful: pantyhose, Walkmans (Walkmen?), microwave ovens, pocket calculators, etc. Fulfilling her desire stated at the reunion, she sleeps with Michael Fitzsimmons, the class beatnik. She has new-found appreciation for her family: Mom, Dad, and Sis.

When Peggy Sue wants to get away from Charlie, so as not to marry him (again),
she goes to her grandparents' house out in the country, where, presumably, people live more simply, in warm and dark houses. Also, more in touch with Nature, they know how to do time travel. In a scene somewhere between implausibly gratuitous and simply bizarre, Peggy Sue goes to her grandfather's lodge meeting where they conduct a mystical ritual with pagan undertones that they hope will send her back to 1985. They invoke a male deity and mumble and chant something about "regeneration of spirit."

At the climactic moment, Peggy Sue disappears, having been snatched away by Charlie. Charlie believes he has the cure for Peggy Sue's aversion to him, which will remove the last obstacle to their eventual marriage. He has given up singing and his father has rewarded him with ten percent ownership of the appliance store. Peggy Sue is not swayed, however, until Charlie presents her with her eighteenth birthday present, a locket containing both their baby pictures.

This, of course, duplicates the locket she proudly displays at the reunion, containing baby pictures of her two children. More pointedly, it is the same locket daughter Beth puts around her mother's neck in the opening scene. In order to produce said offspring, Peggy Sue offers herself to Charlie, making love in the fertile earth of a green house floor as it rains (get it?).

Peggy Sue wakes up back in 1985 in the hospital with Charlie at her bedside. She has had a heart attack and almost died. After initial hesitation, she decides to give Charlie and the marriage a second chance, inviting him over for strudel (Grandmother's secret for keeping the family together) with the kids.

The film may be considered part of the contemporary resurrection of the "woman's film" We've had JULIA, TERMS OF ENDEARMENT, and THE TURNING POINT. Although not the classic tearjerker, PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED does share several characteristics of the "woman's film." The main character is female, it seems designed for a female audience, it involves a sick woman, and it is a maternal melodrama in which the woman sacrifices herself for her kids (in this case twice, or at least retroactively).

The film has many genuinely funny moments. Some jokes involve U.S. popular culture icons: Edsels, red M&M's, the Beatles' song "She Loves You," and ghetto blasters. These jokes recall those in a recent time travel fantasy film, BACK TO THE FUTURE. Along with THE TERMINATOR, these films almost constitute a recent trend.

PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED contains the basic elements of dominant cinema - narrative, developed characters, stars, and conventional cinematic techniques. But it has enough tricks and stylistic flourishes (e.g., pulling away from mirrors) for it to satisfy viewers and critics looking for "art" or personal signature. Impeccable acting, editing, naturalistic sets/settings, and careful period detail raise this film to the highest levels of illusionist cinema.

As the film's storyline goes, Peggy Sue has gone back into the past and chosen to marry Charlie again. She receives insight into Charlie's character and his dream of being a singer by seeing him sing at the party and at the r&b club - this insight makes her love (pity?) him. Also, she experiences the rekindling of their flame of passion. So she (we can conclude) marries him (again) despite her knowledge of the marriage's eventual failure.

When Peggy Sue wakes up, she gives Charlie another chance. This is for many viewers an unsatisfying and arbitrary ending to the narrative. What is going on in this seemingly innocuous piece of entertainment? To help explore how the mechanics of narrative operate in PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED to serve the film's ideological project, I will utilize concepts developed by U.S. Marxist cultural critic Fredric Jameson.

How do works of mass culture operate psychologically on their audience? In "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (Social Text, No. 1, 1979, pp. 130-148), Jameson tries to answer this question by posing an alternative to manipulation theory. That latter theory regards mass culture as simply manipulating its audience - e.g., audiences are coerced by advertising to pay to be brainwashed. This manipulation theory sees works of mass culture generally as monolithic reflections of dominant ideological values, which the audience, of course, accepts. Opposing
values are culturally and socially repressed. Jameson offers a less simplistic notion of how cultural objects "work" on audiences, utilizing Norman Holland's conception of how works of art "mange desire" which Holland developed in The Dynamics of Literary Response.

Holland draws on the Freudian notions of repression and of the work of art as symbolic wish fulfillment to explain how individuals symbolically express unconscious desires and drives. When a desire becomes somehow threatening or unacceptable to the conscious mind, it becomes expressed indirectly; e.g., through a Freudian slip, the symbolism in dreams, or in a work of art. For Holland, works of art have both a repressive and a wish fulfilling function. They "manage" the "raw material" of desire.

Jameson applies this psychoanalytic theory to the text-audience relation, asking us to

"think of repression and wish fulfillment within the unity of a single mechanism, which ... strategically arouses fantasy content within careful symbolic containment structures which defuse it, gratifying ... desires only to the degree to which they can again be laid to rest" (p. 141).

Two points in this discussion particularly serve my purposes. First,

"social and political anxieties and fantasies must have some effective presence in the mass cultural text in order to subsequently be 'managed' or repressed" (p. 141).

Second, mass cultural texts repress or defuse these social and political anxieties by the "narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by an optical illusion of social harmony" (p. 141).

In PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED, the narrative structure depends on a story within a story. The contemporary story frames the film, and in the body of the film, the story is in the past. In contemporary time, Peggy Sue goes to the reunion, faints, wakes up in the hospital, and gives Charlie a second chance. In the part set in the past, Peggy Sue decides to marry Charlie. In the contemporary setting, she faces the question of whether or not to divorce Charlie; in the past setting, she must decide whether or not to marry him.

The story within the story, the back-in-the-past section, provides answers to both questions. It makes a case for marrying and not divorcing Charlie, and the case for marrying Charlie is the case for not divorcing him. More precisely, this narrative structure displaces the contemporary issue of divorce onto the past. This displacement comes from a narrative structure within which the social and political issues become raised as fantasy and there, in fantasy, resolved. This means these issues are really diffused and deflected.

Only a movie? Its ambiguous status serves to mask the repressive function of the displacement structure. Similarly, the whole set of intellectual games inherently posed by the time-travel genre also works to distract the audience from the ideological project at hand. (In this case, if Michael sent the book at the end, she must have gone back in the past to sleep with him, etc.)

In the in-the-past part of the film, Peggy Sue's choices (as determined and limited by the narrative) are these: marry Richard, go off with Michael, be a dancer, marry Charlie, not marry Charlie. Except for dancing, which does not preclude any of the other options, her choices all become defined in terms of relations with men, and except for Michael, those choices involve marriage. This range coincides with her range of sexual choices. Richard does not seem attractive enough and Michael does not offer monogamy. Peggy Sue's liaison with Michael reminds me of Shirley MacLaine's affair with Jack Nicholson in TERMS OF ENDEARMENT. It's a "gift" to the women in the audience and a small gesture toward the sexual revolution and the collective libido. In Jameson's terms, it's "psychic horse-trading." Here, the extramarital affair becomes a fantasy bribe for funnelling Peggy Sue's sexuality into the marital/procreative framework. Almost belaboring the point, the film reasserts Charlie's attractiveness and devotion to Peggy Sue.
The film thus represents fantasy for and about women who came of age in the 1950s and married young at a time when they did not have a lot of other available options. The social pressure for them to marry, marry early, and have lots of kids would ease with the upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the sexual revolution and the feminist movement. For some women the film offers an opportunity to imagine a different life choice. But lest this kind of fantasizing against patriarchal society get out of hand and creep into contemporary consciousness, the fantasy becomes elaborated only in a story in which the woman resigns herself to her fate. Peggy Sue's independence and growth get superseded by the reimposition of her identity as it is defined by the roles of wife and mother.

Other elements stand out in the film's ideological project in addition to the film's reasserting the woman's primary role as baby machine and family glue (strudel baker). Basically the end of the film reunites the nuclear family, giving added significance to "reunion." The film also retroactively okays Charlie and Peggy Sue's abandoning their respective dreams (music and dance) in favor of gaining middle class success: money, stability, security.

The "retro" look of the film, in both the present and past stories, ties into current fashion. The use of pastels in the opening credits exemplifies this appropriation of 1950s styles that have been recycled by the fashion industry. Indeed, what seems striking about the film's look is how similar the two different historical moments, 1960 and 1985, look. The characters' clothes and hairstyles stay almost the same in the contemporary and back-in-past sections: Charlie's bouffant, Walter's flattop, Peggy Sue and both her girlfriends' hairstyles and dresses. The r&b club, with its neon, passes as 1950s but evokes the current popularity of neon and its widespread use.

This blending of 1950s and 1980s does not remain confined to the visuals. The music at the reunion is performed by real-life rocker Marshall Crenshaw, a relatively new and young performer whose image and music recall the 1950s generally and Buddy Holly specifically. Although not a huge star, Crenshaw and others like him have found an audience for their 50s derived music, playing into the hands of the seemingly ever present nostalgia craze, in which popular culture gets endlessly recycled by entrepreneurs, as social trends become translated into commodity purchases. (Or is it the other way around?) Furthermore, we can list neither Buddy Holly nor Marshall Crenshaw among popular music's socially aware or politically conscious figures.

The film's ideological project is perhaps best discovered in Peggy Sue's (and the film's) selective retention of twenty-five years of history. She describes these twenty-five years of history to Richard in terms of her personal history, and in terms of technological and commodity development. She mentions heart transplants, test tube babies, and the lunar landing but spends most of her time telling Richard about commodities. Nowhere do we hear any mention of the social upheavals of the 1960s and 70s: assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate, inflation, feminism, civil rights, etc. The movements of history become defined solely in terms of technology and commodities - twenty-five years of social, political, and economic history becomes repressed.

Peggy Sue uses her knowledge of the future to make money and to try to make her personal life better, not to warn Martin Luther King against being in Memphis on April 4, 1968; or to tell people that Nixon is a crook; or to speak up about the lies being told about Vietnam and what the eventual toll would be. She acts historically only in a business and a personal context. She helps Richard to do what he was already destined to do; she does what she was destined to do. Given the opportunity to intervene in history, personal or social, she does nothing. In the world of PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED, people cannot play an active role in history.

How does the film's ideological project tie into current historical conflicts? Unfortunately, very neatly. The film's anti-divorce, pro-marriage, "pro-family" stance reflects the current attempt to reassert marriage and "family values" in the face of the historical decline/disintegration of those institutions. Indeed, all elements of the film's ideological project mirror the agenda of the radical Right, the "Moral Majority." This agenda includes the "New Patriotism" (Peggy Sue's impassioned "My Country 'Tis of Thee"), the backlash against the women's movement (Phyllis Schlafly and the defeat of the ERA), and the acceptance of
sexual expression and activity only in a marital and procreative context. The reactionary politics of this film reflect the political swing to the right of the Reagan era.

Indeed, the 1950s are precisely where the Right would like to take the country back to, wiping out twenty-five years of social change. The blending of the historical periods and the repression of social history in PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED serve this end. Yet audiences seem unsatisfied by the melodramatic resolution of this film. The ending seems false and goes totally against the hopes raised and dreams awakened or reawakened by the fantasy. In this film, the social and political issues raised do not get wholly deflected by the narrative structure or the arbitrary imposition of a resolution. This is especially so with a resolution that projects the optical illusion of social harmony by placing women back into their place in the structures of patriarchal society.

The positive value of this film for women and feminists may lie in what Jameson calls a "transcendent" quality of social desire, a desire present in even the most commercial works of mass culture. Here the film depicts a woman's desire to be free of oppressive social structures, and that may be much stronger than the false ending and repressive mechanisms imposed on a film like PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED.

Peggy Sue Got Married. A 43-year-old mother and housewife who's facing divorce is thrust back in time when she attends her high-school reunion. Given the chance to change the course of her life, she finds herself making many of the same choices Genres: Comedy, Drama, Fantasy, Music, Romance. Actor: Kathleen Turner, Nicolas Cage, Barry Miller. Director: Francis Ford Coppola. Country: USA. Movie: Peggy Sue Got Married. Production Co: TriStar Pictures, Rastar Pictures, Zoetrope Studios. Duration: 103 min.