"There's No Place Like Home": The Baby Boom and the Crisis of the Public and Private Spheres in *Wild Palms*

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    Wild Palms, an ABC "movie event" produced by Oliver Stone and written by Bruce Wagner in 1993, paints a future (2007) rife with greed, political apathy, drug addiction, family breakdown and media manipulation. Its critique of this possible future is predicated on evoking its audience's memory of the real or imagined past—specifically, the 1950s through the 1970s. That this period coincides with the baby boom's childhood and youth is no accident; *Wild Palms* was created by, for, and implicitly about, baby boomers, for whom this particular past has singular significance.[1] The film is driven by contemporary perceptions that the public and private spheres are in crisis.[2] It identifies the sites of those crises with the media and the family—institutions, I suggest, that have come to represent the public and private spheres (or the "political" and the "personal") for baby boomers, and about which they are deeply ambivalent. *Wild Palms* embodies and exploits that ambivalence as it attempts to symbolically resolve the crises through a form that mobilizes the desires of this intended audience. This essay uses the film as an opportunity to explore the intersection of history, cultural memory and mediated popular culture.
    Wild Palms was hailed as a radical departure from normal television.[3] ABC, Stone, Wagner, and critics compared it to *Twin Peaks* in terms of both productions' complex storylines, innovative aural and visual styles, and links to Hollywood directors. A six-hour production aired over four nights, *Wild Palms* was generally well-received by critics, commanded a sizeable broadcast audience and was subsequently released in video.[4] What attracted me as a viewer was the film's premise—that reality has fallen prey to mediated simulation—a central

issue in media and cultural studies and an increasingly common theme in popular culture.[5] What inspired this analysis is the way *Wild Palms* envisions the real and the illusory, and the seeming contradiction between its innovative aesthetic form and its strikingly traditional thematic content; a contradiction that can be understood only by situating the film in a socio-historical context.

John Thompson argues that cultural interpretation begins with the proposition that symbolic forms are "referential"—they "represent something, refer to something, say something about something."[6] Interpretation seeks to grasp this referentiality and, through a synthesis of formal and socio-historical analysis, to construct possible meaning(s). Fredric Jameson proposes that popular culture texts express historically specific "social and political anxieties and fantasies" arising from "concrete social contradictions" that deny easy solution in reality. These contradictions (and related anxieties) are symbolically managed through "the narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by the projection of an optical illusion of social harmony."[7] A successful narrative, according to Todd Gitlin, accurately identifies its audience's desires and fears and provides satisfying responses to the tensions it has provoked.[8] For Kenneth Burke, such satisfaction occurs when the communicative form—defined as "the arousing and fulfillment of desire"—corresponds with the audience's historically-constituted "patterns of experience."[9] The meaningful linking of narrative, form and viewer is achieved through what Mas'ud Zavarzadeh calls the film's "tale," understood as "the structures of intelligibility that produce the positions of knowledge that will make sense of the film for those who occupy the desired subject position."[10] The meaning of the tale is neither the property of the text's formal elements, nor of the individual viewer's experience; rather, it is "produced in the nexus of global relations that endow the text and reader simultaneously with historical intelligibility."[11]

Wild Palms' referentiality is apparent in reviewers' comments. The film exposes the "disquieting truth" that "its supposed science fiction is only millimeters away from science fact;" it depicts a future where "illusion and reality [are] dangerously interchangeable" and "giant corporations . . . seek to control those illusions;" it offers "a warning against a future in which technology has replaced religion, easing the populace into complacency;" and it "chronicles a rapidly deconstructing society gurgling beneath the surface of artificial reality."[12] That *Wild Palms* offers a resolution is also evident; as one critic noted, the film "holds up the proverbial mirror where we may see one logical end of a materialistic, drugged-out, amoral society—as well as the clear and immediate antidote."[13]

I examine the anxieties and fantasies expressed in *Wild Palms*, the form through which they are conveyed, and the "antidote" prescribed. I ask *whose* anxieties these are, and *why* this particular antidote might be appealing. Answering these questions involves a "renarration" of the film that unearths the social contradictions that drive the tale.[14] I propose that the contradictions that motivate *Wild Palms*, and the form through which it expresses and symbolically resolves

them, are intimately connected to the experiences, preoccupations and desires of baby boomers who occupy the professional managerial fraction of the middle class.

The Baby Boom PMC, the Family and the Media

Drawing on the concept of the "professional managerial class" (PMC) elaborated by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, Fred Pfeil explores the historical development of what he calls the "baby boom PMC."[15] This generational/class fraction is the product of specific socio-historical conditions: post-World War II economic growth that continued unabated through the late 1960s, massive suburbanization, high marriage and birth rates, expanded access to higher education, an explosion in domestic goods production, and the nationwide adoption of television.[16] These conditions aided baby boomers' movement into professional and managerial fields and figured in a larger postwar reconfiguration of the public and private spheres.[17]

Pfeil argues that suburbanization and television played key roles in shaping this generational/class fraction's relationship to both spheres of activity. A host of political-economic policies after the war facilitated the mass movement of (primarily white) people out of cities and into the suburbs—a migration that eroded older workplace and neighborhood cultures, further separated the public world of work from the private world of family life, and insulated millions of families (especially women and children) within suburban enclaves. This accelerated privatization of domestic life was accompanied by the rapid national expansion of television, which became a primary source of information about the world outside the home; as Pfeil says of his fellow suburban boomers, "for most of us, television was all the public sphere we had."[18] If these combined developments contributed to a decisive "withering" of the public sphere, the private sphere was also undergoing transformation: homemaking and child-rearing were increasingly rationalized as "domestic science" guided by experts; women and children were targeted by aggressive marketing campaigns for a variety of consumer and cultural goods; and television actively educated viewers about the middle-class consumption patterns appropriate to modern family life.[19]

This postwar linking of the "domestic economy" to the realm of mass consumption involved a "thorough-going invasion [by] the market," according to John Clarke.[20] Television aided that invasion, delivering the public world to viewers' domestic settings and organizing audiences for advertisers. From the outset, television programming and scheduling strategies were conceptualized through notions of the nuclear family.[21] Clarke argues that through its ability to constitute its members' identities as consumers, the postwar family "became the key nexus of social relations of advanced capitalism."[22] Television reinforced those identities by wedding popular conceptions of "the family" with particular consumption practices. It is within this historical context that the baby boom PMC

acquired its earliest understanding of public and private life and appropriated the specific "media grammar" that would shape its identity and ongoing relationship to mediated popular culture.[23]

I propose that the relationship of the baby boom PMC to the family and the media are inscribed in *Wild Palms* through the desires for "home" and "reality." The film seeks to resolve the public crisis by repairing the characters' private relationships, and thereby equates the restoration of public order with the restoration of "the family." In so doing, *Wild Palms* imagines the political as an effect of the personal and, intentionally or not, echoes the neo-conservative agenda that blames all forms of social malaise on the "breakdown in family values." I suggest that this reduction resonates with the baby boom PMC's own historical trajectory—that of personalizing the political in a way that leads to a retreat from active social engagement in the public sphere. I conclude by considering the limits of the film's provisional resolutions to the social contradictions that necessarily exceed it.

The Personal and the Political in *Wild Palms*

Patent attorney Harry Wyckoff, his wife Grace, and their children—Cody (who appears in TV commercials) and Dierdre (who does not speak)—are a professional, middle class Los Angeles family. Harry complains to his psychiatrist of recurring nightmares, waning sexual desire, and frustration with the size of his salary. He is visited by former lover Paige Katz who reignites his desire and introduces him to Senator Tony Kreutzer, founder of the Church of Synthiotics and Mimecom, a transnational media conglomerate. Kreutzer hires Harry to head off patent challenges from other TV networks who seek access to Mimecom's technological coup—"telepresence"—the video projection of holographic images into viewers' homes. Harry gradually learns that Kreutzer also heads the "Fathers," a powerful quasi-vigilante movement opposed by the much weaker "Friends." As the story unfolds we learn that the U.S. suffered a devastating, planned economic depression and a major nuclear accident in the early 1990s; that the Fathers and Friends have been engaged in a lengthy battle for control of the State; that Eli Leavitt, head of the Friends, has been imprisoned for years; and that the Senator plans to capture the U.S. presidency, and then the world, by seducing the masses with combined media and drug addiction.

The Fathers grew out of the Church of Synthiotics, founded in the 1970s. Combining a Western love of material wealth with an Eastern notion of alternative spiritual realities, Synthiotics is now a worldwide movement whose followers call themselves "New Realists." The Fathers have vanquished most of the Friends, described as "strict libertarians, ardent defenders of free speech," with kidnapping, vigilante executions, imprisonment, strategic environmental pollution, media manipulation, and drug addiction. In the world of *Wild Palms*, the State, the Fathers and Mimecom are apparently one. The Friends have been

reduced to a handful of resisters who travel in underground tunnels and seek refuge in the "Wilderzone," a contained area of urban decay (e.g., the inner city) operating on an underground economy and populated by marginalized people of various kinds. Central to the Fathers' designs is Mimecom and its subsidiary, Channel 3 (WPN—the Wild Palms Network), which premieres telepresence in its "revolutionary" new program, *Church Windows* (Cody Wyckoff is one of its stars). Mimecom is refining the technology so that with the aid of the addictive hallucinogen "Mimezine" (patented by Mimecom), viewers will be able to "go interactive" and participate in the programs. Hence the corporation's slogan: "Is it real, or is it Mimecom?" The Senator now seeks control of a computer nanochip (the "go chip") which, when implanted in his body, will allow him to roam global cyberspace and enter people's minds in any form he chooses, making him omnipotent and immortal. The battle for the chip and control over mediated reality is being waged between two media superpowers: Mimecom and a Japanese counterpart.

Harry's family is bound to the corruption of the public sphere by intimate ties. Grace's mother, Josie Ito, is Kreutzer's sister and political assassin; her father is Eli Leavitt, head of the Friends and Josie's second husband. Josie murdered her first (Japanese) husband when he withheld technological secrets from Mimecom, had Eli imprisoned when he left her to form the Friends, and killed Eli's second wife and crippled his young son, Chickie. Josie eventually murders Grace to take revenge on Eli, before having him killed too. Harry has no memory of his father, but learns from Kreutzer that his father was Dex Wyckoff, the creator of Mimezine who killed himself while on an LSD trip. Near the end of the film, however, the Senator reveals that he killed Dex and that Harry is his own illegimate son. Kreutzer also fathered Cody (with Paige Katz) and substituted him at birth for Grace and Harry's real son (Peter) without their knowledge. Cody is being groomed by Josie to become next head of the Fathers and, like his "grammy," is a cold-blooded killer.

Wild Palms expresses several contemporary anxieties: the power of the media and the dissolving boundary between reality and simulation; family disintegration; addiction (to chemical substances, television, "false" religions); Japan's displacement of U.S. economic/technological dominance; public apathy; personal and corporate greed; environmental deterioration; and the existence of a shadow government. The film suggests that these conditions are ripe for the rise of a demogogue like Kreutzer and the destruction of the liberal-democratic State. *Wild Palms* is an apocalyptic tale that attempts to show how the present leads inexorably to a future where, as Grace tells Harry, "one day, in the middle of *Church Windows*, we're going to find out our country doesn't even belong to us anymore, and no one will even care."

At the center of the tale is Harry's choice between the Fathers (who offer wealth, power and a monopoly over mediated reality) and the Friends (who have fewer resources, minimal power, and prefer the "real" world). Harry has so far

Figure 1: Paige Katz (Kim Cattrall) and Harry Wyckoff (James Belushi), initially seduced by the "Fathers", later join the opposing "Friends."

avoided such choices by remaining ignorant of history—both his own and that of society. *Wild Palms* focuses on the price of such amnesia by tracing the dissolution of Harry's "yuppie" insulation. As one of the Friends tells him in the second episode: "Wake up Harry. You're having a very important nightmare." Harry would prefer not to awaken, saying he wants no part of politics because "I have a family." His comfortable life has been built on avoiding the truth; he would be content to go on doing so were it not that he has bad dreams.[24] *Wild Palms* can be read as the return of the repressed—when the public and private unconscious return to exact their toll. In good TV narrative form, this process is personified in the figure of Harry.[25] Although Harry is in his late thirties, *Wild Palms* is his coming-of-age story. Viewers are invited to identify with his struggle and, with him, to "wake up" and shed their "false consciousness."

By linking the public crisis (the Fathers' ascent to power via terror and media manipulation) to the private crisis of Harry's family, *Wild Palms* takes up the question of the relationship between the personal and the political raised by social activists in the late 1960s and 1970s. The way the film envisions that relationship

structures its diagnosis of what goes wrong in the fictional future, and, by extension, what has gone wrong in the "real" past. The narrative is organized around retrieving the past—restoring memory—as the solution to the public/ private crises. The past it recalls, however, reveals the extent to which the relationship of the political and the personal is typically resolved in American culture by reducing the former to the latter. In the film, the public crisis is subordinated to the crisis of the characters' private relationships: what has gone wrong, in the world of *Wild Palms*, is "the family." Accordingly, the restoration of that family will restore the proper functioning of the liberal-democratic State.[26]

The Crisis of the Public Sphere:
The Longing for "Real"

Born in 1972, Harry would have come of age in the Reagan years—a member of "Generation X"—but neither he nor the film ever refer to the 1980s. Rather, Harry exhibits the cultural tastes and sensibilities of the baby boom PMC. The narrative is littered with references to the popular culture repertoire (music, TV programs, films) of the baby boom cohort; most of the film's pop songs, for example, are drawn from the 1960s and early 1970s. Harry listens to and quotes from these tunes, although it's not the music he would have grown up with. The key decade in the narrative is the 1970s—when, for the Friends, everything started to go wrong; by implication, the 1950s and 1960s become the time before "the Fall." For Kreutzer and the Fathers, the 1970s mark the beginning of the journey *toward* "paradise," when they launched their assault against those who were "tearing the fabric of the country." Arising in opposition to the youth/ counter culture, the Fathers frame their mission in religious terms.

The Synthiotics "bible" is Kreutzer's book, *On the Way to the Garden*; the movement's "prayer" is a passage from Yeats' poem, "Running to Paradise." The Senator refers to the Fathers' imminent takeover as "storming the gates of Heaven." The vehicle through which victory over the masses will be won is *Church Windows*—a sitcom espousing New Realist "theology." When the Fathers' victims are overdosed with Mimezine, they are subdued by visions of a Synthiotics cathedral before which they bow down and pray. Kreutzer seeks to be "God"—an immortal image within mediated reality. The Friends are engaged in their own messianic quest. When Eli Leavitt first glimpses Harry, he intones, "I will come for you all. And you will help me, Harry Wyckoff. That's why you were born." In contrast to Kreutzer, who desires to be God of cyberspace, Harry is associated with the (Christian) son of God who, through personal sacrifice, will restore the Kingdom on earth. The Friends' "prayer" comes from Walt Whitman's ode to Lincoln, "My Captain."[27] Their headquarters is the dilipidated "Walt Whitman Public Library" abandoned by a public enthralled by electronic media.

Through the opposition of these two factions, the narrative also expresses the baby boom PMC's historical relationship to media and popular culture. As the

Figure 2: Senator Tony Kreutzer (Robert Loggia), founder of the "Fathers," battles a holographic projection to demonstrate his Wild Palms network's (WPN) newest technological wizardry.

first American generation to be specifically identified as a "youth culture," to grow up with television, and to experience (in significant numbers) the peculiar insulation of suburbia, (white) suburban boomers were highly dependent on media culture for their understanding of the public and private worlds.[28] This intimacy with popular culture provided a source of pleasure (via mastery of its codes) and identity (via shared consumption patterns that signified belonging to the youth culture). But this pleasure/identification is marked by ambivalence because mastering the codes of media and consumer culture includes knowledge of their manipulative capacity—an awareness that our pleasure can also be exploited to command our consent. The baby boom PMC thus found itself in a contradictory position to media culture: its lifelong acquaintance with mass media helped fuel suspicions about the truth/reality of mediated messages, while its access to "reality" was typically delivered through the very media it was dependent on and suspicious of. Mediated popular culture therefore represented both liberation and manipulation—a paradox evident in many boomers' identi-

12

fication with the products of "youth culture" (rock music, cinema anti-heroes, certain styles of consumption, etc.) as authentic and liberating, and their critique of mainstream, official media culture as repressive, manipulative and "plastic."[29]

The film attempts to reconcile this ambivalence through the binary of authentic/inauthentic associated with the Friends and Fathers. The Friends are highly suspicious of the media—especially newer communication technologies, which they associate with unreality and manipulation. Within this opposition, print is more "real" than electronic media, film and radio are less manipulative than television, original songs (even when mediated) are more authentic than cover versions (even when performed live). The Friends are consistently associated with the former, the Fathers with the latter. Eli Leavitt refuses to watch television, preferring radio because it's "safer," less coercive. The Wyckoff children are often shown gazing hypnotically at television, in contrast to Grace and Harry's real son, Peter, a street kid who works for the Friends. Peter is a fan of old movies that he laments "no one watches anymore" and that he considers more "real" than television. In one scene, Harry and Peter meet at a nearly empty theater playing *Rebel Without a Cause*, one of the earliest films about 1950s youth rebellion. Peter also identifies with *The Wizard of Oz*, a definitive piece of the baby boom's cultural repertoire whose theme centers on the value of home and family (e.g., "reality"), and *Day of the Locust*, a dark meditation on the manipulative power of mass mediated culture.[30]

The film's score reiterates the opposition of real/authentic vs. unreal/inauthentic. Scenes of the Friends' struggle against the Fathers' treachery and those involving Harry's gradual awakening are underscored by 1960s-era songs by the Rolling Stones, the Animals and Bob Dylan. The Fathers, in contrast, are associated with "inauthentic" music: a Kreutzer henchman who performs old broadway show tunes and Dylan ballads in identical lounge singer style, a hologram of three Japanese women lip-syncing the Supremes' "Love Child," a holographic stripper who dances for Kreutzer to the Fifth Dimension's "Marry Me Bill."

The corruption of the public sphere is directly linked to media manipulation. Kreutzer's presidential campaign epitomizes a politics of the image where sycophantic TV news anchors serve rehearsed questions to the Senator and chuckle at his jokes. When Josie is arrested after Harry broadcasts a holotape of her murdering Grace, a TV reporter suggests she will be convicted because "seeing is believing." Josie replies cynically, "you've got to be kidding," signalling her awareness that both of them are in the business of creating "reality" with images. Eli Leavitt describes "telepresence" as a "package for the masses" who have been seduced into preferring enslavement/entertainment to freedom/information. He likens Kreutzer to "a king being held aloft by the minds of his minions." With the aid of the go chip, the Senator will become "our Alexander" who "will conquer the countries of our imaginations one by one and we will dream him into infinity." Kreutzer affirms the centrality of media to his mission when

he tells Mimecom shareholders: "I have seen the future, and it is Channel 3." At the same time, identity, resistance and authenticity are linked to media culture through references to music, film and TV programs associated with baby boomers' youth. When the Friends transmit the tape of Grace's murder, they do so based on the assumption that in the right hands, television can be *made* to speak the truth and that viewers will still recognize the difference between "reality" and simulation.

This assumption reveals the extent to which the public sphere has become synonymous with the mass media; within what John Brenkman calls the "mass-mediated public sphere" it is nearly impossible to imagine the creation of a public outside of mediated messages. Brenkman proposes that the emergence of the modern "mass-mediated public sphere" is the result of a nineteenth-century crisis in its antecedent—the bourgeois public sphere—which was a means of consolidating resistance to monarchical rule, organizing the bourgeoisie's private interests as the "public interest," and fostering integration into the nascent capitalist order. The crisis of the bourgeois public sphere arose when the working class sought equal participation. Brenkman links this to a central contradiction: by bringing workers into association through the institution of wage labor, capitalism enables them to identify their shared position in the process of production and to formulate counter-ideologies. Working-class entry into the public sphere would thus lead not to social integration, but to social division based on class difference. Countering that threat involved transforming the public sphere from a site of open discussion of public issues into a mechanism for formulating the interests of labor in line with the priorities of capital. According to Brenkman, this meant "restructuring the forms of association and exercising control over the discourses which support and develop association." Such is the task of the "mass-mediated public sphere" which replaces the class-based association created within the realm of production with the dispersed, individualized relations fostered in the realm of consumption. The mass-mediated public sphere comprises "fields of symbolic activity [that] aim at replacing the discourses through which the producers develop their association with forms of communication that disperse them;" it does so by addressing each of us as an anonymous "separate subject as constituted by the exchange and consumption of commodities."[31]

Paolo Carpignano and colleagues argue that by the 1920s, the idea of a public formed through spontaneous discussion was being displaced by the conviction that the public "has to be produced" through the work of public relations. In the process, "publicity becomes a strategy for organizing consensus" and "circulation gives way to engineering."[32] By the time the baby boom appeared on the historical scene, the engineering of consensus was a firmly entrenched feature of the mass-mediated public sphere. What was new was the introduction of television and the ease with which it could reach a generation of unprecedented proportions within the burgeoning socio-geographical space of suburbia. More

than for preceding generations, the world view of suburban baby boomers—described by Landon Jones as "children of the media"—was bounded by the mass-mediated public sphere—one that Jurgen Habermas characterizes as a "pseudo-public or sham-private world of cultural consumption."[33]

Wild Palms at once blames the media for the crisis of the public sphere—playing on its viewers' cultivated suspicion—and uses their lifelong intimacy with media culture to draw them into the film's form. Pfeil argues that baby boomers' extensive familiarity with popular culture and subsequent exposure to the high cultural values transmitted through higher education has produced in them unusual skill at traversing cultural codes. The baby boom PMC subject, he contends, "typically finds him/herself an extraordinarily well-rounded, complete cultural consumer and connoiseur, eminently capable of taking pleasure in a spectrum of choices ranging from just a step ahead of mass culture ... to just a foot short of high."[34] That is, an important basis of association for the baby boom PMC is its shared identification with and consumption of a specific range of cultural commodities. This constitutes what Pierre Bourdieu calls a marker of "distinction" that reflects the historically specific "cultural capital" possessed by this generational/class fraction.[35] *Wild Palms'* form is organized around this association through cultural consumption: to fully appreciate the narrative's nuanced meanings, one must possess intimate knowledge of pop culture from the 1950s through the present, ranging from TV sitcoms to pop religion to movies to music. The film's form, moreover, exhibits the intertextuality, irony, pastiche, cynicism, and self-referentiality associated with a postmodern aesthetic.[36] The pleasure of decoding the text involves identifying, and identifying with, that aesthetic, and it is here that the film's form resonates with the baby boom PMC's patterns of experience. As Pfeil argues, "postmodernism *is* the culture of this same PMC, a reworking into aesthetic form of its central experiences, preoccupations and themes."[37]

Thus, the film's opposition of authentic/real vs. inauthentic/simulated embodies the baby boom PMC's own ambivalence toward media culture. Similarly, its identification of the crisis of the public sphere with the media's capacity to manipulate (thereby threatening individualized expression/consumption) reflects the baby boom PMC's contradictory feelings toward the media culture that has so powerfully shaped its consciousness. *Wild Palms* does not interrogate this contradiction so much as exploit it by employing the very form that keeps it in motion. In the guise of critiquing the seductive power of the mass-mediated public sphere, the film's postmodern form beckons its baby boom PMC viewers with the pleasure of exercising their extensive pop culture literacy (and thus legitimizing their "taste"/cultural capital).[38]

This pleasure is not without contradictions. The "pleasure of identification" (the mastery of the codes necessary to recognize oneself in postmodern forms) is "complicated and extended by the gnawing, teasing sense that the sign, even when correctly read, recognized and comprehended, makes no real or necessary sense, supplies no true social significance."[39] *Wild Palms* offers the option of skating

across its densely-coded surface—a strategy favored by creator Wagner who insisted that the film makes no "sociological comment," is "about nothing," and was designed so viewers could "get wrapped up in the look of the show."[40] One response to the vertigo of non-significance produced by the "endlessly prolifer-ating codes" and fragmentation of the self associated with a postmodern aesthetic is a "nostalgia for the authenticity of the non-coded, non-commodified 'real'."[41] This desire is expressed explicitly in the film's opposition of simulation to "reality." In a key scene, Harry tells Paige he wants to escape to "a Norman Rockwell type of town . . . a decent place where people respect reality."[42] Harry's utopia reflects what Pfeil says is the "flip side" of the baby boom PMC's skill at negotiating the fragmented codes of postmodern forms: the "attentuated, contra-dictory desire for 'home'."[43]

The Crisis of the Private Sphere:
The Longing for "Home"

Wild Palms is centrally concerned with the loss and recovery of "home," which it equates with the nuclear family. This "sci-fi melodrama" is a tale of family disintegration where the dissolution of the liberal-democratic State (the public "fall") is causally linked to the dissolution of the family (the private "fall").[44] The family is the lens through which all other issues are refracted—not as a historically constituted and variable institution, but as a universal, eternal entity.[45] Central to this idealized family is its patriarchal gender division. In attributing socio-political ills to the corruption of "the family," the cure becomes its restoration—specifically, the revival of the benevolent authority of the "good father" that will automatically result in the redemption of his counterpart, the "good mother."

All of the central characters have troubled relationships with their fathers, who apparently *didn't* "know best." Kreutzer's and Josie's father, an abusive drunk, abandoned his part Japanese-American wife to a WWII internment camp where she later died. Kreutzer first describes his father as a victim of Friends' violence, but later admits he's plagued by nightmares of his "daddy" burying him alive and blames the old man for his mother's death. While Kreutzer is tormented by his childhood abuse, Josie exhibits no suffering. Aside from her maniacal devotion to her brother who she describes as "soft," she is utterly heartless. If Kreutzer is a fatally flawed character, his sister is an evil one. Grace, abandoned by a father more interested in fighting the good fight than in taking care of her, renounces him out of fear of Josie, but is tormented by her loss. Ashamed that her father is an outlaw, she has hidden his existence from Harry. When she suspects Cody is not her real son and sees Harry falling under Kreutzer's spell, she visits Eli in prison. He apologizes for leaving her with "that demonic woman" and vows to return and take up his fight against the Fathers. Eli also abandoned his other child, Chickie, creator of the coveted go chip who uses it to escape into cyberspace

Figure 3: Josie Ito (Angie Dickinson), chief assassin for the "Fathers" who systematically destroys her enemies, epitomizes the "bad mother."

where he can imagine himself whole. Paige's father was a journalist who, in the 1970s, exposed Kreutzer's connection to a shadowy vigilante group and cost him an election. In retaliation, the Fathers kidnapped young Paige, raised her in New Realist foster homes, and groomed her to be Kruetzer's mate. Peter, also reared in a New Realist foster home, has since escaped and joined the Friends. Selling maps to the homes of Hollywood Stars, he roams the tunnels and the Wilderzone, waiting for the day when he'll be reunited with his real family and "go home," like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Both paternal brutality and absence are depicted as producing "dysfunctional" offspring. Kreutzer, Josie and Cody have replicated their bad fathers; Grace and Chickie are unable to defend themselves against others' violence; and Paige and Harry are susceptible to control by the substitute brutal father. Only Peter escapes this fate; his function in the narrative is to aid Harry's transformation and call him back to the proper family order.

Because the crisis of public sphere is attributed to the loss of rational male authority, the tale focuses on the consequences of poor fathering. The male offspring are cruel, violent sons who identify with their bad fathers and become

17

like them (Kreutzer, Cody), or abandoned sons who lack a strong paternal model and are passive and "womanlike" (Harry, Chickie). Chickie exhibits classic "feminine" qualities—dependence, physical weakness, emotionality—that doom him to the position of victim; he is killed off at the end of the second episode when Eli fails to save him. The film seeks a resolution through Harry, who must renounce his impotence and claim his rightful place as a man *without* becoming like his bad father. In so doing, he will restore order to the public sphere (bringing down the Fathers' reign of terror) and to the private sphere (redeeming the nuclear family with its "natural" gender division that simultaneously restores the position of the good mother).

After witnessing several incidents where dark-suited men beat and abduct male victims, Harry tells his psychiatrist that he identified with and "was rooting for the attackers." The weak, ineffectual male is the flip side of the brutal, dominating male, hence the ease with which Harry is inducted into Kreutzer's world. While Paige recruits him with sex (affirming the traditional view of women's sexuality as a corrupting force), it is Kreutzer who enthralls Harry. The Senator offers him an obscene salary, access to prestige and power, and, more importantly, what Harry most desires: a father's love. Joining Mimecom presents Harry a way out of his impotence. He wins Kreutzer's admiration by negotiating the patent agreement that leaves Mimecom on top, acts on his desire for Paige, and finally gets the beach house he covets.

Grace, a classic female victim, withdraws into sleep and alcohol, plaguing Harry with jealous accusations and paranoid tales about Cody. Harry dismisses her fears and suggests she see his shrink; meanwhile, he meets secretly with Paige. When Grace attempts suicide, Harry asks disengenuously, "Why?" Harry wants Kreutzer's "paradise" without partaking of the tree of knowledge; he wishes to know neither the source of the Senator's power nor its consequences. Neither the Friends nor the Fathers will tolerate Harry's "innocence." The Friends bombard him with the repressed truth, and to earn his place in Kreutzer's kingdom, Harry must hunt down his best friend with a group of vigilantes. When Harry finally confronts Josie, indignant that he has been deceived about Cody, she too assaults him with the truth: "Don't get righteous with me. ... You begged for this life. ... Did you think there wasn't a price to pay? Did you think it was just about beach houses and Hockney lithographs? About fooling around on your wife?" She sends him to witness Cody's ritualized induction into the Fathers, "Because nothing matters. You're with us now."

Harry's confrontation with the price of paradise speaks to a fear among many baby boom PMC members that they too have "sold out." It also reinforces their suspicion that they have been betrayed by the subsequent generation—"Generation X"—which is popularly defined as corrupted by consumerism, media manipulation, apathy and cynicism. Harry represents both the supposed shortcomings of the "Reagan generation" and the nostalgic longings of the one that preceded it. His task is to overcome those flaws and fulfill those desires— recovering the lost past by realizing it in the fantasized future.

The characterization of Josie, Grace and Paige reinforces the film's vision of the proper family. The women are defined by their relationship to the male players, their "goodness" equated with possessing characteristics associated with femininity and motherhood. Grace is the most unambiguously good mother/wife. Her flaws are a "natural" feminine response: she wants to protect her family. Grace exhibits qualities associated with nineteenth-century "True Woman-hood"—the loving wife, mother and daughter who acts as the family conscience to balance the impersonal, amoral, masculine public sphere.[46] Unlike Harry, Grace does have a memory, but because she is restricted to the domestic sphere, her power is limited to trying to influence him. When he refuses her knowledge, she turns to her father to protect her and save her family. Grace's knowledge is undermined by her emotions; she tries to help Cody even when she knows he's a killer and underestimates her mother's cruelty. These "feminine instincts" make her unfit for action in the rational public sphere and are her undoing. When Grace receives a hologram tape of the kidnapped Dierdre asking her mother to rescue her, Eli knows it's a trick, since the girl never speaks. Grace ignores his warning, goes alone to retrieve her daughter, and falls into Josie's hands.

Josie's murder of Grace is her final indictment as bad mother. The most powerful and cruel character in the film, Josie has none of the qualities of True Womanhood. She is strong, aggressive, calculating and devoid of maternal instincts. Outside of her devotion to her brother, Josie does *not* respect the sanctity of the family; indeed, she kills off most of it. This brings about her downfall when the "grandson" she has raised in her image realizes she will never yield her power to him. Cody warns her that his "crimes will be greater" than hers and predicts a day when he will "lay bare every room that ever was." In a world unchecked by "feminine" empathy and altruism, Cody understands there is no haven from naked aggression; as he tells Peter, "There are no mothers. Only Fathers." He has no choice but to have Josie eliminated to clear his path to power. If Kreutzer represents the consequences of "natural" male aggression and competitiveness taken to excess, his sister's aggression is a violation of nature. Indeed, Eli refers to Josie as a "monster"—a "female demon" driven by "sexual obsession."

Paige is transformed from bad to good mother through her realignment with her lost good father (the journalist) and her remorse over abandoning her child (Cody). She cannot save her son, but when she asks his forgiveness for "letting them destroy you," the otherwise vicious Cody rewards his "mama" by sparing Harry's life. The scene in which Paige tells Harry about her lost father and son is central to her redemption. By reclaiming her past and confessing her sins, Paige also recovers her potential to be a good mother. This marks her shift in loyalty and obedience from Kruetzer to Harry. She is then fit to replace the martyred Grace as the good mother/good wife fixture in the revitalized nuclear family.

If Paige's salvation involves choosing the right man, Harry's lies in becom-ing the right man, thus preserving the active-male-subject, passive-female-object polarity. Harry's coming of age involves a journey from infantile narcissism, to

juvenile identification with the punitive father, to adult male autonomy, individuality and action.[47] As Harry distances himself from Kreutzer, he becomes increasingly independent and aggressive. He ultimately replaces Eli who has been unable to defeat his enemies or protect his children. When Harry also fails in this capacity (Dierdre is stolen and Grace murdered), he vows, "I'm gonna bring 'em down." From that point Harry becomes the effective leader of the Friends. He and Peter tamper with the go chip before turning it over to the Fathers, and without consulting the Friends, he decides to single-handedly rescue his daughter.

Harry's final confrontation with Kruetzer marks his achievement of full manhood. The Senator, having received the go chip implant and feeling magnanimous, shares the truth about Harry's origins. Harry demands to know why he has been kept in the dark, why his own father "took everything from me that I loved" and "made a monster" of his other son. Kreutzer replies, "the garden [paradise] is filled with little lies ... my lies are Mimecom's. State of the art. For the masses." He thus justifies his public and private ruthlessness as the necessary price of power. When his image begins to disintegrate, Harry informs him that "we altered the chip. Peter and I. My *son*," and delivers the film's core message: "You ruined everything that you touched. What's the matter? Wasn't this world enough for you? You didn't have to run to paradise, *father*. Paradise is right here." As the Senator dematerializes, Harry whispers: "Coward. I could have loved you."

Harry thus vanquishes the bad father through patricide but redeems fatherhood by affirming the values of paternal love and filial devotion. The paradise "right here" is located in the power of familial bonds, not in power over the public sphere. Immortality is properly achieved through the reproduction of those bonds, not in technological mastery and the coerced veneration of strangers. Reality/authenticity is found in family relationships, not in mediated/inauthentic fantasies.[48] The film associates the corruption of fatherhood with men's quest for public power at the expense of their private ties. The good father, in contrast, acts in the public realm out of respect for his family obligations. Both Kreutzer and Eli Leavitt have violated this mandate through direct abuse or self-serving neglect. They care more for politics than for their families and thus wreak personal and public suffering. Harry represents the corrective to these failed fathers; as he tells Eli in the final episode: "I'm going to have my family back. One way or the other. And those are *my* politics."

In the final scene, Harry recovers his daughter in a shoot-out and gathers his reconstructed family (Paige, Peter and Dierdre—who can finally speak because her father is able to protect her) into his Corvette. Driving them to safety he tells Paige to "stay with the children" while he returns temporarily to the Friends because "they need me." A fully reconstituted good father, Harry has his family back, an international conspiracy has been brought down in a matter of a few days by one "real man," and the restored nuclear family unit drives off into the sunset.

Resolving the Crisis:
The Personalization of the Political

Wild Palms acknowledges real social contradictions and resolves them in ways that reassure us our fears and preoccupations can be accommodated within existing social arrangements.[49] The particular anxieties and resolutions played out in the film also illuminate how the historical experience and cultural memory of the baby boom PMC are embodied in popular culture forms. The conditions that produced the baby boom fostered the development of a generational identity that may be expressed in its purest form in the baby boom PMC, whose historical positioning and class-specific experiences have given it a "uniquely thorough and comfortable familiarity with both the mass and high branches of the culture industry."[50] *Wild Palms* arouses and fulfills this audience's longing for "home" and "reality" through a form that also appeals to its desire to avoid "codification and definition altogether by dispersing and scattering oneself through the codes and cliches" of popular culture.[51] Thus, a very traditional narrative about the sanctity of the nuclear family is conveyed through the conventions of a postmodern aesthetic.

The baby boom PMC's ability to decipher and enjoy "difficult texts" and recognize itself in postmodern forms was initially cultivated in a social environment insulated from the "real world" that supposedly lay behind/beyond mass mediated texts.[52] This generational/class fraction's ambivalence toward media is also an ambivalence toward "reality;" the skill and pleasure of decoding media messages are predicated on knowledge that these are merely *constructions* that can manipulate us only if we mistake them for the "real thing."[53] At the same time, those constructions have been our primary—often only—access to the world beyond our direct experience, and have so thoroughly penetrated our consciousness that even our vision of the "real thing" is formulated within media culture's own terms. It is not too surprising, then, that the "real" and "home" are attached in *Wild Palms* to a vision of the family eerily like those that populated 1950s and 1960s sitcoms. Families where fathers know best and exercise benevolent paternal authority, where mothers embrace their destiny as nurturing, domestic caregivers, where children are secure and respectful, and where the "natural" separation of the public and private spheres ensures the proper functioning of both.

It is important to ask why the supposed loss of the kind of "home" valorized in the film might hold special meaning for those of us who grew up in the 1950s, came of age in the 1960s, and made our way into the PMC. As members of the first "youth culture," boomers' identity was forged in part by adopting cultural products and practices that their elders found alien or distasteful and appropriating a generation-specific media grammar.[54] Growing up in an era of continuous economic growth—in contrast to their parents who had lived through times of severe scarcity—the baby boom, and particularly its PMC-bound component,

enjoyed a historically unprecedented sense of personal and political possibilities.[55] The emergence of the Civil Rights, student, and anti-war movements, heavily populated by future PMC members, reflected this feeling of possibility. These movements, even for those who didn't directly participate, helped shape many boomers' view of themselves as historically significant *as a generation* (e.g., the Friends), while reinforcing their distance from their seemingly cautious, conformist parents (e.g., the Fathers). If such movements never included more than a sizeable minority of youth, the values they embodied affected the contours of the much more widely dispersed youth (and later "counter") culture.[56]

Wild Palms speaks to this generation—most pointedly to its PMC fraction—about the loss of youthful idealism and feelings of potency and possibility. The film offers a diagnosis of what ails society by honing in on what ails this numerically, politically and culturally significant social group.[57] It is no accident that the film depicts the 1970s as "the Fall." For many members of the baby boom PMC, that decade signifies the decline of social change movements, the corruption of the counter culture's "authenticity" (for which the devolution of rock music into bubble gum and disco is a typical analogy), and revelations of some of the youth culture's more troubling manifestations. The 1970s brought Watergate, a worldwide oil crisis and, in 1973, the first economic recession the boom generation had ever known, when its "great expectations" smacked headlong into shrinking economic opportunities. This decade also marked most boomers' entry into young adulthood—with its pressures and responsibilities—in a world that turned out to be far more resistant to personal and structural change than they had imagined. Thus, for many members of this generation, the 1970s *was* when things started to "go wrong."[58]

This period also marks the flowering of the second wave of the women's rights movement. By rehabilitating the idealized nuclear family with its male authority and gender polarity, the film indirectly indicts the women's movement as one of the things that went wrong, less by explicitly denouncing feminism than by erasing it from history. *Wild Palms'* proposed paradise plays on current anxieties about "family values" through which more and more social problems are drawn into the orbit of the supposed "breakdown of the family."[59] Laments about this development frequently cite women's large-scale movement into the public sphere of work in the last three decades, holding women responsible for abandoning children (and the private sphere) and usurping men's place in the work force. Men's role in the crisis of the family is formulated in terms of failing their public sphere responsibilities—lacking the initiative to take care of their families and provide good male role models. Such arguments take on particularly ugly and racist inflections when attached to discussions of "the underclass" or "the inner city."[60]

This diagnosis of what ails us may be seductive, but it ignores the baby boom PMC's actual historical relationship to "the family." This generational cohort has identified itself, in part, in terms of a resistance to the isolated, gender-rigid, suburban, middle-class, mainly white family from which it came. Its members

Figure 4: The logo for ABC's "movie event," *Wild Palms*, which was described in network promotional material as "a mind-bending mixture of horrifying drama, deadpan realism and hallucinatory soap opera."

have initiated alternative family arrangements, more equal sexual relationships, greater openness to inter-racial relationships and different sexual orientations, less authoritarian marital and parental models, increased economic independence for women, and more freedom to leave unhappy unions because these things had been unavailable in their own childhood families. The family, then, has long been a central preoccupation of baby boom PMC, initially as a source of constraints to be resisted, and now as a source of nostalgic longing because of the changes they helped effect in that institution. Plagued by the fear that they have made a grave mistake—are perhaps responsible for the current public/private crises—members of the baby boom PMC are vulnerable to suggestions that we can undo that mistake by willing the "traditional family" back into existence.[61]

Initial critiques of the "traditional family" of the 1950s, particularly by women, recognized that this family type was connected to larger social and political structures that were equally in need of change. The phrase, "the personal is political," emerging from the women's movement, expressed this recognition. Ironically, a film that speaks to the historical experience of this generational/class

23

fraction proposes a return to that very family structure as the cure for socio-political problems. On one level the film warns us of the dangers of individual and collective amnesia, while on another it encourages us to forget the actual institutional arrangements and social relationships that helped fuel desires for change. What we have here is a tale of a return to childhood—a failure of nerve in the face of historical demands. *Wild Palms* relies on the power of nostalgia to evoke the baby boom PMC's repressed desire to return to a mythologized past when its youthful energy, optimism and aspirations had not yet crashed into historical limitations (that is, before we discovered that "history is what hurts," to borrow from Jameson).[62]

Wild Palms' proposed recovery of "the family" is predicated on gender polarity, which upholds relations of domination and subordination inside and outside the family. Stephanie Coontz argues that the polarization of human qualities and social roles along gender lines is embedded in the history of liberal capitalism's separation of the public and private spheres where "emotion and compassion could be disregarded in the political and economic realms only if women were assigned these traits in the personal realm."[63] Through this division, women's exclusion from political citizenship was justified, as was men's isola-tion from family intimacy. Such a division ensures that "values" remain confined to the "subjective" arena of interpersonal, private relationships (women's do-main) while the public world (men's turf) operates according to the "objective laws" of the market (unchecked competition and self-interested striving). When rationality, autonomy and competitiveness are linked to masculinity, and emo-tionality, inter-dependence and cooperation are feminized, the split between the active, public, male subject and passive, private, female object is preserved. Jessica Benjamin suggests that this polarization is itself a source of crisis—the public sphere is in trouble because cooperation, compassion, nurturance and altruism have been defined as private and personal needs, rather than social and political ones. The private sphere is likewise endangered because it cannot compensate for the absence of these qualities in public life, and because the logic of domination (the split between male subject and female object) is woven into the heart of our most intimate relationships, naturalized as a biological given, and reproduced in other social relations.[64]

The film sidesteps this issue by proposing that male domination is a problem only when it is not tempered by men's primary obligation to protect their families. Because the father's only mandate is to look out for his family, the public sphere remains an arena of unmitigated competition among self-interested (male) heads of families. The film thereby reinforces capitalism's investment in a particular form of social organization where cooperation, interdependence and mutuality are restricted to domestic relationships and prevented from contaminating the public world of naked competition between "free" individuals. Such a division ensures the social isolation of actual families while working against the extension of "private" values into "public" spaces where they might contribute to the

creation of community or social movements.[65] Thus, Harry doesn't need anyone else to help him vanquish the Fathers; he needs only his commitment to his family and the fortitude to "be a man." The film suggests that collective action is selfish, unnecessary and doomed. Indeed, those who place political struggle or the needs of the social group above the family (like Eli Leavitt) are condemned.

Wild Palms' fixation on this mythologized family is linked to the striking homogeneity of its fictional landscape. The battle between the Fathers and Friends is waged between two factions of predominantly white, upper-middle to upper class males. Women have no authority and make no decisions among the Friends; they exist only to be protected and to remind men what they are fighting for. Aside from Harry's friend Tommy (a gay professional who dies of Mimezine poisoning), a police lieutenant who works for Kreutzer, a female drug dealer in the Wilderzone, and a prison inmate, Los Angeles in 2007 appears to be devoid of African-Americans, and of Latinos as well.[66] Nor are poor or working class people counted among the Friends, and the Third World has simply vanished. Given the actual and projected demographic composition of Los Angeles, and the riots that rocked that city in 1992, *Wild Palms* might be read as a fantasy tale where the powerful "determinate real contradictions" of race, class and gender have magically disappeared, where 21st century L.A. is rewritten as a replica of homogenous, 1950s suburbia.[67]And, while shifting alliances of dominant classes and class fractions *do* struggle with each other for State power, it may be wishful thinking to believe the outcome of their battles would be liberation for those on the bottom. Indeed, Harry puts up a fight only to recover his family and his self-respect.

By making the restoration of public order dependent upon restoring this idealized family, the film recasts "the personal is political" as "the political is nothing but the personal."[68] Behind this narrative resolution lie concrete social contradictions that cannot be spirited away symbolically. The white, middle-class nuclear family mythologized in the film is the product of concrete historical conditions; it was not a universal family type, even in the 1950s. Its suburban haven was subsidized by urban working and poor people, it was grounded in social relations marked by entrenched structures of racism and sexism, and it generated (and suffered from) its own personal and political problems.[69] A wholesale return to that family type is neither viable—because it never existed for a significant portion of the population, and because of substantially different socio-economic conditions—nor, for many people, desirable. Moreover, actual families and their attendant "values" are less the cause of socio-political arrangements than a product of them.

Zavarzadeh argues that "institutions of intimacy"—such as the family—are key sites through which "the ideologies that legitimate the social order are circulated and produced."[70] The disappearance of contemporary class, race, gender and center-periphery tensions in *Wild Palms* is predicated on its reduction of socio-political conflicts to family problems. In so doing, the film helps "resecure the subject positions needed for reproducing the existing social rela-

tions."[71] When institutions of intimacy are threatened, Zavarzadeh suggests, "one of the most ideologically effective moves to prolong [their] life ... has been to deny that they have been historically formed in response to certain socio-economic conditions." When the family is naturalized as a timeless entity, its problems can be privatized as individual failures. This move "demonstrates that these institutions of middle-class life are in good shape and far from breaking down, saving them from the pressures of a sustained interrogation and enabling the continued mystification of their practices in contemporary thought."[72] Such is the task of a tale like *Wild Palms* that seeks to breathe symbolic life into a family model that lacks the social conditions necessary to sustain it in reality. In the process, the historical focal points of social struggle are shifted from the public sphere and, as Clarke notes, "displaced and marginalized by the reworking of civil society into a 'purer' individualist, familialist formation."[73]

Wild Palms is a therapeutic narrative, drawing its energy from the larger therapeutic ethos in contemporary society and implicated in the popular fixation on the "dysfunctional family."[74] Because therapeutic explanations locate social problems in intra- and interpersonal processes, they prescribe solutions in adjustments of individual perception and behavior.[75] In keeping with this therapeutic orientation, *Wild Palms* reassures us that if we can just get our families straightened out, everything will turn out okay in the end; personal transformation becomes a substitute for socio-structural transformation. The appeal of such solutions is their suggestion that we really had the answer inside us all along, just as Dorothy always possessed the ability to return to Kansas. All we have to do is chant along with her: "There's no place like home."

Most of us have occasionally longed for a perfectly benevolent father and nurturing mother to rescue us from the hurts of history. And we have sometimes also felt enraged by our imperfect actual parents' inability to do so. These emotions can be linked to an illusory object through the work of nostalgia.[76] But if nostalgia draws its power as much from struggles in the present as it does from the actual allure of the past, perhaps this yearning for the redeemed family might be redirected to question what is, instead of fueling fantasies of what was.[77] Rather than longing for improvements to our private havens from the heartless public world, we might be better served by working to make the private qualities of compassion, nurturance, altruism, and mutuality more integral to our public institutions. This would require collective (rather than solely individual) action, social (rather than simply personal) change, and political (rather than merely psychological) work. Nostalgic, therapeutic narratives like *Wild Palms* settle on the private side of this dialectic, and in so doing, affirm rather than challenge existing public arrangements. Like therapy, such tales place responsibility for problems on individual behavior and relationships; if our society and our families are in disarray, it's our own fault. And, like therapy, they are provisional fixes; no matter how seductive the symbolic resolutions offered by popular culture narratives, the real socio-historical contradictions from which they spring remain with us.

26

Notes

1. *Wild Palms* is loosely based on Wagner's comic strip of the same name formerly published in *Details* magazine. It aired May 14-17, 1993 heavily promoted by ABC, which adopted the latest industry trend of creating "high-profile events" for ratings sweeps periods with extensive advance publicity (Elizabeth Jensen, "Media: ABC Believes It Has Made Perfect 'Event'," *Wall Street Journal* 10 May 1993, B1). Stone went with Wagner to pitch the film to ABC; his directorial clout convinced the network to let Wagner create and write an expensive mini-series. Their association began earlier when Stone, who Wagner has called "sort of a godfather to me," bought the film rights to Wagner's novel, *Force Majeure*, which has been described as "a dark indictment of the entertainment industry" and been compared to Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust* (Andy Meisler, "And the Shadowy Figure Who Dreamed It," *New York Times* 16 May 1993, 34; Martin Bool, "'Wild Palms:' Laughing Through the Apocalypse," *Washington Post* 16 May 1993, G-9). Stone is a premier member of the baby boom generation whose films center on issues of the corruption of the public sphere and the betrayal of democratic ideals. His films about the 1960s (*Platoon, Born on the Fourth of July, The Doors, JFK*), which *Washington Post* critic Tom Shales says is Stone's "very, very favorite decade," revolve around the male protagonists' responses to the loss of innocence and youthful idealism ("TV's Virtual Reality a Virtual Failure," *Washington Post* 16 May 1993, G-10). Wagner is also a baby boomer but, unlike Stone, is no idealist. He stated in one interview that he "never wrote this to make a sociological comment about where we are now. I could care less about that." Wagner's dismissal of deeper meanings in the film may echo the values associated with "Generation X;" indeed, *Details* magazine (the original site of *Wild Palms*) has been described as "a field guide to the Generation X *zeitgeist*" (Bool). Wagner's stance might also be understood as a response to lost idealism—the rejection of substance and ethics in favor of style and aesthetics—which has also been associated with a "postmodern" sensibility. His professed indifference and studied cynicism are ironic given the film's clearly traditional message. *Wild Palms'* aesthetic may be "postmodern," but its message is firmly rooted in modernist values of individualism, rationality, and universal truth.

2. *Wild Palms* is not unique in this respect. The existence of public/private crises is the focus of Lawrence Kasdan's *Grand Canyon*, John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood*, Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, and Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. Only Altman's film does not pose some form of the nuclear family as the resolution to the public crisis.

3. Headlines from the *Houston Post* (Eric Gerber, "You've Never Seen TV Like This Before," 17 May 1993, B1) and the *Christian Science Monitor* (Marilynne Mason, "Violent 'Wild Palms' Breaks New Ground," 14 May 1993, 11) are indicative of this view. Stone called the film "innovative" on "several levels at once." He noted that it is "packed with information," employs a "visceral style" and unusual lighting, and had "distinguished directing" (each episode had a different feature film director: Peter Hewitt, Keith Gordon, Kathryn Bigelow and Phil Joanou) (Jim McFarlin, "Oliver's Twist," Detroit *News* 10 May 1993, D1).

4. ABC was clearly interested in appealing to the same market that had made its *Twin Peaks* a cultural phenomenon (Mark Lorando, "Palms Rises From What Killed Peaks," New Orleans *Times-Picayune* 17 May 1993, C1). Like Lynch's series, *Wild Palms'* debut was accompanied by the release of *The Wild Palms Reader* to help viewers decipher its dense symbolism and pop culture references. *Wild Palms* has since been released in video by Capital Cities/ABC; the soundtrack (composed by Ryuichi Sakamoto, academy award winner for *The Last Emperor*) is available on the Capitol label. The film was well-received by critics (in a survey of 17 major daily newspapers, nine reviews were very favorable, five were mixed, three were primarily negative). Based on A.C. Nielsen figures, the premiere episode received a 12.3 rating/20 share, coming in second in its time period; subsequent episodes were rated 9.7/15, 11/19, 9.9/17. One rating point equals 959,000 homes, which means the viewership ranged from 11.8 to 9.5 million homes across the four nights ("Ratings Week," *Broadcasting and Cable* 24 May 1993, 36; "Ratings Week," *Broadcasting and Cable* 31 May 1993, 20). Given that the network share of the prime time audience is around 60 percent, a 20 share is considered quite successful; the 20th ranked program in any given week receives around a 10 to 12 rating. Audience size is not the sole determinant of success; advertisers are increasingly concerned with an audience's "quality" based on its demographic characteristics. The baby boom professional managerial class, encompassing viewers 30 to 49 years old, is a desirable and profitable market. Betsy Williams, "'North to the Future:' *Northern Exposure* and Quality Television," in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: the Critical View*, 5th ed. (Oxford, 1994), 141-154, discusses the economic basis of the networks' quest in the 1970s to create "quality television" that would attract "baby boomers concentrated in urban areas with access to consumer goods and services" (144). An examination of the ads across the four episodes suggests that this was the audience targeted by the network and advertisers. The most common ads were for luxury cars and mid-priced family vans (Buick Park Avenue Ultra, Lexus, Cadillac Eldorado, Mercury mini-van, etc.). Other upscale products advertised included Prudential and Aetna insurance, Hewlett Packard laser printer, and Sharp video camera. The ads were aimed at a mixed gender audience: Black & Decker lawn edger, car ads and Calvin Klein cologne for men; Summer's Eve douche, Pantene hair products and Weight Watchers for women.

Many of the ads depicted products being used by the family: Discovery Channel for kids' enrichment, family cars, Nabisco graham crackers and Oreos (all of which portrayed baby boom aged parents with children).

 5. *Natural Born Killers, Max Headroom,* John Carpenter's *They Live* and Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* center on the mediated blurring of reality/simulation. In popular music this theme has been treated by Neil Young, REM, Talking Heads, Elvis Costello, Laurie Anderson, and others. Wagner notes this core theme of the film: "In *Twin Peaks* the question was 'Who killed Laura Palmer? In *Wild Palms* the question is 'Who killed reality?'" (Bool, "Wild Palms," G1).

 6. John Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, 1990), 289.

 7. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, 1981), 141.

 8. Todd Gitlin, "Television's Screens: Hegemony in Transition," in *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education,* ed. Michael Apple, (London, 1982), 233.

 9. Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley, 1968), 152, 124. Burke's formulation is compatible with the emphasis in cultural studies on signification as an active process of engagement between texts and audiences. See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in Stuart Hall et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language* (London, 1980), 128-138; and Shaun Moores, *Interpreting Audiences: the Ethnography of Media Consumption* (London, 1993).

 10. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films Politically* (Albany, 1991), 18.

 11. Ibid., 27. All interpretation begins with a pre-interpreted symbolic domain, enters into relation with other interpretations, and is thus "necessarily risky, conflict-laden and open to dispute" (Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture,* 290). The fact that media texts are open to differing interpretations by receivers is well-documented. That the encoding process, the social positioning of receivers, and the larger structures of the social formation exert pressures on the range of decodings is also documented. Because this is not an audience study, outside of a small group of critics, acquaintances and students I make no claims for how other viewers read the film. Instead, as a member of the generational/class fraction explicitly addressed by *Wild Palms,* I offer a possible interpretation based on "reasons, grounds, evidence and elucidation" (290).

 12. Quotes from: John O'Connor, "Into the Show Biz Jungle, Seeking a Gentler Life," New York *Times* 17 May 1993, 11; Shales; Marilynne Mason, "Violent Wild Palms;" and Bool, "Wild Palms."

 13. Mason, "Violent Wild Palms."

 14. Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films,* 21-26.

 15. Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," in *Between Labor and Capital,* ed. Pat Walker, (Boston, 1979), 5-45, defined the professional/ managerial class as "consisting of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations" (12). Barbara Ehrenreich's *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York, 1989), further analyzes the history that shapes the PMC consciousness. The concept of a "new class" has received considerable attention in sociology, beginning with C. Wright Mill's notion of the "new middle class," and Alvin Gouldner's identification of this class as a combination of intellectuals and the "technical intelligentsia" (*The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class,* New York,1979). More recently, Pierre Bourdieu has defined the professional managerial sector as the "new petite bourgeoisie" (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, 1984). Scott Lash and John Urry (*The End of Organized Capitalism,* Madison, 1987) define it as the "service class." Such works share a view that this class seeks to enhance the societal valorization of intellectual knowledge, symbolic goods and cultural capital as a means of advancing its social power. John Clarke (*New Times and Old Enemies: Essays on Cultural Studies and America,* London, 1991) argues that the professional/managerial fraction of the middle class plays a central role in shaping popular culture and consumption. He attributes this group's cultural leadership to the "self-confidence" it derives from occupying "the primary subaltern positions of advanced capitalism," its high levels of disposable income, and its "historically specific ... self-consciousness about culture and consumption" (106). While I use the Ehrenreichs' term (PMC),and its appropriation by Fred Pfeil in "'Makin' Flippy Floppy': Postmodernism and the Baby-Boom PMC", in *Another Tale to Tell: Politics and Narrative in Postmodern Culture* (London & New York, 1990), 97-125, my analysis is informed by this larger body of work.

 16. This period has also been associated with a particular form of world capitalism—the "Fordist" "regime of accumulation" based on twin pillars of mass production and mass consumption, a stable coalition of big government, big business and big labor, and generally steady global economic growth. David Harvey (*The Condition of Postmodernity,* London, 1989) analyzes the history and characteristics of Fordism, including its collapse in the 1970s, and its replacement by a transnational "flexible" regime of accumulation, which he links to the emergence of postmodernism. Mike Davis (*Prisoners of the American Dream,* London: Verso, 1986), Clarke, in *New Times and Old,* and Pfeil, in "'Makin' Flippy Floppy,'" consider the relationship of Fordism to the development and growth of the professional managerial class. One of the baby boom's distinguishing features may be that it is the only generation to grow up and come of age wholly within the socio-economic hegemony of Fordism.

17. Using 1980 U.S. census data, Pfeil ("'Makin' Flippy Floppy'") notes that of the 37.4 million adults between 25 and 35 years old, 22.2 million were employed in professional and managerial occupations. That amounts to 59 percent of all 25-35 year olds and 82 percent of all among that age group who were employed in 1980 (98-99). This group, popularly defined as "yuppies," has also drawn the interest of marketers and advertisers. One marketing study in 1985 (cited in John Burnett and Alan Bush, "Profiling the Yuppies," *Journal of Advertising Research*, (April/May 1986), 27) concluded that while only one in seven boomers could be statistically classified as a "yuppie," nearly half of the baby boom generation could be termed "psychographic yuppies" who exhibit similar attitudes and tastes. In their own research, Burnett and Bush concluded that "the yuppie segment does exist and exhibits definite differences [from the general population] in lifestyle, activities, purchase behavior and media habits" (35).

18. Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy," 104. Thompson argues that the electronic media, and television in particular, have radically reconstituted the character of the public sphere via their capacity to make "public" events and actions that are disconnected from their originating social contexts. Such "mediazation," he contends, has reshaped our experience and understanding of both public and private spheres by making "the private domestic setting . . . a principal site of mediated publicness" (*Ideology and Modern Culture*, 242-3). Modern mass communication has "created a new kind of publicness and has transformed fundamentally the conditions under which most people are able to experience what is public and participate today in what would be called a public realm" (246). The baby boom PMC might be understood in terms of its specific historical location in the development of the mass-mediated public sphere.

19. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York, 1978); Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York, 1977); George Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television Programs," *Cultural Anthropology* 1 (November, 1986), 355-387; Lynn Spigel, "Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America," in William Solomon and Robert W. McChesney, *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History* (Minneapolis, 1993): 259-290.

20. Clarke, *New Times and Old*, 96.

21. Ella Taylor, *Prime Time Families* (Berkeley, 1989); and Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory."

22. Clarke, *New Times and Old*, 95.

23. Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart, in "Media Grammars and Generation Gaps," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2 (March 1985), 23-35, examine the relationship of the grammars associated with particular media, the acquisition of media literacy, and their effects on consciousness and social relations. They argue that "media literacy becomes part of each individual's consciousness and as such shapes the individual's perceptions of reality" (33). Media grammars and media literacy are shaped by concrete political-economic forces and social conditions and are thus historically determined.

24. The reference to *Hamlet* is intentional; like Harry, the Danish prince must decide what is "real," and act on his decision.

25. For a discussion of personalization in TV narratives, see Gitlin, "Television's Screens," and John Langer, "The Television Personality System," *Media, Culture and Society* 4 (October 1981), 351-365.

26. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York, 1992) provides ample documentation of this phenomenon. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York, 1988), notes how this anxiety about the traditional nuclear family has made its way into the writings of liberals like Jean Beth Elshtain and Christopher Lasch (199).

27. This creates associations with *The Dead Poets Society*, a film that criticized the conformity of the 1950s. Set in an elite boys' school, the youthful "rebels" recited Whitman's poem as a symbol of their solidarity and resistance to repressive societal authority. The film was clearly targeted at a baby boom audience.

28. The centrality of television in the shaping of baby boomers' identity, their understanding of history, and their aesthetic perferences should not be underestimated. Pfeil says that television, at the "deepest levels of aesthetic and dramatic rhthyms and deployment, constitutes the *lingua franca*" of the baby boom PMC ("'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 104). In *Modernism, Postmodernism, Realism* (Winchester, 1990), Brandon Taylor argues that television has contributed to the formation of a postmodern aesthetic by positing a viewer "who shares the medium's own perceptions of history as an endless reserve of euqal events" (103).

29. This parallels the argument of Clarke and colleagues who suggest that the '60s counter culture was a "negating of a dominant culture" that arose "from within that culture." The baby boom PMC's ambivalence is described as an oscillation "between two extremes: total critique and its reverse, substantial incorporation" (cited in Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 119).

30. *The Wizard of Oz*, was first shown on television November 3, 1956, receiving a 33.9 rating and 52.7 share. It then became a staple yearly event and part of most baby boomers' childhood cultural repertoire. Geoff Ryman, *Was, a Novel* (New York, 1992), 107.

31. John Brenkman, "Mass Media: From Collective Experience to the Culture of Privatization," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979), 99.

32. Paolo Carpignano et al., "Chatter in the Age of Electronic Reproduction: Talk Television and the 'Public Mind,'" *Social Text* 25/26 (1990), 39. The "father" of public relations, Edward Bernays, was the first to describe his field's purpose as the "engineering of consent." *Engineering of Consent* (Norman, 1995).

33. Landon Jones describes the baby boom generation as "Children of the media" in *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York, 1980), 118-127. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Boston, 1989), 177.

34. Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 108.

35. Drawing on Bourdieu, Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London & Newbury Park, 1991), argues that "taste in cultural goods functions as a marker of class" that is related to varying access to economic and cultural capital available to groups differently positioned within the social body. From this perspective, the baby boom PMC's ability to read and appreciate a relatively wide range of cultural codes and practices becomes a gauge of distinction that sets it apart from social groups who lack the cultural capital necessary to become Pfeil's "complete cultural consumers and connoiseurs." It's important to note that cultural capital "has its own structure of value" and can be converted into economic capital (and into forms of social power) (88).

36. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory* (New York, 1991), 11.

37. Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 109. Clarke also links this aesthetic to the baby boom professional managerial class which has been shaped by "the legacy of youth subcultures" and the "cultural inheritance of skills from postwar popular culture." He notes: "it is this class/generation formation that has acquired both the knowledge of popular cultural codes and conventions, and the economic and cultural space in which to 'play' with them." That is, the baby boom PMC subject constitutes the ideal "knowing consumer of popular culture" *New Times and Old*, 107.

38. Here we might draw connections to Mark Crispin Miller's critique of the self-reflexive, ironic stance that has become common in popular culture, especially in television programming. He suggests that the "reflexive sneering" at television that is now a familiar element in many programs flatters viewers' sense of superiority to the medium: "All televisual smirking is based on, and reinforces the assumption that we who smirk together are enlightened past the point of nullity." Such flattery of our ability to see through television is also a means of organizing us as a commodity (for advertisers) and a market (for products): "that inert, ironic watchfulness which TV reinforces in its audience is itself conducive to consumption," *Boxed In: the Culture of TV* (Evanston, 1988), 327.

39. Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 113.

40. Meisler, "and the Shadowy Figure," 34; Bool, "Wild Palms," C9. Robert Goldman suggests that such a stance is a product of routine bombardment by "signifiers and signifieds detached from referent systems." This "blank, but knowing, indifference thus affects a defensive posture vis-vis processes of media 'manipulation'" (*Reading Ads Socially* [London & New York, 1992] 202).

41. Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 111.

42. Significantly, Wagner describes this as his favorite scene in the film (Meisler, "And the Shadowy Figure," 34).

43. Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 111.

44. The film was labeled this way by Mason, "Violent Wild Palms," 11.

45. As Thompson argues, eternalization and universalization are two ideological strategies of representation that serve to de-historicize social life, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 95-96

46. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966), 151-174; and Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 53, 63.

47. This is the model of "adult" ethical maturation outlined by Lawrence Kohlberg, against which women are judged deficient. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge & London, 1982), exposes the inherent gender bias in Kohlberg's research. Benjamin, in *Bonds of Love*, does the same in her critique of psychoanalysis.

48. Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, 1991), 12, argues that contemporary (poststructuralist/postmodern) theory rejects earlier (modernist) "depth models," including the dialectical model of essence and appearance; the Freudian model of latent and manifest; the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity; and the semiotic opposition of signifier and signified. On a theoretical level, then, *Wild Palms'* postmodern form is at odds with its valorization of reality/ authenticity/essence. On an experiential level, however, this contradiction reflects a historical tension within the baby boom PMC, which the film attempts to reconcile by suggesting that we can have our cake and eat it too.

49. See Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979), 130-148; also Douglas Kellner, *Democracy and the Crisis of Television* (Boulder, 1990).

50. Pfeil, "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 113.

51. Ibid., 111.

52. See Brad Chisholm, "Difficult Viewing: The Pleasures of Complex Screen Narratives," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (December 1991), 389-403.

53. As Todd Gitlin notes, a postmodern asthetic is marked by an "acute self-consciousness about the formal, constructed nature of the work" ("Postmodernism: Roots and Politics," *Dissent* [Winter 1989], 100).

54. This cultural identity was not just self-created, but was encouraged by aggressive marketing efforts to exploit this profitable sector of consumers. The dramatic expansion of the music industry, for example, was directly tied to this new youth market. The widespread concern about "juvenile delinquency" during this period attests to older people's unease with this widening generational divide. See James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, 1986).

55. This sensibility is linked to the baby boom's location within the apex of Fordist stability; boomers, Pfeil notes, "were major beneficiaries, unwitting dupes and target audiences of and for the old post-war capital-labor-government accords" ("'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 106).

56. Featherstone associates the '60s counter culture with a loosening of emotional constraints and a resistance to "formal standards of dress, presence and demeanour." He suggests that these informalizing tendencies helped cultivate an openness to "emotional exploration, aesthetic experience, and the aestheticization of life" that are associated with postmodernism, *Consumer Culture*,45. Pfeil contends that postmodernism is the "successor to and transplantation of the 'counter-culture' of the 1960s," "'Makin' Flippy Floppy'," 119.

57. The significance of the baby boom PMC is related not only to its size, but also to its over-representation in occupations that produce and circulate symbolic goods (e.g., marketing, advertising, public relations, journalism, the helping professions). Bourdieu says these "new cultural intermediaries" are strategically positioned to promote, transmit and legitimize those cultural forms, tastes, lifestyles and popular intellectual agendas with which they identify (cited in Featherstone, *Consumer Culture*, 44-45).

58. See Jones, *Great Expectations*, 128-162, for a fuller discussion of the baby boom's problems in the seventies. The 1970s also marks the transition from a "Fordist" to "flexible accumulation" model of capitalism (or from a monopoly to transnational form).

59. The belief that a renewed commitment to family (or to "family values") will cure social ills is not new. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 93-112, cites a similar current of public discourse in the late 19th century when a decade of idealism in the 1860s was followed by socio-economic crises in the 1870s, and white middle-class citizens clamored in the 1890s for a renewed emphasis on the family. She notes the irony of a solution that proposes to ameliorate the public costs of untempered self-interest through an even further withdrawal into private life. Coontz suggests that the current call for "family values" has been spawned by similar social contradictions, is similarly myopic, and is equally inadequate for resolving the kinds of social problems that face us at the end of the twentieth century.

60. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 1989, and William Julius Wilson *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, 1987) argue that reducing poverty and family crises to cultural explanations works to obscure political-economic determinants on individuals and families.

61. Idealizations notwithstanding, the family was neither untouched by change nor safe from critique in the 1950s. The withering of the public sphere noted by Pfeil was already eroding "the socially-constructed polarities around which gendered identities had formerly been constructed" e.g., "male=authority/autonomy/ freedom/power/public sphere, female=nurturance/identification/ connectedness/love/private sphere," "makin' Flippy Floppy", (102). Gaile MacGregor's analysis of 1950s film and television portrayals of the family cites numerous fathers (and father figures) who were villainous or corrupt in the public sphere, or inept bumblers in the private sphere. Popular melodrama of the period blamed familial breakdown on fathers who were weak, absent or neglectful ("Domestic Blitz: A Revisionist History of the Fifties," *American Studies* 34 [Spring 1993], 12). The melodramatic *Wild Palms* echoes this theme of paternal failure and seeks a solution by re-establishing the polarized chain of signifiers noted above.

62. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 102.

63. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 53. Benjamin traces the historical and psychological consequences of this polarization, *The Bonds of Love*, 185-198.

64. On one level, *Wild Palms* acknowledges this lack by evoking viewers' desire for a more compassionate, humane public sphere through the form of the benevolent father who nurtures his family. But it fails to identify how the scarcity of these qualities in the public sphere are rooted in the public/male vs. private/female split in the first place.

65. Michael Lerner makes a similar argument in *Surplus Powerlessness* (London, 1991).

66. Asian characters are plentiful, most of whom are Japanese involved in the battle for control over global media technologies; the film thus reinforces already prevalent anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S.

67. The only reference to *this* reality in the film is the name of the Wyckoff children's school: Daryl Gates Elementary. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London, 1990) outlines how public policy and the built environment in Los Angeles maintain this exclusion and invisibility by insuring that the white middle and upper classes are insulated from exposure to lower class and non-white inhabitants.

68. Indeed, the baby boom PMC's (including the filmmakers') suspicion that they have created the current crises is another instance of imagining that public life is merely the sum of private relationships.

69. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988), argue that this family type is a historical aberration. Betty Friedan's influential and groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963) exposed "the problem that has no name"—women's oppression within the nuclear family.

70. Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films*, 139.

71. Ibid., 12.

72. Ibid., 139.

73. Clarke, *New Times and Old*, 175.

74. This therapeutic ethos is treated in Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, 1985); Eva Illouz, "Reason Within Passion: Love in Women's Magazines," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (September 1991), 231-248; Debra Grodin, "The Interpreting Audience: The Therapeutics of Self-Help Book Reading," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (December 1991), 404-420; Wendy Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture: Reading Between the Lines* (New Brunswick, 1992); and Janice Peck, "TV Talk Shows as Therapeutic Discourse: The Ideological Labor of the Televised Talking Cure", *Communication Theory* 1 (Spring 1995), 58-81.

75. See Edward E. Sampson, "Cognitive Psychology as Ideology," *American Psychologist* 36 (July 1981), 730-743; and Lerner, *Surplus Powerlessness*.

76. Jones describes baby boomers as "the most powerfully nostalgic generation in history" *Great Expectations*, 328.

77. On the social implications of nostalgia, see Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York, 1979).