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Masters Thesis in Film and TV

Submitted to the *University of Witwatersrand, Department of Film and TV* on the 12th February 2018

When Life Comes Early: Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995) and *Bully* (2001)
An enquiry into the loss of innocence

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Declaration

I declare that this is my own unaided work, save insofar as indicated in the acknowledgements and references. It is being submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television, in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Sean Steinberg - 488154
12 February 2018

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Introduction: Understanding Larry Clark and His Films

In the 1990s the [*]'indie' film' presented a new "genre of youth films [that] reflect[ed] the culturally and aesthetically eclectic character of contemporary American cinema" (Schmidt, 2002: n.p.). These "independent films boomed larger than they ever had. Even bigger than they did in the 1970s" and became alluring to investors in that almost anyone could "make a cheap, soulful, meaningful film that would, perhaps, get mass consumption in a previously limited market" (Seibold, 2012: n.p.). As a result, it allowed for ambitious filmmakers like Larry Clark to flourish with Grimm-like fairy tales that told the raw and unadulterated truth of what it was like to be a 'Latchkey teenager' in the 1990s; a child or teenager who is "not supervised by an adult for regular and significant periods" (Seibold, 2012: n.p.)(Messer, Wuensch, Diamond, 1989: pg 302).

The result - *Kids* (Clark, 1995), Larry Clark's first film, and a ticket booth surrounded by pink fliers that read:–

> 'Kids' is a film about adolescent sexuality and contains very explicit language... some people may be offended. There will be no refunds. No one under 18 will be admitted unless accompanied by an adult.
>
> (Gates, 1995: n.p.)

The reception of *Kids* was strongly divided among critics, audiences and film scholars. Some, such as Roger Ebert received the work as a breakthrough, of which he said "this culture in such, flat, unblinking detail… [felt] like a documentary; it knows what it's talking about", and what it's talking about is the real lives of a sub-culture of urban disaffected youths from poor to working and middle class backgrounds. This was out of step with the pursuit of the American Dream, which may have characterized the upbringings of their parents (Ebert, 1995: n.p.). Others like Rita Kempley of the *Washington Post*, who described the film as something akin to "child pornography disguised as a cautionary documentary" saw Larry Clark being labeled a child pornographer (Kempley, 1995: n.p.). In all fairness to Clark, and in spite of his depictions of teenagers taking part in illicit sex and violence, he was able to bring a 'fictional reality' to the coming of age experience on film that few had done before, and that says sex and violence are part of real life… and teenage life at that!

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[*] 'Indie' film refers to films that "are financed and filmed largely outside of the aegis of major Hollywood studios" (Seibold, 2012: n.p.).

In trying to understand Larry Clark's work and why it has been misconstrued as being 'exploitative' – conditioning teenagers to take part in illicit sex and violence – I have found it useful to look at his raw and gritty photographs that came alive in his first book entitled *Tulsa* (Clark, 2000). These pictures of adolescence set a precedent which Clark has continued to explore in his vision of the films I will consider here, namely *Kids;* which follows a group of teenagers, boys and girls, over the course of a day as they make their way across Manhattan indulging in unprotected sex, violence, drugs, and alcohol; and *Bully* (Clark, 2001), which tells the fictionalized true-crime drama of a circle of friends whose only reprieve from their humdrum lives is to have sex and murder a bully within the group, and which has become central to his directorial vision of what it means to lose one's innocence and come of age. I want to understand how and why Clark did this and how he succeeded or failed.

It is Clark's portrayal of realism in the psychology of adolescents which has stuck with me since my first viewings of his films, and which has essentially become a story of "resemblance, or if you will, of realism" that represents "a plausible reality of which the spectator admits the identity with nature as he knows it" (Bazin, 1967: pg 10, 108). As a result, many of Clark's film goers also appeared to be struck by the standard of realism which resulted in a "confusion between the aesthetic and the psychological; between true realism, the need that is to give significant expression to the world both concretely and its essence, and the pseudorealism of a deception aimed at fooling the eye (or for that matter the mind)" (Bazin, 1967: pg 12). According to Sonya Posmentier, a 20-year-old student at Yale University, in responding to Clark's film *Kids*, she felt that "13-year-old kids should see it… [but]… on the other hand, it could seriously traumatize them", and Sara Overholt, a 12-year-old, who saw the film with her mother, said that "she had been telling her friends about the film, but hesitated to recommend it wholeheartedly to everyone: 'I'm telling them that if you're going to see it, it's pretty heavy. So be ready for that'" (Gates, 1995: n.p.).

Despite lurid assumptions, Clark is far more responsible than one might think given his subject matter and the controversial nature of his films. Clark's approach and how he engages with the young subjects of his films speaks to a carefully considered process as a director; at fifty-years-old Larry Clark decided to take up skateboarding in order to get to know these teenagers and convince them to take part in his film. According to the actor Leo Fitzpatrick, who plays Telly, "Larry doesn't do kids the way other people do [and he] knew early on that to make a film like this he needed to be on the inside of this sort of counterculture" (Locker, 2015: n.p.). From the performances he was able to elicit from his actors, it's absolutely clear

that he succeeded in this. So what may appear as an exploitation of youth for many, may be something more akin to an exploration of a "marginalised youth" where "kids are abused physically and abused emotionally and [are] fucked-up, and the adults are using the children to try and fulfill their own emotional emptiness" (Edelstein & Florence, 2002: n.p.). For Clark, these teenagers don't have anything else other than each other, which is shown in his films by the young characters "coming together and having sex" (Edelstein & Florence, 2002: n.p.). This plays to his uncanny ability to capture those watershed moments in which "the individual has developed full sexual capacity but has not yet assumed a full adult role in society" (Spacks, 1981: 7). Rather than labeling Clark as "an old pervert" or pornographer, it is better to think of him as anything but (Gilbey, 2011: n.p.). The nature of Clark's sexually explicit scenes in the case study films are not for the purpose of gratification. They are intended to offer audiences privileged access to a world they wouldn't normally access (Gilbey, 2011: n.p.)(Spencer, 1996: n.p.). I agree with Clark's own defense of his work in the face of accusations over his depiction of gratuitous and exploitative teenage sexual encounters, when he says "if it's in the story and it makes sense and if it's part of life and it's done right… it won't be pornography" (Edelstein & Florence, 2002: n.p.).

Of course there will always be the question of power relations that may emerge when an older film director casts teenagers to take part in a film production that conveys events which may be construed as lewd activities. And in that, one ought to raise the ethical concerns which are important in dealing with Clark's work, considering the allegations which have extended to Clark being heavily criticised for being "an old pervert whose brand of research – spending months gaining the trust of his street-punk subjects – might easily be confused with grooming," and create a pressing need for Clark to be judged (Gilbey, 2011: n.p.). The aim of this thesis is not to judge him but rather to understand the motivations behind his choices. Leo Fitzpatrick advocates Clark's view as he explains that for him, "the surprise was that people thought it was crazy, because – outside of the sex – it depicted what was going on in my life. It wasn't that crazy to me" (Locker, 2015: n.p.). Looking back twenty years ago, all of this seemed to upend the very bedrock that the coming of age genre was built on. In part, one could say that it was the very explicit illustration of adolescents taking part in sex and violence which audiences found so startling and which challenged the established conventions that came before. Through my research I will attempt to offer a more nuanced understanding that goes beneath the surface reading of the sensationalist aspects of Clark's films by taking a multi-disciplinary approach that includes film genre theory, narrative

studies relating to the work of Robert McKee, developmental psychology, and finally the contextualization of the loss of innocence. On closer viewing it is worth noting that much of the perceived sex and violence is alluded to rather than shown, requiring that the audience use their own imaginations to draw conclusions as to what happens on the screen. But that's exactly where Clark's true brilliance lies as Bazin explains in his explanation of a realistic cinema "that preserves the freedom of spectators to choose their own interpretation of an object, character or event" (Hallam & Marshment, 2000: pg 15).

My interest in the Clark films as coming of age narratives extends from a curiosity about youth's irony – a binary relationship which seems to exist between innocence and curiosity that, for all intents and purposes, is instrumental in corrupting itself by its very nature. These themes evolve out of a long literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman* which references "the early bourgeois humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity" (Hardcastle, 2009: pg 3). Within cinema, this genre has offered a vast and varied field of inspiration for filmmakers interested in fictional representations of various teenagers across various cultures and social strata within those cultures. And according to film theorist Christian Metz, it has been useful in the study of certain types of films which display similarities cinematographic language that are understood as conforming to certain types of narratives, characters, and settings following an already established foundation of themes and conventions in cinema (Metz, 1974: pg 69). And in terms of the coming of age genre, it's all about growing up.

In order to introduce the coming of age narrative, I will first offer an historical overview of the coming of age films that lead up to Clark's films – the case studies in question – whilst comparing and contrasting films from his contemporaries such as John Hughes. In doing so, this thesis will look at how genre studies as applied to film theory may be used to understand how Clark's films can be read as a challenge to narrative conventions in subverting the established themes and codes of the coming of age film, and in their place create a new set of narrative devices which roots violence and [*]sexual debut at the psychological centre of the transitional narrative from adolescence to adulthood. I am interested in how and why Clark challenges stereotypes in the coming of age genre, as well as how and why he uses sex and violence as a narrative device to define the transition from childhood into adolescence: the liminal space through which adolescents become poignantly aware of evil, pain, or suffering

[*] Sexual debut refers to one's first sexual experience.

and thereby lose their innocence. Central to this aim is the question of whether or not the coming of age narrative is predicated upon a causal relationship in which encounters with sex and violence result in the loss of innocence, which may, in actual fact, be a necessary rite of passage in Clark's work.

Furthermore, without denying the important moral questions that enter into a discussion of Clark's films, it must be noted that these questions might be better left to social commentators and film reviewers concerned primarily with ensuring that audiences make informed choices before watching Clark's films. In saying that, I do not intend to shy away from ethical and moral concerns, but instead offer a discussion of the narrative devices employed by Clark and how these raise their own ethical and moral questions which implicate the viewer by asking "not how can we judge these kids, but how can we judge them without judging ourselves?" (Hosney & Engdahl, 1995: n.p.). In forcing the audience to judge themselves, Clark also raises important questions around the root cause for the destructive behavior presented in the character actions. Clark places capitalism and the consumer market at the centre of the cause which gives rise to the hedonistic and nihilistic lifestyles represented in the films. The group of adolescents that Clark focuses on are the first generation of 'Latchkey kids' who were mostly left to their own devices; no parental guidance, no rules, and living for the moment, not thinking about anything beyond that. This autonomy outside of conventional parenting places these adolescents in the wider acquisitive society that is rooted in scoring girls, drugs, booze, attire, and skateboards. And in spite of being surrounded by a reality that perpetuates the American Dream, they are largely unable to attain it without stealing or taking it. Of course, one could say that both *Kids* and *Bully* are of a different generation than that of today, but by the same token, this particular subgroup, even in today's day and age, and even in South Africa, appear to exercise the very same measure of hedonistic and nihilistic tendencies, such as in Sibs Shongwe-La Mer's *Necktie Youth* (Shongwe-La Mer, 2015), whereby two disillusioned youths rummage through the manicured northern suburbs of Johannesburg in search of answers, drugs, distraction and salvation. Nothing has changed. And yet this reasoning, or so it appears, is not to make a statement about the world, but instead to use film as a means of conveying a message that points "to the complex issues at stake in an exploration of what it means to come of age": to grow up with a clear conflict "between social convention and individual desires… that lead to the loss, or to the grow[th], that these films explore" (Hardcastle, 2009: pg 1, 3).

I will also look at how Clark uses narrative strategies such as Robert McKee's Archplot

and Miniplot to decode how coming of age films represent meaning through recurring patterns or thematic opposition, because as McKee puts it, “all coherent tales express an idea veiled inside an emotional spell” and no story is innocent (McKee, 1997: pg 129). In doing so, I will illustrate how the difference in narrative strategies gives rise to additional but specific ethical concerns that emerge out of the discourse that present audiences with a responsibility to reflect and question what the moral consequences are. This will allow one the opportunity to examine the relationship between film and ethics in terms of how Clark’s voyeurism, grooming, and exploitation exemplify the notion of losing one’s innocence.

Clark’s realism is not only reflected in the outer world of the characters, in the props, locations, dialogue and actions, but also in the interior world; the psychological world of the characters, and as such, I will also investigate the psychology of the teenager. Sigmund Freud’s Theory of Psychoanalysis surrounding the psychosexual years of early development has offered particularly fertile ground in this regard, which of course accounts for the development of “unconscious, subjectivity, and sexuality,” which are described as taking place in childhood over a series of fixed stages (Creed, 1998: pg 2). I will not attempt to make an exhaustive study of Freudian psychoanalysis and early development theories, but rather use aspects of the last stage of Freud's psychosexual Theory of Personality Development, which begins in puberty and is a time when “genital sex becomes the primary goal of sexual activity (Westen, 1999: pg 537). Following on from a long tradition of film theorists who have employed Freud and other psychological perspectives as useful conceptual frameworks in the reading of film texts, I will consider the work of Erik Erikson and how he socialized the Freudian Theory by positing the psychosocial stages of ego development, whereby adolescents become “primarily concerned with attempts at consolidating their social roles” (Erikson, 1959: pg 89). I believe that this will open up an understanding into the psychological aspects of how Clark’s adolescent characters are represented within the coming of age narrative, and in which both Freud’s and Erikson’s Theories are employed within the ambit of cinema studies.

To build upon the aforementioned multi-disciplinary approach, I aim to contextualize the world in which Clark’s ‘kids’ lose their innocence and come of age as part of a rite of passage. It is this threshold, which I believe characterizes the aimless wandering in which adolescents try to find themselves, and as such, are forced to grow up and lose their innocence. In analyzing Clark’s lens through which his adolescents come of age, it becomes clear that the rite of passage appears to be inextricably caught up in sex and violence. I,

however, will proffer a different reading in which sex and violence falls under the umbrella term of trauma, which is absolutely clear in Clark's films as I will show later.

This theoretical inquiry into Clark's films is essential to my creative research, which encompasses a short film screenplay entitled *(S)he*, along with an extensive director's treatment that covers the following; a director's/writer's statement; logline and narrative synopsis; cast/character profile; casting and audition processes; table reading footage; location and floor plans in terms of blocking and staging; art direction; colour palette; references for character hair, make-up and wardrobe; a mood board; ideas around camera and lighting, edit and grade; film and music references; the shooting schedule; camera and gear list; the budget; and finally an idea for the poster of the film. All of this has been put together in place of actually making a film. The form and presentation of these elements have been done in keeping with accepted industry practice. I offer these documents and materials as the director's pre-visualization of the film, which is regularly done prior to filming in the pre-production and planning phase within the industry. In the final chapter of this thesis, which is an application of conclusions, I will self reflectively discuss how after arguing that Clark's films are predicated on sex and violence as necessary precursors to coming of age, I believe that there is an alternative way to explore coming of age in film. In the process of writing the aforementioned screenplay, I questioned a number of aspects in Clark's work, which has left me unsure if I fully agree with Clark's maxim in losing one's innocence and how it is constituted; being that of a rite of passage which appears to be socialized with sexual debut and violence. To show this, I will illustrate how I've gone so far as to even subvert my own analysis in order to challenge various conventions of the coming of age genre as well as Clark's films by illustrating how bodily difference (intersexuality) could be used to achieve a similar, and yet less violent representation of the loss of innocence on screen.

In turning to genre in the following chapter, I will critically engage with how Clark subverts the established themes and codes of the coming of age film, and in their place creates a new set of narrative devices which roots violence and sexual debut at the centre of the transitional narrative from adolescence to adulthood.

Chapter 1

Genre Studies

The Coming of Age Genre

Since the conception of the French word *genre*, which is rooted in the Latin word 'genus'

defined as ‘kind’ or ‘class’, it’s importance has been paramount in classifying painting, music, literature, and of course cinema. It has been used used by Structuralist scholars such as Christian Metz, Peter Wollen, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith in the study of cinematographic language in which the “cinema possesses various ‘dialects,’ and that each of these ‘dialects’ can become the subject of a specific analysis (Chandler, n.d.: pg 1)(Metz, 1974: pg 69). But more importantly, and for the purpose of this thesis, it has provided a framework “for the industry and thus for the production, marketing, and distribution of films; for film critics and the academic, aesthetic, historical, and theoretical analysis of film; and for audiences as a framework for the selection and experience of films” (Bondebjerg, 2015: pg 160). As a theoretical tool, genre is also useful in categorizing films into types based on certain established conventions applicable such as the western, the horror, and the coming of age film. Through the “tens of thousands of years of tales told at fireside, four millennia of the written word, twenty-five hundred years of theatre, a century of film, and eight decades of broadcasting”, it’s not surprising that generations upon generations of storytellers have found the need to spin story into a “diversity of patterns” (McKee, 1997: pg 79). The reason for this is so we are able to build a foundation of general knowledge around a specific class of films, as well as use said class of films as a comparison (Tudor, n.d.: 119). To build on this, I also believe that the generic nature of genre is used almost as a safety net, which ensures the reproduction of specific conventions in order to continuously reach audience expectations and consequently build upon a market that is to be kept commercially viable.

If one traces the coming of age genre back to its film origins, historians, and social critics identify the 1940s as the years where the teenager became “a recognized, quantifiable life stage, complete with its own fashions, behaviours, vernacular and arcane rituals” (Cosgrove, 2013: n.p.). One of the key moments in cinema that exemplified this new youth culture was the release of *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955), which is about a middle-class rebellious teen with a troubled past who arrives in a new town taking to a life of thuggery and drag racing. It played to “the emergence of teenage audiences… [that were] both symptomatic of, and contributed to, sweeping changes taking place in Hollywood and US society” (Slocum, 2007: n.p.). As such, the film instantly became one of the first major coming of age films confronting the moral decay of American youth. When the star of the film, James Dean, died tragically, the French New Wave director, François Truffaut, noted that today’s “youth would discover itself [through the] eternal adolescent love of tests and trials, intoxication, pride and regret at feeling ‘outside’ society, refusal and desire to become integrated and, finally,

acceptance – or refusal – of the world as it is" (Slocum, 2007: n.p.).

Filmmakers have continued to mine the coming of age narrative as a rich source of material in order explore ideas of inner turmoil and discontent within the liminal space between childhood and adulthood. In fact, the anthem of youth became all about 'finding yourself.' This soon found expression in soaring cult classics such as *Sixteen Candles (*Hughes*, 1984), The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985), and *Pretty in Pink* (Hughes, 1986), which all helped build the characterization of the outcast who wants to be part of the in-group, who suffers from unrequited love for the prettiest girl in school, who has a sympathetic friend, who is a rebel against authority, and of course, who gets the happy ending. John Hughes' representation of teenage reality in the 1980s and early 1990s was more than just part of the culture, it became something more akin to a moral lesson as the films always portrayed a right way and a wrong way. With clear moralistic choices laid out for the adolescent characters, Hughes' films seemed in sync with the moral rectitude and conservatism that accompanied the Reagan presidency from 1981 to 1989. In contrast to the 1980s and the conservative family values that this era espoused in America, the 1990s and Clark's films were to speak to a completely different time during the 1990s.

Clark's Subversion of the Coming of Age Genre

Unlike John Hughes' version of teenage reality, Clark sought to do the opposite. He overturned all the conventions that Hughes' films helped create, and instead brought a sense of pathos that isn't naturally part of the coming of age narrative. He offered a social commentary on AIDS, a pandemic that had all but been denied during the Reagan years and written off as an act of divine vengeance against homosexuality, drug abuse, and sexual deviance. Without any straightforward moral judgement, Clark turned his lens on a group of American youth and profiled a dependence on heavy drug abuse, the pursuit of virgins, and senseless violence which seemingly changed the genre overnight by blurring the line between reality and fiction with its *cinema vérité* style (Kempley, 1995: n.p.). He offered no outcast who wanted to be part of the in-group, or that crushed on the prettiest girl in school; Telly, our protagonist is the leader of this rat pack and is the "virgin surgeon" whose insatiable sexual hunger sees him on the prowl for everything and anything, especially virgins. There is no sympathetic best friend; Telly's best friend, Casper, is always high on drugs and ready to take what he can get, even if it means rape. Suffice to say that there is no rebellion against authority either, because in Clark's version of teenage reality, there is no authority and there

is certainly no happy moralistic ending either.

At the time, one might have thought that Clark's subversion of the coming of age narrative was his alone. But Clark's style began to take on a life of its own, aesthetically and conventionally, and started to influence other director's films such as Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (Van Sant, 2003) and *Paranoid Park* (Van Sant, 2007), and Gia Coppola's *Palo Alto* (Coppola, 2013). As radical as it may be, I believe that Clark's unique vision of the coming of age narrative has consequentially forced upon the genre a new set of conventions that are evident through the body of work I am investigating. To build further upon this argument, it is important to take note of the narrative strategies that are employed by the coming of age genre as different narrative strategies will, in varying degrees, proffer different types of narratives that ask its audience to examine different aspects of not only the films, but themselves.

McKee's Narrative Strategies

Broadly speaking, all stories come down to narrative strategy regardless of the type of genre being employed to tell the stories. The coming of age genre is no different, but what must be noted is that within this paradigm, audiences have grown sharply accustomed to a [*]story design that ultimately comes to a close with an up-ending as is seen in Hughes' coming of age films. Clark, however, chooses not to use this type of story design despite employing two of the most popular kinds of narrative strategies in Robert McKee's story triangle. Instead, he opts for a story design that is much darker in the sense that it comes to a close with a down-ending in order to examine the relationship between coming of age and the loss of innocence that is socialized with sexual debut and violence in his films.

Within this triangle lie the two aforementioned types of narrative strategies. The first is the Classical Design which according to McKee, applies to "every earthly society, civilized and primitive, reaching back through millennia of oral storytelling into the shadows of time" (McKee, 1997: pg 45). Under the Archplot lies a "collection of timeless principles" based on the following:–

> A story built around an active protagonist who struggles against primarily external forces of antagonism to pursue his or her desire, through continuous time, within a consistent and causally connected fictional reality, to a closed ending of absolute,

[*] Story design refers to a writer's choice of events and their design in time.

irreversible change.

(McKee, 1997: pg 45)

This, as mentioned previously with regards Hughes' films, has become the dominant narrative form in commercial cinema and plays to a very specific and formal paradigm that focuses heavily on a single and active protagonist with an external conflict that drives toward a closed ending (McKee, 1997: pg 46-50).

The second is the Minimalism Design of storytelling, under which lies the Miniplot, which "begins with the elements of the Classical Design but then reduces them - shrinking or compressing, trimming or truncating the prominent features of the Arch plot" (McKee, 1997: pg 46). This design does not mean the narrative doesn't have a plot. On the contrary, instead it strives for simplicity and economy whilst still retaining elements of the Classical Design (McKee, 1997: pg 46). This paradigm, however, is more likely to focus on multiple protagonists with internal conflicts which drive toward an open ending (McKee, 1997: pg 46-50). This is often regarded as a less mainstream narrative strategy in its abandonment of the central protagonist-driven storyline and closed moralistic endings.

What is interesting about Clark's films, both *Kids* and *Bully*, is the way he conflates these narrative strategies in varying degrees and as such, proffers, as I mentioned in the end of the last section, a new set of conventions of themes and morals to be used within the coming of age genre. For example, in *Bully*, Clark, despite having a clear protagonist, "splinters the film into a number of relatively small, sub-plot-sized stories, each with a separate protagonist," which fits into the Multiplot variation of the Miniplot which is defined as weaving together a number of stories of subplot size (McKee, 1997: pg 49, 226-227). However, everything else about the film sits firmly in the Archplot paradigm. Marty, the protagonist, has a very clear external conflict – his best friend and the antagonist of the film, Bobby, who bullies and undermines him at every corner. And so, Marty, and the rest of the 'Brat Pack' set out to kill Bobby. The result is nothing less than the exemplification of the Archplot's closed-ending, providing answers to all questions raised by the story; "all emotions evoked are satisfied. The audience leaves with a rounded, closed experience – nothing in doubt, nothing unsated" and is provided with simple moral lessons, simply deconstructing ideas of sexual identity and violence in adolescence, making it abundantly clear that killing someone is "no fucking video game" (McKee, 1997: pg 47-48) (Clark, 2001).

In *Kids*, however, instead of splitting the focus of the film among a number of relatively small, sub-plot-sized stories, Clark only splits it between two protagonists, Telly, and Jennie, Telly's AIDS victim. And in spite of the protagonists' strong external conflict with the world and getting what he and she wants, the film's emphasis appears to fall within Telly's and Jennie's own thoughts and feelings. In using this narrative strategy, Clark puts his audience at the centre of a moral conundrum that forces them to take sides; detesting Telly and sympathizing with Jennie, which is in direct contrast to the likes of Hughes' films. As for the ending, Clark leans decisively into the Miniplot's open-ended paradigm, where the film is left incomplete. Instead of providing a sense of closure, "most of the questions raised by the telling are answered, but an unanswered question or two may trail out of the film, leaving the audience to supply it subsequent to the viewing" (McKee, 1997: pg 48). Additionally, "most of the emotion evoked by the film will be satisfied, but an emotional residue may be left for the audience to satisfy," which in this case is something best described as being unspeakably horrifying (McKee, 1997: pg 48). The audience is forced to witness the shocking reality whereby Casper rapes the HIV positive Jennie. This goes to the very heart of challenging the simplistic moralistic choices offered by Hughes' films where the protagonist always makes the right choice in order to win the girl. Again in *Bully* Clark confronts Hughes' reliance on genre convention whereby at the end of the film, the audience is left with a clear sense of moral justice and neat reconciliation of the main storylines. In *Kids*, however, Clark avoids any form of didacticism. Instead, he offers a 'fictional reality' in which these adolescents are in their final state and aren't going to grow or develop. In contrast to the closed ending with its simplistic moral conclusions, the open ending raises ethical concerns that emerge out of the discourse that are seemingly unresolved like the open-ended film itself. This results in an ethical problem which revolves around the audience's responsibility to reflect and question what the moral consequences are of not only having unsafe sex, as in the ending of *Kids*, but also of being an absentee parent whose child, like that of Telly's and Jennie's generation of 'mall-rat wannabes', have no conception of consequence.

This offers an opportunity to examine the relationship between film and ethics in terms of how Clark may exemplify the notion of losing one's innocence especially by using adolescents to play adolescents in sexually explicit scenes that have become notorious for being misconstrued as *reality*, and consequently how Clark makes the audience complicit in his so-called voyeurism. Here the relationship between film and ethics comes down to "questions of trust -- a quality that cannot be legislated, proposed or promised in the abstract

so much as demonstrated, earned and granted in negotiated, contingent, concrete relationships in the here and how" (Bershen, 2010: n.p.). By all standards, according to Leo Fitzpatrick, Clark achieved this because he was a part of it, and gave his adolescent actors something they never had before – the feeling of what it is like to be valued by an adult (Hynes, 2015: n.p.). In making his audience complicit in his so-called voyeurism, he consequently makes them voyeurs themselves. The question is not whether it's good or bad, right or wrong, but what it means for the audience to be implicated as voyeurs. In my view, it seems that by implicitly being coerced to be a voyeur, they are ultimately forced into Clark's lens and to confront this unsettling reality as if it were in the real world.

Here I've attempted to show how Clark has used two different narrative strategies within the coming of age paradigm and conflated them by illustrating how the relationship between coming of age and the loss of innocence is socialized with sexual debut and violence in his films. In doing so, I've also illustrated how he has intentionally raised questions surrounding the relationship between film and ethics that ultimately come down to trust. While these films may have raised issues and been too difficult to confront over twenty years ago, the themes Clark dealt with are still relevant today as is seen in reference to the widely acclaimed South African feature film *Necktie Youth;* a fictional account of adolescents in search of meaning by having too much sex and doing too many drugs. As previously stated, nothing has changed.

In discussing the psychological framework that surrounds Sigmund Freud's Theory on the psychosexual years of development, I will offer an insight into the liminal space within the coming-of-age genre that begins in puberty as a time of adolescent sexual experimentation. This will be supported by Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, which will offer insight into the adolescent's mindset and his/her social world. On the whole, this psychological framework will offer an understanding of how the characters in the case studies of *Kids* and *Bully* are represented within the coming of age narrative.

Chapter 2

Psychological Theories

Psychoanalysis in Film

Psychoanalysis and film were both born at the end of the nineteenth century sharing a "common historical, social, and cultural background shaped by the forces of modernity"

(Creed, 1998: pg 1). Since then, they have continued to influence one another, and according to Barbara Creed, with psychoanalysis' emphasis "on the importance of desire in the life of the individual" it has managed to influence cinema quite heavily (Creed, 1998: pg 1). The converse is also true. In fact, Freud drew on cinematic terms to describe his theories, which has consequently allowed for the two disciplines to share a similar language, and has found representation on screen in such cult classics like *Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991) through the exploration of anti-social personality disorders, *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) with its dark narrative of a frustrated writer's descent into madness, and *The Awakenings* (Marshal, 1990) which is another film that explores psychopathology (Murphy, 2005: n.p.). These are just a few of the many films that draw on aspects of psychoanalysis in shaping character and story.

First it was the Surrealists, who were most influenced by Freud, that "extolled the potential of the cinema" in their quest for new and innovative means by which they were able to transgress "the boundaries between dream and reality" (Creed, 1998: pg 2). Over and above that, Freud's work has been taken up by other film theorists in offering an understanding of the psychological aspects represented in films, especially in his "accounts of the unconscious, subjectivity, and sexuality" (Creed, 1998: pg 2). Within the realm of sexuality, it is in puberty, however, that Freud's ideas of a child's sexuality with regard their impulses and object-relations becoming re-animated in that there is a "a struggle between the urges of early years and the inhibitions of the latency period" that it can be seen in his Oedipus Complex Theory (Freud, 1995: pg 23). Drawing on Greek mythology, Freud used this theory to explain an important early developmental stage whereby "the infant boy desires sexual union with his mother" and comes to realize that the love and attention he receives from his mother may be under threat from his father (Indick, n.d.: pg 3-4). This rivalry, according to William Indick on Freud, results in the infant boy's divergent feelings of "love for mother and aggression toward father", which "reflect the two basic primal drives – Eros (the sex drive) and Thanatos (the aggressive drive) – which will be discussed subsequently in relation to Clark's films (Indick, n.d.: pg 4).

I will now attempt to extend aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis pertaining to early childhood development, or what was commonly known as the psychosexual years of development, to a critical reading of Larry Clark's films.

Sigmund Freud's Theory of Development: The Genital Stage

According to Freud, "the existence of sexual needs in human beings… is expressed in biology by the assumption of a 'sexual instinct'" also known as the 'libido' (Freud, 1995: pg 240). Freud theorized that the libido did not always have a smooth course of development which resulted in "premature satisfaction" and "fixations of the libido", which were traceable back to various stages of his development theories such as the oral stage, the anal stage, the phallic stage, the latent period, and the genital stage (Freud, 1995: pg 22). It is this which he believed to be the driving force behind one's behavior.

The stage I will be focusing on is the last one of his psychosexual theory of personality development – the genital stage. It is a time when "conscious sexuality resurfaces after years of repression, and genital sex becomes the primary goal of sexual activity (Westen, 1999: pg 537). It takes place between the ages of twelve and eighteen or more aptly, from puberty to adulthood, and is expertly and explicitly explored in both of Clark's films. The genital stage, more so than the others, is categorized by behaviour similar to that of the Oedipus complex, and is associated with the erogenous zones of the body motivated by the instinctual drives: Eros and Thanatos (McLeod, 2007: n.p.). As I've already stated, these instinctual drives are ultimately associated with the libido energy.

Kids, which opens with a titillating prepubescent scene depicting two teenagers kissing; their mouths open and tongues clearly in each other's mouths, seems to evoke this very libidinal energy associated with adolescence. In fact, Clark uses the strong interest in sexual feelings in order to create a verisimilitude where the goal is directed toward heterosexual pleasure, as seen when one girl comes right out and says, "I have sex and I like fucking" (Clark, 1995). Even a boy, who looks no older than thirteen, when asked what "bitches" he likes to fuck, says, as flippantly as being asked what food he likes, "anything, don't matter" (Clark, 1995). It's clear that in this world of adolescents, who are in the transition between childhood and adulthood, they all have one thing on their mind, and that is SEX; "hardcore pound fucking" (Clark, 1995). And according to Freud, it is from this that we can assume that the libido energy is entirely "employed in the service of the pleasure principle… to facilitate discharge" (Freud, 1995: pg 649).

In *Bully*, however, despite its far more explicit sex scenes, Clark's interest seems to lie in the perversity that prevails when an adolescent remains fixated on Freud's Anal or Phallic stages. In spite of this fixation being able to occur at any point in the course of development, Freud lays out that if "subsequently a repression takes place… the point of fixation is what

determines the choice of neurosis, that is, the form in which the subsequent illness makes its appearance (Freud, 1995: pg 22). In the case of *Bully,* this becomes abhorrently clear in the scene where Bobby, Clark's antagonist, rapes Lisa. He is clearly aware of his transgression, of his perverse desire for a kind of sexual masochistic sadism. In spite of continuing to act upon it, he quite clearly tries to repress it by attempting to wash it off with hot boiling water and soap. This is further explicated when Bobby forces Ali to watch gay porn, which we believe he himself had filmed, while they have sex. When she refuses, he turns violent, re-enacting his rape scene with Lisa, and again turning to the sink with hot boiling water and soap. In light of this, Clark makes Freud's notion of repression and its defenses quite clear. He illustrates how the defenses of one's perverse desires, when repressed, can manifest in a violent and transgressive way.

Moreover, it is violence that Clark uses to expand on Freud's Theory of sexual drive by illustrating how in spite of how strong the tendency toward pleasure is, that tendency may be opposed by other circumstances which result in a reality and outcome that "cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure" (Freud, 1961: pg 3-4). Clark shows this by way of a two-tiered schematic. On one hand he uses it to explore how sexuality is almost continually threatened by male violence such as in *Kids* when Telly deflowers the thirteen-old Darcy and she cries out, "Telly, it hurts", only to have him undermine her pain by telling her, "You're doing fine" (Clark, 1995). Clark exemplifies this with the film's ending where Casper rapes Jenny, telling her not to worry, "it's me Casper!" (Clark, 1995). What is most unsettling about this is the haunting irony in which Clark implicates the comic-book friendly ghost of the same name into the violent act of rape, rendering it something casual and familiar, when it is clearly not – *it is perverse and violent*. It seems only natural to ask if Clark is suggesting whether or not sexuality is inevitably linked to violence, which essentially ties into Freud's theory of instinctual drives – Eros and Thanatos. I think he is suggesting as much, especially considering the 'fictional reality' he presents, which offers a kind of sex and violence that is so completely intertwined with each other that it's actually uncertain which one of the two predominates. That being said, it does raise the question to the problems of a permissive society and reality in which Clark sets his films and which appear to enslave young generations of people by their own hedonistic pleasures and violent transgressions. This is not to say that the reality which Clark presents belongs to these teenagers. Or even that it is Clark's reality, whether current or as a child. But it is to say that it is a teenage reality as understood by Clark.

Moreover, Clark is insistent upon showing his audience the kind of violence that is only heightened by the folly of these adolescents who have no real conception of consequence. This impunity is seen in one of the most memorable scenes of *Kids* where Telly and his friends beat up another skateboarder so brutally, he could have been killed, yet they walk away without any consequence. However, it is in *Bully* that Clark really illustrates how violent these adolescents can be. And they talk about wanting to "stab that motherfucker [Bobby], slice his throat and bleed him like a pig" (Clark, 2001), without any sense of urgency or weight. When they actually commit the crime, the violent reality isn't what they envisioned, and none of them believe that they are required to answer for their crimes. They all want to be absolved and yet are ready to accuse each other without batting an eyelid. Unfortunately, in my research I have yet to find an empirical reason for such a connection between the Eros and Thanatos apart from laying emphasis on the aggressive factor in the libido. But according to Freud, if the history of human civilization has shown us anything, it "shows beyond any doubt that there is an intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct" (Freud, 1995: pg 252).

In order to understand how this is further socialized, I refer to Erik Erikson's clinical observations on Identity versus Role Confusion which corresponds to Freud's Genital Stage. This is a stage in which individuals going through puberty and adolescence are faced with a physiological revolution within them because of the entirely new addition of physical genital maturity (Erikson, 1959: pg 89). Because of this, they become "primarily concerned with attempts at consolidating their social roles", which in the search of their new sense of self they try to connect to earlier and more cultivated roles (Erikson, 1959: pg 89). This, of course, does often result in the adolescent suffering "more deeply than he ever did before (or will again) from a diffusion of roles" which also proffers that they will ultimately be defenseless "against the sudden impact of previously latent malignant disturbances" (Erikson, 1959: pg 117). But instead of speaking directly to the psychosexual element of adolescence, Erikson claims that in spite of maturing mentally and physiologically, more importantly, an adolescent develops a "multitude of new ways of looking and thinking about the world" in which his/her "sense of personal identity" is actually dependent on "the social milieu in which he" is brought up (Elkind, 1970: pg 14). For example, in *Kids*, because of their difficult social circumstances, which is anything but romanticized – absentee parents and lower class – "a certain amount of *role confusion*" is presented as being normal (Elkind, 1970: pg 14). These adolescents don't know who they are or where they belong. And as

Erikson clearly states:-

> In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of ego identity. To understand this would be to understand the trouble of adolescents better, especially the trouble of all those who cannot just be “nice” boys and girls, but are desperately seeking for a satisfactory sense of belonging, be it in cliques and gangs.
>
> (Erikson, 1959: pg 90)

As such, it’s clear, or should be, that Clark is not only interested in exploring what it means to come of age, but also to show the raw nature of a ‘marginalised youth’ that no one has seen before. He also exemplifies how the “diffused and vulnerable, aloof and uncommitted, and yet demanding and opinionated personality of the not-too-neurotic adolescent” contains many necessary elements of the “I dare you” and “I dare myself” experimental variety (Erikson, 1959: pg 117). He illustrates this in *Bully* by presenting a narrative where its teenage protagonists come from a good family and well-to-do homes. Yet in spite of this, they still do drugs, have sex, and act upon violent and abhorrent desires like “leaving schools and jobs, staying out all night, or withdrawing into bizarre and inaccessible moods” (Erikson, 1959: pg 91). They succumb to the very same permissive society, and perhaps that is why the case studies have created such concern amongst adult audience members like David Santos, a 35-year-old personnel manager, who said that it made him glad he didn’t have children, claiming that “it's not news to me that teenagers are drinking and taking drugs and having unsafe sex" (Gates, 1995: n.p.). Maybe that is because Clark’s films are anything but gratuitous. They are as real as real life gets, and what is most troubling is that these new identifications “force the young individual into choices and decisions which will, with increasing immediacy, lead to a more final self-definition, to irreversible role pattern, and thus to commitments ‘for life’” (Erikson, 1959: pg 110-111).

Considering my reading of Clark’s films through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis and the developmental stages of the psychosexual, as well as how Erikson expands on this into the psychosocial, I believe that Clark’s representation of coming of age in film ultimately speak to the mentality of a disconsolate youth who slide all too easily into moral depravity. They talk themselves into doing unthinkable things, which according to Freud is only a symptom of repeating something “that has made a great impression on them in real life, and

that in doing so they abreact the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation" (Freud, 1995: pg 601). Clark appears to blame society for its role in creating this violence, banality, and alienation which is abundant in his films. But on the other hand, Freud claims that it is "obvious that all their play is influenced by a wish that dominates them the whole time… to be grown-up and to be able to do what grown-up people do" (Freud, 1995: pg 601). In order to explicate this further, I intend to contextualize the world in which Clark's 'kids' lose their innocence and come of age as part of a rite of passage.

Chapter 3

Contextualizing the Loss of Innocence

Coming of Age: A Necessary Rite of Passage

As discussed in the section on genre studies and in looking at the implications of the conventions of the coming of age film and the subversion thereof, such as in Clark's films, I have illustrated that the process of coming of age to be ubiquitous regardless of the version of teenage reality being represented on screen. In saying that, I have also discussed that adolescence, as defined as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, can be considered as a turbulent time (as referenced through the lens of Freud's psychosexual state of development and Erickson's expansion on this in terms of the psychosocial). What adds to this profundity is the work that has been done by theorist and anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, who according to Hardcastle, in his book entitled, *The Rites of Passage*, considers the coming of age process as a type of ceremony that "mark life's transitions: birth, puberty, marriage, and death," and as such, is "germane to our discussion of cinematic transitions, coming of age in and of film" (Hardcastle, 2009: pg 3-4). This threshold, which I believe characterizes the aimless wandering in which adolescents try to find themselves is the process through which adolescents come of age (Hardcastle, 2009: 3-4).

In analyzing both *Kids* and *Bully* through the lens of the coming of age genre, it has become clear that, given Clark's background and expertise in exemplifying what it means to come of age on screen by applying the psychosexual and psychosocial, the linkages between coming of age and it being a rite of passage appears to be that which is socialized with sexual debut and violence. In fact, for Clark, this mode of filmmaking has become his modus operandi in tackling the coming of age film; giving the world an intimate gaze into the raw and real nature of youthful defiance and coming of age. From the outset of both films, as has

already been illustrated, Clark explicitly shows how sexual and violent these adolescents can be.

But what is interesting, however, is Clark's ability to illustrate the rite of passage in such a way that these adolescents' hedonistic pursuits of sex and violent reactions to everyday problems are perpetual in nature. In contrast to the innocent-fluff-like world that Hughes' offers for instance, which acts as more of a rite of deliverance, where the adolescents in his films will get over the difficulties of growing up, Clark's adolescents' may not survive their coming of age. The rite of passage they are going through is corrupt and depraved and an unending vicious cycle, which is epitomised by the moral vacuum in which they exist. Clark makes this explicitly clear at the end of *Kids* when a shirtless Casper sits sprawled across a couch, lifts his head and asks, almost as if he were directly addressing the audience, "Jesus Christ, what happened?" (Clark, 1995). Clark is posing a rhetorical question to the audience requiring their moral questioning of what they have seen and to consider the possibility that they are powerless to stop it from continuing. As I've stated before, Clark has only claimed to offer a version of reality in which he is unapologetically transgressive in his use of the camera as the proverbial knife to deconstruct ideas surrounding sexual identity and violence in the rite of passage that is the coming of age narrative.

However, in spite of the coming of age narrative being predicated on the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, and sex and violence being fundamental to the coming of age's rite of passage, I would like to proffer a different reading. It seems to me that while sex and violence appear to be the impetus to come of age, something is left behind when both of those things fade into the past. I believe it is trauma that is at the heart of all coming of age films, which may be the result of sex and violence. And Clark contextualizes this trauma through the loss of innocence in order to reflect upon the seemingly benign period known as adolescence (Hardcastle, 2009: pg 5). In trying to understand the causal links between adolescent struggles in attaining adulthood and the expression of trauma, it is helpful to consider an interview between David Amsden and Larry Clark in the *New York Magazine* online in which Clark says that he is "always trying to get at the consequences of actions. And if it's titillating? Well, sometimes I'm dealing with good-looking people having sex, sure, but that's not the point. The point is the *consequences*" (Amsden, n.d.: n.p.). My point in considering Clark's claim is to illustrate how, for him, despite his films being full of consequences that are rife with moral ambiguities and without judgement, the expression of consequences appears to equal the expression of trauma. This is clearly evident in both the

case studies I've been discussing. In *Bully*, Clark explores the trauma of being bullied and what can happen when causality has been completely disconnected by his characters' lewd lifestyle. In *Kids*, Clark explores the trauma of rape and being sexually infected with HIV while these adolescents have no conception of consequences. What I am adverting to is the fact that this expression of trauma has become part and parcel of the new genre conventions that Clark imposes. So, given how unapologetically transgressive Clark is in exploring the rite of passage in the coming of age narrative, as well as his proclamation of consequences, I felt that in tackling the self-reflective creative process of my own film entitled, *(S)he*, I had to do the same. Upon attempting to emulate Clark's work and confronting the planning and pre-visualization of the narrative I was envisioning, I found that a stronger position to take would be to challenge Clark's modus operandi of explicit sex and violence (which have been discussed as being a necessary aspect of the coming of age film). My reasoning behind this is that in spite of Clark's films exemplifying the rite of passage as predicated on sex and violence in the coming of age genre, they do not exist in a vacuum. What I mean by this is that the rite of passage becomes a product of its context. For example, *Rebel Without a Cause* was produced in a time when conformity and conservatism characterized the social norms, which was why young audiences connected so vehemently with the rebellious, restless and misunderstood middle-class youth. Clark's films, however, especially *Kids*, were produced in a time when adult supervision was reduced due to increased divorce rates and excessive participation in the workforce, which gave rise to teenagers who were being characterized as the 'Latchkey' and 'MTV' generation. It was also a time when the AIDS epidemic was being confronted and spoken about more openly, and Clark dealt with it in a really honest way. But rather than blindly adopting the new conventions born out of Clark's influence over genre whereby sex and violence are accepted as the norm, I have chosen to explore a more emotionally sensitive depiction of the coming of age narrative by turning to other dramatic possibilities which might become life-changing obstacles for a young person faced with the challenges of growing up. I set out to achieve this by personifying these motifs through an [*]intersex protagonist whose rite of passage would rather speak to an entire system of laws, rights, responsibilities, and privileges that are built on notions of binary genders.

[*] Intersex refers to a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Chapter 4

Application of Conclusions

The Writer's Treatment

As has been evident in my research of Larry Clark's film's, *Kids* and *Bully*, I have suggested that Clark is in fact an outlier, shaped by and in response to the issues of his times, who tackles tough realistic issues rather than skirting by them with the romanticized notions of youth that films such as Hughes' *Breakfast Club* have perpetuated. And like Clark, I have chosen to explore these issues by writing a narrative that uses body and gender as a means of conveying a message that points to the complex issues at stake surrounding discussions of sex and gender.

In critically analyzing Clark's films, I have identified three prevalent conventions that I wish to tackle and offer as an alternative approach in my reimagining of the coming-of-age film.

1) An adolescent who is typically male dominant and in his mid-teens;
2) Parents who undervalue how serious adolescence can be; and
3) Notions of sex and violence as precursors to coming of age.

In both of Clark's films, *Kids* and *Bully*, there is a male protagonist. In the former, the focus is on Telly, a teen whose ultimate goal is to deflower as many virgins as he can. The latter's focus is on Marty, a teen who finds himself at the center of mental and physical abuse by his best friend and as a result plots to kill him. In developing the narrative in my screenplay I wanted to challenge this reliance on typically male dominant protagonists. As such, I built the story around an intersex (of which the medical classification is Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia [CAH], which means the genitals are ambiguous: they are not easily classified as male or female) teenager who identifies as female. In my filmic research I have often come across transgendered characters in films such *Boys Don't Cry (*Pierce, 1999), *Ma Vie En Rose* (Berliner, 1997), and *Tomboy* (Sciamma, 2011), but only ever one teenage intersex character in the film, *XXY* (Puenzo, 2007). So, in approaching the coming of age narrative centred around an intersex character, I hope to speak to many of the sex and gender discussions that are often avoided altogether in our society.

Rather than reproduce the theme of the disengaged or completely absent parental figures, which is common in the Clark films I have discussed, I wanted to develop parental figures

who are of the same world as their child and as such, completely understand the severity of their child's plight. If done successfully, I believe that it would not only provide a richness to the adolescent protagonist of the story, but would also offer a glimpse of what it means to have a supportive family and still come of age.

The final and most important trope that I was intent on challenging is the paradigm in which Clark uses explicit sex and violence as a precursor to coming of age. In both case studies Clark relies heavily on these dramatic circumstances or scenarios. While sex and violence appears to be an undeniable part of the reality Clark presents and something that may be part of the adolescent transition to adult life, given my discussion in the previous section on contextualizing the loss of innocence, I have chosen to explore this in another way. What is more important for me is to offer a more nuanced portrayal of emotional trauma and reveal how the character deals with this as a rite of passage to coming of age.

I conceived of a film entitled, *(S)he*, which I believe hints at a more subtle understanding of sexual identity whereby one would instantly question traditional notions of social-sexual identity. And despite the nature of this social-sexual story, it doesn't directly deal with sex and/or violence like the films I have discussed. Instead it focuses on elements that complement the story's narrative; the importance of inclusivity, body-positivity, body autonomy and the power of peaceful and intelligent protest for social justice in the sense of acceptance and against discrimination. It explores the emotional trauma of an intersex teenager (Ryann) who is excluded by peers (Ashley) on her swimming team, and subsequently her school (Miss Hart). She is made out to be some kind of monster for having a different body. But by the end of the film, with the love and support from her parents (Paul and Maree) and two best friends (Zoe and Shey), she finds the inner strength to accept her own conflicting identity and in this case, body, and to stand up against societal injustices. And like the women of the 1956 Woman's March (which is referenced in the script), she rises up and takes on the establishment. It is this dramatic arc in the protagonist's story which dramatizes the loss of innocence and the coming of age narrative.

The Director's Treatment

Being the writer as well as the intended director of *(S)he*, I've had to approach the project from two different angles. As the writer, I used my academic research and its conclusions as a foundation to explore what it means to come of age. As the director, my commitment to this story is simple - to tell it honestly. Precisely because the story branches out so far, because

the themes are so seismic, the rendering of this story needs to be subtle, humane, and uncluttered. As such, I want to let the drama unfold with something akin to a documentary realism, quite similar to how Clark envisioned *Kids*, where we get to see what it means to be an adolescent, what it means to be accepted, and what it means to stand up for who you are.

While I did not embark on the phase of production commonly referred to as principle photography, where the filming of the production occurs, I did complete the writing of the screenplay (Addendum A), all of the pre-production in which I considered the following; casting; locations; hair and make-up; wardrobe; art direction; colour palette; camera, lighting, and grading; editing; blocking; music and score; shooting schedule; and budget (Addendum B), and a shot list (Addendum C). I have aligned the style and tone to fit the narrative's documentary-like world. And like in Gillian Sagansky's article where Clark, who has repeatedly said that he "didn't want to make a documentary", neither do I (Sagansky, 2016: n.p.). But I do want it to be real and as truthful as possible and because of that, I have cast amateur actors who were of the appropriate age and familiar with that world (Sagansky, 2016: n.p.). In discussing the script with them I found that they were able to bring an earnestness to some of the original dialogue that felt somewhat glutinous.

In planning the camera set-ups and adopting the documentary-like feel, I made the decision to shoot the entire film handheld. I have provided reference footage from *Friday Night Lights* (Berg, 2006-2011) and *Kids* in Addendum B to give a sense of the look and feel of the cinematographic style I intend for. I also planned for multiple camera angles and set-ups such as medium and medium close-ups in order to ensure a variation of shot size in order to control empathy for the characters. The shooting style will also lend itself to using the zoom and jumping the 180-degree line of sight for specific dramatic effect in order de-stabilize the scene at particular times. I also intend to use two cameras simultaneously. I know this is not standard practice, but my reasoning is that it would allow for the actors to have far more opportunity and freedom to let the story and scenes happen organically as opposed to forcing the actors into pre-set blocking and staging patterns.

Given the documentary realism I intend to shoot for, I want my lighting set-up to match that sentiment as close to perfect as possible. For this outcome, I have settled on using more natural/ambient, motivated, and practical light as opposed to using extra lights that might possibly diminish the realism of the shot. If additional lights are necessary, they will be used purely to complement what light is readily available.

With regard to the editing, I intend to use uninflected shots in varying sizes to allow for

manipulation of rhythm, pace, and dramatic tension in the scene. Then in terms of the film's grade, my intention is to compliment the muted colours of the palette in order to achieve a look that was proposed in the *'Dogma 95' manifesto.

As far as the music and score are concerned, I don't want either of those things to overpower the narrative. What I mean is that I don't want the music and score to instruct the audience on what to feel. That is the narrative's job. Instead, I want a score that will first and foremost support the mood of scene, the character's emotional state, and the overall story in order to give the audience an understanding of the emotional resonance and internal conflicts of the characters. As for the music, I want to make it part of the film as diegetic sound so that the characters themselves can engage with it, offering a slice of life as opposed to something that would be far more artificial.

During the pre-visualization of the film, I found myself reflecting on the creative process of the initial development of the narrative. When I first conceived of the project, the narrative was far more closely aligned with how I think Clark would have written the film. It was full of sex, nudity, and violence – everything I initially thought the coming of age film was about, especially considering Clark's choices as a filmmaker. But as I began questioning his choices within the sphere of the coming of age genre itself, what became clear to me was that in spite of the way he challenged the genre's conventions, he was ultimately bound by a new set of conventions of his own making, as I have tried to show throughout this paper. So when I asked myself what would be the best way to tackle a story in this genre, I knew that I too would be unable to completely break away from these constraints. My only option, as I assume Clark's was, was to lean into it as far as possible, building upon what conventions were necessary to tell this story, and then to pull away without losing what it meant for my protagonist, Ryann, to brave her rite of passage and come of age. In saying that, my creative process was heavily shaped and informed by my theoretical research. For instance, in building the psychology of my protagonist, I turned to Freud's and Erikson's understanding of the psychosexual and psychosocial in order to grasp what it meant, in psychological terms, for an adolescent to come of age. I also relied heavily on genre studies so that I could ultimately subvert them. But I also relied on them in terms of my narrative strategy in the same way Clark did. I conflated McKee's Archplot and the Miniplot so that my narrative was built around an active protagonist who struggled against external forces of antagonism to

* 'Dogma 95' refers to filmmaking based on the traditional values of story, acting, and theme, and excluding the use of elaborate special effects or technology.

pursue her desires. I also built in the Miniplot's open ending, which is left somewhat incomplete, leaving audiences with the responsibility to reflect and question what happens beyond the film's credits and what it ultimately means. What was most important, however, was finding a new way to tell the coming of age story and only in contextualizing the loss of innocence did I realize that I didn't need sex and violence to tell this story. All I needed was a narrative that epitomised a rite of passage through the emotional trauma of my protagonist.

Conclusion: Subverting Larry Clark

We are in the second decade of the twenty-first-century, a long way from Clark's incendiary debut in *Kids*, which changed the perception of what it means to come of age. As I stated in the beginning of this research report, it was my intention to use Clark and his films to investigate how and why he challenges stereotypes in the coming of age genre by using sex and violence as narrative devices to define the transition from childhood into adolescence (which I defined as the liminal space through which adolescents become poignantly aware of evil, pain, or suffering and thereby lose their innocence). I investigated and critically discussed these elements by firstly confronting genre studies through an historical overview which established recurring patterns and themes in the coming of age film. Building on this, I was able to illustrate how Clark and his films appeared to break free from a mould which typically romanticizes this transition. I was able to show how Clark redefined the coming of age genre by demythologizing the central myth of finding yourself and being undone by unrequited love established in previous coming of age films. Additionally, and in support of my argument, I explored how using Robert McKee's narrative strategies such as the Miniplot and Archplot has aided Clark in breaking away from mainstream Hollywood by challenging the representation and meaning of coming of age on screen. In critically analyzing this point I found that by taking this stance, Clark's films have consequently been imbued with ethical concerns that, as a result, have given his audiences a responsibility with which to reflect and question not only the coming of age narrative but also the moral implications of his films.

I also found it pertinent to investigate the psychological framework within the coming of age narrative. I did this by first illustrating how psychoanalysis and film have both influenced one another as I delved into the psychosexual framework of Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson's socialized extension of this in the psychosocial stages of ego development. When applying these theoretical ideas within the scope of cinema studies in relation to Clark's teenage subjects, I found that Clark ultimately speaks to the mentality of a disconsolate youth

who slide all too easily into moral depravity by talking themselves into doing unthinkable things as they come of age.

By considering this process as a rite of passage, this allowed to me to further contextualize how adolescents come of age and thus, experience a loss of innocence that marks one of life's many transitions. In light of this, I proffered that, in spite of the coming of age narrative being predicated on the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, and often being associated with sex and violence as Clark suggests, the process of coming of age is often traumatic.

As part of the creative component of this research, I have self reflectively discussed the application of the aforementioned concepts and how I've applied conventions of the coming of age genre to the writing of the writing of a screenplay and preproduction of a film entitled, *(S)he*. Like Clark did in *Kids*, I attempted a narrative that conflated both the Archplot and Miniplot in order to offer a central and active protagonist with whom audiences can empathize and support, and an open ending which would ultimately leave audiences with the responsibility of emotional reflection. In Clark's films I identified three primary conventions within the coming of age genre, namely; an adolescent who is typically male dominant and in his mid-teens, parents who undervalue how serious adolescence can be, and notions of sex and violence as precursors to coming of age, that I could challenge. In doing so, it would offer an alternative way of thinking about how adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood. I believe I achieved this by avoiding explicit and external depictions of sex and violence and building the narrative around an intersex protagonist with parents who completely understand the severity of their child's plight. The result is a narrative that is far more nuanced in the understanding of sexual identity whereby one instantly questions traditional notions of social-sexual identity.

In closing, I believe that I have clearly considered and illustrated how Clark challenges coming of age genre conventions and successfully subverts many of the established conventions that preceded his films. I have argued through my investigation of genre studies, psychoanalysis, as well as the contextualization of the loss of innocence, and the development of the narrative of *(S)he*, that in spite of the coming of age narrative being predicated upon a causal relationship with the illicit encounter of losing one's innocence, coming of age is not limited to a transition through a sexual or violent rite of passage such as in Clark's work. Thus, what I realized was that this transition is possible through any rite of passage that is traumatic and as such, found that I was not bound to follow Clark's modus

operandi that is predicated on sex and violence, but that I was able to offer a challenge to that in dealing with an intersex character and the emotional trauma she experiences rather than the more physical trauma of rape and murder on which Clark relies.

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Addendums

Addendum A: (*S)he* – Screenplay (DVD)

Addendum B: (*S)he* – Director's Treatment (DVD)

Addendum C: (*S)he* - Shot List (DVD)

NOTE TO READER:

1. Please be patient with opening the Addendums. *They all do open.*
2. Please note that the videos and music referenced in the Director's Treatment (PowerPoint) are in a separate folder entitled - **ADDENDUM_B_(S)he_video_files_Sean_Steinberg_488154**
3. Please use VLC or QuickTime to play the video and sound references.