

Out of Site

Landscape and Cultural Reflexivity in New Hollywood Cinema

1969–1974

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Cover image: *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969)
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Where did you here about the West in Sweden?

Movies. American movies. We see that great landscape in our dreams. It haunts us.

So it's the landscape that grabs you more than the characters?

Yes. That vast background.

So in Sweden, when you're watching an American western, you're all staring at the background? Is that it?

Sam Shepard, "Gary Cooper, or the Landscape"

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Introduction

You can only think about something if you think of something else. For example, you see a landscape new to you. But it's new to you because you compare it in your mind with another landscape, an older one, which you knew.

Edgar in *Eloge de l'amour* (Jean-Luc Godard, 2001)

Notwithstanding the continual change that land undergoes, two predictions can be made regarding the emergence of a new landscape: that it transpires in the light of our expectations and previous encounters, or that it evolves from a change of mind and from an altered relationship between self, society and environment. Thus, changes wrought on a landscape are not the same as changes wrought on the land, but on ways of perceiving, representing and communicating an experience of land. One such instance of newness was boldly announced by Robert A. Sobieszek in the opening paragraph of an essay about the late 1970s desert photography of Lewis Baltz in which he claims that “landscape underwent rather grave changes between 1956 and 1979.”¹ Bracketed by John Ford's *The Searchers* and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, this was a time, Sobieszek continues, when “a new order of landscape had taken hold of the imagination.” The “radical shift in perceiving the landscape” that he proposes is one from the solid and permanent toward the treacherous and transmutable, or from fixity to fluidity. As his cinematic circumscription further suggests, different media beget new landscapes.²

In a series of photographs entitled *Ask the Dust* (1989-92), Cindy Bernard provides what could be understood as a typology to match Sobieszek's claim, photographing locations from twenty-one films released between 1954 and 1974, re-staging a specific shot from each film in the same aspect ratio. If Bernard perpetuates a formalist principle by rendering these settings devoid of human presence, she has also chosen settings conditioned by absence to begin with: deserts, fields, flat horizons, and vacant highways. All

¹ Robert A. Sobieszek, “Terminal Documents: The Early Desert of Lewis Baltz” in *Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West*, ed. May Castleberry, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p. 181-185; 181.

² It can be illustrated by the rumination in *Eloge de l'amour* (*In Praise of Love*) cited above which is first heard against a sharp, black and white shot overlooking the Seine, familiar *nouvelle vague* territory, and later repeated together with the molten colors of a sunset by the sea rendered in electronic video imagery.

of these locations convey a vacuous quality at odds with their reverberations with popular Hollywood fictions, a treatment that also levels the meanings originally conveyed in the films. Bernard transforms these settings by freezing them, displacing them from the narrative flow into single, static images, and also from their contemporary context since little sign of human intervention is visible. Isolated and recreated as landscapes, new connotations transpire. Whereas some might evoke the photographic legacies of Walker Evans or Ansel Adams, others, like the sewer system of Los Angeles which appeared in the 1954 science fiction film *Them!* (Gordon Douglas), anachronistically bring to mind the deadpan quality of a number of photographers who turned their cameras toward urban fringes in the 1970s. Among other things, *Ask the Dust* illustrates a key supposition in landscape studies, namely that it straddles the border of the material and imaginary, referring both to physical environments and to the various discourses associated with them. The later part of *Ask the Dust* corresponds roughly to the time span considered in this study; a street corner in Dallas featured in *Bonnie & Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), a scenic highway through Monument Valley traveled in *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), the gasoline station in Vancouver where the final scene of *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1971) is set, and the dry riverbed on the outskirts of Los Angeles in *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974). These images incite landscape as a site of cultural memory and crossover, in this case between fine art photography and popular cinema. The impression is nonetheless evocative rather than analytical; what we would feel impelled to ‘ask the dust’ seems to rely heavily on subjective associations, and thus finally indicates one of the methodological problems confronted in using landscape for analysis and interpretation.

Historically, landscape is first and foremost associated with painting, and in the course of writing this dissertation various phases of the genre’s development have been showcased in exhibitions in Stockholm. Established during the Dutch golden age in the seventeenth century, the depiction of an emerging infrastructure of harbors, channels and roads running across a sheltered countryside illustrates the often stated claim that the genre was a product of the transition from feudal to capitalist economies.³ Another exhibited the progression from the sublime to the symbolic landscape in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the era when it reached its apogee of popular appeal.⁴ In terms of nationalistic overtones, both these were surpassed by a collection of canvases portraying a mythologized Nordic wilderness from the final century of the Swedish-Norwegian Union, the kind of

³ “Holländsk Guldålder: Rembrandt, Frans Hals och deras samtida” (The Dutch Golden Age: Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Their Contemporaries), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (Sept. 22, 2005-Jan. 8, 2006).

⁴ “Naturens Spegel: Nordiskt landskapsmåleri 1840-1910” (A Mirror of Nature: Nordic Landscape Painting 1840-1910), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (Sept. 30, 2006-Jan. 14, 2007).

high-strung imagery now frequently considered exemplary of bad taste and, very likely, bad faith.⁵

There has also been a wide array of examples of its more recent manifestations and transmutations. In Ann Böttcher's *Yosemite National Park (A Recollection of Wilderness)* one could see 162 slides of the park from a viewing platform built in the gallery room.⁶ As the *recollection* of the title suggests, the exhibition reconstructs what was a constructed experience to begin with, the park putting wilderness on display as a series of preconceived scenic attractions. Two video installations, finally, bring us back to the cinematic reverberations of *Ask the Dust*. In Canadian artist Rodney Graham's *How I Became a Ramblin' Man* (1999), a lone horseman rides through wide expanses of scenic nature and stops by a river to perform a song celebrating his nomadic lifestyle. He then mounts his horse and rides away.⁷ Running as a nine-minute loop, the spaciousness of the countryside gradually comes to convey a sense of entrapment and compulsive repetition. A similar effect was achieved in *Highway Patrolman* by Ulrika Gomm (2004).⁸ Accompanied by the song with the same title, a toy car was placed before a roadside panorama made up of sheets of paper pasted together and unwound at a jerky pace. The lyrics are saturated with geographical ambience, the reference in the chorus to the Johnstown Flood adding to its biblical resonance, while a set of recurring variables passes by; bare trees and silhouetted buildings with signs reading Rooms, Bar, Bank, Diner, Drugstore. About halfway through the song, it is back at the start, and the same panorama unfolds anew.

If the loop-structure of these video installations suggests the persistence and circulation of landscape, they also formalize how these familiar scenes of Americana, whether rendered in crisp cinematography or drab brushstrokes, seem to generate narratives simply by unfolding. As in Bernard's photographs, their explicit *déjà vu* might be renounced as an exercise of post-modern irony, a detached comment on how landscape has been mediated and re-mediated and, in the process, lost any connection to a physical referent. Each of these exhibitions further illustrates the historical role landscape has played to represent nation, but also how it seems disposed to become outdated. Between them, the development of landscape read as one of gradual loss and increasing fragmentation.

⁵ "Myt och Landskap: Unionsupplösning och kulturell gemenskap" (Myth and Landscape: A Tribute to Swedish-Norwegian bonds), Waldemarsudde, Stockholm (Sept. 3, 2005-Jan. 8, 2006).

⁶ Ann Böttcher, *Yosemite National Park (A Recollection of Wilderness)*, Simon Says c/o Enkehuset, 15, Stockholm, (Nov. 3-Dec. 7, 2003).

⁷Rodney Graham, *How I Became a Ramblin' Man*, (video/sound installation, 35mm film transferred to DVD, 1999), Index: The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation (Nov. 17-Dec. 16, 2001).

⁸ Ulrika Gomm, *Highway Patrolman* (2004), "Landskap" (Landscape), Studio 44 and Centrum för fotografi, (Feb. 2-19, 2006).

This thesis argues that landscape enables new perspectives and areas of analysis and interpretation in film studies. In the simplest definition, landscape emerges when the setting becomes the subject. Applied to the study of film, it thus facilitates a shift from plot, psychology and characters toward aspects more rarely considered in mainstream film. A major concern is, therefore, to discuss landscape as an expression in its own right, and sometimes with its own agenda. Neither something out there which can be fixed on film or canvas, nor as part of an established analytical structure, landscape can be understood as consisting of a number of interacting ideas, conventions and traditions.

The discussion is conducted within the realm of the late 1960s and early 1970s New Hollywood cinema, culturally and industrially a period marked by a number of upheavals and uncertainties. Throughout, there is a focus on film and landscape as sites of the contested notion of nationhood at the time and how the concern among filmmakers to probe the properties, practices and traditions of American cinema coincided and overlapped with landscape, and how landscape in turn collaborated, but also conflicted and contradicted with formal effects and themes in the films under consideration. The reflexivity referred to in the title does then not primarily refer to a pursuit for metacinematic or anti-illusionist devices, but to how landscape can be advanced to reflect on its own status as a construct and the cultural legacy of which it is part.⁹ Since I argue that landscape pertains to the cultural and historical moment of its production prior to the physical environment it depicts, I want to proceed by outlining the inquiry from the period in question.

In the introduction to *Radical Visions: American Film Renaissance, 1967-1976* Glenn Man observed how a number of filmmakers “scrutinized the moral and mythical landscape of the American scene” in what would become an increasingly despairing endeavor, arriving in the mid 1970s to “a critique that depicts the American society as a moral wasteland, reflecting a disillusionment over the waning of progressive values.”¹⁰ Though Man uses landscape in its most common form as a metaphor, one way to circumscribe the thesis would be to take the metaphor literally, that is, to examine how landscape had formed values in the past vis-à-vis the widespread redefinition that it underwent as a field of artistic and academic practice at the time. In a more recent consideration of that brief period of American filmmaking to surface between the disintegration of the major studios in the late 1960s and the film industry’s re-consolidation in the mid 1970s, several scholars grasp

⁹ “Reflexivity,” in Robert Stam’s definition, “points to its own mask and invites the public to examine its design and texture. Reflexive works break with art as enchantment and call attention to their own factitiousness as textual constructs.” Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985), p. 1.

¹⁰ Glenn Man, *Radical Visions: American Film Renaissance, 1967-1976* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 1, 5.

at some rare or poignant quality in the treatment of exterior settings as a hallmark of the era. Thomas Elsaesser, for example, discerns a “love of landscape” which draws its beauty from “unglamorous everydayness” and “desolation” rather than picturesque traits; Alexander Horwath similarly notices an urge to “rediscover the wide open spaces, the street and everyday life”; and Kent Jones, finally, makes the more general claim that “a common thread in 1970s art is the importance of landscape”, defining New Hollywood through “its flux, its resistance to pinning people or places down with ready formulations, as an antidote to the current norm of easily tagged characters fastened to a spruced and polished backdrop.” In current Hollywood, Jones continues, “landscape disappears, becomes flattened out and standardised or turned into an exotic effect moulded to fit whatever drama is at hand.”¹¹ I suggest that these remarks indicate how landscape has figured as a latent discourse in the writing on New Hollywood.

In generalized terms, the penchant for filming in rural, out-of-the way locations can be understood as a reaction against the lavish studio-sets and fantastic backdrops of musicals and historical epics in the 1960s. The development towards a low-key and quirky naturalistic style for which the period has often been merited thus reflects an appetite for differentiation. However, I have chosen to deal with a limited number of films and directors, some, it can be argued, representatives of broader tendencies in filmmaking at the time, others conspicuous for their overt idiosyncrasies. When it comes to the selection criteria, it has been guided less by personal preference than the opportunities for connections and juxtapositions that the films themselves have gradually elicited. The study concurs with a generally agreed upon bracketing of this often discussed period in American filmmaking, sometimes referred to as the Hollywood New Wave to further emphasize its anomalous status, of which the years 1969 to 1974 delimit the core. Though “New Hollywood” later has been used to signify all Hollywood cinema from the 1960s to the present, shifting its designation from artistic innovation to financing and distribution, notably by writers who denounce the possibility of deviations from the classical norm, even these considerations usually admit some transitional, idiosyncratic status to the early 1970s, if only as “a brief detour” before the era of the high-concept and corporate blockbuster.¹²

¹¹ Thomas Elsaesser, “American Auteur Cinema: The Last – or First – Great Picture Show?”, p. 37-69; 38; Alexander Horwath, “A Walking Contradiction (Partly Truth and Partly Fiction)”, p. 83-105; 95; Kent Jones, “‘The Cylinders Were Whispering My Name’: The Films of Monte Hellman”, p. 165-194; 181-182; in *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, eds. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath, and Noel King, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004).

¹² Kristin Thompson, for example, refers to it as “a brief detour” which “constituted a tiny portion of the films released by the big Hollywood firms” in *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 4-5. See also Jim Hillier, *The New Hollywood* (London:

However, when it comes to defining the nature of these idiosyncrasies, and to critical assessments of the era, one account varies considerably from another. Positioned between European art film and Hollywood populism, it might be described as a discourse about contested differences. The diversity is evident also in the films which frames this thesis, beginning with the first, and only, entirely independent production of the era, *Easy Rider* and closing with the studio produced genre film *Chinatown*.¹³

The organization of the study is roughly chronological, based around a series of reconsiderations of central films and the critical debates which have surrounded them. Though it does not intend to be an exhaustive survey of New Hollywood, the advantage of confining the thesis within a manageable area is that it allows alignment of individual films over a period of time and shows how they respond to each other. More precisely, it is the negative, adversary and antagonistic aspects through which the period has been defined – its ambiguity, disaffection, and disillusionment – that concerns the study. Despite the newness that names it, an impulse for retrospection has often been observed. As in the rumination of how a new landscape is always conditioned by and refers back to a previous landscape in the epigraph from Godard's *Eloge de l'amour*, the newness of American cinema at this time in every vital sense evolved from its reverberations, appropriations and displacements of an older Hollywood. The assumptions that have guided the selection of films, and the parameters within which they are studied, is discussed in more detail in the concluding section of this introduction.

The first question is how to define landscape. The remainder of these introductory remarks are concerned with seeking such a definition, first by making a tentative distinction between space and landscape, and secondly, by addressing some of the research that landscape in cinema has recently been subjected to. It concludes by addressing some methodological concerns in applying landscape for analyzing film and the dangers, as well as the expected skepticism, that are attached to such an enterprise.

Towards a Definition: Space vs. Landscape

For the argument of this study, we need to distinguish between space and landscape, not to isolate one from the other but to arrive at some specificity of landscape as a concept in the study of cinema. To begin by considering

Studio Vista, 1993) and Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹³ The 1969-1974 period demarcation will be exceeded on a couple of occasions, in a brief example drawn from *Missouri Breaks* (1976) in chapter four and a somewhat lengthier discussion of *Bonnie & Clyde* in chapter five, incidentally both films directed by Arthur Penn. In the former case its presence is due to some illustrative lines of dialog, in the later to provide a closing frame for the new Hollywood when considered in relation to film noir. *Bonnie & Clyde* is also discussed in chapter three where I refer to an argument made by Timothy Corrigan who has discussed it together with *Badlands* (Terrence Malick, 1973).

space, it was a category which migrated rapidly as a tool for ideological critique in the ongoing project of ‘demystification’ that evolved from the new left of the 1960s, most notably by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*.¹⁴ In the burgeoning discipline of film studies, space became a particularly urgent issue in what came to be known as “Screen theory,” named after the British film journal. As Fredric Jameson sums up in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*:

For one thing, a good deal of the film theory we classically associate with *Screen* magazine could be rewritten as the proposition that in the process of naturalizing narrative or the realistic story, Hollywood was very systematically obliged to organize, that is to say, to repress and to naturalize space as such, since space is what interrupts the naturality of the story-line.¹⁵

This brief passage carries two crucial assumptions; that space might pose a reluctant and unruly element in the staging of cinematic narratives, indeed, if not properly contained one that might imperil the story’s claim on closure and coherence; it further forestalls the return of a repressed space formerly seized within a closed fictional universe. As Jameson continues, “when space itself is thus foregrounded, it is itself thereby deprived of any natural background, as which a kind of inert and conventionalized space normally serves. Reality and matter are released from their ground, and become peculiarly free-floating”.

The illusionism and transparent narration of Hollywood cinema was a chief adversary of the screen theorists, a concern they shared with several directors of the new waves in European film who set out to challenge and transform the nature and institution of cinema by making its own devices, technology and means of production visible. Though a more extended commentary on screen theory lies outside the remit of this discussion, one instance may be noted as the common denominator of the various disciplines that engaged in a critical analysis of space – they all deduce the origin of illusionist space to an elite Renaissance Europe and a mimetic claim of mechanically exact images of the physical world, extending from the invention of linear perspective to photography and cinema, media that all equate visibility and realism. Reproducing the principles of Renaissance perspective, cinema was seen as a continuation and culmination of a bourgeois ideology of individualism.

The screen theorists typically explored how certain technological devices, such as depth-of-focus photography or editing practices like the shot/reverse-shot system, had been developed in classical cinema to give the impression

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [1974], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 74-75.

of a homogeneous, given world, while at the same time erasing the process that went into the making of this world.¹⁶ The level of abstraction and the mounting number of metaphors that this critique involved, drawn both from Marxist and psychoanalytical theory, have been forcefully questioned since then, especially the assumption that ideology is axiomatic to cinematic representation. If screen-theory has had its day, the major conception of space as something that has to be controlled and subordinated to the demands of narration has prevailed. According to David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, classical narration always privileges story over space. A location is accordingly defined by its function to authenticate and settle the drama, and to whatever it might contribute in terms of atmosphere or local color. If a location is emphasized, it is to advance plot and characterization. In short, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* argues that we are encouraged “to read film space as story space”, that space is “rigidly codified by the scene’s flow of cause and effect” and that once it is settled, it is “of little interest in its own right”.¹⁷ Landscape, I argue, can be defined in direct opposition to these three contentions.

To facilitate a working definition of landscape in cinema, we can begin by considering one that’s been provided by filmmaker Chris Welsby, instigator of the short-lived ‘Landscape Films’ movement in Great Britain in the 1970s: “Landscape is a subdivision of nature as a whole. The degree to which we call it landscape is the degree to which mind has had an effect on it, the degree to which it is structured and modified by ideas and concepts.”¹⁸ In this case, landscape is defined through degrees of human intervention; the more artificial, it seems, the more of a landscape. This characterization however seems to circumvent that ‘nature’ is a charged cultural construct on its own. We may further note how Welsby’s circumscription relates to how the genre of landscape painting gained currency as it was subdivided into aesthetic and philosophical categories like the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque. Deriving from the Dutch ‘landschap,’ the English ‘landscape’ originally designated a picture of an expanse of scenery taken in from a single, coherent view; it was thus perceived as an artifact before it was valued

¹⁶ See, for example, Brian Henderson, “Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style” [1971], p. 422-438, and Daniel Dayan, “The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema” [1974], p. 438-451, in *Movies and Methods Volume I*, ed. Bill Nichols, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976); and Stephen Heath’s essay “Narrative Space” [1976], *Questions of Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 19-75.

¹⁷ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 54, 66, 63.

¹⁸ “Interview with Chris Welsby”, *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artist’s Film and Video*, eds. Nina Danino and Michael Maziere, (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), p. 121-126; 126.

in nature.¹⁹ The same goes for contiguous terms like ‘panorama’, referring to circular painted canvases popular in the nineteenth century, ‘scenery,’ from the Greek word for ‘stage,’ and ‘picturesque’ from the Latin ‘pictor,’ painter, referring to “the scenery’s capabilities to be formed into pictures.”²⁰ Though the suffix *scape* posits a unifying principle, basically the same as ‘scope’ or ‘shape,’ a section of land which the eye can contain and comprehend within a single view, it further connotes ‘state’ and ‘condition.’ Landscape is then not merely a picture of nature but, quite literally, a worldview. I will advocate a return to this early use which refers to a self-conscious representation. To utilize the concept of landscape, before, let’s say, space or *mise-en-scène*, is thus to invoke an aesthetic tradition with manifold ramifications. Cultural practices of self-representation and self-definition are of key interest here; especially the vital role landscape historically has played in the formation of empires and in projects of signifying the nation state.

Though space as defined in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* may serve as a resonance of character psychology, or to evoke atmosphere and emphasize mood in ways that guide the interpretation of the unfolding plot, it conveys little expressiveness of its own. Subordinated to the key elements of narration, cuing continuity and closure, the meaning of story-space is patently determined *within* the narrative world of the film. Landscape on the other hand, i.e. when a location gains a certain conceptual or formal significance of its own, would seem to involve some excess. Still, we have to consider space and landscape along an axis of differentiation rather than as excluding categories.

Among the multitude of definitions one could find in the various disciplines and institutional traditions overlapped by landscape, most notably art history and cultural geography, there is one which would seem particularly germane for the study of cinematic landscape. It appears in the introduction to an anthology called *Landscape and Power* where art historian, W.J.T. Mitchell, encourages us to think of landscape not as a genre of art but “as a medium of representation that is re-represented in a wide variety of other media”.²¹ Following Mitchell, the study of landscape in film would thus per definition require an intermedial venture. As we shall see, whenever land-

¹⁹ Etymological deductions of landscape seem obligatory in studies of the subject, though with some variations between them depending on the authors’ disciplinary habitat. For an extensive philosophical examination, see Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting & Maps* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). For a condensed history see Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), p. 8-13. See also cultural geographer John Brinckerhoff Jackson, “The Word Itself”, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 299-306.

²⁰ Paul Shepard, *Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Aesthetics of Nature* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 119, 124.

²¹ W.J.T. Mitchell “Introduction” in *Landscape and Power* [1994], ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 1-4; 3.

scape has been asserted as an independent category in film, it's been done with explicit reference to some medium other than cinema, to painting, music and poetry. Likewise, when critics and reviewers have observed a heightened attention paid to exterior locations in specific films, it has usually been described as a lyrical, poetic or painterly quality. Preceding whatever treatment it may be given in painting, photography or film, Mitchell continues, "landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness, etc.)."²² This last statement seems to me problematic as it implies that representation is posterior to some external physical entity, whereas the etymological derivation of landscape tells us that it was from the outset an aesthetic and pictorial concept. Applied to film studies, it thus differs from illusionist space in that it asserts its own act of mediation and invites a dialog with the tradition of which it is part. Mitchell's stated purpose when defining landscape as a medium is to link it to a discourse on power and imperialism, to move away from aesthetic judgment and to look at it as an agency or channel of communication, and how it works as a process of value formation. However, instead of differentiating between primary and secondary mediums, we might understand landscape as a field of intermedial studies.²³ As a picture, a genre, or a view, landscape is intimately tied to various technologies, from Renaissance perspective and Claude glasses to stereopticons, panoramas and photography, while it also holds a middle position between them by being entrenched in an ongoing process of social and cultural production. With these reservations, Mitchell's recasting from text to media is useful for the historization of landscape made in the second part of this introduction.

The intermediality of cinematic landscape can be divided into two approximate categories. First, what we might call transposition, when forms and techniques of one medium are transferred to another, and second as allusion, when landscape appears as a quote or citation.²⁴ It would be safe to say, however, that the key mediator of landscape in the twentieth century has been cinema, and allusions to landscapes with a film historic resonance are prominent. As a case in point, Monument Valley, famous from the Westerns of John Ford, serves as a reference point throughout the study, both as an imaginary scene of American origins and as a paradigm of classical Hollywood. Endlessly recycled in every conceivable medium – advertisements, comic books, commercials, and music videos – Monument Valley is a key

²² W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape" in *Landscape and Power*, p. 5-34; 14.

²³ The definition of intermedia as something that happens between media was proposed by Dick Higgins in "Intermedia", *Something Else Newsletter 1*, no. 1, (Something Else Press, 1966).

²⁴ Here, I'm approximating the distinction Werner Wolf made between *thematization*, when a reference to, or a quote from another media is made, and *imitation*, when one media shapes the overall structure of another. Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), p. 44-45.

example of landscape as mass-circulated imagery, its currency also verified by Cindy Bernard's *Ask the Dust* which includes no less than four location shots taken there. It further illustrates why intermediality is a more apt term than intertextuality, which explores the internal relationships within a medium, or interartality, which mainly focuses on the fine arts. Though intermediality doesn't by itself entail reflexivity, the modes of transposition and allusion imply that it is a step in that direction, encouraging the viewer to reflect on the act of textual construction and mediation, and the filmmaker to bring attention to or depart from mimetic and narrative conventions.

Previous Research

Until recently, writing on landscape in cinema has presented a rather disparate miscellany, causing P. Adams Sitney in an essay on the subject from 1993 to declare that "the topic itself is virtually an unconscious issue of film theory."²⁵ In terms of an organized body of theory, a solid methodology or a generally agreed upon terminology, one would have to agree. Though recent years has seen a number of studies exploring adjacent areas, locating cinema within the framework of ecology,²⁶ urban studies,²⁷ and geography,²⁸ in none of these can we locate a satisfactory definition of landscape as a category in film studies. The usage of landscape also tends to be slippery, readily swapped for space, location or *mise-en-scène*, a redundancy which doesn't seem to promise much analytical precision. When landscape is emphasized it has often been along the lines of how *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* described story-space; as a background for events to unfold, as an aid for narrative plausibility, or as spectacle or metaphor, that is to say, when the background attains some additional significance as production value or anthropomorphic projection.

²⁵ P. Adams Sitney, "Landscape in the Cinema: the Rhythms of the World and the Camera" in *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 103-126; 103.

²⁶ Leo Braudy, "The Genre of Nature. Ceremonies of Innocence" in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 278-309; David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000); Pat Brereton, *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema* (London: Wallflower, 2003); *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns: Ecocriticism in an American Film Genre*, ed. Deborah A. Carmichael, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006).

²⁷ Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notaria* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); David B. Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997); Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space* (London: Reaktion, 2002).

²⁸ *Place, Power, Situation, and Spectacle: A Geography of Film*, eds. Stuart C. Aitken and Leo E. Zonn, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994); Sam Rohdie, *Promised Lands: Cinema, Geography, Modernism* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

During the final stages of completing my study, Sitney's claim was re-futed in two anthologies, the Synema publication *Moving Landscapes: Landschaft und Film* and the first book-length study in English *Landscape and Film*, both published in 2006. In the former, editors Barbara Pichler and Andrea Pollach catalogs the expressive potential of cinematic landscape in ever widening circles; as background and spectacle, as narrative agent and symbol, as testimony, palimpsest and as material for experimental film.²⁹ Reading landscapes, the authors conclude, not only involves iconological and iconographic traditions but also historical and ideological dimensions through which political, social and technological processes can be mapped. To engage with how real and virtual landscapes integrate is also to acknowledge that these culturally defined projections may flood the narrative to summon very personal sensations and associations.

If the meaning of landscape hence would appear to ramify indefinitely, Martin Lefebvre, editor of *Landscape and Film*, is more concerned with making a demarcation. By drawing from painting, Lefebvre distinguishes between location as a setting for actions and events to occur on the one hand and as spectacle and attraction on the other, a differentiation between story and spectacle that corresponds to "two modes of spectatorial activity: a *narrative mode* and a *spectacular mode*."³⁰ It is this "'autonomizing' gaze", Lefebvre maintains, which "*makes possible the transition from setting to landscape*." These are not static categories however; instead the viewer shifts between the two modes so that settings transform into landscapes and vice versa. If the landscape then resides in the eye of the beholder, a spectacular mode can be encouraged by certain effects which lend exteriors a primary importance, such as quotations, tableaux, or *temps morts*.

A general inquiry that can be deduced from Lefebvre's discussion concerns the relation between classical and post-classical cinema, since 'narrative' and 'spectacle' have often been utilized to make a distinction between the two. Associating the former with a homogeneous space-time continuum and the latter with visual display indicates that New Hollywood would be particularly suited to a study of cinematic landscapes.³¹ Then again, such an

²⁹ Barbara Pichler and Andrea Pollach, "Moving Landscapes: Einführende Anmerkungen zu Landschaft und Film" in *Moving Landscapes: Landschaft und Film* (Wien: Synema, 2006), eds. Barbara Pichler and Andrea Pollach. The editors initially draw from André Gardies "Le paysage comme moment narratif" in *Les Paysages du Cinéma*, ed. Jean Mottet, (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1999), p. 141-153. I was fortunate to be included in the *Moving Landscapes*-anthology with the article "Getting Back into Place (Going into Orbit): Realismus, Narration und Landschaft im Kino des New Hollywood", p. 109-130 which consists of some early ideas of what became the second chapter of this thesis.

³⁰ Martin Lefebvre, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema" in *Landscape and Film*, ed. Martin Lefebvre, (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), p. 19-59; 29.

³¹ In *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (London: Arnold, 2002), Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland have called this binary opposition into question, suggesting instead that we think of post-classical Hollywood as an "excessive classicism", p. 18. For their discussion on classical/post-classical Hollywood, see p. 26-79.

assumption is contradicted by the fact that when landscape has been studied in Hollywood film, it is the classical era that has been privileged. Though some of the connotations of ‘spectacle’ (distancing, foregrounding) apply, others (attraction, scopophilia) seem ill suited from the perspective of this study, for if landscape in some cases provides a cause for spectacle, it might also be asserted as a patently non-spectacular feature, or even going unnoticed altogether. Excess provide a more apt term. In Kristin Thompson’s definition, excess appears when “the physical presence retains a perceptual interest beyond its function in the work.” That landscape might be particularly liable to such transgressions is also affirmed by Thompson, observing that “[t]he simplest, most traditional way of doing this involves the presentation of the picturesque composition.”³² Calling attention to itself through its lack of causal motivation, we can also see how landscape would be a likely target for critique against mannerism, just as excess connotes the superfluous or redundant.

Surprisingly, yet consistent with the transatlantic exchange that is discussed throughout this study, the most extensive research on landscape in American cinema is of French origin, respectively in Maurizia Natali’s *L’Image-paysage: Iconologie et cinéma* (1996) and Jean Mottet’s *L’invention de la scène américain: Cinéma et paysage* (1998). Mottet has also edited two anthologies which address landscape and cinema more generally, *Les Paysages du Cinéma* (1999) and *L’arbre dans le Paysage* (2002). The former is introduced with a remark on the curious circumstance that despite the ongoing interdisciplinary work on landscape and its prominence throughout the history of cinema, film theory and landscape research has remained on separate tracks.³³

In his monograph, Mottet discusses how landscape was utilized in nineteenth-century America to satisfy the social need for a shared vision of the nation. Describing how national significance was conferred to local scenes valid for all Americans, Mottet refers to this as a process of “bringing together European landscape aesthetics and the substance of American everyday life: external anecdote and identifiable topography”.³⁴ Tracing the accelerated production of landscapes as it was transformed and multiplied from

³² Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 259-260. Thompson has elaborated on the term more extensively in the last chapter of *Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

³³ Maurizia Natali, *L’Image-paysage: Iconologie et cinéma* (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1996); Jean Mottet, *L’invention de la scène américain: Cinéma et paysage* (Paris and Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1998); *Les Paysages du Cinéma* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1999) and *L’arbre dans le Paysage* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2002), both edited by Jean Mottet. I’m referring here to Mottet’s introductory remarks in *L’arbre dans le Paysage*, p. 5.

³⁴ Mottet, *L’invention de la scène américain*, p. 24, my translation.

painting via stereoscope and photography to cinema, his major case in point are the films of D.W. Griffith which also dominate the book.

Mauritzia Natali's study assumes a theoretical rather than a historical perspective by drawing from art historian Aby Warburg's iconological method to map the passage and exchange of images over history. Defined as "archeological hieroglyphs" circulating in a collective consciousness, Natali engages with the landscapes of some canonized Hollywood films as cryptic enigmas which, when deciphered, reveal the ancient origins of the American landscape. Reminiscent of Bazin's distinction between painting and cinema, Natali states that "if the painted landscape is a united and centripetal composition, the filmic landscape is an image fragmented and centrifugal," and, she continues, one disposed to "produce a great number of rhetoric and ideological effects."³⁵ The cultural migration and textual density through which Mottet and Natali characterize the cinematic landscape would suggest that it is a subject inherently prone to eclecticism. In conclusion to this first part, I will consider some of the possibilities and fallacies involved in employing landscape as a concept for studying film.

Methodological Considerations

It still holds true that prominent theorists on landscape seldom gave cinema much consideration. There is, for example, no mention of it in the writing of Edward S. Casey, Denis Cosgrove, Stephen Daniels, John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Simon Schama or Yi-Fu Tuan. In the introduction to *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell feels impelled, almost ruefully, to comment on its conspicuous absence in his anthology:

Although this collection does not contain any essays on cinematic landscape, it should be clear why moving pictures of landscape are, in a very real sense, the subtext to these revisionist accounts of traditional motionless landscape images in photography, painting, and other media. The basic argument of these essays is that landscape is a dynamic medium, in which we 'live and move and have our being,' but also a medium that is itself in motion from one place or time to another.³⁶

Mitchell's delineation of landscape as a medium that is itself "transitional", "dynamic" and "in motion" in turn provides a subtext for this study, namely that a period of Hollywood filmmaking in the early 1970s lends itself particularly well to study landscape as a key expository element, "itself in motion from one place or time to another." Though each film under discussion reflects different and sometimes radically opposed artistic sensibilities, they share a resemblance in that landscape is not a neutral or static entity.

³⁵ Natali, p. 15, my translation.

³⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction", p. 2.

To engage landscape as an analytical concept poses some problems on how to build the relation between text and context. Why is landscape applicable for the study of these films? The recognition of landscape supposes that one is capable of referring it to certain historic and aesthetic traditions, for example, in visual arts or literature. Indeed, it is this awareness that makes it viable to render geographic space as the value of a landscape. Does the director make it apparent that a concept of landscape is addressed or relevant for this film, for example, by showing a painting or referring to one through framing and composition, or in the dialog, or is it the spectator that refers the film to such a notion which he believes to identify? From the first concept to the second one risks going from interpreting a film to what Umberto Eco calls ‘using’ it,³⁷ with inevitable drift, which is convenient for the interpretation but not necessarily for the scholarly analysis. Clearly, it is not sufficient to determine that landscape was a major concern among artists and academics at the time to claim it as germane to the study of New Hollywood cinema; one has to identify ostensible cues for its bearing in individual works, rather than deducing it from an established periodization.

An intermedial focus, however, allows us to downplay authorship and questions of the filmmakers’ intentions to a certain extent. Observing how landscape has been highlighted by previous critics and historians who have addressed the films at issue, the visual prominence given to locations was, as we shall see, cause of some bewilderment. In each case we encounter proposals of what import landscape conveys in these films, or fails to convey, of its function or lack of function. Consistent with the criticism leveled against a derivative, mannerist style among the New Hollywood directors, landscape was often seen as symptomatic of an ‘arty,’ ‘cosmetic’ or ‘superficial’ approach covering up the lack of *real* meaning. It has thus commonly been defined as a spectacle or a distraction not satisfactorily integrated into the narrative fabric, or in more assenting terms as lyrical interlude. If anything, such accounts bear witness to the difficulty of coming to terms with landscape; quite literally as there is no consensus or readily applicable terminology for naming or exploring landscape in film.

This brings us once more to a central methodological problem, aptly expressed by Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock in their introduction to *Landscape as Photograph*: “As both construct and artifact, landscapes are so saturated with assigned meanings that it is probably impossible to exhaust

³⁷ Eco makes the distinction between interpretation and use in *Lector in fabula* (Milano: Bompiani, 1979), p. 59-60, in part translated in *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1979). Maurizio Viano has questioned the supposition of an ‘ideal reader’ on which Eco’s distinction between ‘use’ and ‘interpretation’ resides in the preface to *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini’s Film Theory and Practice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), p. xi.

them.”³⁸ Laced and overlaid with multiple and interweaving discourses, landscape calls for a more open methodological approach and a caution not to impose a priori conclusions and ready-made theories, though the very absence of the latter implies that this is to claim a necessity as a virtue. I argue, however, that the perplexed response landscape caused more often has been the outcome of an unwillingness to probe its “aligned meanings” than a demand to assimilate, adjust and make it conform to the function of a story-space which is explicatory or complementary to narration and psychological motivation.

Making Sense, Making Meaning

Not attempting to identify principles of how to classify or categorize landscape in cinema, or to offer a general system of rules, one might object that my approach tends to make landscape denser rather than clearer. In terms of method, I try to synthesize two approaches: defining overarching concepts through which the films and the period previously have been considered, such as realism, nostalgia, and genre-revisionism, and to approach them anew through close textual analysis. Locating landscape as such an interface between the general issue and the specific film, a range of binaries are sorted out to bring specificity to the more general circumscription of story-space and landscape, classical and post-classical, America and Europe. What binds the chapters together is the consistency with which landscape is applied and, hopefully, the versatility that it presents as a concept for analysis and interpretation.

Since landscape is part of a totality of the meaning-making processes in film, an initial problem is one of retaining focus. If the close readings inextricably shift towards aspects of narration and characterization, I nevertheless want to resist a tendency to read films primarily according to story-logic and character psychology. This also calls for comment on the close textual engagement upon which the study rests. Implied already in the distinction made between landscape and story-space as defined primarily in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, for its scope and insight widely considered as the standard work on Hollywood, this can be formulated as a retrospective remark on the longstanding debate provoked by one of its authors, David Bordwell, and the case he made in *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*.³⁹ Forcefully calling into question institutionalized practises of interpretive criticism, Bordwell’s objection mainly targeted when a pre-given theory as a matter of routine is used to legitimize

³⁸ Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock, *Landscape as Photograph* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. xiv.

³⁹ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1989).

analytical claims. Considering the examples he draws from, I have few objections, neither do I adhere to any ‘Grand Theory’, though landscape with its connotations of unity and coherence might imply otherwise.⁴⁰ Instead, my concern is of a more pragmatic nature, reflecting the fact that film studies for a long time seems to have avoided textual analysis, engaging in other aspects (reception studies, historical poetics) rather than the films themselves. If the conclusion Bordwell draws on the basis of ‘bad interpretation’ is that interpretation should best be avoided altogether, one array of interpretive activity is still encouraged, namely his own cognitive model for spectatorship as a problem-solving activity where the audience navigates between narrative clues to make sense out of the distributed information.⁴¹ Considered together with the rigorously defined classic style forever confined within its “bounds of difference” in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, these normative claims on how Hollywood films should and shouldn’t be studied would thus either appear to reduce spectatorship to a problem-solving activity or to accommodate texts within a theory which automatically rejects anything that isn’t narratively motivated.

Aware that this positioning against Bordwell has itself become somewhat of a convention, it follows more directly from the methodological issues that my distinction between story-space and landscape involve.⁴² As has been suggested throughout this introduction, landscape entails a reading strategy that recasts the priority of mise-en-scène criticism by turning background into foreground. If such a practice is likely to be indicted for trading the principal (character, story) for the subordinate (location), this hierarchy is conditional to begin with. In the essay that concludes the anthology *Landscape and Film*, Matthew Gandy briefly reflects on the reluctance to engage with cinematic landscape: “The very idea of the cinematic landscape as an object of critical inquiry consequently faces a degree of ‘dislocation’ in which the cultural and historical coordinates behind the production of film

⁴⁰ The debate I refer to continues with *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996) which oppose a cognitivist oriented “mid-level research” (29) against the Grand Theories “derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralist semiotics, Post-Structuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism” (xiii).

⁴¹ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, Madison, Methuen: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

⁴² A extensive critic against the argument for a homogeneous classical style made in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* can be found in Andrew Britton’s “The Philosophy of the Pigeonhole: Wisconsin Formalism and ‘The Classical Style’”, *CineAction!*, no. 15 (Dec. 1988), p. 47-63. A number of scholars expressed their views on Bordwell’s rebuke on practises of interpretation in a special issue of *Film Criticism*, vol. 17, no. 2/3, (Winter/Spring, 1993). In the latter, Thomas Elsaesser suggests that “it may well be that classical cinema – our own standard and reference point for so many years – will appear the exception, a moment of relative stability in a much more riven and fluid (‘media’) history.” Elsaesser, “Film Subjects in Search of the Object”, p. 40-47; 45.

may be occluded from critical analysis and theoretical speculation.”⁴³ However, in order to identify some aspect to be engaged in analysis and interpretation, a certain abstraction and isolation is required. This doesn’t necessarily mean that it is detached from “cultural and historical coordinates”; in fact, I argue that such coordinates are vital for the understanding of cinematic landscape.

When I make a distinction between landscape and story-space as defined in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, it reflects dominant approaches to analysing popular film rather than my own unreserved acceptance of a Hollywood paradigm. Since Bordwell maintains that this uniform mode of filmmaking also encompasses the transitory period of the New Hollywood in the early 1970s, an implicit aim of the study is to challenge this, to my mind, reductive notion in defence of the possible density of a text, of how much it may withhold from us, and of the questions and challenges it may pose. On the other hand, there is always the risk of over-emphasising differences, and here the very notion of a New Hollywood not only raises the problem of how to achieve periodization, it also runs the risk of simply opposing classical and a post-classical cinema. Certainly, non-classical elements have been in Hollywood throughout, or as James Morrison has acknowledged, “the seemingly coherent genres of Classical Hollywood had really always been sites of confusion, contestation, and ideological tension”.⁴⁴ Though rather than looking at how Hollywood cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s concurs to the presumed closure and symmetry of classical Hollywood, I’m interested in the meanings that emerge from the ways in which they differ.

As for the title, *Out of Site* refers to a certain displacement as much as an insistence to create something *from*, and not just *at*, a location. Considering various strategies of engaging with the material, as well as the extensive research many of these films have previously been subjected to, it also denotes an attempt to attend to aspects that might have been considered marginal or secondary, and thus have remained out of sight.

⁴³ Matthew Gandy, “The Cinematic Void: Desert Iconographies in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point*” in Lefebvre (ed.), p. 315-332; 317.

⁴⁴ James Morrison, *Passport to Hollywood: Hollywood Films, European Directors* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 211.

Contemplating and Interpreting Landscape

A pure film of lights and darks slips into a dim landscape of countless westerns. Some sage-brush here, a little cactus there, trails and hoof-beats going nowhere. The thought of a film with a “story” makes me listless. How many stories have I seen on the screen? All those “characters” carrying out dumb tasks. Actors doing exciting things. It’s enough to put one in a permanent coma.

Robert Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia” (1971)⁴⁵

If landscape primarily has been addressed as a utility to guide character and plot development in Hollywood cinema, its evocative charge has gained considerable momentum when European art film has been considered. Sam Rohdie’s short essay “Film and Landscape” illustrates the point by turning to the deserted volcanic island that appears in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* (*The Adventure*, 1960). Through the protracted engagement with the graphic qualities of the rocky surface and its textures of light and shadow, the location comes to assert itself as an element autonomous to the fiction, in fact, one that momentarily causes it to disintegrate. In Rohdie’s words the island gradually “begins to pass into the abstraction of an image.”⁴⁶ This is the other, and apparently contradictory, approach to landscape in cinema where opacity and autonomy have been valorized and associated to practices in modernist art. For Rohdie, landscape becomes symptomatic of a latent and largely unrealized potential in cinema, “as practiced, certainly as studied,” he maintains “most discussions of film have been insensitive, indeed increasingly insensitive, to the visual qualities of film and to its forms.”⁴⁷ Rohdie makes his case in reference to modernist painting where landscape incited “a new and more insistent subject, not nature, not the figure, not reality, but painting.” Thus, on the one hand, we have the location as an element subordinated to plot and character, on the other, as a part of a modernist vocation for pure art.

When Robert Smithson, coming to prominence in the late 1960s with his ground-breaking work as an environmental artist, envisioned a new cinema emancipated from narrative restraint in the epigraph above, he drew on this polarized relation between landscape as a visual shorthand for familiar plots (“Some sage-brush here, a little cactus there”) and as a sensory experience where the audience “would drown in a vast reservoir of pure perception”.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Robert Smithson, *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*, ed. Nancy Holt, (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 105.

⁴⁶ Sam Rohdie, “Film and Landscape”, *Screening the Past: An international, refereed, electronic journal of visual media and history*, issue 16, 2004, p. 2.

http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr_16/sr2fr16.html, accessed April 9, 2007.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Smithson, p. 107.

Though there has been little crossover between landscape as pre-coded iconography and as “pure perception”, I contend that these discourses aren’t mutually exclusive but suggest instead the rich possibilities, as well as the liabilities, of assuming landscape as a category for analysis and interpretation.

With some similarities to the two intermedial modes of transposition and allusion that were addressed earlier, W.J.T. Mitchell, who holds a central position in this study, has made a useful historical distinction between two overarching approaches to studying landscape, the first of which he refers to as “contemplative”, emphasizing a kind of unmediated sensual experience, the other “interpretive”, associated with post-modern strategies of reading and decoding.⁴⁹ Below, I attempt to outline these two approaches for studying landscape in more detail. Under the heading “The Aesthetics of Landscape” I look at various proposals of a genre of landscape in film that narrates a process of progressive purification via analogies to music, poetry and painting. The second part, “The Politics of Landscape”, which requires a much lengthier exposure, attempts to discuss an ongoing project of reading landscapes that germinated from semiotic theory. Willfully disinterested in aesthetic judgments but concerned with landscape’s hidden agendas, this approach brings us back to W.J.T. Mitchell’s definition of landscape as a medium, and also to the historical moment of the New Hollywood. Following how landscape has been conceived as iconography, myth, text and medium, I attempt to add some weight to Kent Jones’ claim of landscape as “a common thread in 1970s art” and to how the film industry’s destabilized condition in the early 1970s implemented a certain reflexivity and ambiguity.

The Aesthetics of Landscape: Landscape Film, Fine Art and Abstraction

“Essentially, landscape in film is an atmosphere for story, a setting for action, there, but in the background. There is no film genre called landscape, as there is in painting,” Sam Rohdie remarks in his essay.⁵⁰ The assertion isn’t as self-evident as it may first appear. When Canadian filmmaker Michael Snow discussed his ideas on *La Région Centrale* (1970-71), he took this very lack as an incentive for his undertaking: “The traditional painting division of subjects seems to me to be still applicable” Snow explained in an interview in 1971, “portraiture, landscape, still life, etc. there are good reasons why those divisions are still used. It’s like animal, vegetable and mineral - those things do exist. And I thought about how you could make a landscape film.” Elaborating further on the basics of such a genre, Snow marks out a paradox

⁴⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell “Introduction”, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Rohdie, “Film and Landscape”, p. 2.

endemic to landscape: “I wanted a complete wilderness with nothing man-made...We had all this sophisticated machinery up there in this complete wilderness.”⁵¹ Landscape is located here at an interface between technology and nature, aesthetic category and a physical reality.

The essay by P. Adams Sitney referred to earlier, called “Landscape in the cinema: the rhythms of the world and the camera”, is useful when demarcating how a genre of landscape in film, in common with its antecedent in painting, has been narrated as an evolution away from the figurative and representational toward abstraction and purity. A decisive source to begin such a consideration is Sergei Eisenstein’s essay from 1945 “Nonindifferent Nature” which Sitney briefly refers to.⁵² As the subtitle “The Music of Landscape and the Fate of Montage Counterpoint at a New Stage” suggests, landscape primarily becomes a pretext to pursue a musical analogy, one which leads the author into the familiar territory of montage-theory. Especially the first third of Eisenstein’s essay nevertheless presages several notions to endure in proposals for a ‘landscape film.’ Through an analogy between Chinese scroll-painting and the tracking panorama shot, Eisenstein begins to outline his conception of landscape as “plastic music”⁵³ and how rhythmic elements, textures and tonalities pertain to poetry and music rather than topographic documentation.⁵⁴ ‘Purity,’ ‘plasticity’ and ‘abstraction’ are frequently invoked to define this unique resource of cinematic expression, as summarized at one point, “landscape is the freest element of film, the least burdened with servile, narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences. In a word, *all that*, in its exhaustive total, is accessible only to music, with its hazily perceptible, flowing imagery.”⁵⁵

Eisenstein’s conceptualization mainly focuses on ephemeral effects of mood and atmosphere and on cinema’s ability to translate natural elements like air, water and earth into “purely *tonal* and *textural* combinations” to compose “*a musical-emotional interpretation of a piece of visible nature*”.⁵⁶ If Eisenstein defines the pure landscape in opposition to representational logic, he grasps at greater expressive and interpretive potentials near the end of his essay:

⁵¹ “The Life and Times of Michael Snow”, interviewed by Joe Medjuck, *Take One*, vol. 3, no. 3, (Jan-Feb 1971), p. 6-12; 10-11.

⁵² Sergei Eisenstein, “Nonindifferent Nature: The Music of Landscape and the Fate of Montage Counterpoint at a New Stage”, *Nonindifferent Nature: Film and the Structure of Things* [1945], trans. Herbert Marshall, (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 216-396. Sitney discusses Eisenstein’s essay only briefly on the assumption that it doesn’t deal with natural beauty, which is the subject of the anthology Sitney’s essay is part of, and without discussing the intermedial analogies that he shares with Eisenstein.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 229, 234.

Landscape is a complex bearer of the possibilities of a plastic interpretation of emotion. ... For not only is a pure – almost abstract – emotional effect of mood accessible to landscape. A strong dramatic effect is just as accessible to a no less degree. ... Landscape can serve as a concrete image of the embodiment of whole cosmic conceptions, whole philosophic systems.⁵⁷

A validation for landscape film that bears some marked similarities with Sitney's article was made by Maureen Cheryn Turim in *Abstraction in Avant-Garde Films* (1978), contending that a number of avant-garde filmmakers resumed, "the exploration that painting began of light and abstraction within the landscape genre."⁵⁸ Turim defines the tenets of this "evolution of pictorial abstraction" now entering a new medium as follows: "Landscape painting uncovers painting's possibilities not to merely represent objects but to explore the relationship between light and vision, between color and light taking into account the transformational qualities of pigment and canvas. Avant-garde films whose figuration involves landscapes display parallel concerns."⁵⁹ Creating interfaces between 'natural' and technological systems, the landscape filmmaker adds the temporality and transformations wrought by mechanical and photochemical processes to the genre. As Turim concludes, "[t]he culture/nature paradigm is therefore inherent in films studying landscape."⁶⁰

Returning finally to Sitney's article, it outlines an evolutionary trajectory where landscape gradually grows more versatile and resourceful throughout the history of cinema. Describing how optical effects, pans, sound, color, portable lightweight equipment, superimpositions, dissolves, and zooms have added to the formal and thematic expressiveness of landscape, Sitney states that it finally emerged as a recognizable genre of its own in "the late 1960s and throughout the seventies ... created by European and North American *avant-garde* film-makers".⁶¹ Without further elaboration, Sitney also notes that this new genre was concurrent with Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1965 treatise "The 'Cinema of Poetry'".⁶² Within this context it is significant that Pasolini began his anticipation of how a classical narrative cinema of prose would be replaced by a cinema of poetry by emphasizing the role of the environment, further accentuated as Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il deserto*

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 355.

⁵⁸ Maureen Cheryn Turim, "Scanning Landscapes and Collapsing Architectures: Shattering the Grounding of the Subject/Eye", *Abstraction in Avant-Garde Films* [1978] (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985), p. 107-131; 108, 121.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 121.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

⁶¹ Sitney, "Landscape in the Cinema", p. 103.

⁶² Ibid., p. 119.

rosso (*The Red Desert*, 1964) serves as his prime example of this new cinema.⁶³

Like Turim, Sitney locates the period when landscape emerged as “a term in the epistemology of cinema,” within a rather exclusive avant-garde and he similarly emphasizes the interaction of nature and technology as the basis for this genre, bringing together “the rhythms of the world and the temporality of the medium”. Limited as this group of filmmakers may be it contains highly diverse approaches, from Stan Brakhage’s emphasis on a subjective perceptual experience to Michael Snow’s attempts to eliminate any anthropocentric nuances.⁶⁴ As it happens, we may note that the emergence of this indigenous landscape film coincided with the period of Hollywood cinema under discussion; from Jonas Mekas (*Walden*, 1968/69) and Robert Smithson (*Spiral Jetty*, 1970), to Michael Snow (*La Région Centrale*, 1970/71) and Larry Gottheim (*Fog Line*, 1970, *Horizons*, 1973). The most ambitious attempt to date to explore this branch of independent film is Scott McDonald’s *The Garden in the Machine* which points to the rise of “landscape films” as part of the radicalism and cultural critique of that era but also as a desire to return to the “simplicity and directness” of an early, silent, non-studio cinema.⁶⁵

In all these cases, landscape is asserted as a means to implement some essential propensity or aptitude of the medium. Conceiving landscape as a genre where the specific properties of cinema could be explored and purified, rather than by its fidelity to the geographic area represented, these contentions sustain a modernist vocation to move away from mimetic concerns. This emancipation, invoked via analogies to the fine arts, whether music, poetry or painting, has a parallel in art history, the seminal work to trace such a lineage in painting being Kenneth Clark’s pioneering *Landscape into Art* (1949). Clark outlines a genealogy from the symbolic landscape of religious iconography where landscape was valued as allegory, via a secularized landscape of fact valued for its fidelity to nature, and steering toward an increasingly impressionistic landscape which was valued for the feat of artistic imagination.⁶⁶ In W.J.T. Mitchell’s words, this evolutionary trajectory tends to be narrated “as a quest, not just for pure, transparent representation

⁶³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, “The ‘Cinema of Poetry’” [1965] in *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett, (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 167-186.

⁶⁴ Sitney, “Landscape in the Cinema”, p. 125. Sitney has also discussed the Romantic heritage of experimental film in America, from the Abstract Expressionism of Brakhage to the ‘structural’ films of Michael Snow, in his seminal *Visionary Film: The American Avant Garde*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁶⁵ Scott McDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 7, 6.

⁶⁶ The stages Clark chronicle are respectively “the landscape of symbols,” “the landscape of facts,” “landscape of fantasy,” “ideal landscape,” “the natural vision,” “the northern lights,” and “the return to order.” Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 1949).

of nature, but as a quest for a pure painting, freed of all literary concerns and representation.”⁶⁷ As a subject in cinema, it is notable that these implements of media-specificity consistently have been described by way of some other art, and that cinema would attain autonomy by emulating another medium.

Closing her discussion on the American avant-garde filmmakers, Turim addresses a critique raised against the lack of legible social and political criticism in these films, apparently not aspiring for anything in the way of, “instructive argumentations for political thought and action in the manner that the discourses of documentary or fictional narrative can be.”⁶⁸ Turim’s observation has a broader application as it evokes another, and far more dominant, attitude toward the role of landscape in the twentieth century more generally. Compromised by its association with a Romantic tradition, landscape was dismissed as a concern of aloof aesthetics that only too willingly were diverted from the urgent call for political struggle. Sometime in the late 1960s, however, the assumed innocuous and apolitical character of landscape was gradually revised. This brings us to the second discourse on landscape, moving from aesthetics to issues of power and ideology. If landscape in the accounts considered above emerged from the background, it turned into a literal battleground in the ones to be addressed below.

The Politics of Landscape: From Refuge to Battlefield

“I don’t like mountainsides, or lakes, or streams, or rivers. I don’t fall in love with that. I’ll leave that for the old poets.”⁶⁹ When John Cassavetes voiced this indifference towards the American countryside while driving through the Hollywood hills in 1965, the nation was at the brink of a decade afflicted by political turmoil and civil unrest, crisis in economy, energy and governmental legitimacy, culminating with Richard Nixon’s resignation in 1974 and the withdrawal from Vietnam the following year. Albeit this volatile climate, Cassavetes’ eschewal of rural America as a concern for reclusive romantics would prove to be anything but prophetic; instead “the old poets” were to become a forceful, if ambiguous, presence.

⁶⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape”, p. 13. Later in the same anthology, Mitchell elaborates further on this link between landscape and purity: “Secular landscape perception, while generally contrasted to the contemplation of sacred sites, nevertheless mimics their rituals of ‘purification’ – landscape as a liberation of the visual consumption of nature from use-value, commerce, religious meaning, or legible symbolism of any sort into a contemplative, aesthetic form, a representation and perception for its own sake. This purification, finally, is almost invariably described as a modern and Western discovery, a revolutionary liberation of painting from narrative and ecclesiastical symbolism that can be dated quite precisely in the seventeenth century.” Mitchell, “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness” in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, p. 261-290; 265.

⁶⁸ Turim, p. 130-1.

⁶⁹ *Cinéma, de notre temps: John Cassavetes* (Hubert Knapp, André S. Labarthe, 1998).

For all its casualness, Cassavetes remark is representative of how landscape from the perspective of cosmopolitan modernist artists would become a cause of embarrassment, profiting as it did on anti-modern and anti-urban sentiments.⁷⁰ A famous complaint was voiced in the 1930s by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson against the kind of motives endorsed by his fellow colleagues overseas: “The world is going to pieces and people like Adams and Weston are photographing rocks!”⁷¹ He was not alone in his indictment. Prominent scholars of the literary tradition in America such as D.H. Lawrence and Leslie A. Fiedler diagnosed the infatuation with wild places and farther frontiers as an escapist fantasy to evade social commitment and responsibility.⁷² What might be the fiercest assault on this preoccupation with primordial nature was delivered in writer and literary critic Edward Dahlberg’s “World-Sick and Place-Crazy” where he argued that the prose and poetry of “the wild, watery men in American literature” not only revealed asocial and anti-intellectual impulses, but ultimately expressed a nihilistic and morbid drive away from community.⁷³

In the agitated climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s one might assume that the eulogizing of an idealized countryside would have appeared increasingly untenable. Nevertheless, a nostalgia for a pre-industrial, organic society was a vital part of the New Left and the counter-culture where the paintings of the Hudson River School, the photographs of Ansel Adams, and the transcendentalist writing of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, attracted a new audience. In 1970, Charles A. Reich’s ecological manifesto *The Greening of America* popularized the idea that a “green revolution” would purge the nation from the sterility brought on by what he, in an idiom typical of the time, referred to as the military-industrial complex of the Corporate State.⁷⁴ Looking back at this period, Leo Marx, author of *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), one of the key texts for the ecologically-minded counter-culture, describes the pastoralism of the 1960s as a “quasi-

⁷⁰ John Beardsley, “Earthworks: The Landscape after Modernism” in *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* [1991], eds. Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 110-117.

⁷¹ Cartier-Bresson’s objection has often been quoted, here cited from Jussim and Lindquist-Cook, p. 140.

⁷² In the first chapter of *Studies in Classical American Literature* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923), “The Spirit of Place”, D.H. Lawrence points to the paradox he would explore throughout the book: “Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealizable purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west.” p. 12. The obsession with nature as an urge to escape from the duties and responsibilities of marriage, family life and community is also a major theme in Leslie A. Fiedler’s *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960).

⁷³ Edward Dahlberg, “World-Sick and Place-Crazy”, *Alms for Oblivion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 20-27; 21.

⁷⁴ Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970).

political ideology” offering “a consoling absolution from the painful complexity of political choice.”⁷⁵

However, parallel to these evasions from pressing social realities by clinging to the mythic solace of a dwindling, unspoiled America, there was a markedly different development where landscape would resurge as a field of artistic innovation unprecedented since the nineteenth century.⁷⁶ It has been suggested by scholars such as John Beardsley and Rebecca Solnit that this return of landscape to the art scene reflected a major transition. In Beardsley’s words, “It may prove, in hindsight, that nothing signaled the end of the modern era in art so much as the restoration of landscape to an important position among artists of a particularly venturesome character in the latter half of the 1960s.”⁷⁷ Instead of a diversion from social and political commitment, landscape emerged as a potent vehicle for cultural critique, or as Rebecca Solnit phrased it, as “one of the principal intellectual battlefields of our time.”⁷⁸

A tentative period demarcation of this transition from Romantic eulogy to battlefield could be marked by two influential New York exhibitions: “Earthworks” which established the Environmental Art movement in 1968 and “New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape” assembling a new generation of landscape photographers in 1975. Different as these artists were from each other, they all shared an impetus to undercut expectations by lavishing attention to locations usually considered unworthy of interest. The preference of ‘environment,’ ‘earth’ and ‘topography’ before ‘landscape’ further suggests a disengagement from readily applicable aesthetic concepts, a counter-strategy reflected in the frequent invocations of ‘displacements,’ ‘voids’ and ‘entropy,’ or in Robert Smithson’s elaborations on ‘missing vanishing points’ and ‘negative maps.’ However, the purpose

⁷⁵ Leo Marx, *The Pilot and the Passenger: Essays on Literature, Technology, and Culture in the United States* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 203, 207.

⁷⁶ To quote two authorities on American art who date such a shift to the late 1960s; Barbara Novak closes her study *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1969) with the following observation: “What emerged in the 1960s, then, in one short decade from Pop to conceptual art, was a way of dealing with the American environment, from appropriating banal objects to colonizing and reforming the landscape itself through idea—often through maps, plans, and diagrams even more ambitious in their scale than the nineteenth century panoramas.” Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 288; Robert Rosenblum has similarly remarked: “Landscape or, more cosmically put, nature was the site of countless original Romantic meditations on ultimate mysteries. For the modern movement, however, it became an endangered species that deflected attention from the marvels of a new man-made world. But since the late 1960s it has been resurrected and venerated in countless ways,” Rosenblum, *On Modern American Art: Selected Essays by Robert Rosenblum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), p. 295.

⁷⁷ Beardsley, “Earthworks: The Landscape after Modernism”, p. 110.

⁷⁸ Rebecca Solnit, “Elements of a New Landscape” in *Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Friedman, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 100-115; 100.

wasn't simply to negate theological or anthropomorphic readings of landscape, but to call attention to where and how we look, in order to make space for new interpretations to emerge. To come to terms with this deconstructive impulse, we need to backtrack and grasp how landscape was constructed in the first place. When referring to "mountainsides," "lakes," and "rivers" as a realm of "the old poets", Cassavetes unknowingly invoked one way to go about such a task, namely by studying what Marwyn S. Samuels has termed as "the biography of landscape," that is by way of tracing and unraveling its authorship.⁷⁹ Below, I attempt a brief historical survey of this authorship which will lead to the expanded notion of text pioneered by Roland Barthes and to how landscape emerged as a field ripe for semiotic decoding; as a text written, read and interpreted, and as a cultural practice that constructs, rather than records, the world. Though I'm less interested with the specificities of the "ancestry and upbringing"⁸⁰ of landscape than with how it moves from one place to another, a biography of landscape provides a point of departure which allows us to go from the textual metaphor towards Mitchell's conception of landscape as a medium.

The Making and Un-making of Nature's Nation

In discussions of the landscape tradition in America, a passage in D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), which refers to James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, has become near obligatory:

The American landscape has never been at one with the white man. Never. And white men have probably never felt so bitter anywhere, as here in America, where the very landscape in its very beauty, seems a bit devilish and grinning, opposed to us. Cooper, however, glosses over this resistance, which in actuality can never quite be glossed over. He *wants* the landscape to be at one with him. So he goes to Europe and sees it as such. It is a sort of vision.⁸¹

If Lawrence's account speaks of the difficulty to reconcile visionary ideal with material facts, it also contains some uncertainty of where landscape resides; the given reality or Cooper's "vision." To find a landscape to communicate a reciprocal relation between nature and nation posed a considerable challenge in the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, this mediation

⁷⁹ Marwyn S. Samuels, "The Biography of Landscape: Cause and Culpability" in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 51-88.

⁸⁰ The phrase is from Alan R.H. Baker's "Introduction: on Ideology and Landscape" in *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective*, ed. Alan R.H. Baker and Gideon Biger, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Baker emphasizes that, "a landscape also needs to be situated within its own natural and cultural history – its own ancestry and upbringing – if it is to be properly understood." p. 1-14; 2.

⁸¹ Lawrence, p. 61.

engaged two interlacing strategies.⁸² First, by nationalizing nature, establishing a symbolic link between nature and nationhood where nature comes to reflect the virtues of the nation. In the United States, the country's aspiration to greatness was confirmed by the grandeur of the landscape, the merits of its social and political order by the stability and permanency of its geological features. Second, by naturalizing the nation, as when Thomas Jefferson surveyed the Virginian countryside in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), announcing that natural laws were immediately attainable from America's un-trodden soil and that the new nation would be an outgrowth and culmination of nature itself.

A host of authors of the American landscape could be deduced; from the spokesmen of agrarian idealism clinging to the fictional mode of a Virgilian pastoral to the more aggressive doctrine of Manifest Destiny; from the novels of Cooper and Owen Wister to the political and historical treatise of Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Fredrick Jackson Turner where nature was defined as the spirit to animate national character; from the Transcendentalists and advocates of wilderness preservation asserting the immanent sacredness of American nature to the canvases of the Hudson River and Rocky Mountain School of painters. This nineteenth-century discourse reads as a series of manuals on how to properly appreciate the moral and aesthetic significance of natural scenery. Much scholarship has accordingly been dedicated to how a continental geography was transcribed into legible iconography, one which in the twentieth century has remained mainly in a patently lowbrow version of advertising, calendar art, postcards, and tourist magazines.

However, landscape is more dynamic than the concepts of biography or authorship give at hand. The alleged newness of the landscapes in the New World has, for example, been challenged by calling attention to how techniques and themes developed by Claude Lorrain in seventeenth-century France were employed by America's early landscape painters, conventions which in turn derived from themes and motifs in the classical landscape poetry of Virgil.⁸³ Several of the prominent American landscape painters traveled to Europe to learn their craft and the Swiss Alps and the Italian countryside provided the models against which American scenery was measured, and which it gradually was believed to supersede and replace. Considered this way, landscape starts to appear less grounded in native geography than as a circulation of images, ideas and icons. If it is possible to some extent to

⁸² This distinction between a metaphoric and deterministic conceptualization of the relation between landscape and nation has been proposed by Oliver Zimmer, "In Search of Natural Identity: Alpine Landscape and the Reconstruction of the Swiss Nation", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 4, (Oct. 1998), p. 637-665.

⁸³ See, for example, Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 65-67, and Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (London, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1980), p. 228.

deduce landscape to certain instigators and creators, this authorship doesn't exhort authorial control. Instead, its meaning is open for appropriation and reinterpretation; Mitchell has, for example, written about how the image of the American desert and its vocation for settlement was appropriated and mobilized by the state of Israel.⁸⁴ Still, the textual dimension implied by a biography helps us to begin to consider landscape as a scene where meaning is made and legitimized but also challenged and unsettled, a 'battlefield' in Solnit's phrase. We may also note that even the most upfront revisionists of landscape have readily adopted venerable father figures, as in Robert Smithson's endorsement of Thomas Cole or Stan Brakhage of Frederick Church. More recently, landscape filmmaker James Benning has spoken about the influence of both of these painters, as well as the writings of John Muir and the photographs of Ansel Adams.⁸⁵

Landscape and Semiotics: From Text to Medium

The exploration of the textual dimension of landscape has often relied on an iconographical approach for deciphering and decoding that retrace images of the natural world to the political and economic interests which produced them. If landscape in Denis E. Cosgrove's often cited maxim is "a way of seeing,"⁸⁶ a view or vista arranged from the vantage point of a particular purpose or end, this approach emphasizes instead what landscape doesn't show, what it withholds from seeing, and how landscape, to draw upon Roland Barthes, can become, "an agent of blindness."⁸⁷ The claim that frequently has been raised is that landscape is tainted by a latent content, that it has a "dark side" as John Barrell called it in a famous essay, and that despite, or rather because of, its vocation for overview and lucid prospects, it ulti-

⁸⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness".

⁸⁵ In "Landscape in the Cinema", p. 121, Sitney refers to Brakhage's "long study of Frederick Church and other landscape painters." Robert Hobbs repeatedly comments on Thomas Cole's influence on Smithson, arguing that Smithson's "view of the landscape is an unidealized twentieth-century pendant to Cole's." Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 28. When asked by Paul Cummings about his father, Smithson comments that "he did have a real sense of a kind of, you know, American idea of the landscape, but in an American way ... he sort of had a feeling for scenic beauty, but didn't understand modern art. PC: He liked Bierstad paintings. RS: Yes. Well, that sort of thing." Robert Smithson, *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, p. 142. James Benning, finally, began his address accompanying the premiere of *Ten Skies* (2004) and *13 Lakes* (2004) at the Vienna Film Museum November 21, 2004 by referring to his study of the detailed landscape renditions of John Muir, Ansel Adams, Thomas Cole and Frederick Church. The lecture has been transcribed as "Durch Null dividieren" in Pichler and Pollach (eds.), p. 197-208.

⁸⁶ Cosgrove, p. 13.

⁸⁷ In his essay "The *Blue Guide*", Barthes examines how the tourist guide's emphasis on picturesque scenery, mountains and monuments in effect occludes access to "a countryside which is real and which exists in time", which is when he refers to it as "an agent of blindness." Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [1957], trans. Annette Lavers, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 76.

mately works to mask and conceal. Barrall accordingly asks if it is possible to penetrate the landscape's surface, "and discover there evidence of the very conflict it seems to deny."⁸⁸ A certain duplicity has thus become the hallmark of landscape, evident in the growing number of publications which has concatenated it with "power", "politics" and "ideology" during the last decade.⁸⁹

Art historian Barbara Novak's seminal study, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875*, provides an early example of how a semiotic interpretation of visual codes and conventions has been combined with an inquiry of why certain images emerged out of particular historical and cultural contexts. Many studies to follow Novak have probed the way landscape painting in the nineteenth century both reflected and informed cultural politics at the time, serving a burgeoning nationalism and advancing the cause of Manifest Destiny in what appears as an almost complete symbiosis of politics and aesthetics.⁹⁰ As one scholar put it, "Jefferson was a landscape painter; the Hudson River School artists were statesmen."⁹¹

To recap, Mitchell's revisionist understanding of landscape, "not as an object to be seen or a text to be read,"⁹² urges us to consider it as a "verb" rather than a "noun", and "as a medium, a vast network of cultural codes, rather than as a specialized genre of painting."⁹³ Despite his intention to move away from the textual metaphor, Mitchell is obviously involved in forms of reading and decoding, scrutinizing how landscape is fraught with ideological tension and amenable to all sorts of manipulations, and how it serves to reify social hierarchies, power relations and claims on authority. Accordingly, the task is one of reversing "the process by which landscape effaces its own readability and naturalizes itself", to show how landscape contrary to its appearance of permanency is in fact frail and provisional and to discover the "moral, ideological, and political darkness" beneath its guise of "innocent idealism".⁹⁴

⁸⁸ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 5.

⁸⁹ Beside *Landscape and Power*, there is, for example, Martin Warnke's *Political Landscape*, trans. David McLintock, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1995) and *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective*, ed. Baker and Biger. See also Stephen Daniels "Marxism, Culture, and the Duplicity of Landscape" in *New Models in Geography: The Political-Economy Perspective*, ed. Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) p. 196-220.

⁹⁰ Two notable examples are Angela L. Miller's *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993) and Albert Boime's *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting, c. 1830-1865* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991).

⁹¹ David Jacobson, *Place and Belonging in America* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 196.

⁹² W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction", p. 1.

⁹³ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape", p. 13.

⁹⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction", p. 2; "Imperial Landscape", p. 6.

Passages like these indicate Mitchell's alliance to a semiotic approach and it is useful to modify his dense essay in relation to one of the bedrocks of semiotic theory, Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* and its longstanding case of how myth "transforms history into nature."⁹⁵ To apply the distinction between the signifier and the signified central in Barthes' early writing, denotation refers to that which signifies, here a view of scenery, while connotation is the network of cultural associations aligned to it; Virgin Land, Manifest Destiny or American Exceptionalism, to name the most pervasive. This relation has also been described as one between form and concept. The argument Barthes made was that myth confuses the first and the second order of signification and in so doing brings additional meanings to the literal or dictionary meaning. Values and worldviews that are in fact "contingent, historical, in one word: *fabricated*," come to appear as natural and given. In Barthes' phrasing, myth "purifies them", "makes them innocent" and "gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but a statement of fact."⁹⁶ It is easy to see how Barthes' concept of myth would have applied to a study of landscape, especially considering the invocation of a-historical nature in an American tradition; as a clean slate or a *tabula rasa* uncompromised by culture and tradition or a "nature's nation" as Perry Miller famously labeled this prime trope of self-definition.⁹⁷ Along the same lines, Novak defines the indigenous approach towards landscape in painting as one of monotheistic dedication: "The American landscape artists felt no special need to excuse their preoccupation with the landscape through the use of mythological themes. The landscape *was* the myth."⁹⁸

If landscape had founded "the iconography of nationalism" (Barbara Novak), "national icons" (Stephen Daniels), or "the iconography of nationhood" (D. W. Meinig),⁹⁹ it is also easy to see how it could be turned against itself to become a primary venue of iconoclasm and used as a point of departure for adversary and antagonistic views of the nation. A notorious example of how landscape can be advanced as a battlefield is the controversy stirred by the 1991 exhibition "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920" at the National Museum of American Art.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 129.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁹⁷ Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press; Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁹⁸ Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture*, p. 216.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15; Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery & National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 5; D. W. Meinig, "Symbolic Landscapes: Some Idealizations of American Communities" in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, p. 164-192; 164.

¹⁰⁰ "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920", the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington. For a critical discussion both of the reception and the demythologizing strategies of the exhibition, see Bryan J. Wolf, "How the West Was Hung, or, When I Hear the Word 'Culture' I Take Out My Checkbook", *American Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 3, (September, 1992), p. 418-438.

Accompanying period artifacts - notably a number of grandiose landscape paintings - with a revisionist historiography of the settlement of the West, the exhibition set out to challenge and deconstruct hegemonic myths of America's foundation. The response was hostile and the exhibition accused as tendentious, even heretic. However, the very fervor with which such landscapes are defended seems to indicate their latent instability: "The devotion to national heritage," Stephen Daniels speculates, "and the anger when it is put into question, arguably reflects uncertainties about the security of traditional, taken-for-granted, national identities and the durability and effectiveness of the cultures which have sustained them."¹⁰¹

The Instability of Landscape

The difference between landscape as text and landscape as medium, or between intertextuality and intermediality, might seem less decisive than Mitchell's polemic tone gives to hand. They share the basic notion of a culturally and socially produced meaning and a concern with symbolic assertions of power relations; of man over nature or of one nation over another, and both "conveys the inherent instability of meaning, fragmentation or absence of integrity, lack of authorial control"¹⁰² Foregrounding the process of representation rather than the text that the medium produces, Mitchell commends us to approach landscape as an agent or instrument instead of a text to decode. The shift from text to medium can also be configured in relation to a transition from structuralism to post-structuralism. The involvement with decoding and deciphering assumes that there is an empirical, external reality to which the decoder can gain access, an epistemological claim on truth that since then has become highly problematic. In his later writing, Barthes also revises the contention that the world can be demystified and that a historical reality can be recovered beneath the coded surface.¹⁰³ Here, a focus on intermedial relations, on how media overlaps, integrates and constructs additional levels of meaning in the process, allows us to go beyond such text-world, image-reality, and myth-history binaries. If landscape is neither an object to look at or a text to be read but something that acts, it is nonetheless conditioned by discussions and representations in the past, and a form of reading

¹⁰¹ Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision*, p. 3. Daniels also introduces his book with a discussion of "The West as America" exhibition, p. 1-2.

¹⁰² Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, "Introduction" in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, ed. Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 1-17; 7.

¹⁰³ Barthes would modify this claim by calling the qualitative difference between denotation and connotation into question, arguing that denotation is in fact "no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems to establish and close the reading)," *S/Z* [1970], trans. Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 9. For a discussion of Barthes continual self-revision see James S. Duncan and Nancy G. Duncan, "Ideology and Bliss: Roland Barthes and the Secret Histories of Landscape" in *Writing Worlds*, p. 18-37.

and analysis is therefore required in order to grasp these structures and networks.

Mitchell's linking of landscape to European imperialism is, however, a point that could be argued as it appears to restrict the mobility and flexibility which he otherwise underscores. Not merely a whitewashing of colonial conquest, landscape may involve all kinds of contradictory impulses. When landscape has recently been approached in disciplines other than art history, for example, applied to nineteenth-century literature by Robert E. Abrams in *Topographies of Skepticism*, to twentieth-century poetry in Bonnie Costello's *Shifting Grounds*, or to theatre in *Land/Scape/Theatre*, the focus has indeed been on its inherent flexibility and transmutability.¹⁰⁴

If specific landscapes emerge in certain historical and cultural contexts, they are also part of an aesthetic and cultural legacy that has been formed and reformed over time. This is also why I believe that a historic circumscription helps to give conceptual shape to the study, allowing us to trace continuities and transformations across a period. An approximation rather than a rigid delineation, the New Hollywood has often been bracketed by political watershed events, flanked overseas by the Song My massacre in 1968 and North Vietnam's takeover of Saigon in 1975 and internally by the presidency of Richard Nixon, coming to power in 1968, impeached and forced to resign in 1974, a backdrop prone to encourage symptomatic readings. Along with this general sense of social malaise and institutional corruption, the involvement and defeat in Vietnam, as Henry Kissinger himself proclaimed, "created doubts about American judgment, about American credibility, about American power – not only at home, but throughout the world. It has poisoned our domestic debate. So we paid an exorbitant price for the decisions that were made in good faith and for good purpose."¹⁰⁵

A noticeable work that examined how these upheavals affected traditional assumptions about the national landscape is John Hellmann's *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*. Showing how the civilizing mission of a mythologized frontier was mobilized at the outset of the conflict, Hellmann argues that when the belief in moral distinctions and valid action became increasingly frustrated, Vietnam started to transmute into the very antithesis of the cultural myth of the frontier, what he refers to as a "fallen landscape" or "an anti-frontier", leaving Nixon to preside "over a barren mythic landscape."¹⁰⁶ Though I will refrain from determining such one to one correspon-

¹⁰⁴ Robert E. Abrams, *Topographies of Skepticism: Landscape and Ideology in American Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Bonnie Costello, *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2003); *Land/Scape/Theatre*, ed. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Henry Kissinger as quoted in Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* (Frome, London: Butler & Tanner, 1983), p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 139, 150, 94.

dences between society and cinema, partly because it's been a dominant strand in studies of New Hollywood films, and one which might have over-politicized their content, an initial assumption is that the concern with American myths and media in late 1960s cinema involved the national landscape in various ways. Playing a key role in the burgeoning republic's struggle for self-definition to strengthen a sense of belonging, the landscapes that I address seem reluctant to define such final meanings or values. Instead, as James Morrison and Thomas Schur have observed of films from this period, "a sense of aimlessness emerges as a defining feature of the locale."¹⁰⁷ The irreconcilability of faith and outcome that Kissinger lamented above has frequently been addressed in accounts on the New Hollywood. Instead of seeking to heal this rift, it was consciously exploited, thereby calling into question the validity of representational traditions and the beliefs that define them. It is these accounts that the final section of the introduction discusses.

¹⁰⁷ James Morrison and Thomas Schur, *The Films of Terrence Malick* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger Publishers, 2003), p. 94.

The New Hollywood: Lost Illusions, Double Visions

I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure in the landscape – the loneliness of it – the dead feeling of winter. Something waits beneath it – the whole story doesn't show.

Andrew Wyeth, 1965¹⁰⁸

One of the paradoxes of the “second golden age” or “renaissance” of Hollywood cinema in the early 1970s is that it appeared more readily to announce an ending than a beginning. In this way, it might be described as a cinema aware of its own belatedness, a theme explicitly commented upon in several films from this period, and one which I suggest has a particular resonance in relation to landscape. There is a recurring image which seems to me emblematic in the way it merges the post-golden age condition of Hollywood cinema with the lie of the land. In the opening shot of John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) the camera pulls back from the blank white of a screen of a drive-in cinema on an overcast prairie. As the animated sound from some Western movie fades away, the zoom out gradually reveals the complete desertion of the scene. The point is emphasized in the following title sequence when the camera pauses on a sign at a rundown movie theatre reading, albeit with some missing letters, “John Wayne's *The Alamo*”. A markedly similar venue was featured in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Rain People*, also in 1969, where an immense screen is located on a barren tract of land, and Peter Bogdanovich ended his debut *Targets* (1967) with a birds-eye view of the vacuous concrete expanse of a drive-in. These recurring images of the blank screen and the empty land, isomorphic in the sense that they are both physical objects of projection, seem to prompt a sense of elegy and introspection about long-lost national fantasies.

The motif is at the centre of Bogdanovich's next film, *The Last Picture Show* (1972), where the closing of the local cinema takes on an agonizing significance. The final attraction referred to in the title is Howard Hawks' *Red River* (1948) and Bogdanovich uses the sequence where John Wayne commands the cattle drive at dawn, the camera panning the desert nearly full circle in a reverent, majestic arc that reflects the scale and anticipation of the enterprise. This citation starkly contrasts with the environment featured in *The Last Picture Show*, one where “everything is black and empty” according to one character; lengthy, static shots of streets and storefronts, pans along flat horizons and, in counterpoint to the scene inside the cinema, barren stretches of countryside edged within the black frame of a car window, suggesting not so much nostalgia for the past as for a way of imagining it on screen.

¹⁰⁸ As quoted in *The Natural Paradise: Painting in America 1800-1950*, ed. Kynaston McShine, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976), p. 119.

In *Midnight Cowboy* and *The Last Picture Show*, these obsolete movie relics evoke the founding narratives of Texas, the battle at Alamo and the blazing of the Chisholm Trail, in poignant contrast to the Texas of the films' present. This implication is elaborated further in Bogdanovich's film where a poster advertising John Ford's *Wagon Master* (1950) can be seen at the cinema, the owner of which is played by Ben Johnson, the same actor who headed the wagon train in Ford's film. In a scene set in the flatland, Johnson's character waxes about the changes wrought on the land while a pan moves along the scant, level horizon. In this way, ruminating about the land becomes a way of ruminating about classical Hollywood, both of which now exist solely in the realm of romantic recall. If an explanation of the New Hollywood finally relies on changes in audience preferences and the industry's infrastructure, my interest is to look at ways in which it fashioned itself through a self-consciousness about its past as industry and cultural legacy. Whether valorized as a significant challenge to the dominant Hollywood tradition or as a misfortunate deviation from it, a sense of unsettlement or loss has often been observed.

The title of David A. Cook's detailed survey of American cinema in the 1970s - *Lost Illusions* - refers on one hand to the belief that "a liberal, political consensus" would transform American politics, while on the other hand that a "European-style auteur cinema that prevailed briefly from 1967 to 1975" would transform American mainstream film.¹⁰⁹ From this perspective, the New Hollywood reads as a lost opportunity both for the medium and for the nation. A third meaning could, however, be figured in relation to the blank screens cited earlier, namely that Hollywood had played out its role as an agent of national consensus and, as James Morrison has noted, "of certain formerly unchallenged pleasures, or of a certain representational innocence, as illustrated in the oft-voiced exclamation of cinematic nostalgia".¹¹⁰

The unsettling tone and moral ambiguities in many films of this period, which often end on a note of defeat or disillusion, seems to suggest a shift in American self-perception. Emerging in the wake of failed political activism and the breakdown of the 1960s social movements, the invocations of a renaissance or a second golden age have also been complemented with less gratifying epithets. In a state of fatigue with the new trend of revisionist Westerns, film critic Pauline Kael complained that they only recycled the fact "that the myths we never believed in anyway were false".¹¹¹ Kael's assessment was to be seconded by a number of scholars dealing with American cinema of the 1970s; Thomas Elsaesser observed that the classic Hollywood

¹⁰⁹ David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), p. xvii.

¹¹⁰ Morrison, p. 242.

¹¹¹ As quoted by Christopher Frayling in *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl Marx to Sergio Leone* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 41.

narrative of goal and resolution had been replaced by a “pathos of failure”; Robert Kolker referred to it as a “cinema of loneliness”; Fredric Jameson glossed the term “nostalgia film”; and Noël Carroll concluded that films of the period were content with “registering a sense of loss”.¹¹²

As for the last case, Carroll’s disparaging assessment of the legacy of the New Hollywood in “The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)”, a prevalent tendency of returning to generic themes and patterns while rejecting the genre’s call for consistency and closure is reproached as it results in the somewhat schizophrenic experience of “watching two films simultaneously. There was the genre film pure and simple, and there was also the art film in the genre film”.¹¹³ To Carroll the European influence is mainly a cause of regret, and he goes on to discredit the “connoisseurship” of coteries and “collage-bred” film-buffs whose allusive and self-reflexive concerns imperiled the “organic expression” of the pure genre film.¹¹⁴ Film critic John Simon stated it even more bluntly in regard to Arthur Penn’s revisionist work in the 1970s: “He seems to be obsessed with trying to heighten genre film into art. Couldn’t he pick something easier – say, making silk purses out of sows’ ears?”¹¹⁵

The appellation ‘New Hollywood’ suggests a kinship to new waves in European cinema, Italian neorealism and the French *nouvelle vague*, as well as continuity with the classical era. The implementation of a certain measure of freedom to test and negotiate the boundaries of Hollywood conventions and the emergence of a new wave in American mainstream cinema had been recognized by the mid 1960s when a generation of TV-trained directors started to work in Hollywood, introducing stylistic devices derived both from television (swish pans, zooms), and European art film (jump cuts, sound-image mismatches) along with semi-documentary methods (handheld camera, improvisations and location shooting).¹¹⁶ These tendencies gained further sustenance by the introduction of the auteur theory in America by Andrew Sarris in the early 1960s, the circumscription of a corpus of classical

¹¹² Thomas Elsaesser, “The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 1970s. Notes on the Unmotivated Hero”, *Monogram*, no 6, (October 1975), p. 13-19, also published, slightly revised, in *The Last Great American Picture Show*, p. 279-292; Robert Philip Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* [1980] (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” [1983] in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, (New York: The New Press, 2002), p. 127-144; Noël Carroll, “The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)” [1982], *Interpreting the Moving Image* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. p. 240-264; 247.

¹¹³ Noël Carroll, 244.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 242-244.

¹¹⁵ John Simon, *Reverse Angle: A Decade of American Films* (New York: Potter, 1982), p. 250.

¹¹⁶ Henry Jenkins, “Historical Poetics” in *Approaches to Popular Film*, eds. Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich, (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 99-122; 115.

texts which accordingly could be engaged intertextually, and in the advancement of film studies as an academic discipline, all compensating what Sarris referred to as “a cultural inferiority complex about Hollywood.”¹¹⁷

The transatlantic transfusion was also manifested by the presence of European directors in Hollywood of whom Michelangelo Antonioni, John Boorman, and Roman Polanski, along with prestigious photographers like Vilmos Zsigmond, Laszlo Kovacs, Nestor Almendros and Jean Boffety, are discussed in subsequent chapters. In 1975, Thomas Elsaesser pinpointed this negotiation between American mainstream and European art. Given the commercial demands of an audience-oriented American cinema, there was little incentive for the kind of experimentation found in European cinema. Renewal instead had to be conducted from within, a process which he describes as one of “shifting and modifying traditional genres and themes, while never quite shedding their support”, pursuing “the narrow path between locating a new image of America and the need to keep in touch with the visual and emotional rhetoric of their culture”. Accordingly, “a double aspect” is emphasized; classical vs. post-classical, native vs. foreign. It could also be configured along a modern/post-modern, rather than a classical/post-classical axis, for sooner than pursuing the modernist, oppositional agenda of its European precursors, the New Hollywood was indicted for engaging in pastiche, allusion and nostalgia.

Ambiguity has become a recurring figure through which the New Hollywood has been defined. In reference to Robert Altman, Robert T. Self has observed “a persistent double vision” whereas Thomas Schatz makes the more general claim that New Hollywood filmmakers strived for a “synthesis of classical mythmaking and modernist demystification”.¹¹⁸ Pam Cook defined the New Hollywood by “the way it plays on the known conventions of past Hollywood to displace it,” while Timothy Corrigan has referred to a “generic hysteria”, and James Morrison has finally suggested that it can be understood through a “dialectical concept of mythic self-consciousness”.¹¹⁹ There is then on the one hand a nostalgic invocation of generic patterns, on the other, a lost belief in them as rituals of unification. As a consequence, these films tend to gravitate toward themes of loss, failure, nostalgia and loneliness. If critics repeatedly have recognized such dialectics, little in terms of a synthesis has been defined. Merely reversing the optimistic stance

¹¹⁷ Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962”, *Film Culture*, 27 (Winter 1962/63), p. 1-8, reprinted in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 500-17; 509.

¹¹⁸ Robert T. Self, *Robert Altman's Subliminal Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 78-79; Thomas Schatz, *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood: Ritual, Art, and Industry* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 243.

¹¹⁹ Pam Cook, “Masculinity in Crisis? Pam Cook on Tragedy and Identification in ‘Raging Bull’”, *Screen* vol. 23, no. 3/4, (Sept. – Oct. 1982), p. 39-46; 40; Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Morrison, *Passport to Hollywood*, p. 209.

of the classical era, but unable to imagine an alternative or offer a solution, the dominant assessment tends to concur with Geoff King's summation that "the diagnosis is entirely negative."¹²⁰

My contention is that landscape can be studied as a compound topos to these highly vexed issues of self-reflection, failure, loss and nostalgia. In the next section, I will deduce some approximate guidelines by way of two films by Robert Altman from the early and mid 1970s. Considered together, they actualize three of the binaries I've been addressing above: landscape and story-space, the contemplative and interpretive discourses, and the intermedial modes of transposition and allusion. They also allow a delineation of some of the core issues to be probed in forthcoming chapters.

Robert Altman and the Advantage of Environment

A central assumption of the study is that the aesthetic and ideological perspectives on landscape, and the contemplative respectively interpretive modes aligned to them, aren't mutually exclusive but need to be considered together. Formal innovation and iconoclastic themes interlace and overlap, and one begets the other. As we have seen, there has been a tendency among critics to discard disruptive techniques or stylistic reflexivity as a devaluation of the solid narrative ethos of American genre film. From V.F. Perkins' normative assertion in *Film as Film* (1972) that settings primarily function "to provide a believable environment for the action,"¹²¹ it is indicative that he would object to the first half of the 1970s as a "death of *mise-en-scène*" in American cinema.¹²² In another general outline on the role of the setting, amongst other visual conventions of American genre film, Edward Buscombe asserts that they "operate as formal elements. That is to say, the films are not 'about them' any more than a sonnet is about fourteen lines in a certain meter", and that such "outer forms" merely "provide a framework within which the story can be told."¹²³

This hierarchical relation can be compared to how Robert Altman, one of the most prolific directors of the New Hollywood, explained what first attracted him to make the Western, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971): "So everybody knows the movie, those characters and the plot, which means they're comfortable with it and gives them an anchor. And I can really deal with the background."¹²⁴ When Altman further explained that he wanted to make his western "more real", it would thus seem to involve some rather different

¹²⁰ King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p. 45.

¹²¹ V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 94.

¹²² *Movie* no. 20 (Spring 1975), group discussion "The Return of the MOVIE", p. 1-25; 6.

¹²³ Edward Buscombe, "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema" [1970] in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), p. 12-26; 16.

¹²⁴ *Altman on Altman*, ed. David Thompson, (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 60.

criteria of realism than narrative plausibility.¹²⁵ In a way, Altman's approach can be described as a reversal of the conventional relation between setting and story, the latter now providing the backdrop, or an "anchor" as Altman described it, while the setting with its atmosphere and visual textures advances as a vital subject matter on its own, in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* literally to the expanse of engulfing the characters. "We gained the advantage of environment", Altman attests, building a real town in the mountainous regions of western Vancouver under capricious conditions.¹²⁶ Yet the instant naturalism provided by the location was filtered through anti-illusionist devices; the aged look and hazy tonalities of the photography; the arbitrarily roaming camera and the evocative, overlapping soundtrack, what John Simon in his review in 1971 labeled as "audiovisual mannerisms",¹²⁷ all of which are central to the way Altman both asserts and unsettles spatial relations. Another element is the extensive use of the telephoto lens and the manner in which its steep perspective literally brings space to the foreground, distorting the illusion of depth and distance.¹²⁸ Tracking back and forth with the camera together with an excessive and unpredictable use of the zoom, Altman developed digression as a formal feature. Conveying a sense of spatial, rather than sequential, relations, the breadth and reach of the social and geographical environment spreading away on all sides is however one of which we may only catch inconclusive views.

The film opens with a moving crane shot that leads us from the North Pacific timberland into a ramshackle mining town. In *Robert Altman's America*, Helene Keyssar designates such expansive pans or tracks that leisurely scan the environs as "the assertion of Altman's signature".¹²⁹ If we turn instead to the consideration of the period made in the closing chapter of *The*

¹²⁵ *Robert Altman: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), p. 7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8. Altman has frequently voiced this disinterest with story-telling, preferring to describe his approach in terms of painting and his idea of a good movie as "taking the narrative out, taking the story out of it. The audience will sit and see the film and understand the movie's intention without being able to articulate it." Altman was allegedly willing to share the credits for *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* with his production designer Leon Ericksen: "'The town grew as the script grew,' says designer Ericksen. 'Lots of things in the town changed because of the script; lots of things in the script changed because of the way the town was built. Everything happened organically.'" *Ibid.*, p.11. The creative impact of the environment is also elaborated by Altman throughout the audio commentary to the DVD issue of *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* where he once more refers to story as an 'anchor.'

¹²⁷ Simon, p. 45.

¹²⁸ Geographer John A. Jakle has observed how the telephoto makes space "an overt thing": "The sense of spatial relationship between things is enhanced when 'telescoped' by a telephoto lens. Through such distortion spatial awareness, the sense of distance between things, is amplified. Expectations are violated, calling attention to what normally is taken for granted. Immanent contact is implied." In addition, Jakle suggest that this distortion "brings the space concept to the fore." John A. Jakle, *The Visual Elements of Landscape* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 23-24.

¹²⁹ Helene Keyssar, *Robert Altman's America* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 318.

Classical Hollywood Cinema, a very different case is made: “The New Hollywood can explore ambiguous narrational possibilities but those explorations remain within classical boundaries”, the authors assure, and in case such deviations do occur it is merely vain mannerism on the director’s part since, “any failure to motivate cinematic space and time by cause-effect logic – can be read as ‘authorial commentary.’”¹³⁰ The question such assessments incite is if narrative causality is always of sovereign interest, and if it is what one is impelled to look for and reflect upon in a film like *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, or any other of the films Altman made in the 1970s for that matter. If author intentions are considered, Altman has frequently stated his disinterest in traditional stories with a beginning, middle and end, emphasizing instead an approach closer to painting which allows the atmosphere, colors and climate to advance without the circumscription of a fixed story.¹³¹

The dominant perspective through which the film has been studied has focused on ways in which it violates the conventions of the Western genre. Several scholars have, for example, taken John Ford’s *My Darling Clementine* (1946) as a counterpoint to demonstrate how Altman undermines the way a setting leads us to expect generically determined situations and behaviors.¹³² This focus on genre-revisionism, though a relevant one, might however finally be restraining. In reference to *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, Robert T. Self argued that the prevalence of this approach indicates how mired in narrative concerns analysis of Hollywood cinema tends to be. His observation is worth quoting at some length as it pinpoints a central premise of the present study:

Such interpretations reflect the influence of classical narrative paradigms and reading strategies that subordinate film’s spatial and temporal systems to the service of the story logic. The ambiguities and gaps in the story, its representation of weak and insecure characters, its metaphorical use of song and atmosphere are all seen as the practice of the new Hollywood cinema to tell stories in innovative ways. Art-cinema narration, however, subverts the classical relationship between story and style, not to destroy story, but to activate visual and rhythmic systems as counterpoints to the story as well as supplements to it.¹³³

¹³⁰ Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 377, 374.

¹³¹ On his audio commentary to *3 Women* (1977), Altman describes how the climate and colors of the desert “dictated how that film should be shot” and comments on the interrelated concerns of setting, painting and non-story: “This film had it been done in the south side of Chicago or had it been done in a different kind of community than this isolated desert kind of non-existent place it couldn’t have worked, it would have been a different kind of film - its impressionistic ... I look at it like a painting. It’s not anything you say here is the beginning, here is the middle, here is the end, it’s an impression ... Really that is the art of film I think. I don’t think story...I should say, a story doesn’t interest me very much.”

¹³² For a comparison of the spatial layout of the gunfight in respective film, see Norman Kagan, *American Skeptic: Robert Altman’s Genre-Commentary Films* (Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1982), p. 72.

¹³³ Self, p. 92-93.

Though one can cite a number of conventions that are dismantled in the film, the opportunity for exploring visual and atmospheric qualities, and Altman's frequently professed aspiration to make his films like paintings, are equally important, if harder to define. As a contemporary reviewer observed: "rarely has the weather and the progress of the seasons been more meticulously attended to in a film *without* investing it with some symbolic or sentimental importance".¹³⁴ As a final example I'd like to cite Michael Kowalewski's perceptive comment on how the rendition of the Pacific Northwest prompts a sense of melancholy and transience that, "seems consonant more with the landscape – whether mountain vista or a muddy street filled with debris – than with an individual character. The film's sadness always seems to be larger and less focused than what might be encompassed by any one of the character's perspective."¹³⁵

One way to conceptualize Altman's analogy to painting would be to consider a long-running tradition that has been distinguished between literature and painting, going back to Gottfried Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766). Drawing on space and time as the first principles to define each art, Lessing opposed the temporal, sequential character of literature with the spatial principle of painting; what literature conveys over time, visual arts convey in a single moment.¹³⁶ Germinating from a vocation to isolate and essentialize the arts, the analogy only goes so far. Nonetheless, it indicates a way to begin considering the intermediality and interartality of the cinematic landscape. As we have seen, it tends to be described in intermedial metaphors, as lyrical and painterly or in terms of rhythm and design, as if aspiring either to a condition of extreme stasis, as a photograph or painting, or plasticity, as the unfolding of a piece of music, both analogies which have been used by Altman.

To conceive of film as painting and to look to the visual arts for a model of creative activity thus in itself incites a certain distancing. Some of Altman's stylistic choices could be considered as a move from the temporal dimension of story to the spatial dimension of painting; the consistent use of telephoto; the fragmented sound recording; and the long, fluid takes. It is an approach that, borrowing from Elinor Fuchs, "requires from the audience the 'landscape-response' appropriate to a dispersed perceptual field,"¹³⁷ a response that urges the audience to scan and feel the environment rather than to make logical deductions of action and motivation. The mountainous at-

¹³⁴ Jackson Burgess, "McCabe & Mrs. Miller", *Film Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2, (Winter 1971/72), p. 49-53; 51; see also Self, p. 93-95.

¹³⁵ Michael Kowalewski, "An Estranged Frontier: Landscape in Altman's *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*" in Engel (ed.), p. 207-224; 211.

¹³⁶ For a discussion, see "Space and Time: Lessing's *Laocoon* and the Politics of Genre" in W.J.T. Mitchell's *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* [1986] (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 95-115.

¹³⁷ Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 98.

mosphere of the film is also allusive of the imagery of nineteenth century Romanticism – for example, how the cross mounted on the church at sunrise refers back to Caspar David Friedrich’s renditions of solemn, elevated crosses in desolate winter landscapes amidst mountains and tall pines - whereas the impressionistic flecks of warm autumn colors produced by the rack focus and the way Altman and his cinematographer, Vilmos Zsigmond, singles out leaves or ice-chiseled branches evokes a painterly mode in a more general sense.

Altman returned to the Western genre with *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull’s History Lesson* (1976), as the title suggests, shifting focus from marginal characters to famous historical figures, namely William F. Cody and his Wild West Show. There is also a fundamental shift of space between the films. Altman repeatedly stresses the point that the geographical reality beyond the confines of Fort Ruth where Cody’s troupe is accommodated is as radically other to the circus arena as the historical past is from Cody’s reenactment of it, or from Cody’s “I have a better sense of history” to *Sitting Bull’s*, “History is nothing more than disrespect for the dead.” These mutually incompatible perspectives are repeatedly conveyed in the spatial disconnection between the fort and the hazy, telescoped realm of the surrounding Rockies.

Elaborating on such opposite orders, the film addresses the conversion of history into narrative and of environment into ritualized space. The showman’s surname also gives rise to a number of semiotic puns, as when referring to the Wild West show as “Cody-land” or in the declaration “we’re gonna Cody-fy the world!” This codified world doesn’t extend beyond the confines of the fort, however, and when forced to move outside it, Cody is conspicuously out of his element. The arena of the Wild West Show thus marks a palpable allegory of generic boundaries. With its orchestra, cast, props, and tableaux of scenic wilderness serving as backdrops, it is little surprise that Cody’s variety show often has been examined as the founding paradigm of the Western genre.¹³⁸ Richard Slotkin has, for example, made the following comparison: “If the Wild West was a ‘place’ rather than a ‘show,’ then its landscape was a mythic space in which past and present, fiction and reality, could co-exist; a space in which history, translated into myth, was re-enacted as ritual.”¹³⁹ Slotkin’s discussion on how history was

¹³⁸ For further reading on Buffalo Bill’s Wild West circus in relation to the Western genre and American history, see the three essays collected under the heading “Historiophoty: Buffalo Bill, the Indians, and the Western Biopic” in the anthology *Westerns: Film Through History* (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), ed. Janet Walker. For a discussion on the use of tableaux in Cody’s Wild West Show, see Christopher Kent, “Spectacular History as Ocular Discipline”, *Wide Angle*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1996, p. 1-21.

¹³⁹ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* [1992] (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), p. 69. Along similar lines, Thomas Schatz has defined the Western as a “determinate space” or, “a symbolic ‘arena’ of action; a

recreated into marketable entertainment also provides us with a historic circumscription of how space has been integrated into the fabric of story in Hollywood cinema: “The history of a movie genre is the story of the conception, elaboration, and acceptance of a special kind of space: an imagined landscape which evokes authentic places and times, but which becomes, in the end, completely identified with the fictions created about it.”¹⁴⁰

Considered together, Altman’s two Westerns encompass two modes of reflexivity, one that traces the process of myth-making, the other that attempts to reverse it, for in its attentiveness to the particularities and nuances of the environment, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* seems intent to restore an image of America’s past from the realm of symbols and clichés.

Key Topics and Chapter Outline

In conclusion, let us consider the last image of *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*. While McCabe is buried beneath a snowdrift after a gunfight, Mrs. Miller lies in a Chinese opium den fingering a ceramic jar. In a final, extreme close-up we see the jar turning against a black background. As the camera scans the patterned, red and golden textures, zooming into its icy-blue edging as if a wide, spatial expanse, this insignificant prop becomes an abstract figuration of the contrasting elements of warm interiors and frozen exteriors ventured throughout the film. As described by Altman: “I went back and forth with the zoom into her eye and into that vase and the idea was to diminish – just to take all that experience and put it inside her head so that it looked like you were looking at a planet from a spaceship.”¹⁴¹ Altman emphasizes our distance from this world, a world “you’re looking through” rather than “living in,”¹⁴² through a disorienting simultaneity of intimacy and withdrawal. This act of metonymic displacement in which the turning jar comes to resemble the orbit of a foreign planet completes the film’s descriptive approach to a world that we’re shown rather than pulled into.

The final image in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, and Altman’s remark on it, anticipates a line of dialog in a film which is paid close reading in chapter three. In Terrence Malick’s *Badlands* (1973), a teenage girl finds herself roaming the great plains of Montana with her sociopath boyfriend, commenting on their involuntary exile that, “the world was like a far away planet to which we could never return.” Rephrased into a general observation on New Hollywood cinema, James Morrison and Thomas Schur have noted, “a form of displacement emerging as a new convention of the time”.¹⁴³ The

specific iconographic locale which is visually and thematically defined through its conventionalised usage.” Schatz, p. 70.

¹⁴⁰ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 233.

¹⁴¹ Sterritt, p. 114.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁴³ Morrison and Schur, p. 62.

subsequent chapters will engage with various levels of displacements. If the characters in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and *Badlands* are displaced in an obvious, geographical sense, so are the story patterns and audience expectations they evoke. Displacement can thus also be understood as an encouragement for a different kind of imaginative activity on the spectator's behalf.

Of the key topics which I suggest could be drawn from Altman's example, the analogy to painting and the intention to make films "more real" dominates the first part of the study. The filmmakers which are considered here all brought specific concerns to Hollywood: Dennis Hopper with a background as painter and photographer, Monte Hellman from the theatre and Terrence Malick formerly a scholar and teacher of philosophy. The first two chapters are set within a parameter of abstraction and realism, primarily in relation to Hopper's *The Last Movie* and Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop*, both from 1971 and both with directors having referred to their films in terms of painting, Abstract Expressionism in Hopper's case and landscape painting in Hellman's. Michelangelo Antonioni, one of the esteemed figures of European cinema at the time and a key figure whenever landscape in feature films is discussed, is used as a reference point in both chapters to discuss influences from European art film versus native aesthetic traditions.

The close reading of *Badlands* in chapter three marks a transition from a contemporary setting to landscapes which are associated with the past. For the remainder of the study, William F. Cody's remark "nostalgia ain't what it used to be" could stand as an epigraph. The notion of 'nostalgia film' here provides a point of entry to discuss how landscape advanced as an instance of reflection and interrogation of the Western and of film noir in John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972) and Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) respectively. My argument is that nostalgia served a specific function already in the classic traditions that these films drew upon and that nostalgia film accordingly needs to be expanded from a mere retro-stylization to include rhetorical and thematical levels. The American/European exchange is also addressed, considering the Westerns of Sam Peckinpah in relation to Boorman's film and by way of a number of canonical film noir in relation to *Chinatown*.

The study is thus divided into two parts, the first dealing with American directors aspiring to make American art film, the second with already established European art film directors making films firmly grounded in a generic framework. In the former case I'm concerned with influences from European cinema but also endemic traditions in painting and photography; in the later, with the resurgence of popular myths and genre-patterns at the time. Put slightly differently: whereas a new generation of American directors distanced themselves from the studio-formula, congenially through the itinerant mode of the road movie, the two European directors under consideration located their revisionist agenda within a classical mode. Reflexivity will finally be traced to a set of practices which encourages a "landscape-

response”, or that in some manner assert its own act of mediation, whether flaunted in travelogues and tableaux, or in the entrenched presence of *mise-en-abyme*. This two-part arrangement also roughly corresponds to my initial differentiation between transposition and allusion as two modes of intermediality; however, subjects tend to be contiguous, overlap, interlock and engage with each other, and cross-references will be made between them.

Closing Remarks

My discussion of Altman finally raises a series of questions which brings us back to the issue of method. If landscape produces meaning on its own, why this need to go beyond the films themselves and include studies of reception and production and comments by the filmmakers, and if landscape allows us to downplay authorial intentions, as I have claimed, why choose two films by the same director? Why refer to paintings instead of, for example, television, a more likely influence considering Altman’s background? And why the emphasis on the first and last images of a film, which also *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* would acknowledge as moments when the hierarchy of story over setting is unsettled? In conclusion, I’d like to retrace the process behind the assumptions that came to guide the selections and mark out the parameters of the study.

From the outset, I considered the subject of landscape within an aesthetic context of painting, photography and literature, drawing from art historians, literary scholars and a canon of American Studies. As a consequence, the study has gravitated toward issues with some markedly traditional aspects about them, especially in its focus on nation and nationhood. If these are areas which landscape conventionally has been associated with, it is also a context that is liable to permeate clichéd images of American culture. Dealing with films that all in some way evoke the myth of the national landscape, the study straddles the interface of two highly amorphous entities, since nationhood as well as landscape designates tropes of self-representation in ongoing transformation rather than fixed essences.¹⁴⁴ The focus on landscape as ‘nature’, as desert, pastoral or wilderness, even in such a markedly urban universe as that of film noir discussed in the final chapter, also follows from this discourse of nationality. Distinguished by way of the uncultivated and untamed, these pristine sceneries are, of course, no less cultural than the man-made or vernacular landscape studied in cultural geography. That this national identity conspicuously coincides with a male, white Anglo-

¹⁴⁴ Christopher Ely, who has studied how the vocabulary and iconography of a national landscape was formed in nineteenth century Russia, has expressed the issue as follows: “National identity should be understood as no more than an organizing principle of cultural self-definition. It is a process, the attempt to limit and shape the collective imagination, rather than a fixed phenomenon that can be limited and defined in and of itself.” Ely, p. 14.

American identity is a matter more thoroughly addressed in the latter part of the study.

“The splitting of New Hollywood into a picaresque stream,” as Alexander Horwath observed, “and a revisionist genre strand,” is also to pursue a well trodden path.¹⁴⁵ The same goes for situating it between Classical Hollywood and European new waves, rather than exploring influences from experimental film, commercials or television. In both cases, it is an outcome of the films themselves as much as my reliance on secondary reading. Likewise, the attention given to comments made by individual filmmakers would seem to follow from a common notion of the New Hollywood as an auteur cinema. Neither succumbing to the belief in the biographical person as the single source of meaning, nor to the declaration of the “death of the author” as it has been applied in film theory, I concur to the middle position circumscribed by Tom Gunning where the author is approached as “a creature formed by the texts and their reading, as much as a creator”.¹⁴⁶ Put another way, I’m concerned with the relation between the text and statements about the text rather than the relation between a text and a biographical person. It is my claim, however, that authorship, the assertion of a personal signature or vision, has a certain pertinence in relation to landscape. By definition, a testament to an individual point of view, landscape can be advanced to convey personal themes, independence and self-expression. Such assertions will, for example, be considered in how shooting on location has been described as a determining factor of the creative process, or how certain motifs have been coded in biographical terms. My recurring references to John Ford and Monument Valley also confess to this symbiotic relation between authorship and landscape.

So what is the status and role of this kind of information? I suggest that statements by filmmakers, whether directors, photographers, producers or script-writers, can be useful in the same way as a review, that is, as something to dispute or develop, rather than as the key to a final reading. Such comments can further provide valuable clues about generally held assumptions regarding landscape. The same goes for my occasional engagement in reception studies and the process of production. Once again, I cite Gunning when describing an approach of neither “hermetically sealing these texts from the context in which they are produced and understood” nor claiming “a full history of either their production or reception,” but nonetheless acknowledging both of them as vital elements that add to what is the central object of study in the thesis, “the images and sounds coming from the screen.” Though each chapter departs from a general category or concept, or from how films previously have been grouped together, the subsequent

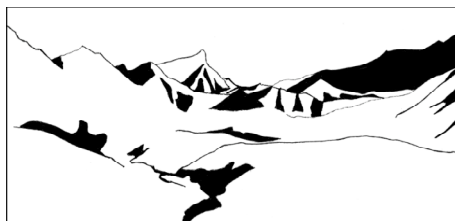
¹⁴⁵ Horwath, “A Walking Contradiction (Partly Truth and Partly Fiction)”, p. 91.

¹⁴⁶ Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 416.

analysis is in each case finally inexorably tied to the individual film under consideration.

As I have argued, engaging with landscape in feature film involves bringing something from the background to the foreground, from periphery to the centre, though more so in regard to habits of perception and previous considerations of these films than to the images themselves. This has in turn impelled two approaches; either revising prior readings which, I argue, may be limited or reductive when landscape is concerned, or attempting to expand and modify previous claims which have inspired and guided my own undertaking. I've also been concerned with identifying the issues in dialectical terms to allow for a movement back and forth between different conceptions, for example, between locations as an index of realism on the one hand and as a means for formal abstraction on the other. It is these frameworks, and the comparisons and perspectives that they have elicited, that have guided the process of choosing one film, or one sequence, before another.

Finally, the recurring emphasis on the first and last images of a film obviously relates to formal conventions. As a general rule, these are instances that synopsise the overall structure and themes of a film, in Old and New Hollywood alike. Once more, I'm not arguing for a radical break but how the impulse for return and revision, for probing and undermining tradition, incite certain ruptures and displacements. Still, this is a perspective that is liable to construct a false dichotomy between an Old and a New Hollywood, making generalizations on the former in order to bring specificity to the latter. Obviously, landscape didn't suddenly shift from static to dynamic; however, I do suggest that certain inquiries and contradictions may rise to the surface at certain times, and that landscape offers a prolific, if still mainly uncharted, area for investigating and exploring such contradictions, tensions and shifting sensibilities.



1 An Image in Place of an Image

Empty Land and the Invention of Origin in *Easy Rider*, *Zabriskie Point*, and *The Last Movie*

I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America
Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 1947¹

In 1968 while Dennis Hopper was crossing the southwest making *Easy Rider*, one of the most revered European directors was shooting a film in the deserts of California and Arizona where the two came to spend some time together.² Probably more than anyone else, it is the work of Michelangelo Antonioni that has been drawn upon whenever landscape has been discussed as an autonomous aesthetic quality in feature films. According to the Italian director, the film he was making in America was inspired by, or more precisely, the consequence of his encounter with Death Valley. “Vastness”, Antonioni stated in the spring of 1969 while in production of *Zabriskie Point* (1970), “has a great deal to do with the American character. A country of such vastness, with such distances and such horizons, could not help but be

¹ Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* [1947] in *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1-105; 17.

² Antonioni commented on *Easy Rider* in 1975: “I thought it was a sincere film. I know Dennis Hopper well. He was shooting his film not too far from me, in the desert, when I filmed *Zabriskie Point*. They lived in tents and came to see me every once in a while. Behind this story there is a real America.” Michelangelo Antonioni, *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema*, eds. Carlo di Carlo, Giorgio Tinazzi and Marga Cottino-Jones, (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996), p. 179. In Sam Rohdie’s *Michelangelo Antonioni: The Complete Films* (London: British Film Institute, 1990) it is stated that Antonioni admired Hopper’s film (p. 126), and Lee Hill finally cites Antonioni as an early champion of the film in *Easy Rider*, (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 29.

molded in its dreams, illusions, tensions, its solitude, faith, innocence, optimism and desperation, its patriotism and revolt, its dimensions.”³ Antonioni seems to subscribe to a long running tenet that has asserted a formal relation between the American mind and the scale of the continent. That American imagination should find its sustenance in the land was also apparent in a self-penned manifesto from 1965 where Dennis Hopper, by then blacklisted as a Hollywood actor for eight years, made a plea for “good old American – and that’s not to be confused with European – Art Films” which independence and originality would derive from the land: “Big old-fashioned sound stages that cost them more to run and build sets on when the whole damn country’s one big real place to utilize and film, and God’s a great gaffer. Shoot natural light! Use lightweight reflectors!”⁴

Marking the inception of the BBS, a small, independent company distributed by Columbia Pictures formed during the production of *Easy Rider* and usually considered as the vanguard of American filmmaking in the early 1970s, Hopper’s debut has often been merited for providing the template not only for the subsequent BBS films but for the New Hollywood at large.⁵ In 1972 Mitchell S. Cohen deduced a corporate style of the, by then, seven BBS productions from *Easy Rider*, arguing that cinematographer “Laszlo Kovacs’ crisp evocation of our national landscape contributed to the overall conception of environment as subject, an idea that would become a corporate motif.”⁶ Characterizing the BBS films through their explicitly indigenous subject matter, usually in spread out, episodic trajectories adept to survey the nation’s social and geographical diversity, Cohen identified an urge to reflect and comment upon “the entire idea of America”.⁷

That *Easy Rider* portrayed the conflicts and contradictions of American society was eagerly propagated by the film-makers at the time, and it also applies to two other films considered in this chapter.⁸ In 1968, Antonioni remarked that *Zabriskie Point* was “a film about America. America is the protagonist of the film. The characters are just a pretext.”⁹ On location in Peru in 1970 while making his second film, *The Last Movie*, Hopper simi-

³ Antonioni, p. 93. When interviewed in 1968, Antonioni remarked: “I decided on this story when I came to Zabriskie Point. I found that this particular place exactly what I was looking for.” Antonioni, p. 305.

⁴ Dennis Hopper, “Into the Issue of the Good Old Time Movie Versus the Good Old Time” in *Easy Rider: Screenplay*, ed. Nancy Hardin and Marilyn Schlossberg, (New York: Signet Books, New American Library, 1969), p. 7-11; 10, 8.

⁵ The film is attributed to Raybert Productions which Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson had formed the previous year, however, it was reformed into BBS during the production of *Easy Rider*. The last BBS film was Peter Davis 1974 Vietnam documentary *Hearts and Minds*.

⁶ Mitchell S. Cohen, “The Corporate Style of BBS: 7 Intricate Pieces”, *Take One*, vol. 3, no. 12, (July-August 1972), p. 19-22; 19.

⁷ Cohen, p. 20, 22.

⁸ Both Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda elaborate on the film as a statement about America in the interviews in *Easy Rider: Screenplay*, Hardin and Schlossberg (ed.)

⁹ Antonioni, p. 298.

larly announced that it was “about America and how it’s destroying itself.”¹⁰ With these stated intentions, why then move away from urban centers, in *Zabriskie Point* literally abandoning campus activism and riots in the streets, and into remote deserts, or in the case of *The Last Movie* as far as the Peruvian Andes? What could these locations possibly communicate about the volatile zeitgeist at the close of the 1960s protest and student movements? In what way were they “about America”?

The fraught relation implied in Cohen’s pairing of “environment as subject” and the “idea of America” was already announced in the poster art of *Zabriskie Point* and *Easy Rider*. Of the former, the bold letters of the title are patterned in stars and stripes against the stark background of a bare rock while a naked young couple embraces on the salt lake below. Of the latter Wyatt, alias Captain America, is portrayed in three-quarter profile overlooking a valley while the star-spangled banner on the back of his jacket dominates the foreground. The imagery confirms a ready rhetoric, a conspicuous example being Frederick Edwin Church’s rendition of an organic union of symbol and scenery in the painting, *Our Banner in the Sky* (1861), where a fiery dawn spreads in red and white streams across the sky while a patch of blue sprinkled with stars next to a bare tree serve as a flagpole.¹¹ If Church’s synthesis was a plea for unity in a war-torn nation, the poster art of *Zabriskie Point* and *Easy Rider* would seem to express a similar urge for a renewed relation, alternatively yield a dissension, between scenery and symbol, spelled out in the *Easy Rider* advertisement “A man went looking for America and couldn’t find it anywhere.”

Both films, moreover, follow a markedly similar trajectory, out of Los Angeles, into the desert and terminated by an explosion, and both involve extreme topographies, from the Colorado Plateau and Monument Valley situated 5,000 feet above the sea to New Orleans below sea level in *Easy Rider*; in *Zabriskie Point* even more so, as Antonioni remarked, “Death Valley contains both the highest and lowest point in the United States.”¹² These are also locations officially designated as signifiers of America, Monument Valley, not a national park but a Navajo Indian reserve, and Death Valley which was declared a National Monument in 1933.

¹⁰ Quoted by William Charles Siska, “Formal Reflexivity in Dennis Hopper’s *The Last Movie*”, *Modernism in the Narrative Cinema: The Art Film as a Genre* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); p. 80-100; 96.

¹¹ Church painting is on the cover of Angela Miller’s *Empire of the Eye*, though discussed rather briefly in the book. Albert Boime also discusses this painting in the first chapter of *The Unveiling of the National Icons: A Plea for Patriotic Iconoclasm in a Nationalist Era* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 24-29. See also Doreen Bolger Burke “Frederic Edwin Church and ‘The Banner of Dawn’”, *American Art Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, (Spring, 1982), p. 39-46. David A. Cook has also called attention to the use of the flag on the poster ads in *Lost Illusions*, p. 166.

¹² Antonioni, p. 308. The ancient lakebed below *Zabriskie Point* is the lowest point on the North American continent while Mount Whitney is the highest. The quote is originally in italics.

Considering that “landscape” originally designated the cultivated scenes of Dutch painting, the prospect of an American landscape would initially have appeared as an oxymoron. In *L'invention de la scène américain*, Jean Mottet recounts how the creation of a national landscape preoccupied artists and industries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To distinguish itself from European models, certain aspects were emphasized; a more expansive sense of scale, mobility rather than stability, an effect of hallucinatory presence, and foremost, by shunning literary and historical subjects for the benefit of the immediate environment.¹³ The invention that the title of Mottet's book refers to is thus an invention of an origin, or put another way, origin as the making of an image. It seems consistent then that it eventually would be the desert, the Great Plains and the prairies, biotopes apparently irreconcilable with the aesthetic categories developed in Europe and the mercantile values of ownership and cultivation once celebrated in Dutch painting, which would be defined as the national archetype. Not estate, history or ornament, but a primal condition of emptiness, the desert is, of course, also the place of mirages. It is further significant that the trope of the *tabula rasa* that was applied to the territories of the new continent referred to a slate or tablet for making inscriptions and images, or to a screen for projection, rather than to land in any geographic or historic sense. Once again, this metaphor implies that the freedom of the New World was the freedom to invent an image.

I'm paraphrasing here literary critic, Joseph Riddel, who stated that the vocation to “make it new” in American literature “means to repeat the moment of some pure origin” and the key role that he allocates to space in this renewal, disrupting and displacing tradition, “projecting new fields, not recuperating old ones.”¹⁴ The compulsive recycling of images from the past thus confesses to a desire to “re-enact” their making” rather than nostalgia.¹⁵ “The ‘project’ of an ‘American’ poetics,” Riddel concludes, “has been to invent a machine of its own origins ... not as that which has been lost and can be recuperated, but as that which has been invented as a pure fiction so that it can be destroyed, or deconstructed, in the ‘beginning again.’”¹⁶ Not attempting to follow Riddel's essay in any detail, it is this paradox of destroying and inventing origin, or of making “an image in place of an image”, which will be discussed in the first chapter.¹⁷

¹³ I'm referring here to the first part of the book, “L'émergence de la scène américaine”, p. 13-43.

¹⁴ Joseph Riddel, “Decentering the Image: The ‘Project’ of ‘American’ Poetics?” in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 322-358; 323, 354.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

¹⁷ The title of the chapter, “an image in place of an image”, derives from the Gospel of St. Thomas, another key influence stressed by Hopper. Though the eschatological and iconoclastic themes of the Gospel could be related to the reading I make, I'm using it merely as a figure

Below, I examine how *Easy Rider*, *Zabriskie Point* and *The Last Movie* engage two apparently incompatible versions of empty land as the scene of origin; on the one hand as the popular mythology of the frontier, on the other as a modernist aspiration for abstraction. Following the practices of decoding and purification that was counterpoised by W.J.T. Mitchell in the introduction, this conflict between the land as media icon and as an opportunity for emptying out literal content will be considered in relation to dominant modes of postwar art in America. Though one would be in a difficult situation trying to unravel the influences listed by Hopper, his professed aim to assimilate principles from Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art will serve as a context to discuss this oscillation between nature as primordial energy and pre-coded image.

It is a conflict that can be traced back to what has been considered as a seminal source of the Abstract Expressionist movement, Clement Greenberg's essay, "Avant-garde and Kitsch". The paired opposites in the title of Greenberg's essay is on the one hand the synthetic products of a commercial urban mass-culture, and on the other an abstract art guided by a principle of purity, "creating something valid in its own terms, in the way nature is itself valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid; something given, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals."¹⁸ I suggest that the tension between the "landscape" and "its picture" in Greenberg's statement is also at issue in these films. However, notions about landscape not only seem to migrate effortlessly from one medium to another, but also through the stratification of the popular and the highbrow. If the schism between country and city, the desert and Los Angeles, is readily observable in Hopper's debut as well as *Zabriskie Point*, I argue that the representation of the desert itself is rife with contradictions in these films.

for a strategy of replacing one image of the land with another. On his audio commentary to the *Easy Rider* DVD, Hopper recites this passage during the sequence in the New Orleans cemetery, and Dan E. Burns has argued that the gospel "provides a master plan for Hopper's film-a blueprint" in "Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie*: Beginning of the End", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 2, (1979), p. 137-147; 140. Burns writes that the Gospel presents an imagery of "paired opposites which are metaphorically identified with each other and with everything else. This scheme is congruent with Hopper's tendency to view the real world through 'dialectic logic' (to use his own term)". While Hopper was filming in Peru, his companion on the road in *Easy Rider*, who also appeared in a brief cameo in *The Last Movie*, was making his own directorial debut with the low-key Western *The Hired Hand* (Peter Fonda, 1971). It is noteworthy that the film features extensive sequences of landscape montages though, possibly as an intended differentiation from Hopper's direct cuts in *Easy Rider*, rendered in extremely slow, multiple dissolves. Most likely influenced by Hopper, Fonda has Warren Oates recite a passage from *The Gospel of St. Thomas* during a burial, apparently unaware of the anachronism since the Gospel wasn't found until 1945.

¹⁸ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch", *Partisan Review* 6 (Fall, 1939), p. 34-49, as quoted in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, ed. David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 17.

Travelogues: Dennis Hopper and the American Art Film

In movies about Dodge City, they always put in big mountains but there aren't any. Just endless wheat fields, this fantastic flat horizon line, incredible electric storms, sunsets like the northern lights. Every Saturday, I'd walk from the farm into town with my grandmother, who had her apron full of fresh eggs. We'd sell them and use the money to see whatever picture was playing: Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Smiley Burnette. Then all next week I'd live that picture ... Like Thomas Wolf wanting to see where the trains were going to. I wanted to see where the movies were coming from ... seeing real mountains and real ocean for the first time. Wow, what a bring down! The mountains in my head were much bigger than the Rockies. The Pacific was the horizon line in my wheat field.

Dennis Hopper, 1969¹⁹

Browsing through the writings, interviews and films of Dennis Hopper, one is likely to encounter this reminiscence of the flat plains and Saturday matinees in Kansas in various guises; the stuntman he plays in *The Last Movie*, aptly named Kansas, gives an almost word for word rendition of it, and Hopper's preface to a collection of his photographs from the 1960s fragmentarily describes growing up on a farm, observing natural phenomena, studying the sun and rain, living the pictures he had seen and the letdown of seeing actual mountains.²⁰ We may also note how this self-fashioned mythopoeia gives equal credence to low and high, referring to three of the 'singing cowboys,' the least renowned branch of the Western genre, and to marveling before the elements unleashed in the heartland.

I begin by considering two retrospective accounts of *Easy Rider*. If the sequences of scenic roadside photography were acknowledged as a stylistic hallmark of the film, they have also been a focus of critical attention, either for their lack of narrative function or for their patriotic flavor.²¹ Contrary to Cohen's appraisal of how *Easy Rider* formalized the thematic and stylistic identity of the subsequent BBS productions, Chris Hugo's "*Easy Rider* and Hollywood in the '70s" used it to exemplify a contrived style that he considered symptomatic for the confused agenda of American cinema during this period.²² This mannerism is particularly noticeable in the film's arbitrary shots of roadside scenery, dismissed simply as "a technical solution to the

¹⁹ Hopper, "Will Easy Do it for Dennis Hopper?", interviewed by Tom Burke in *Easy Rider: Screenplay*, p. 12-18; 13.

²⁰ *Dennis Hopper: Out of the Sixties*, Dennis Hopper, Michael McClure and Walter Hopps, (Pasadena, California: Twelvvetrees Press, 1986).

²¹ Allegedly it was also mainly these montages, including a sequence that juxtaposed signs and billboards in Los Angeles, that were edited out from Hopper's original rough-cut lasting somewhere between three and four hours, see Hill, p. 26-27, 42, and *Easy Rider: Shaking the Cage* (Charles Kiselyak, 1999).

²² Chris Hugo, "Easy Rider and Hollywood in the '70s", *Movie* no. 31/32, (Winter 1986), p. 67-71.

problem of not having a very interesting story to tell.”²³ Though I don’t intend to challenge Hugo’s assessment of the film as weakly plotted and acted, I do argue that his warrant for narrative content, literal statements and a concerted social critique is to read it according to a criterion that relegates the setting as a function of narration, whereas the film itself seems little concerned with character motivation, psychological development and intricate plot structure, but more so with the images it is making.

The other common critical objection has focused on the symbolic construction of landscape in the film, most thoroughly argued by Barbara Klinger in “The Road to Dystopia. Landscaping the Nation in *Easy Rider*” where the gratifying depiction of the countryside is addressed as a politically unconscious level of the film.²⁴ Klinger argues that the blend of pans, sun flares and traveling point-of-view shots conforms to the “ultra-photogenic aesthetic” of *National Geographic*. Reproducing an affirmative vision of the continuity of American myths of spiritual and territorial expansion, the travelogues validate “the enduring presence of the historical past and the ideals of patriotism through what amounts to a transcendental view of America”.²⁵ Rather than criticizing dominant values, Hopper’s film disguises an essentially conformist agenda under the banner of counterculture alienation and an experimental aesthetics emulated from new wave cinemas. The argument that the visual splendor of the travelogues obscured the film’s social critique was made in two articles by Stephen Farber following its U.S. premiere where he reproached Hopper for being “startlingly sentimental” about “the myth of Western freedom” while oblivious of the origin and consequences of this mythology.²⁶ Like Klinger, Farber finds the film’s invocation of “the freedom of the open road, the magical power of the unpolluted land, the journey away from civilization as a regenerative experience” as incongruent with its alleged radicalism.²⁷

²³ Ibid., p. 71. Lee Hill’s closing account of the film similarly regrets the lack of elaborate dialogue and social commentary, along with the sketched, stereotypic characters, at the benefit of the protracted sequences of traveling shots as a major shortcoming of the film, Hill, p. 54-55.

²⁴ Barbara Klinger, “The Road to Dystopia. Landscaping the Nation in *Easy Rider*” in *The Road Movie Book*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 179-203. Klinger adopts the term ‘travelogues’ used by some contemporary reviewers, and though she does so to enforce the tourist discourse within which she locates the film, it also emphasizes the autonomous quality of these sequences. More recent examinations of *Easy Rider* have likewise argued that the film updates and naturalizes a populist conception about the West as America, see for example David Ingram p. 145-146, and Elaine M. Bapis, “Easy Rider (1969): Landscaping the Modern Western”, p. 157-181 in Carmichael (ed.).

²⁵ Klinger, p. 191-2.

²⁶ Stephen Farber, “End of the Road?”, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2, (Winter 1969-1970), p. 3-16; 8.

²⁷ Stephen Farber, “Easy Pieces”, *Sight and Sound. International Film Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3, (Summer 1971), p. 128-131; 128.

The readiness with which the travelogues are deemed either as evasive or regressive due to their lack of narrative or critical agency relate more generally to how landscape in cinema tends to be assessed. Instead, I suggest that the most prominent aspect of the travelogues is how they render the technology of the medium as an indissoluble quality of the landscape. Following the credits, there is a scene that serves as a kind of preamble to the journey in a brief associative montage where Wyatt explores the surrounds of their first night's camp. After studying sunlight flickering through the missing slats in the roof of a broken-down barn there are images of him fingering some snares of tangled wires, followed by the shadows cast by brushwood on the ground and then the branches and weeds themselves moving in the morning breeze. Beyond linking the protagonist's flight from the city with artifacts being recycled into the ground (a sheet of rusted tin, a broken shed, an automobile wreck, a paperback novel), these images are also suggestive of cinema's own processes of signification; the light rays bursting into darkened interiors, the shadows moving on the flat surface of the desert floor and their referents moved by the wind. There is a similar, if considerably more elaborate, sequence early in *The Last Movie* which is discussed later.

The upcoming travel montage goes through pine forest and rolling hill country with the bikers showered in prisms of solar flares breaking in the lens. Pushing the limiting edges of the frame by combining the contrary motions of simultaneous tracking shots and zoom outs, there is an optical illusion of lateral expansion across the screen. Though the elaborate long-lens and rack-focus cinematography is partly intended to simulate a drug induced perception, the pull-and-push effect achieved by the combined zoom and tracking shot moving in opposite directions occurs so frequently that it attracts attention to itself as a stylistic feature. Simulating immersion while at the same time flaunting the technology that produces this illusion, it is also significant that the lens and focus alterations are devices internal to the camera. So are the flares, not visible to the eye but a result of the dispersion of radiant energy when passed through the prism of the lens. This affirmative synthesis of nature and technology is most striking as the bikers venture through the multihued mountain slopes of the Painted Desert and into Monument Valley.

As the journey descends from the high country the inspiration swiftly wanes. In the two concluding travelogues the vertical drama flattens out and an industrialized environment of oil refineries, smokestacks and road constructions encroaches while the editing becomes increasingly jumbled. The erratic back-cutting repeatedly reverses their direction and pushes them backwards. This tendency toward breakdown culminates in the notorious acid-trip sequence in a New Orleans graveyard. In contrast to the southwest panoramas, the footage is in murky 16mm with obscure close-ups of light flickering in inky pools and bare trees sprawling against a fiery sun. Whereas sunlight previously produced pulsating, multi-colored prisms, it now repeat-

edly floods and dissolves the emulsion into a blinding white. Finally, rain-water not only stains the lens but also causes disfigurements on the film stock, which happened while changing cartridges during shooting. The amalgamation of nature and medium that we've observed in the travelogues, initially energized with prismatic effects, disintegrating toward the end of the journey, would seem to imply that one can't be separated from the other.

As Klinger observes, *Easy Rider* isn't "simply a counter-nationalistic film" but rather one that is "caught between two languages."²⁸ However, when she refers to the iconoclasm of 1960s Pop Art as a radical alternative to the film's reverential treatment of the open road, she unwittingly broaches the art scene which Hopper was involved in. Starting out as a painter in the vein of Abstract Expressionism but turning to photography after a fire allegedly consumed three hundred of his canvases in 1961, Hopper began to buy the work of then little-known artists such as Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol in what became one of the pioneering collections of Pop Art.²⁹ Then again, Hopper's commitment to these traditions seems primarily to be spurred by a nationalistic credo: "We had painted landscapes like the Europeans before that, but then suddenly with Abstract Expressionism we had an art form of our own where we used paint as paint" Hopper has commented, and regarding the advance of Pop Art, "we had another art form which was totally American."³⁰ As is evident in Hopper's 1965 treatise, cinema would be the American art to precede them both: "Our grandfathers and fathers made it what it is today, they invented it. Can we sustain it? Because we've lost it. Can we fill the movie-gap? And take back our invention? And surpass the Europeans?"³¹

Similar to the conflicting languages of patriotism and revisionism scrutinized by Klinger, the critical assessments of Abstract Expressionism as well as Pop Art has either referred to them as radical and revisionist or as populist and pro-American. Before considering these traditions in more detail, a brief survey of the various landscapes charted in *Zabriskie Point* demonstrates how the desert can be turned into a battleground of conflicting modes of representation. In this context, it is also noteworthy that Antonioni has been associated with Abstract Expressionist painting.³² If not as an immediate

²⁸ Klinger, p. 183, 199.

²⁹ Biographical notes are drawn from *Dennis Hopper (A Keen Eye): Artist, Photographer, Filmmaker*, Rudi Fuchs and Jan Hein Sassen, (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam: NAI Publishers Rotterdam, 2001).

³⁰ George Hickenlooper, "Dennis Hopper: Art, Acting and the Suicide Chair" in *Reel Conversations: Candid Interviews with Film's Foremost Directors and Critics* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Carol Publ., 1991), p. 63-75; 67.

³¹ Hopper, "Into the Issue of the Good Old Time Movie Versus the Good Old Time", p. 11.

³² Angela Dalle Vacche has discussed the influence of Abstract Expressionism, and also briefly Pop Art, on *Il deserto rosso* in "Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*: Painting as Ventriloquism and Color as Movement", *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), p. 43-80. See also Matthew Gandy's two essays "Landscapes of Deliquescence in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*", *Transactions of the Institute of*

influence, we can understand it here within the more general framework of a modernist teleology toward essence and purification.

Discovery and Destruction in *Zabriskie Point*

The first part of *Zabriskie Point* contains several montage sequences driving through downtown Los Angeles where the urban environment appears as a vast display of graphic art. A privileged motif in these montages of brand-name logos, billboards and painted murals is a rural iconography of cattle ranching and agriculture where the countryside is presented in terms of economic enterprise, consumption and leisure culture, most obvious in a scene where a group of land developers, all of them old, establishment figures, watch a TV-advertisement for a housing project in the desert. The Los Angeles section, roughly one-third of the film, culminates with aerial views of urban sprawl and looping freeways against the curve of the earth, bringing us to the stark geology of the desert that is the main setting of the film.

Fleeing Los Angeles, Mark and Daria, a frustrated dropout from the student movement and a flower-child dressed in Native American beads and garments, representative of the militant and the pastoral fractions of the counter-culture, cross tracks in the Mojave Desert and venture together to the brink of Death Valley. Arriving at the outlook of Zabriskie Point with the parched ridges spreading beneath them, Daria reads from a plaque in the foreground. Describing the geological origin of the site, the text is complemented with a graphic logo of the dry riverbed zigzagging between pointed peaks. Jumping off the promontory, they start to explore the wrinkled and ribbed formations, climaxing in Daria's hallucinatory vision where the valley fills up with embracing lovers. As this fantasy draws to a close, there is a high-angle shot reminiscent of the emblem on the plaque, now with young bodies strewn over the mud-hills. In the aftermath of Daria's vision, a trailer arrives at the outlook and a tourist couple step out to take in the view. A close-up traverses a number of decals plastered on the side-window where Arizona is signified by a cactus before three cone-shaped peaks, Utah by the Delicate Arch, Colorado and Oklahoma merely with the state name and a pin-up girl. Among them there is also one with the slogan, "Discover America".

After parting ways, Daria arrives at a luxurious desert resort where a real estate attorney confers with potential investors. This is also the location of Daria's second 'vision' after she finds out that Mark has been killed by the

British Geographers, vol. 19, no. 2 (2003), p. 218-237, and "The Cinematic Void" in *Landscape and Film*. The Italian director talks about his admiration for Pollock's use of color in Antonioni, p. 204. When visiting Mark Rothko in his New York studio, Antonioni also famously remarked: "Your paintings are like my films – they're about nothing...with precision." Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni: or, the Surface of the World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985), p. 54.

police while returning to Los Angeles. Preceding Daria's vision of the ranch house repeatedly exploding, there is a close up of a copy of *National Geographic* left fingered by the wind. Similar to the way the parched ridges and streambeds became fluid during the orgy, the visual frenzy of the explosion shatters consumer goods of plastic, glass and metal into a liquid, gravity-defying space. The film ends with her driving off towards the sunset.

On the one hand, landscape is featured on the billboards and murals, the Sunny Dunes TV-advertisement with plastic dolls in a synthetic desert, the decals with various states as pop logos, and the plaque at the outlook of Zabriskie Point. On the other, there is the austere purity of the desert. If the Los Angeles montages flaunt a host of motifs endorsed by Pop Art at the time, Antonioni's treatment of the textures and tones of the mineral formations might instead recall the abstract formalist aesthetics of Edward Weston's photographs of Death Valley or Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings of the Southwest, not least in their analogies between the desert and the female body. Technicolor and Panavision further amplify this anthropomorphism in *Zabriskie Point*, beginning with their voices resounding between the walls and slopes and continuing with the bodies getting covered with dust. Merging with the smooth shapes and fleshy earth tones, primordial geology and youth rebellion unite at the lowest point on the North American continent, realizing Daria's urge for "a whole new scene."

"If one is instinctively brought to make common cause with America's youth," Antonioni professed, "perhaps it is because one is attracted by their natural animal vitality."³³ Consonant with this equation of natural and counter-cultural energies, Colin MacCabe called attention to how Antonioni, "taints the opening heated discussion by students with a yellow that moves into red," and that not until the last shot when Daria "mentally exploded 'civilization' does the film move up to the sun and bring back its opening color."³⁴ In fact, the closing image that MacCabe refers to has been anticipated by a billboard in Los Angeles with the logo, 'Bank of America', printed over the glossy picture of a sun setting behind a mountain range.

The film invites a rather forthright reading. In Daria's two visions, youth rebellion is canalized as if a force immanent in the land. Or the other way around, the literal deconstruction performed in Death Valley and the anthropomorphic play of form and color indicates that the desert has been animated by the same subversive, emancipating energies that impel the counter-culture. Probably no other film from the period utilizes antithetic settings as polemically as *Zabriskie Point*, taking landscape to the extreme in opposite directions. The conflicting imagery links a modernist concern with formal abstraction to a counterculture rebellion against corporate capitalism engag-

³³ Antonioni, p. 97.

³⁴ Colin MacCabe, "Filmosophy: Colour" in *New Scholarship from BFI Research*, ed. Colin MacCabe and Duncan Petrie, (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 86-110; 101.

ing in the ultimate profanity: turning the desert into commodity. In *Death Valley*, aesthetic and political catharses coalesce.

The oppositions that we have observed in Antonioni's film have a marked resonance with the contrasting subject matter of Abstract Expressionist and Pop Art. When landscape is considered, they are poles apart, as different from one another as Jackson Pollock's, "I am nature", is from Warhol's, "I want to be a machine."³⁵ Whereas the first statement expresses the belief in the medium, the canvas and paint, as nature in the way Greenberg had urged, Pop Art insisted on their disconnection. By no means intended as an exhaustive survey, Abstract Expressionist and Pop Art will here be considered in relation to the contradictions that riddle empty land as the site of national origins in *Easy Rider* and *Zabriskie Point*.

Continental Visions, Unobtainable Dreams

A longstanding claim made of Abstract Expressionism has maintained that it resumed the venerable pursuit for creating an art native to the American land. As such, it would seem a key expositor of how "the history of landscape painting", in W.J.T. Mitchell's words, has been described "as a quest for a pure painting, freed of all literary concerns and representation."³⁶ The paintings were commonly described as organic, gutsy and earthy, and the process of their making as a vocation to "distill" and "intensify" elemental energies.³⁷ In this way artistic activity and natural processes, or pantheism and "paint-theism" in art critic Robert Rosenblum's terms, became interchangeable concepts.³⁸ The contention about the non-representational school of New York painters as the heirs of a Romantic landscape tradition would

³⁵ Francis V. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), p. 26; Gene Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Answers From 8 Painters", *Art News* 62, (Nov. 1963), p. 26.

³⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," p. 13.

³⁷ John Ireland Howe Baur, *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 6, 9, 10. See also *American Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s: An Illustrated Survey with Artists' Statements, Artwork, and Biographies*, ed. Marika Herskovic, (New Jersey: New York School Press, 2003).

³⁸ Robert Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime" [1961] in *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970*, ed. Henry Geldzahler, (New York: Pall Mall Press, 1969), p. 350-359; 358. Rosenblum was one of the champions of claiming the Romantic heritage of Abstract Expressionism, beginning with his 1961 article "The Abstract Sublime", elaborated to book length in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), and culminating with his contribution to the exhibition *The Natural Paradise* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York the following year. Barbara Novak has also associated Abstract Expressionism with nineteenth-century landscape painting in "its flirtation with the idea of a grand style – in which the idea of abstraction is now substituted for the idea of nature – is the locus of a similar struggle between indigenous ambitions and European conventions." Novak, *Nature and Culture*, p. 26.

culminate with the exhibition, *The Natural Paradise*, in 1976. Celebrating the bicentenary of USA, paintings by Cole, Church and Bierstadt were here put side by side with those of Pollock, Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko. Employing nature as a unifying concept to accommodate such diverse expressions as the frenzied patterns of Pollock's action paintings and the meditative, contemplative effect sought by color-field painters such as Rothko and Still, a Romantic attraction to primeval nature merged with a modernist concern with the process and material of painting – the lavish use of paint, the attention to surface qualities, the harnessing of drips and stains that exposed the grain of the canvas in what was termed gestural painting.

Assuming such a causal relation between imagination and environment, artist and art critic, Dore Ashton, argued that “the American affection for what is both literally and figuratively vast can be interpreted on a simple geographical basis. Americans have long been wilderness painters, impressed by America's continental breadth.”³⁹ Ashton went on to clarify this distinction: “In the purely environmental sense, it is understandable that Europeans rarely have felt the need to align themselves with vast nature. Their transcendental paintings remain within a normal format usually since they don't have the continental vision behind them reminding them of overwhelming physical reality.”⁴⁰ More recently, Australian art critic Robert Hughes has analogized Pollock's action-painting to “the epic space which nineteenth-century artists had found in American landscape: they are expansive, full of wind and weather,” and the color-field paintings of Still with “a heroic and entirely American conception of space: that of nineteenth-century Big Sky landscape, Church and Bierstadt brought forward into a modernist idiom.”⁴¹ Ashton and Hughes both invoke the Grand Style of American landscape painting and its use of wide, panoramic formats to equal the scope and magnitude of spaces in the New World, a tradition which Rosenblum repeatedly has referred to as “travelogues.”⁴²

The love scene in *Zabriskie Point* and the travelogues in *Easy Rider* both seem to confirm this sense of the land less as identifiable geography than as

³⁹ Dore Ashton, *The Unknown Shore: A View of Contemporary Art* (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown Books, 1962), p. 213.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁴¹ Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 486, 492.

⁴² See Rosenblum, “The Abstract Sublime”, p. 358; *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*, p. 68; and *On Modern American Art*, p. 299. In this context, it is indicative that historical epics of westward migration has excelled in foregrounding landscapes through various widescreen designs, from the 70mm Grandeur format used for Raoul Walsh *The Big Trail* in 1930 to the Cinerama spectacle of *How the West Was Won* (Henry Hathaway, John Ford, George Marshall) in 1962, the latter a technique originally intended for travelogues. For a discussion see John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 89-92, and Sheldon Hall, “How the West Was Won: History, Spectacle and the American Mountains” in *The Movie Book of Western*, ed. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye, (London: Studio Vista, 1996), p. 255-261.

expansionary energy, kinetics and momentum. In the former, the encounter with Death Valley incites a removal and paring away of accumulated imagery; in the latter, abstract techniques and effects are noticeable in the compulsion to magnify and squeeze out visual space, in the spontaneous look of Kovacs' photography with casual focus alternations and what Cohen referred to as "a feeling of randomness in its scene selection".⁴³ The conspicuous camera work of combined pans, tilts and traveling shots, the fragmentary succession of images, and especially the harnessing of accidents like the flecks and swirls of sun flares and the damaged filmstrip of the cemetery sequence, further elicit analogies to the brushwork of gestural painting. There is also a tendency to isolate motifs that lend themselves to abstract compositions, spaces bound by sharp angles like the steel grids of bridges, or by letting a singular element fill the screen, as in the recurring close-ups of the sun, zooming into green vegetation or light reflecting on water. At the same time, both films relentlessly draw from the commercial and industrial environment as a resource of pre-existing imagery, singling out street iconography and objects in saturated colors, bright colored silos, road signs and corporate logos. It is especially striking during Mark's navigation through downtown Los Angeles in *Zabriskie Point* which is a veritable tour through the commercial semantics of Pop Art.

Fixed on images of mass taste and techniques of mass production, Pop Art turned the commitment to purity and artistic originality of Abstract Expressionism on its head. If artists like Lichtenstein, Oldenburg and Warhol prior to adopting the label Pop Art had been referred to as "The New Realists", realism came to appear as an ill-considered criterion for their overt concern with mediated material.⁴⁴ In an often cited distinction made by Lawrence Alloway, realism is "concerned with the artist's perception of objects in space and their translation into iconic, or faithful, signs" whereas "Pop Art deals with material that already exists as signs: photographs, brand goods, comics, that is to say, with pre-coded material."⁴⁵ Nature thus appeared to be of no relevance for the Pop Artists, and if landscape was utilized as a motif it was treated with detached irony, as in Lichtenstein's pixel sunsets or Warhol's 1962 *Do It Yourself (Landscape)* which featured the countryside as a

⁴³ Cohen, p. 21.

⁴⁴ The term was initially drawn from a contemporaneous trend in France referred to as *le nouveau réalisme* and established in an exhibition held at Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1962 featuring artists like Lichtenstein, Oldenburg and Warhol under the label "The New Realists." For a discussion of the critical debates surrounding Pop Art in relation to the issues of realism, nature and culture, see "Social Critics", Sylvia Harrison, *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Modernism* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 37-111.

⁴⁵ Lawrence Alloway, "Popular Culture and Pop Art" [1969] in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 167-174; 170.

serially produced painting-by-numbers picture.⁴⁶ As defined in hindsight by Roland Barthes, Pop Art “accepts being an *imagery*, a collection of reflections, constituted by the banal reverberation of the American environment”, and as such seems to cancel the nature/culture dichotomy all together, for, as Barthes puts it, “fact, in mass culture, is no longer an element of the natural world”.⁴⁷

Accordingly, Pop Art might be characterized through a straightforward reversal of Abstract Expressionism; imitation instead of originality; appearance instead of experience; the commonplace instead of the sublime. Pop Art’s endorsement of standardization and mechanization seemed destined to terminate the notion that artistic integrity derived from some intuitive alignment with primal energies, as if the moral function of art had disappeared along with the artists’ connection to the land. However, this blunt acceptance of what the Abstract Expressionists heroically resisted has also been understood as a symptom of disillusion and despair that would confess to an elegiac streak in Pop Art. Barbara Rose, for example, pointed in this direction in an article from 1963 when writing that an obsession with signifiers of ‘America’ that reduces consumer goods and the national flag to the same leveled status ultimately “illustrate a longing for and recognize the betrayal of that unobtainable dream.”⁴⁸

The American flag, the archetypal Pop Art motif initiated by Jasper Johns in the mid 1950s, is omnipresent in *Easy Rider*, stitched on the back of Wyatt’s jacket, sprayed on his gas tank and helmet, but also singled out in nearly every environment encountered along the road, sometimes filling the frame, other times glimpsed in the margins. A reduction of signifiers of America along the lines of Rose’s remark above is suggested in a scene at a service station in Arizona. A pan moves from majestic snowcapped ridges across two signs, the first with the logo of a petrol company, the second reading “Sacred Mountain” like a brand name on the station, both in red capital letters, while the saturated red and blue gas pumps against the white-chalked wall of the station evokes the national flag. A basic idea drawn from Pop Art is thus how stock iconography of the West - the landscape, horses, Billy’s buckskin outfit - is utilized while at the same time separated from its original moral significance. In the street parades encountered in New Mexico

⁴⁶ Particularly Roy Lichtenstein has been preoccupied with landscape, from images inspired by Native American art in the 1950s to his “Landscapes in Chinese Style”-series in the 1990s.

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, “That Old Thing, Art...”, [1980] in Madoff (ed.), p. 370-374; 370, 372. In hindsight the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art in the late 1950s, early 1960s has often been elaborated upon as a shift from modernism to postmodernism. For a discussion on how American critics adopted post-modern theory as a response to the Pop Art scene in New York, see Harrison.

⁴⁸“Rosenquist’s billboard fantasies, Lichtenstein’s cartoons, Robert Indiana’s pinball machines, Wesselmann’s nostalgic collages, Rauschenberg’s coke bottles and John’s American flags and maps illustrate a longing for and recognize the betrayal of that unobtainable dream.” Barbara Rose, “Dada, Then and Now” [1963] in Madoff (ed.), p. 57-64; 59.

and at Mardi Gras, history itself is reduced to a procession of pop icons: the Mayflower, the Indians and the military flaunted along with repeated full screen images of the flag. A similar treatment is given to Monument Valley. Displayed in a series of shots that magnify and isolate the pointed rocks, silhouetted mesas and flat plateaux encircled with aureoles, the bikers' sunset entry into the valley culminates with a reverently paced pan from the scenic outlook at Inspiration Point. Moving over the mesa-sculptured skyline, the sky shifts from intense purple to deep blue while the wind on the soundtrack reinforces the epic dimension of the setting. To use Maurizia Natali's, in this context, apt characterization of Monument Valley, its appearance is that of a "readymade."⁴⁹

In Antonioni's account of how vastness had made America into a nation molded in its own visions, or in Hopper's of the Kansas wheat fields sufficiently vast for the imagination to thrive, the distinguishing feature of the American landscape seems paradoxically to be its lack of geographic specificity and local identity. *Easy Rider* "breathes the space of the American highway and landscape; it is leisurely 'spaced out,'" Paul Warshow wrote when reviewing the film.⁵⁰ Space is thus recast from noun to verb, similar to how Joseph Riddel in his circumscription of an American poetics described space as an act of displacing, disrupting and suspending "the semantic depth of the sign."⁵¹ In *Zabriskie Point*, this instrumental function is one of distilling, extracting, and stripping away, the *National Geographic* magazine serving as a final shorthand for the commoditization of the land before the explosion. This urge to do away with referential function is even spelled out by Daria and Mark in the paradoxical slogan, "No Words", that they paint on the plane in the desert. As a leap into abstraction and a means to make a claim for a new beginning, space incites a political as well as an aesthetical act of resistance in Antonioni's film. However, whereas commodity culture can be confronted and dismantled in *Zabriskie Point*, something posterior to the real desert and thus something that can be cleansed away, the desert encountered in *Easy Rider* appears already as a Pop icon. The cameo appearance of Monument Valley occasions a discussion of empty land in its popular context; that is, as an *imagery* rather than a *vision*, though there is a remarkable resemblance between the infatuation with emptiness shared in popular fiction and fine arts.

⁴⁹ Natali, p. 107.

⁵⁰ Paul Warshow, "Easy Rider", *Sight and Sound. International Film Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1, (Winter 1969/70), p. 36-38; 38.

⁵¹ Riddel, p. 353.

Empty Land

When Klinger addressed landscape as a cue of U.S. history in *Easy Rider* she was referring specifically to the pristine scenery along the Colorado Plateau. Her observation of the unpopulated southwest as a token for national history may be rephrased into a question: what does it mean that the celebratory or sentimental phase of the journey is dominated by apparently untouched scenery? What vision of U.S. history does it transmit?

In *The Invention of the Western Film*, Scott Simmon argued that after having been made for over a decade in the lush woodland of upper state New York, the relocation of the Western to the traceless, immemorial scenery in California impelled a far more clear-cut dramatization of American history as a new beginning in a virgin land. The politics of representing empty land, Simmon argues, is that the landscape itself seems to sanction a blanking out of the historical complexities of conquest and colonialism.⁵² Consistent with this transfer, Native Americans were portrayed less as individual characters, also evident in how the genre during the silent era was re-labeled from “Indian and Western subjects” to “Westerns” plain and simple.⁵³ Simmon thus sums up the film industry’s westward migration in the early 1910s as a “replacement of historical time with expanses of space.”⁵⁴

The desert in *Easy Rider*, however, invokes a rather specific historical past, summoning the memory of the Westerns of John Ford, two of which starred the biological father of ‘Captain America’, Henry Fonda.⁵⁵ In fact, Ford’s inception of Monument Valley predates *Easy Rider* by a mere thirty years. In *Stagecoach* (1939), his first Western to be set within these prodigious geological formations, Richard Slotkin has proposed that “we can see mythic or generic space in the process of creation.”⁵⁶ In that film, Monument Valley represented the stretch of land between Arizona and New Mexico, just as the indigenous Navajo would substitute for Sioux, Cheyenne, Arap-

⁵² Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half-Century* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Though Simmon makes this argument throughout the book, it is most concisely addressed in chapter 7, “The Politics of Landscape”, p. 51-54.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁵⁵ According to John A. Murray, this linkage is already suggested when Wyatt and Billy after crossing the Colorado River pass the Chemehuevi Mountains, the same desert ridges that appeared during the exodus in *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940), Murray, *Cinema Southwest: An Illustrated Guide to the Movies and Their Locations* (Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Publishing, 2000) p. 110.

⁵⁶ Richard Slotkin, “John Ford’s *Stagecoach* and the Mythic Space of the Western Movie” in Engel (ed.), p. 261-282; 262. However, Ford was not the first one to use this location which had appeared before in George B. Seitz’s *The Vanishing American* (1926). During the twenty-five year span between *Stagecoach* and *Cheyenne Autumn* (John Ford, 1964), it became an increasingly ambiguous site of contestation and ideological tension, for ethnical conflicts and contradictory perspectives on history.

aho and Apache in Ford's subsequent Westerns, in fact, for any tribe other than Navajos.

It has been argued that it was precisely the otherworldly and surreal appearance of this setting that verified its authenticity, an exterior so persuasive that it revitalized the legacy of the A-feature Western and a genre that prior to *Stagecoach* had been in decline.⁵⁷ "Monument Valley was virtually unspoiled land for Westerns when Ford first went there to shoot, enabling him to make the landscape his own," Joseph McBride writes in his biography of the director, and the vision of the past Ford projected was in turn confirmed by "the overwhelming reality of the landscape."⁵⁸ Above all, it was empty, a place that couldn't be cultivated. In what way, one might ask, does Monument Valley, where the indigenous Navajo always substituted for other tribes and where no historical colonization or settling ever occurred, evoke the "presence of the historical past" in *Easy Rider*? If it sustains a "vision of the wilderness", as Klinger claims, "carefully tied to a sense of US history,"⁵⁹ it's a vision where the past is defined not by historical record but as a primal condition of vacancy.

In the accounts above, Ford's authorial claim on Monument Valley reads as a reenactment of the historical events his films portrayed. Again, there is the idea that America equals emptiness, and of space as a mode to break with the past, to project new beginnings and to assert independence. The concluding section of this chapter discusses how *The Last Movie* came to expand upon themes and techniques already present in *Easy Rider*. Determined to expose the apparatus underpinning the ideals that guided the journey in the former film, the Western becomes a metaphor for Hollywood at large, as an institution, ideology and power structure. Made back to back with *Easy Rider*, the production and reception of *The Last Movie* had, in fact, more in common with *Zabriskie Point*: financed by a major Hollywood studio, scandalized during production and received with overwhelming hostility by American critics.⁶⁰ An underground movie made overground as one reviewer referred to it,⁶¹ or a "movie about movies, about how you get drawn in and want to believe" in the words of the director,⁶² *The Last Movie* was with-

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 270; Clive Bush, "Landscape" in *The BFI Companion to the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe, (London: Andre Deutsch/British Film Institute, 1988), p. 167-170; 168.

⁵⁸ Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford: A Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), p. 289; 291.

⁵⁹ Klinger, 189.

⁶⁰ For a discussion on the critical reception, see Burns, p. 137 and James Hoberman, *Dennis Hopper: From Method to Madness* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Walker Art Center, cop. 1988), p. 21.

⁶¹ "Hopper does nothing in his film that has not been done by underground filmmakers like Kuchars or Jack Smith, but he has done it overground, in a commercial 35mm film with theater distribution." Stuart M. Kaminsky, *Take One*, vol. 3, no. 4, (March-April 1971), under the magazines recurring column "Overlooked & Underrated", p. 30-31; 31.

⁶² Hopper, "Dennis Hopper: how far to the Last Movie?", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1982, vol. 49, no. 585, p. 221-222; 222.

drawn from circulation after two weeks and has been paid sparse critical attention since then.

The causes and consequences of seizing indigenous environments for fictional worlds and the remaking of the past into marketable entertainment provided the central premise for *The Last Movie*. Similar to how experimental techniques were integrated into the patently low idiom of the biker or exploitation film in *Easy Rider*, the transposition of a popular form, the Hollywood Western, into an art context in *The Last Movie* would seem to derive from Pop Art. The major incentive for the film was, however, drawn from Abstract Expressionism. According to the director, the working principle was to treat the basic material of cinema (light, emulsion and film stock) in the way that the Abstract Expressionists treat paint, brush and canvas.⁶³ Below, I look at how this tenet of using paint as paint, i.e. film as film, also involved using landscape as landscape, and how political and aesthetic conceptions of empty land interact in the film.

The Last Movie

The metacinematic agenda of *The Last Movie* is already evident in the synopsis. The first film-in-the-film is the one Sam Fuller is making on the last days of Billy the Kid in the Peruvian village of Chinchero, presumably profiting by lower production costs and the benefit of novel scenery for a hackneyed genre. After shooting is finished the stuntman Kansas stays behind intent to attract new film companies to exploit the production values of Chinchero. However, his plans are interrupted as the Indian villagers start to reenact the actions they have witnessed in the abandoned set in their own film 'La Ultima Pelicula,' i.e. 'The Last Movie.' Staging real violence in front of cameras, microphones and light reflectors fashioned out of bamboo, Kansas discovers that he is to play the lead as Billy the Kid and is to be killed at the end of their movie.

Whatever other perspectives that may be adopted, *The Last Movie* is obviously a film about Americans projecting their myths and dreams on what is imagined as an unspoiled, virgin land, with Peru providing a new prodigious backdrop to fashion a mythic space for the emigrated Hollywood film crew. Allegedly, Hopper's idea for the film originated from leaving a Western set

⁶³ Hopper has talked about this intermedial activity with some consistency: "In a way, it's like an abstract expressionist painting, where the guy shows the pencil lines, leaves some empty canvas, shows a brush stroke, lets a little drip come down and says, 'Yeah, I'm working with paint, canvas, and a pencil line.'" Elena Rodriguez, *Dennis Hopper: A Madness to His Method* (New York: St. Martin, 1988), p. 95; "I used expressionist terms in *The Last Movie* – where I showed the leader running out or I showed the clap board hitting – to keep saying 'This is a film' the same way an Abstract Expressionist says 'I'm dealing with paint here, folks. This is not a picture of a tree. This is paint.'" Hickenlooper, p. 68; "This is paint I'm using. See? And this is canvas. I'm showing you canvas. Now I'm going to turn it upside down... This movie shows you the structure." Siska, p. 85.

on the outskirts of Durango, Mexico after completing *The Sons of Katie Elder* (Henry Hathaway, 1965).⁶⁴ Describing the location of Chinchero, Hopper refers to it as a kind of pre-modern civilization: “it’s nothing but a hamlet with Indian farmers, shepherds, llamas, a rural area with striking scenery. Most of the Indians had never seen a movie: They didn’t even know how to fire a pistol.”⁶⁵ If *The Last Movie* discloses the persistence of colonial relations and conflicts in the Western’s need to revive its mythology against un-storied, a-historic exteriors, Hopper’s description of Chinchero, whether it is accurate or not, willfully makes his own undertaking implicit in this exploitation.

In a rare close-reading, David E. James probed the intricate relations between location, history and Hollywood that is raised in the film: “The trip south is symbolically a movement west and also a movement back in time,” and the Western Fuller is making, James continues, is thus “an attempt to claim the past for the present, so the practice of filmmaking reenacts the past; it entails the appropriation of present geographies and cultures and is no less damaging now than a hundred years ago.”⁶⁶ Accordingly, James conceives of the Indians’ re-appropriation of the set as both historically and economically consistent, “symbolically reclaiming the landscape that was stolen by white imperialism in North America and also the landscape which is presently being stolen by a contemporary form of capitalism.”⁶⁷ If James refers to landscape in the sense of territory, the claim to land he describes equally pertains to artistic practices of moving back in time, not to arrive at a site of the past but to sweep the slate clean to mark a point of origin which

⁶⁴ There is a photograph Hopper took during the making of Hathaway’s film that seems to anticipate his subsequent fascination with the Western and Hollywood’s technology of deception. It is taken from a low angle, looking up on the senior stars John Wayne and Dean Martin in full Western gear mounted on their horses. While the low angle conventionally signify stateliness and dignity, Hopper has framed them through the tripod on which the film camera they are posing for is positioned.

⁶⁵ As quoted in Robriguez, p. 71.

⁶⁶ David E. James, “Dennis Hopper’s *The Last Movie*”, *Journal of the University Film and Video Association*, vol. 35, no. 2, (Spring 1983), p. 34-46; 41. James article also provides the most thorough consideration on how *The Last Movie* relates to practices in Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art: “The film has obvious similarities with the gestural phase of abstract expressionism; it is very much a film about process, an ‘action film’ in which the act of making a given shot is worthy of preservation both for its own sake and as the record of a similarly life-validating action. And so the film moves easily in the esthetic of Happenings; it turned out that making the film was an event, an event documented within the film, and ironically perhaps finally more important than the film itself. Like Pop Art, the film takes a commonplace subject matter, one not usually considered fit material for an ‘art’ film, and self-consciously emphasizes the re-contextualization. ... But unlike Jones and the painters of the sixties, Hopper did not stay within the limits of such purely formal concerns. Unlike those artists, he accepted the fact that the investigation of formal qualities involves historical, political and social considerations.” James, “Dennis Hopper’s *The Last Movie*”, p. 45-46. James also discusses *The Last Movie* in *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 297-303.

⁶⁷ James, “Dennis Hopper’s *The Last Movie*”, p. 43.

itself lacks origin. From the agitated scenes in town to the high-altitude serenity of the Andes, *The Last Movie* literally alternates between high and low, juxtaposing a confrontational, aggressive mode with a meditative, contemplative stillness. Below, I address two of the sequences that are set in the highlands.

The first is a succession of images while Kansas drives across pastures ringed by snowcapped peaks. It begins with a pan over the ridges reflecting in the crystalline surface of a lake and is followed by a close-up pan of mountains painted on a canvas. A static shot of a distant glacier interferes; it has a quivering, unreal quality due to extreme distance and the telephoto lens. A third pan moves from the ridges in the distance, across a wooden frame and into an extreme close-up of the canvas, scanning the texture of the cloth and the vague, blue and grey brushstrokes which signify mountains and clouds. A concluding long shot shows the giant canvas, presumably a side screen left by the film company, in the low left foreground while in the distant upper right lofty peaks soar above the clouds.

All moving leftward and sharing the natural sound of the wind, these mediations of the mountains - turned by 180 degrees in the lake's surface, suggestive of the inner workings of the camera, and constructed of wood, paint and canvas - are consistent and continuous with each other, yet a formal tension is asserted between them. Shortly after, the relation between image and sound is re-addressed in a montage of six extreme close-ups of plants and rocks, beginning with the blurred crystal of a single drop of water on a blade of grass and the noise of the focus being pulled. Contrary to the wind in the highland sequence, the sound of the focus being pulled *is* the natural sound of the shot. The phantasmagoric image of the glacier also reemerges, randomly inserted in the middle of a scene when Kansas rides along a mountain trail and there are similar flashes of obscure mountain footage during the delirium he suffers near the end of the film. One is reminded of Hopper's comment on how the numerous Westerns, allegedly set in his hometown Dodge City, "always put in big mountains but there aren't any." The mountain as a sign in the Western, in Edward Buscombe's account "what western landscape was all about",⁶⁸ is one that can be disconnected and re-contextualized at will.

The second sequence I consider appears when Kansas, like Billy and Wyatt before him, stages a frontier quest of his own, embarking on an expedition for a goldmine. The whole episode is recounted in 15 shots lasting little more than two minutes with no dialog or music, merely the wind. Beginning with images of the expedition riding past rocks, a waterfall and crossing a sulfurous stream, the setting gradually loses texture and stratifica-

⁶⁸ Edward Buscombe, "Inventing Monument Valley: Nineteenth-Century Landscape Photography and the Western Film" in *The Western Reader*, ed. Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman, (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 1998), p. 115-130; 116.

tion as the riders recede into the vast expanses. In the concluding five shots, space becomes increasingly opaque and dimensionless, reduced to mere surfaces, gradients and hues. Each shot further involves a spatial and temporal ellipsis, further accentuated by the alterations of focal length. The effect is one of obscuring the distinction between foreground and background, near and far, sky and earth, but also between space and screen. Neither can changes wrought by the atmosphere be distinguished from those that are created by optics. Elemental colors, like an expanse of dark violet which can be recognized as a rainstorm in the distance, drastically alter between the shots. The sequence concludes with a pan of a flight of birds against a trembling monochrome background followed by a tilt through gilded cloudbanks at sunset, the light diminishing as it moves over the mountains, drifts to the right and zooms in closer and dissolves into a grainy void.

In all, the sequence comes less and less to refer to an external, physical environment than to areas of light and tone. By means of lens selection and distancing, there is a gradual reduction of referential content to a single hue. Especially the last five shots with their mingling of sky and ground lend themselves to a comparison with the veiled, ephemeral landscapes of the color-field painters. The process can be described as one of divorcing the medium from narrative, since any traces of figures or story are lost in the landscape, and of reducing the environment to a function of light, shape and surface. The fluxes in scale between the earlier montage of close-ups of vegetable and mineral forms and the extreme distancing in this sequence concurs to Rosenblum's characterization of the "abstract geology" conveyed by the color-field painters where "all the sublimity of God can be found in the simplest natural phenomena, whether a blade of grass or an expanse of sky."⁶⁹

From this point on, the boundaries between the different levels of fiction and reality quickly dissolve. Clapboards appear along with outtakes of the actors out of character, the sound goes out of sync and there is footage of Hopper being made up, not as the stuntman in Fuller's film but for his part as Kansas in his own. Refusing to privilege any level of narration or allow for any suspension of disbelief, Fuller's movie, the Indians re-enactment of it and the film Hopper is in the process of making are all exposed as equally contrived. After repeated takes of Billy's/Kansas' death scene, some continuing as Hopper gets up and brushes off the dirt, an epilog brings us back to the gold expedition where Kansas and his partner sit at the campfire, arguing whether seeing *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (John Huston, 1948) is sufficient experience to go prospecting. As they stake out the direction for the next day, the quarrel concludes with the film's last line of dialog: "We keep heading west!" As the epitaph of Hopper's film, as well as his career as a director for the remainder of the 1970s, the line may equally refer to the

⁶⁹ Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime", p. 351.

protagonists who imagine themselves living a movie as to westward expansion as a mode of renewal for imperial as well as artistic enterprises.

Coda: Earth Feeling/Made-Up Image

Departing from the dissension of symbol and scenery in the poster art of *Easy Rider* and *Zabriskie Point*, this chapter has attempted to pursue the deconstructive and purifying approaches to landscape discussed in the introduction and how they converge in the notion of empty land. “More than the desert itself, I always felt the need to live in a different historical context, in a non-historical world,” Antonioni stated in 1975.⁷⁰ In *Zabriskie Point*, civil protest appears as an organic emanation of the desert, in the words of the director, a setting that allowed having his countercultural lovers “out of their milieu – to be free, Zabriskie Point was perfect; it was so primitive, like the moon.”⁷¹ From the Farmer John murals, Marlboro Men and Sunny Dunes commercials in Los Angeles to the extraterrestrial views after Mark hijacks the plane, it becomes the site where graven images of consumer culture can be exorcised and where the land regains its prehistoric purity. In this way, Antonioni engages Death Valley in a rigorous set of oppositions: modern vs. primitive, material vs. spiritual, synthetic vs. organic and male vs. female.⁷² It also entails two opposite modes of looking, from scanning the visual overload of Los Angeles to contemplating the austerity of Death Valley. This dualism climaxes in Daria’s encounter with a Native American woman employed as a service worker at the Sunny Dunes ranch house just before her apocalyptic vision.

Whereas Antonioni imagined a youth culture restoring the desert to originality and authenticity by destroying civilization, the title of Hopper’s second feature instead announced the destruction of cinema. The iconoclasm in each film thus appears to be aimed at different targets. Likewise, the displacement of the West to the Andes in *The Last Movie* would indicate that it isn’t a physical site to be discovered as in *Zabriskie Point*. Commending underground filmmaker Bruce Connor for reediting found footage and making “fresh films without the expense of shooting one foot of film” or Warhol who “behaves like the inventor, Tom Edison”⁷³ in his 1965 call for American

⁷⁰ Antonioni, p. 183.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 308.

⁷² Clara Orban has written about empty space in Antonioni’s work in these terms: “Emptiness and absence provide comfort for women because they allude to a pre-Edenic, pre-natal world.” Orban, “Antonioni’s Women, Lost in the City”, *Modern Languages Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2, (Autumn, 2001), p. 11-27; 24. Matthew Gandy’s recent “The Cinematic Void” further argues that “Antonioni uses ‘nature’ in *Zabriskie Point* in its broadest sense as a metaphor for something that resides outside of ‘history’: something which is unchanging and ever-present as a deeper layer of human consciousness and experience.” Gandy, “The Cinematic Void”, p. 323-324.

⁷³ Hopper, “Into the Issue of the Good Old Time Movie Versus the Good Old Time”, p. 9.

filmmakers to “take back our invention”, Hopper seem committed to an ideal of new beginnings. In this sense, the “totally American” art forms, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and the Western, are all similar in their claim on firstness, neither of them referring back to an anterior reality. Hopper accordingly locates the notion of a timeless West in the medium and within the various traditions where it’s been reinvented as a site of national origin, from the Westerns of John Ford to the gestural and color-field paintings of the Abstract Expressionists.

That *The Last Movie* was “about America and how it’s destroying itself” could accordingly be understood in two ways; that America is destroying itself by insisting on believing in its own illusions and projected fantasies, or that an American art is one that insists on the freedom to invent and destroy its own origin. Not referring to an external world but to the practices and processes of its own making, origin is not a geographical site but the act of invention itself. That nature is always already an image is also suggested in that both of Hopper’s films display painted landscapes before we see any actual scenery. The first shot in *Easy Rider* shows the murals of mountains and lakes on the walls of ‘La Contenta Bar’ whereas a large canvas with indigenous highland scenery and a Western mesa-landscape painted on a stage panel in a saloon features within the first few minutes of *The Last Movie*. Invented rather than encountered, it is then little surprise that these characters in search of America “couldn’t find it anywhere.”

When considering Hopper going to Peru to engender an American art film we may note that Frederick Church, the painter who forged the American flag from broken clouds in *Our Banner in the Sky*, went on a similar trip searching for unexploited scenery, making a series of grand-scale paintings from the Andes in Ecuador close to the Peruvian border. Renewing the sublime vocabulary with tropical rainstorms, soaring rainbows and erupting volcanoes, these canvases would later be regarded as antecedents to the non-representational school of New York painters.⁷⁴ The comparison rests on a conception of a space that transcends local geography, that is distilled beyond place and time into some primeval state of origin, and that takes on the universal significance of openness, vacancy, and a new beginning.

The guiding impulses of *The Last Movie* are, however, anything but pristine. More readily, it can be described as a film caught up in its own paradoxes. Made within the commercial and corporate enterprise of Hollywood cinema, it alternates between crude farce and lyrical passages. Neither is the landscape vertically integrated along a lowbrow/highbrow axis. If the repeated ascents to high altitudes in *The Last Movie* isolate the expressivity of natural settings from representational signification so that they emerge as vacant and untaken, these color-field compositions aren’t privileged above any of the other modes randomly travestied through the film – the episodes

⁷⁴ See for example Novak, *Nature and Culture*, p. 26.

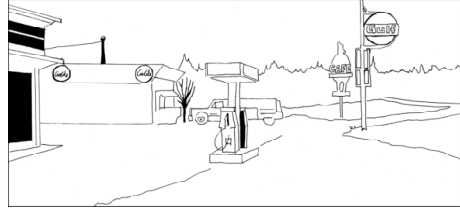
in a cinéma vérité-style, what some reviewers referred to as Cassavetes “middle class realism,”⁷⁵ Brechtian alienation effects by inserting ‘Missing Scene’ titles in the middle of a shot, or experimental devices like showing black leader. Like cinema, landscape may be taken apart and rearranged, deconstructed and reconstructed.

As the 1969 interview where Hopper muses over the Saturday matinees and the oceanic wheat fields of Kansas draw to a close, he anticipates that *Easy Rider* will give him freedom to make more films like it, and to make them far away from Los Angeles: “I’ve noticed that a film I’m directing is affected by the place I’m making it in,” Hopper ponders, “I’ve got to get back to the country, to an earth feeling, like when I was a kid. You know: touch a leaf, see if it has bugs under it.” Though he promptly adds, “I’ve gotta see if I really am this sensitive loner, or if that’s just an image I made up for myself.”⁷⁶ As in the recollection of the singing cowboys and the Kansas wheat fields, Hopper posits a dialectic between the pre-coded and the immediate, the imposed and the innate.

In relation to the disclaiming and reclaiming of empty land that has been considered above, the oscillation between the readymade – like the silhouetted posing of Billy and Wyatt in Monument Valley, or the gaudy desert sunset in *Zabriskie Point* – and the impulse to create distances and dismantle referential relations through space, there is a noteworthy scene of two children playing on a plateau which appears twice in *The Last Movie*. Silhouetted, stage-like and rendered almost in black and white, it is in style and subject matter an image of instant kitsch. The first time it appears is after Sam Fuller has finished shooting his Western, the second near the end amidst the disintegration of Hopper’s own film. This time, however, the camera drifts away in an expansive leftward pan, scanning close to the ground, then along a horizon of distant ridges and a dusky, violet sky, eventually zooming into the dark mountains shrouded in clouds.

⁷⁵ Stuart M. Kaminsky, “Overlooked & Underrated”, *Take One*, vol. 3, no. 4, (March-April 1971), p. 30-31; 31.

⁷⁶ Hopper, “Will Easy Do it for Dennis Hopper?”, p. 18.



2 No Neutral Ground

Roads to Realism in *The Rain People*, *Five Easy Pieces*, and *Two-Lane Blacktop*

If you love space, then value time, for time is the stuff that space is made of.
John L. Fell¹

That's the beautiful thing about realistic pictures versus old Hollywood: we utilize locations. Since we are there, we might as well use the location. For some reason, film always looks better when you shoot outside. I don't know why, there is just the feeling of reality.

Vilmos Zsigmond²

Within the loose confederation of semi-autonomous films to follow in the wake of *Easy Rider*, the swapping of carefully structured dramatic situations for a spur-of-the-moment approach emerged as a means to stake a claim against Hollywood orthodoxy. As predicted in Hopper's 1965 treatise, leaving the sound stages and studio sets and filming en-route made this departure palpable. To move outside the studios, galleries and museums and to work directly with the environment was also part of a broader trend across a number of artistic and academic disciplines at the time. Robert Smithson, for instance, left the New York art scene for his home state of New Jersey in 1967, the resulting photo-essay, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic", documenting a post-industrial landscape of blighted suburbs, unfinished

¹ John L. Fell, *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), p. 229.

² Dennis Schaefer and Larry Salvato, *Masters of Light: Conversations With Contemporary Cinematographers* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 313-314.

highway construction, and a countryside strewn with debris and inactive machinery, what Smithson, typically in a cinematic analogy, referred to as an “anti-romantic *mise-en-scene*”.³ The “road book” also became a defining genre for a new wave of American photographers, as in William Eggleston’s color snapshots of the rural southeast or Stephen Shore’s photographic diaries from cross-country trips in the early 1970s.⁴ In hindsight, this centrifugal activity has been referred to as the formation of a “new vocabulary” of landscape.⁵ The engagement with previously neglected, and apparently graceless, aspects of the environment also had a counterpart in academic research at the time where “sprawl,” the “auto-vernacular” and the “new west” were used to define the American landscape.⁶

Among the numerous and often contradictory strands of realism in cinema, we note André Bazin’s ontological criteria of an indexical relation between photographic reproduction and a pro-filmic reality, meriting the photographic image for being “objective”, “impassive” and of “earthly origins”, since it was “formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man.”⁷ Bazin’s essentialism was later denounced as naïve, followed by the structuralist argument that the impression of realism derives from the internal cohesion of the way characters act and events unfold, famously contended by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* and in Colin MacCabe’s concept of “the classic realist text.”⁸ In the politicized climate of the 1970s, finally, realism was often defined by an epistemological and explanatory principle, that is, for its power to reveal how surface description related to a deep structure, the personal to the political, and the individual to a social totality.⁹

³ Smithson, p. 54.

⁴ The genre-label “road books” is used by May Castleberry in *Perpetual Mirage*, p. 166.

⁵ Robert A. Sobieszek refers to “a new vocabulary for landscape photography,” in “Terminal Documents”, p. 182, while John Beardsley writes that Robert Smithson “found the landscape so altered from its traditional form that he struggled, in a series of essays, to develop a new vocabulary for describing it.” Beardsley, “Earthworks” p. 114.

⁶ The work of the photographers that will be discussed in this chapter was in various degrees influenced by, or at least resonant with, John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s exploration of ordinary landscapes, the originator of the term “the vernacular landscape” and founder of the magazine *Landscape* in 1951. See Thomas W. Southall’s “Second View: A Search For the West That Exists Only in Photographs” in Castleberry (ed.), p. 192-198, and Neil Campbell’s analysis of Jackson’s theorizing on the American highway, the ‘roadscape’ or ‘auto-vernacular landscape’ in “‘Much Unseen Is Also Here’: John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s New Western Roadscapes”, *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 23, no. 3, (2004), p. 217-231.

⁷ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Cinematic Image” [1945] in *What is Cinema? Volume I*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1967), p. 9-16; 13, 15.

⁸ Colin MacCabe, “Realism and the Cinema: Notes On Some Brechtian Theses”, *Screen* vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1974).

⁹ The most influential figure for this conception of a “critical realism” endorsed by the New Left was Georg Lukács, for example in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* [1958] trans. John and Necke Maunder, (London: Merlin, 1963), and *Realism in Our Time* [1958], trans. Necke Mander, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

We have previously encountered the term, “new realism”, in relation to Pop Art. A highly flexible label, new realism would also be used to designate the attempts to devise an objective, descriptive style in landscape photography at the time, as well as the naturalistic filmmaking in vogue differentiating itself from a generally accepted realism of narrative consistency. Tracing some historical uses of the term we will see how it was applied to early 1970s Hollywood to characterize a pared-down visual style with sparse dialog, meandering story-lines and a downbeat mood.

In the critical assessments to be discussed, the emphasis on location was both commended and a cause of skepticism. If the peripatetic, sequential shooting warranted closer correspondence to a broad spectrum of everyday reality, the isolated and drifting existence of the protagonists at the same time seemed to stall any constructive inquiry into economic and social processes, and the films were often criticized for being unproductively ambiguous, providing little access to characters, avoiding literal content or explanation and deferring from explicit political or social commentary. From this perspective, the prominence given to pre-existing locations seemed symptomatic of a failure to integrate setting and subject matter, advancing from backdrops for events to occur, to one where very little appeared to happen at all. This un-eventfulness in itself seemed to confess to the constraints of the new realism, sustaining a fatalistic worldview instead of probing underlying social and economic factors. Analytically limp, it lived up neither to the internal cohesion and consistency of classical realism, nor to the explanatory principle of critical realism. Rather than dispute this criticism, new realism is considered within the context of other artistic explorations of landscape which gathered momentum at the time, primarily in photography. Across the numerous differences, I discuss some shared concerns to indicate that a new vocabulary of landscape could also be recognized in some New Hollywood films from the turn of the decade.

Covering the Ground: New Realist Practices

Whether enthused by the European new waves or the outcome of the demand to minimize production costs, the penchant for outdoor filming at the time has usually been understood as a commitment to authenticity. In a retrospect of the BBS films in 1986 Teresa Grimes observed that “a different kind of realism” was instigated by taking “film-making out of the studios and into the ‘real[?]’ America, so that the film could become a response to an actual reality ‘out there’, rather than a pre-constructed fabrication.”¹⁰ As a

¹⁰ Teresa Grimes, “BBS: Auspicious Beginnings, Open Endings”, *Movie*, no. 31/32, (Winter 1986), p. 54-66; 60-61. Neither Cohen or Grimes enforce the BBS-produced films as a strict demarcation for the trends they observe in the early 1970s, both for example include the non-BBS film *Two-Lane Blacktop* on account of similar thematic and stylistic concerns.

consequence of a more vagrant mode of production, dramatic continuity was replaced with a sense of drift, and in place of a causal story logic Grimes recognizes “an aesthetic in which making a film – scripting and shooting (the material filmed and the manner in which it is filmed) – are structured around an open-ended response to environments and situations as they are met.”¹¹ The films addressed in this chapter are all defined by a geographically dispersed narrative: the south-north trajectory along the western seaboard in *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970), the route east-west in *The Rain People* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1969) and west-east in *Two-Lane Blacktop* (Monte Hellman, 1971). Despite the distances they cover, and in contrast to the romanticism kindled by the southwest in *Easy Rider*, they appear at first sight to emphasize uniformity rather than diversity. Eliciting an analogy between the road and the causal, linear logic of the goal-driven trajectories of classical Hollywood narratives, what had been a theme, the quest or journey through America, appeared to have transgressed into form, the road itself.

“One of the countless current films that are basically travelogues,” renowned film critic Manny Farber labeled *The Rain People*,¹² suggesting a kinship to Hopper’s film which, in fact, merely had been one month in production when Coppola began shooting in the early spring of 1968. Traveling across eighteen states during almost as many weeks of filming, Coppola explained: “With *Rain People* I planned deliberately to complicate matters, to follow the housewife wherever she went – to literally take the trip. With our small crew and very mobile equipment, we set out to see what would happen”.¹³ Writing the film as it was shot and without pre-set locations, Coppola described it as a process of “filming things as we saw them, choosing locations and even sequences as we came upon them.”¹⁴ Bob Rafelson similarly asserted auteur identity by renouncing authorial control: “I don’t like to know what my movies are about, and I don’t like to know how they are going to end”, a commitment to make things happen “in unexpected terms” which made shooting in continuity essential.¹⁵ “We just traveled,” his cinematographer on *Five Easy Pieces* and *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972), Laszlo Kovacs, corroborated, “and whenever we saw something better than the pre-selected location we used it.”¹⁶ Monte Hellman and his

¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

¹² Manny Farber, *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies* [1971] (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 220.

¹³ Richard Combs, “The Rain People”, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 46, no. 540, (January 1979), p. 10-11; 11.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Chaillet and Elizabeth Vincent, *Francis Ford Coppola*, trans. Denise Raab Jacobs, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1984), p. 19.

¹⁵ Rafelson, “Staying Vulnerable: An Interview with Bob Rafelson”, *Sight and Sound. International Film Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 2, (Autumn 1976), p. 200-204; 204.

¹⁶ *New Wave King: The Cinematography of Laszlo Kovacs*, ed. Ray Zone, (Hollywood: ASC Press, 2002), p. 89. When preparing for *The King of Marvin Gardens*, Kovacs also recalls

small film-crew making *Two-Lane Blacktop* also moved cross-country, and although there was a script the actors weren't allowed to read more than what was to be shot each day in order to keep it open for improvisation. Concerning the extensive travel, despite the fact that most of the action takes place inside two cars, Hellman commented: "I thought it would be the only way to convince the audience that we actually traveled across the country. That we would never get the feeling of covering that ground unless we actually did it."¹⁷ On the DVD commentary to the film, associate producer Gary Kurtz emphasizes this approach as a bold reassessment of filmmaking at the time: "The idea of using the real weather and not worrying about back-up and cover-sets was new to the studios. They didn't believe it could be done."

Despite the professed novelty, this disaffiliation from studio practice re-sounds with a traditional discourse on cinematic realism, from Siegfried Kracauer's notion of the "found story" and how the medium's unique aptitude to capture the transitory phenomena of the everyday world initiates a "redemption of physical reality" as well as the pro-filmic accuracy and respect for real time and space championed by André Bazin.¹⁸ From an explanatory criterion, however, this impromptu procedure seems to fall short, utilizing the veracity of locations rather than dealing with political and social issues, trading analysis for naturalistic surface description. Like their protagonists, the films themselves seemed to lack social agenda and commitment. As Grimes sums up:

Action is not tightly bound to a symbolically charged dramatic scheme, but rather *appears* to occur arbitrarily; 'plot' is submerged, narrated through the way the hero drifts into situations and drifts through America. This is one reason why the road movie became the perfect embodiment of this sort of narrative, the journey – into or across America – being both a search for experience (the thrill of gratuitous adventure, the haphazard, the unexpected), but also a form of estrangement ('getting away from things that go bad if I stay'). Landscape – the bleak spaces of America in which the hero can no longer 'fit' – often enforces a sense of dissociation.¹⁹

Paradoxically, the most remarkable aspect of this commitment to extreme traveling in films like *The Rain People* and *Two-Lane Blacktop* is the conspicuous lack of settings with conventional production values and thus the apparent pointlessness of going from one place to another; in Coppola's film from an unremarkable suburban street in Long Island to an equally anony-

merely discussing the "mood and feeling" of the locations with Rafelson, instead of characters and story, see Joy Boyer, *Bob Rafelson: Hollywood Maverick* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), p. 56.

¹⁷ Beverly Walker, "Two-Lane Blacktop", *Sight and Sound. International Film Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 1, (Winter 1970/71), p. 34-37; 37.

¹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

¹⁹ Grimes, p. 62.

mous trailer park in Nebraska, in Hellman's from a highway in California to a landing strip in North Carolina. It's not only that the locations aren't particularly scenic, but that the difference between them appears to be of no consequence.

Everywhere and Nowhere: Pathos, Ethos, and Realism

Except *The Rain People*, all the films mentioned above were addressed by Thomas Elsaesser in his seminal article in 1975, "The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 1970s. Notes on the Unmotivated Hero." "New realism" is a key term in the article, if alternatively referring to an "objective realism" or "documentary realism", an "unmetaphoric realism" or simply an "American realism", and is continually associated with the proliferation of rural, desolate locations. Though the article has a more general scope, the references to a new realism particularly relate to the films under discussion. Elsaesser, for example, refers to *Five Easy Pieces* and *Two-Lane Blacktop* as precedents for the "desire for an image of America that becomes palpable not because of the interplay between moral symbolism and an ideological plot-structure but because of its solid specificity, its realized physical presence".²⁰ In common with most historians who have addressed these films, he finds little in terms of a direct probing of social or political issues. It is a "realism of sentiment" rather than an inquiry into current reality, an evasion that is reflected in the move away from large cities into the hinterland of provincial America "recognizable by its barren roadside, its drive-ins, petrol-stations and hick town main-streets – the kind of scenery precisely *nowhere and everywhere* in America, and therefore furnishing an important element of abstraction without being itself abstract."²¹

I'd like to proceed by pointing to some similarities between the oscillation of abstraction and specificity delineated in "The Pathos of Failure" and how Barbara Novak and Angela Miller have discussed the construction of a national landscape in nineteenth-century painting. As it happens, Miller uses the exact same phrase as Elsaesser in the title of her article "Everywhere and Nowhere: The Making of the National Landscape" where she discusses a metonymic strategy of ascribing a nationwide, if not universal, significance to regional features.²² As Miller sums up, this "shared landscape would weld the individual to the general, the concrete to the abstract, the part to the

²⁰ Elsaesser, "The Pathos of Failure". Quotations are taken from the 1975 version of the article published in *Monogram*, p. 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17, 18, my emphasis.

²² Angela Miller, "Everywhere and Nowhere: The Making of the National Landscape", *American Literary History*, vol. 4, no. 2, (Summer 1992), p. 207-229.

whole.”²³ This correspondence between empiricism and idealism, palpable fact and concept, is also central in Novak’s *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, the study which preceded her landscape book, *Nature and Culture*. As the subtitle, *Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, makes clear, her contention is that the burgeoning realist tradition in America was governed by the underlying assumption that there was a moral order to be grasped behind surface reality, and that physical objects were imbued with a deeper, essential meaning.²⁴ Paradigmatic for this synthesis is the manner in which the meticulously observed detail (a leaf, a blade of grass or a pebble on the shore in the immediate foreground) and the infinite distances and “the otherworldly light of a Bierstadt sky” could be accommodated within one landscape.²⁵ The scientific precision of nineteenth-century landscape painting was thus a means to an end, aiming to reveal the innate morality of American soil.²⁶

Didn’t the new realism described by Elsaesser equally modulate a generalized American experience, if one where realism was paired with pessimism rather than idealism? To consider this difference we might turn to his choice of pathos as its designator, a term from ancient rhetoric traditionally contrasted with ethos. Whereas pathos pleads to sentiment by stimulating negative feelings like pity and fear, ethos is grounded in values that make clear distinctions between right and wrong. Dealing with the experience of “a defeated generation,” though “concerned neither with cause nor historical circumstances” for this defeat, Elsaesser remarks that the critique seldom extended beyond a generalized mood.²⁷ A markedly consistent vocabulary has been used to circumscribe this attitude, or lack thereof. In 1972, Cohen observed “disintegration”, “isolation” and “rootlessness,” while three years later Elsaesser defined it in terms of “indifference” and “detachment,” and Grimes finally referred to a “lack of direction”. The viewer, however, is not left completely disconcerted as the voiding of a conventional moral and symbolizing content is soothed over by an emotion of defeat and resignation

²³ Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, p. 9-10. In “Everywhere and Nowhere”, Miller defines the oscillation observed by Novak in similar terms as one between “factual accuracy” and “spiritual essence” (215) “part and whole”, “local experience and national abstraction”, p. 217.

²⁴ As Novak writes on the painter John Singleton Copley, “abstract knowledge is fortified by the stuff of empiricism, distinctive and tactile properties of objects, qualities of weight and texture. The objects, as it were, presents itself, and the result is a ‘higher coefficient of reality,’ making the real somehow more real.” Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁶ The close symbiosis between landscape painting and photography in America is crucial in this regard. For a detailed discussion, see Elizabeth Lindquist-Cock, *The Influence of Photography on American Landscape Painting, 1839-1880* (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1977).

²⁷ Elsaesser, “The Pathos of Failure”, p. 17. In this, the new realism may imply a kinship to the “poetic realism” of Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné where real, usually drab, peripheral locations, exude a general atmosphere of pessimism and fatalism.

where “the pathos of failure” still brings a sense of closure. Engendering audience identification and emotional involvement by confirming this as the only acceptable stance in a society defined through its sheer lack of value, “the pervasive pessimism of the American cinema in the 70s”, Elsaesser maintained, is “the limiting constraint of a new realism”.²⁸

Unwilling to probe social or political contexts, and thus preventing the criticism to extend beyond a private experience of discontent, the New Hollywood road movie was often indicted for settling for a general theme of modern alienation solicited from European precursors.²⁹ Where landscape is concerned, this comes across as a bit paradoxical. On the one hand, films in the late 1960s and early 1970s furnished a different form of “realism” from “real locations,” on the other, this didn’t include any analysis of the social and political implications of the settings. However, wouldn’t showing real settings and describing real milieux automatically transport some sense of social or political context? And might not locations acquire a social and political dimension precisely through their apparent liminality and de-centeredness? The argument implies that a rural milieu would be less contemporary than an urban. To some extent this assumption is self-evident. However, from another perspective, we might look for the temporal context of landscape not in the location per se but in the *way* it is represented.

New Realism and New Topographics

Similar to the photographic road journals of Eggleston and Shore, the immanent contradiction between the road’s metaphoric resonance of metaphysical search and the tawdry uniformity of American highway culture was at the core of the road movie. As Elsaesser observed, the journey has been reduced from “moral trajectories” to “a narrative device,” a reduction that also affected the connotative reverberations of the road itself, from an ideology of progress to “a quality of contingency”.³⁰ Differentiating themselves from American mainstream narrative cinema of “order, linearity and articulated energy”, these films fashioned a mode that has variously been described as “loose-structured”, “disjunctive” and “inconclusive”.³¹ In terms of locations,

²⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁹ “A mood of rebellious self-piety characterizes nearly all the movies which BBS produced in *Easy Rider*’s wake” James Hoberman asserts in *Dennis Hopper: From Method to Madness*, p. 23. In common with Cohen and Grimes, he groups *Two-Lane Blacktop* together with the BBS films though it was produced by Universal. Chris Hugo further argues that *Easy Rider* established “the comfort of despair”, p. 69, Stephen Farber refers to a wave of “indulgent ‘personal films’” in “Easy Pieces”, p. 128, and David Laderman’s *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) argues that *The Rain People*, *Five Easy Pieces* and *Two-Lane Blacktop* displaced cultural critique as introspection.

³⁰ Elsaesser, “The Pathos of Failure”. p. 13-14.

³¹ Ibid., p. 17; Grimes, p. 64. As Laderman observes: “This sense of restless wandering, foregrounded throughout, lingering at the end, distinguishes the road movie’s rebellion against conformity from that of classical Hollywood.” p. 37.

a shared repertory of used car lots, trailer parks, strips of American suburbia, and empty tracts of land is noticeable in the road books as well as the road movies of the early 1970s.

In photography this tendency culminated with a landmark exhibition in 1975 dubbed by its curator, William Jenkins, as “New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape”.³² As the term topographics implies, these artists were determined to stay clear of the romanticism of an earlier tradition. According to Jenkins’ introduction to the exhibition catalog, “the photographers take great pains to prevent the slightest trace of judgment or opinion from entering their work.”³³ Though rather than a claim for strict scientific objectivity, this detached and non-committed stance might be understood in terms of a counter-aesthetic, intentionally seeking out unremarkable aspects of the everyday environment and depicting them in a dispassionate manner, in some cases with a conspicuous lack of compositional focus, as opposed to the pristine and pre-visualized idiom of Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. Estelle Jussim and Elizabeth Linquist-Cock have identified this inversion of what conventionally would be considered a good view or proper subject with a specific photographic practice: “The snapshot – casual formlessness epitomized – was suddenly the most cherished American photographic style. For the new realists, the information in photographs, especially the snapshot, supplied the randomness of nature.”³⁴ However, doesn’t the snapshot also entail some act of interpretation and value statement? Can a representation of an environment be emptied out of anthropomorphic and moralizing content? Rebecca Solnit has, for example, characterized the approach of the new topographers as a “deadpan bitterness”³⁵ which would suggest a stance of resentment rather than objectivity.

Rather than a direct historical influence, the comparisons I suggest rest on a shared sensibility and approach to composition and subject matter. The new topographers’ stated concern to minimize human intervention, though paradoxically by working out rather rigorous parameters for making their pictures, and to do away with “moral postures,” “conclusion or judgment”³⁶ further has some significant parallels with how Elsaesser defined a new re-

³² “New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape”, International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, 1975. In his critical survey of postwar American photography, *American Photography: A Critical History. 1945 to the Present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1984), Jonathan Green locates a new expression of the nature/culture paradigm in the 1970s which was dedicated to document what he refers to as “the new American frontier”, most forcefully expressed in the “New Topographics” exhibition. See chapter 11, “The New American Frontier”, p. 163-181.

³³ William Jenkins, “Introduction to The New Topographics” [1975] in *Reading into Photography: Selected Essays, 1959-1980*, ed. Thomas F. Barrow, Shelley Armitage, William E. Tydeman, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), p. 51-56; 55.

³⁴ Jussim and Lindquist-Cock, p. 111.

³⁵ Solnit, p. 110.

³⁶ John Szarkowski, Foreword, “The New West” [1974] in *Reading into Photography*, p. 45-50; 48; Jenkins, p. 55.

alism in American cinema at the time. In both cases, the renouncement of an ethic or symbolic dimension can be understood as a reaction against a classical tradition. To bring some specificity to this analogy, I begin by considering how locations were addressed as the basis for a discussion on American genre versus European art in relation to the films of Coppola and Rafelson.³⁷ Rather than a mannerist *mise-en-scène* emulated from a more prestigious cinema overseas, I will call attention to some formal and thematic concerns shared with other so-called new realist traditions in the pictorial arts, or what Elsaesser referred to as an “American realism”. In the second part, the minimalism and consistency with which Monte Hellman treated the continental terrain traversed in *Two-Lane Blacktop* will be addressed, a film which I will argue allows for a more thorough comparison with landscape photography at the time.

“A Noble Capitalizable Commonplace”: *The Rain People* and *Five Easy Pieces*

The two contrary assessments that run through the critical discourse on the New Hollywood – as particularly ‘American’ in scope and subject matter or as inflected by European new waves – also applies to the treatment of locations, which might be utilized as much for authenticity as to assert auteur identity. Though both Coppola and Rafelson had directed previously, *The Rain People* and *Five Easy Pieces*, both with stories partly biographical, were intended to establish them within the emerging pantheon of New Hollywood auteurs. The credit sequences of the respective films, the opening shot of *The Rain People*, lasting about a minute, and the closing shot of *Five Easy Pieces*, running a minute and a half, provide a patent example of how independence and authorial presence is modified in relation to a detached, observational mode.

The Rain People begins with a low-angle shot of a rain-soaked suburban street at daybreak, bare trees recede toward the vanishing point and a red street sign is reflected in a patch of water close to the lens. There is some distant, early traffic and a few garbage men are carrying out their morning routines. *Five Easy Pieces* ends at a roadside filling-station. A red “Gulf” sign and blinking neon distracts the otherwise subdued landscape; there is little activity at the station as a diesel truck pulls out and drives toward the forested distance. In terms of geography and season, the shots are poles apart (Long Island in early spring and Vancouver in the midst of winter) whereas in mood and composition they’re almost interchangeable. Firstly, both are

³⁷ As summarized by Laderman, “the American road movie of the New Hollywood imports the following from post war European film modernism: elliptical narrative structure and self-reflexive devices; elusive development of alienated characters; bold traveling shots and montage sequences.” Laderman, p. 5.

nearly silent - in *The Rain People* there is only the distant droning of the sanitation truck, in *Five Easy Pieces* the muffled sounds of cars on the highway; a sonic fidelity to accompany the sequential shooting that was emphasized further in *The King of Marvin Gardens* and *Two-Lane Blacktop*, neither with any music except for what was recorded on location.

Beside scenes of an unannounced breakup from a relationship, there are a number of shared formal attributes: the stationary camera, the duration and the removed point-of-view; the perspectival framing of the road; the equal proportions of ground and sky, all of which subordinate human events to the properties of the composition. There is also the sense of idleness conveyed through the mundane activities going on in the margins and the anonymous traffic; the vehicles traveling these roads, the sanitation truck and the log-freight being governed by infrastructure rather than a pursuit of individual goals. Finally, there is the red sign that punctuates these tonally unified scenes.

Both films have been commended for repudiating what was considered romantic and naïve in *Easy Rider*. Klinger, for example, observed that *The Rain People* “refuses to idealize the American landscape” while Stephen Farber proposed that *Five Easy Pieces* can be read as a self-conscious commentary and “a critique of some of the unacknowledged assumptions of *Easy Rider*.”³⁸ Though defined as a more somber and mature approach to the mythology associated with the open road, the objection towards a derivative stylization modeled on European art cinema prevailed. In particular, it is Michelangelo Antonioni who has been recognized as an influence, a comparison encouraged by Coppola who stressed that his collaboration with Shirley Knight was inspired by that between Antonioni and Monica Vitti.³⁹ In *The Rain People*, Knight plays Natalie, a pregnant, middleclass, Long Island housewife who leaves her husband to embark on a journey across America in what amounts to a staple Antonioni/Vitti plot; the existential search of a disconcerted woman through an anonymous, sterile modern environment, experiencing the occasional sense of release in natural settings, like Vitti when traveling through the countryside in *L’Avventura* or flying over Verona in *L’Eclisse* (*The Eclipse*, 1962).

Rafelson’s film about Bobby Dupea, a musician of privileged background who has turned his back on his upper-middle-class origin, working on an oilrig at the beginning of the film and traveling to visit his reclusive family in Puget Sound in upstate Washington, has also been described with refer-

³⁸ Klinger, p. 190; Stephen Farber, “Easy Pieces”, p. 128.

³⁹ “The idea of writing a film for an actress and making it together, like [Michelangelo] Antonioni and Monica Vitti, really appealed to me.” *On the Edge: The Life and Times of Francis Coppola*, Michael Goodwin and Naomi Wise, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1989), p. 86.

ence to Antonioni's tormented protagonists.⁴⁰ However, the opposition between art and entertainment, Europe and America – or “Camus and Sartre meet Frederick Remington” as it was put by Noel King – imposes a dichotomy that, at least in regard to landscape, may be more reductive than elucidating.⁴¹ What, to begin with, brings about this recurring association with Antonioni?

As Natalie leaves her suburban home at daybreak in *The Rain People* to aimlessly roam the heartland, there is a shot where she emerges from a tunnel and into glaring daylight which makes the freeway architecture dissolve into milky hues. This liquid imagery pervades the film, in the broad pans and the soaring helicopter shots dominated by placid expanses of water or close-ups of the configuration of ripples, streams and waves on the windshield. With its framing and flattening effect, the windshield in this way becomes a screen for optical distortions of the exteriors. Along with the uniformity of rest-stops and trailer parks, phone-booths and corporate motels, Coppola also prompts a poetic mode that is explicated by the title of the film, drawn from a poem or nursery rhyme about “people made of rain” who “cry themselves away” recited by a hitchhiker Natalie picks up.⁴² We may recall Pasolini's invocation of a “Cinema of Poetry” that was mentioned in the introduction, both for its emphasis on a prosaic environment of “billboards, signposts, traffic circles” and for accrediting Antonioni for blending milieux, subjectivity and style.⁴³ The saturated landscape imagery in *The Rain People*, equally wrought by the vagaries of weather and camera optics, reduces visibility to the extent that neon signs and billboards often appear as the most salient features of the countryside.

Turning to Rafelson, the stylistic trademark of his approach to location shooting was the stationary camera. In regard to *Five Easy Pieces*, as well as *The King of Marvin Gardens*, his next collaboration with Jack Nicholson and Kovacs, Rafelson explained his decision of not moving the camera when filming exteriors as the outcome of an intentional “concept about rearranging geography.”⁴⁴ As counter to the mobile and occasionally handheld camera

⁴⁰ At one level, the film sustains an allegorical reading on the New Hollywood. Equally displaced from low- and high-culture, Bobby Dupea is torn between European high art (Chopin) and popular culture (Tammy Wynett), between art music and commercial genre tunes, between introspection and forceful self-assurance. In this context, it is indicatory that the 360° pan while Bobby performs a piece by Chopin, a shot which might evoke similar pans in some of Godard's films, is followed by Bobby mocking the insincerity of his own performance, thus preceding the critics who would renounce the ‘artiness’ of the film merely as empty pretense.

⁴¹ Noel King, “Mersault Goes West: Five Easy Pieces and Art Cinema”, *Framework*, no. 20, (1983), p. 37-40; 39.

⁴² The dialog is also flavored with ‘poetic’ lines, Natalie confessing “I’m aimless” to her husband from a phone booth accompanied by the droning of the highway, or the hitchhiker whom she picks up explaining, “I was gonna buy a map, but I forgot.”

⁴³ Pasolini, p. 168.

⁴⁴ Rafelson, p. 203.

used in interiors, these static shots and rigid formalized compositions impart a frozen, tableau-like quality that renders the exteriors as static, disparate segments. In this way, the openness of exteriors and the confinement of interiors are leveled.

A pertinent example of how landscape came to the fore in the critical debate about the artistic merits of a new American cinema is the scene where Bobby leaves the oilrig in the Californian desert. Framed from a low angle to include large expanses of sky with Bobby and the silhouetted derricks positioned on a thin strip of land against a violet cloud formation, the composition evokes a familiar imagery of the West. However, the camera is left to linger after Bobby has exited the frame. The distorting filter, the solarization effect with a string of colorful pearls frozen diagonally across the lens, and the removal of sound, motion and human presence, isolate this moment. It also appears to indicate exhaustion, a location where neither narrative nor protagonist can remain. The foregrounding of space during such instances of delay in *Five Easy Pieces* has some similarity to what Seymour Chatman has referred to as a “postdiegetic space” or *temps mort*, dead time, in Antonioni’s films. Distinguishing it from a pre-diegetic space which can be defined in accordance to how the establishing shot sets a scene for characters to enter and events to take place, Chatman argues that post-diegetic space alters the meaning of a previously established location, and that a qualitative change transpires in this aftermath where space transgresses from same to other into “an extradiegetic place ... that challenges the whole tissue of fictionality.”⁴⁵

When reviewing *Five Easy Pieces* in 1970, John Simon objected to a mannerism that elevated trite and clichéd moments to existential allegory, referring to this particular shot as “a noble capitalizable commonplace.”⁴⁶ Noel King assumed a more probing approach to the same image when he discussed how it combined formal properties of art and genre film, referring to it both as an Antonioni-styled expression of existential angst and alienation, and as an allusion to “a specific pictorial sculptural mode of imagining the American west.”⁴⁷ Heading off in a postcard-picturesque sunset, the journey in *Five Easy Pieces* makes a consequent reversal of frontier promise, driving along the seaboard through crisp autumn into a damp and cooled-off Northwest Pacific. Locations that conventionally evoke opportunity - the desert, the coastline, and the open road – are repeatedly photographed in a manner that makes them appear as terminal rather than transitory. If King describes the final shot of the gas station as a *mise-en-scène* emulated from European art film in the way it foregrounds signs that read “Men”, “Café”

⁴⁵ Chatman, p. 125. For a discussion of ‘dead time’ in Antonioni’s films as places where narrative momentarily dissolves, see also Rohdie, *Antonioni*, p. 51.

⁴⁶ Simon, *Reverse Angle*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ Noel King, p. 39.

and “Gulf”,⁴⁸ there are also two signs advertising Coca-Cola which he doesn’t mention. The features of a franchised and trademarked American environment thus appear to be of equal interest as extracting allegorical significance from the location.

My emphasis above has been on how location shooting encouraged a certain formal abstraction: in *The Rain People* through the elaborate rack focus, distortions and dissolves, fashioning an indeterminate, poetic mode; in *Five Easy Pieces* through the obsessive, static framing and exaggerated perspective. If both Coppola and Rafelson appear as mindful of a formalist aesthetic in their treatment of exteriors, even flagrantly drawing attention to their own devices, it is combined with an often minute attention to vernacular architecture. In this they evoke an indigenous realist tradition as much as Antonioni, one which also furnished an effect of dead time, namely the paintings of Edward Hopper. The similarity derives as much from the thematic concern with isolation, mobility and rootlessness as the shared motifs of motel interiors, service stations, storefronts, and isolated houses. More specifically, the red signs which appear in both credit sequences are reminiscent of how Hopper frequently punctuated his paintings with conspicuous red areas. As it happens, Hopper’s paintings of the American scene have been labeled as a “new realism” and he has also been quoted as an influence on Pop Art and the new topographers alike.⁴⁹

Art historian Jean Gillies argued that the experience of “alienation”, “silence” and “timelessness” through which Hopper’s paintings habitually have been characterized can be explained by their combination of extreme perspectival compositions and the absence of motion, a contrast of deep space and stasis that generates an impression of uncanny silence.⁵⁰ My aim is not to make a point to point comparison between Hopper’s compositional techniques and those of Coppola and Rafelson, but to suggest how the “objective” or “American realism” that Elsaesser referred to relates to this predilection for deserted streets, rented rooms and autonomous rows of buildings.

What Coppola achieves through his fluid imagery is, in one sense, similar to what Rafelson realizes through his frozen, rigid compositions, described by the director in terms of a de-naturalizing of exteriors by making them

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁹ Lloyd Goodrich has defined the “new realism” of Hopper as “a new kind of objectivity” that was “purely representational” and “based on American life” in *Edward Hopper*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1976), p. 62. On Edward Hopper’s influence on artists like Claes Oldenburg, Mark Rothko, David Hockney, and Edward Ruscha, see Gail Levin, “Edward Hopper: His Legacy for Artists” in *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination*, ed. Julie Grau, (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 109-128. Photographer Robert Adams also confesses to Hopper’s influence in *Landscape: Theory*, ed. John Flattau, Ralph Gibson and Arne Lewis, (New York: Lustrum Press, 1980), p. 8.

⁵⁰ Jean Gillies, “The Timeless Space of Edward Hopper”, *Art Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4, (Summer 1972), p. 404-412.

appear as a part of the architecture.⁵¹ The liquefied, dissolved quality of the former and the congealed and immobilized effect of the latter appear to prevent involvement and integration with location. This effect of stasis is even more noticeable in the extreme deep-focus compositions of *The King of Marvin Gardens*, also markedly similar to Edward Hopper's evacuated street scenes and emphasis on geometric regularity. From the credit sequence display of empty hallways, streets, and alleys in a depopulated Philadelphia to Nicholson's arrival at an equally empty railroad platform in Atlantic City, a graphic continuity between interiors and exteriors is sustained, whether of a subway station in Philadelphia, the boardwalks in Atlantic City, or the hallways of the Essex Carlton Hotel, along with a number of extreme high-angle long shots of the beach, the boardwalk, and inside a convention centre. In overt counterpoint, there are the billboard fantasies and the real-estate deal of a tropic island that provides a loose story for the film. Such an effect also occurs when paintings with marine motifs appear next to drab window views over the Atlantic. This leads us to a final point of comparison in how the internal frame of windows in these films occasionally elicits locations as figures in their own right, an effect often noticed in the paintings of Edward Hopper. A notable example is a shot inside a motel room in *The Rain People* where the camera strays from Natalie and tilts upward to frame a view of the traffic on the flat interstate through a window.⁵²

If credited for steering clear of *Easy Rider's* idealization of the landscape, Coppola and Rafelson were still criticized for letting social problems dissolve into an unspecified stance rather than to probe the real causes for this experience of isolation or frustration.⁵³ Noel King's analysis of *Five Easy Pieces* maintained that the individualization of conflicts finally thwarted any discussion of class, institutions and socio-political practices that the film initially promises. Though *The Rain People*, *Five Easy Pieces* and *The King of Marvin Gardens* commonly have been referred to as character-studies, they don't pursue a psychological realism in the sense that actions are explained and protagonists attain self-knowledge. If anything, explanation and insight is obscured by their journeys, and though landscape evokes mood in a way that suggests interiority, it doesn't appear to be tied to an individual character, as for example in Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso*. Diane Jacobs's early study, *Hollywood Renaissance*, points in this direction when meriting

⁵¹ "On Marvin Gardens we were constantly making one shot out towards the ocean, and another shot towards the façades of the buildings, and rearranging the geography of the beach and making it more suitable for the frame as opposed to the natural landscape." Rafelson, p. 203.

⁵² A long shot of Natalie sitting motionless on a motel bed further recalls several of Edward Hopper's paintings, like *Hotel Room* (1931).

⁵³ In his closing assessment of *The Rain People* in *Driving Visions*, Laderman recaps a general critique aimed at the early 1970s road movie, one where society is vaguely defined, "more a mood than a real visible force", and where reclusive characters "signals a generally conservative shift in the road movie's first generic wave." Laderman, p. 88.

Five Easy Pieces for “the evocation of place and time, rather than the portrayal of the inner conflicts of self-absorbed hero Robert Eroica Dupea, a portrayal that panders to nihilism without justifying it.”⁵⁴

The decree “to see what would happen” vis-à-vis the very un-eventfulness of the locations confronted would seem to encourage another kind of attention on the part of the audience. Peter Cowie, for example, registered this oscillation between the particular and the general, regional and national, in *The Rain People*: “One motel may look like another across the whole width of the United States, but Coppola registers subtle differences of region and attitude ... The rich green fields of Pennsylvania and West Virginia give way to the small-town parade in Tennessee, and finally to the bare, unredeemed flatlands of Nebraska.”⁵⁵ Neither is the standardized and trademarked environment traversed in the film without its evanescent beauty, as when a shot of a sunset among isolated farmsteads in the heartland precedes a huge billboard promoting a chain hotel, or when a montage of motel neon signs precede a painterly long shot panning the reflection in a lake. In these road sequences, a bygone rural America merges with the contemporary. There is then, in the films addressed above, an emphasis on sameness and specificity, on how locations differ and how they relate. As much to furnish an unpolished, naturalistic look from exteriors as to assert formal distancing, the road, most obviously in *The Rain People*, suggests a new modality of realism where what used to be a theme – the journey or quest – has turned into form, a form all the more pared down in *Two-Lane Blacktop*. Considering the road movie as a mode of differentiation, Kristin Thompson’s concept of excess would seem an apt reference here, particularly when she refers to it as a “departure” from conventional storytelling and observes how a shortage of “forward drive provides a great potential for deflection of attention outward toward excess.”⁵⁶

Before moving on to Hellman’s film, I want to return to practices in landscape photography that evolved at this time. An artist whose work overlaps both the new realism of Pop Art and landscape photography - though featured neither in “The New Realists” nor the “New Topographics” exhibition - was Edward Ruscha. In the catalog introduction, William Jenkins traced the attitude as well as the subject matter of the new topographers to the expressionless, deadpan aesthetics with which Ruscha documented trite urban subjects such as petrol stations, roadside signage and empty lots. If the serial organization practiced in Ruscha’s road books from the 1960s also guided the work of photographers such as Robert Adams and Joe Deal, Jenkins saw a crucial distinction in “the difference of what a picture is *of* and what it is

⁵⁴ Diane Jacobs, *Hollywood Renaissance* (South Brunswick : Barnes, 1977), p. 29.

⁵⁵ Peter Cowie, *Coppola* (London: André Deutsch, 1989), p. 48.

⁵⁶ Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, p. 260.

about.”⁵⁷ Whereas Ruscha’s pictures address strictly conceptual issues, the new topographers, according to Jenkins, strived for a synthesis of physical and conceptual subject matter. To cite two of these photographers, the idea that determined the stylistic approach “had to do with denying the uniqueness in subject matter or in one exposure as opposed to another in the belief that the most extraordinary images might be the most prosaic,” as phrased by Joe Deal, or, in the words of Nicholas Nixon, to make photographs that were “of the world.”⁵⁸ I argue that *Two-Lane Blacktop*, where locations emerge less as a pretext to assert artistic style than a mandate for discerning how the local and the national, particularity and redundancy, tie together, transmits an idea of landscape with some marked similarities to the stated intentions of these photographers.

Two-Lane Blacktop

The tendency of playing down dramatic effect in conjunction with extensive travel was taken to an extreme in Monte Hellman’s *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971). Contrary to Coppola’s and Rafelson’s films, we learn nothing about the history or motivation of the protagonists, not even their names. There are no destinations, merely interchangeable points of transit to refuel, eat, get a night’s rest or set up a new race in order to maintain this seemingly endless pattern of transit and stasis. As Elsaesser observed, “by its own logic, the drive, and thus the film, could go on indefinitely: that is its beauty as a composition of pure movement.”⁵⁹ In the same way, the beginning and the end in *Two-Lane Blacktop* are interchangeable.

In two earlier Westerns, *The Shooting* and *Ride in the Whirlwind* made back-to-back in Utah in the summer of 1965, Hellman had explored an idiosyncratic juxtaposition of realism with naturalistic detail and characters speaking in a period idiom and a modern formalism of dissonant music, a bewildering plot, and an elliptical editing style. With dialog that confuses names, dates and directions as characters ventures into increasingly featureless and arid spaces, Antonioni was once more a favored reference.⁶⁰ This relation between naturalism and formalism became less conspicuous in *Two-Lane Blacktop*, though when landscape is concerned, all the more articulate.

⁵⁷ Jenkins, p. 52.

⁵⁸ As quoted in Jenkins, p. 54, 53.

⁵⁹ Elsaesser, “The Pathos of Failure”, p. 19.

⁶⁰ As described by Beverly Walker: “Not really ‘likeable’, the films are startling and disconcerting in their nihilism and oddly detached objectivity. Terse and pared to the bone, they offer none of the orthodox Western entertainment values. Action is minimal, rugged individualism is out, and nobody wins ... None of the questions are ever answered; and, finally, are irrelevant ... The lunar-like landscape, reminiscent of Antonioni but infinitely tougher, leaves a man exposed and vulnerable ... We never learn more about the people than what we see”, Walker, “Two-Lane Blacktop”, p. 35. Laderman associates twice the “wandering, digressive narrative pacing” in *Two-Lane Blacktop* with Antonioni, p.94, 97.

Unsuccessfully launched as a sequel to *Easy Rider*, and though covering at least as much ground, Hellman is not interested in the spectacular aspects of the environment. Contrary to the emphasis on extreme topographical contrast and regional diversity in Hopper's film, *Two-Lane Blacktop* focuses, instead, on locations that in their commonness usually go unnoticed. Evenly paced in long takes, stylistic devices are not made obtrusive, neither are the ubiquitous billboards, signs and ads, though they sometimes have an ironic or counterpoint effect. All the same, this laconic approach has spruced allegorical readings of the countryside as an abstract backdrop to the ennui and inertia of the characters, and the existential despair of an exhausted counter-culture in general. However, in a 1973 interview with Michel Ciment, Hellman objected to what Ciment described as an "undifferentiated space" in the film or that little attention is paid to changes in the milieu:

For me, space is not neutral, not only in life but also in my films. New Mexico is not Oklahoma, and I never used a scene outside of its geographical context, and I never inverted the sequences in *Two-Lane Blacktop*. The landscape is different and, from this point of view, everything was very precise. It's like the sound or the dialogue; I don't want to make an element of the film obvious. In a sense I'm a landscape painter, but I don't want to show a landscape only for its beauty, or to enhance its value.⁶¹

Following this statement, what carries meaning in a reading of landscape is geographical context and continuity, and that the way places differ, however slight it may be, still matters. Hellman's reference to himself as a landscape painter also raises the question of what the film is about, for whereas the delineation of different parts of the country is "very precise", recording the vagaries of the weather as climate and seasons change cross country, the characters are overtly unarticulated and non-descript, and while places are named and positioned, characters remain nameless.

One noticeable consequence of the recognition that "space is not neutral" is how the use of direct sound involves the location, even to the extent where off-screen location sounds threaten to drown out what little dialog there is. Neither are there any constructed sets in the film but locations are recorded as they are met and with few exceptions occupied by the actual residents performing their daily chores and speaking their local accents. The remote protracted pans and stationary deep focus shots register how the topography, vegetation and architecture vary as the journey progresses from bright California suburbs into the semi-arid southwest, turning increasingly humid and verdant and ending in the autumn-clad Smokey Mountains of North Caro-

⁶¹ Michel Ciment, "Entretien avec Monte Hellman", *Positif* no. 150, (May 1973), p. 51-64; 57, translation from *Monte Hellman: His Life and Films*, Brad Stevens, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2003), p. 87. However, Stevens has left out the part, "et je n'ai jamais interverti les séquences dans *Two-Lane Blacktop*." Further citations from this interview are my translations.

lina, while road signs continually inform us whenever a state line is crossed. On a formal level the scarcity of point-of-view shots contribute to a shift from identification to observation. Shot in sequence and with each place in their geographical context, the long single takes accentuate the distances between the characters who often remain unaware of what's going on in different parts of the spaces they occupy. Real-time distances tend to determine the pace and length of shot, frequently lingering for half a minute without events other than someone walking, or cars arriving and departing. The removed point-of-view of the camera, usually in 180° pans from the roadside, implement a sense of seriality while they also emphasize the disconnection between cuts, just as the journey conveys a series of in-between moments that do little to elucidate what happens before or after. As if caught at random, scenes don't build up to any decisive moment, encounters only vaguely turn into confrontations, and never into resolutions, the tenuous plot offering but a few hesitant attempts at romance, friendship, a cross-country race, all of which are left inconclusive.

In an article from 1975, Terence Butler called attention to how the editing produces this discontinuous effect, observing that "Hellman usually holds a shot for a long time, and this contributes to the movie's tone of dislocation, since, more often than in most movies, a cut signifies a change in locale or a lapse in time." Together with this time-lapse, Butler further notices that, "the pan provides a means of expressing the limitations of the frame, the camera frequently picking up one of the cars from the roadside and following it for a distance until it slips into the unknown beyond the frame or – as a variation of this – comes to a halt at the edge of the frame."⁶² However, unlike the dead time effect of Antonioni, the camera is not left to linger after the vehicle has exited the frame, with one exception; after one of the cars departs from the quartet's last rendezvous at a roadside station in North Carolina, the shot is held for a good ten seconds. The composition is the most random imaginable, slightly tilted down, off-balance and with no determinate focus, framing gravel, asphalt, grass, undergrowth and a white fence – the various signature features that have been observed across the continent. Despite the geographical fidelity, the differences between each location are quite minimal; as in this shot it is a fence, a billboard or a roadside stand, gravel instead of asphalt, a patch of grass, or a thicket of trees that marks the singularity of each location.

Conditioned by the linear trajectory of the road, the leisurely-paced rhythm of the editing and the uniform, somewhat repetitive approach gives each location equal weight and presence.⁶³ This recording of the roadside

⁶² Terence Butler, "American Cinema in the '70s: Two-Lane Blacktop", *Movie*, no. 21, (Autumn 1975), p. 34-37; 34, 35.

⁶³ This approach to location also applies to the characters and events, as Brad Stevens observes, "The male protagonists may be goal-centered, but Hellman's stylistic evenness (that

environment while driving from one place to another can be compared to the serial structure of the on-the-road photography practiced by Stephen Shore and Robert Adams, and most consistently utilized by Edward Ruscha, beginning with *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1963). Despite the extensive distances traveled by the artist, the deadpan, frontal snapshots of gas stations between California and Texas depict them as variable conditions of the same, a principle spelled out in the titles of Ruscha's subsequent road books: *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1965), *Every Building along Sunset Boulevard* (1966) and *Thirty-four Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967). The reiterative organization of photos taken along Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles or the strip in Las Vegas has often been associated to the filmstrip.⁶⁴ If Ruscha's approach simulates the linearity of film where one frame follows another, there is also a joint or seam between the images, what in cinematic terms might be described as a jump-cut effect.

While the road reinforces linearism in Hellman's film, the editing incites a sense of seriality, resisting the equation between story and space simply in the scarce supply of narrative suggestion to dominate the setting. Though its formal approach at cursory glance evinces little interest in distinguishing one view from another, it spurs a consideration of on/off screen space and sound/image relations, and on closer inspection one notices how attuned the film is to nuances of changing light and climate. Discovery is often merely hinted at within the character's field of vision, as in the faint streaks of a purple dawn or the breaking autumnal foliage glimpsed through the side windows, and rather than being evacuated, the locations are teeming with discrete presence: the sound of freight trains, gas pumps, engines, and loudspeakers, but also of cicadas, rain and thunder, calling attention to how these locations are interwoven within larger frameworks of biosphere or infrastructure.

Non-exceptional Landscapes and the Redemption of Physical Reality

In Ciment's interview, as well as on the audio commentary track to the DVD thirty years later, Hellman frequently returns to how environmental conditions and transient atmospheric qualities determined how scenes were set up, stressing the joy of "reacting to the situation" and the possibility of discov-

'gift for uniformity' noted by Kent Jones) implicitly contradicts them, giving every event (as well as every character) an equal value." Stevens, p. 89.

⁶⁴ May Castleberry have characterized *Royal Road Test* (1967), which Ruscha made together with Patrick Blackwell and Mason Williams as "[a] filmlike succession of captioned photographs" in *Perpetual Mirage*, p. 166. "The layout of the photographs in *Every Building on Sunset Strip* mimics a filmstrip" Cécile Whiting similarly observes in *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2006), p. 95.

ery, whether of stockyards in Texas, an antique gas station and a parts store in Oklahoma, or the autumn colors of North Carolina. It only seems appropriate then that at the end of Ciment's interview, Hellman quotes Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. As one of film theory's most dedicated advocates of the merit of location shooting, Kracauer stressed the medium's unique ability to involve the environment without making it serve some extraneous purpose or to illustrate preconceived meanings. In opposition to the closed, organized story, Kracauer insisted on the "found story"⁶⁵ and cinema's aptitude to "record visible phenomena for its own sake", already evident in how the first Lumière films disclosed "the ripple of leaves stirred by the wind."⁶⁶ D.W. Griffith had similarly spoken about this as the essence of the medium when in 1947 he lamented that Hollywood had forgotten "the beauty of moving wind in the trees".⁶⁷ Just as Kracauer readily locates "[t]he medium's affinity for the flow of life" to the street, Hellman ends the interview by repeating that "the best décor for a film, it is still a street."⁶⁸ A common denominator would be the distinction Kracauer makes between *exploiting* and *exploring* pre-existing reality, between subduing it to abstract principles and predetermined meanings or to let it emerge in its own random and indeterminate terms.⁶⁹

There is, however, an additional idea elaborated by Hellman that resonates equally with Kracauer's realism and the new vocabulary of landscape at the time. In his conversation with Ciment, Hellman specifies that the difference of one place from another resides in people's sentiments about the place, whereas the environment itself tends to be more or less the same. While emphasizing geographical specificity through minute attention to natural sounds and light, Hellman dismisses the idea of an exceptional or unique landscape that is differentiated by some immanent quality or essence. Instead, it is both particular and commonplace.⁷⁰ This refusal to aestheticize

⁶⁵ Jeffery Chown briefly elaborates on Kracauer's concept of the 'found story' in relation to *The Rain People* in *Hollywood Auteur: Francis Coppola* (London, New York: Praeger, 1988), p. 52-53. The 'found story' also stakes its claim on a higher degree of realism, being fashioned from a physical world which exists before and independently of the act of representation.

⁶⁶ Kracauer, p. x, ix.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60. British director John Boorman has made a comment along the same lines: "Griffith had wanted to make films about the wind and the wheat, and he shot his films largely on location. But then, when sound came in and the camera became so cumbersome, they had to shoot everything in the studio. *Gone With the Wind* is a story about the love of the land, and you never see any land because it was all shot on the back lot!" As quoted by Peter Cowie in *Revolution! The Explosion of World Cinema in the 60s* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. 159.

⁶⁸ Kracauer, p. 72 ; Ciment, "Entretien avec Monte Hellman", p. 63-64.

⁶⁹ See Kracauer's epilogue, p. 300-311, especially p. 301.

⁷⁰ This was a view purported by John Brinckerhoff Jackson in regard to the vernacular landscape, it "has no inherent, [fixed] identity, it is simply defined by the way it is used", as quoted by Neil Campbell, p. 223. Two quotes used by Kracauer may illustrate this idea. First the French film theorist Albert Laffay's comment that cinema must sustain "the impression

or enhance the value or beauty of a landscape, and to never shoot out of sequence, is a conviction shared by the new topographers. What has been referred to as a snapshot aesthetics has then less to do with the actual process of taking the photographs than with an eschewal of a vertical dimension, aiming instead at an effect of equality. The landscape was in this way rendered as a part of, rather than outside or beyond, the world we inhabit, or as simply stated by Robert Adams: “Pictures should look like they were easily taken. Otherwise beauty in the world is made to seem elusive and rare, which it is not.”⁷¹

If the difference between the Old and the New West, or between Ansel Adams and Robert Adams, is that between unique and common landscapes, we might finally transfer this question to the Old/New Hollywood by asking how Hellman’s treatment of the Midwest differs from Ford’s use of Monument Valley. If Ford, in a way similar to Hellman’s self-characterization as a landscape painter, asserted that “the real star of my Westerns has always been the land”, the difference in their approach is implied already in Ford’s use of the term “star”.⁷² Providing physical portals and passages both as compositional elements and as emblems for the trials and transformations of manhood and nationhood, the protruding formations of Monument Valley correlate historical progress and a higher, unchangeable order. In this way Ford compels a passage from the particularities of the location to a generalized moral vision of history.⁷³ When Hellman emphasized that he “never used a scene outside of its geographical context” and that “New Mexico is not Oklahoma”, he voiced a spatial practice that runs counter to how Monument Valley was crafted into a mythic space, for in Ford’s West it provided the setting both for New Mexico, as in *Stagecoach*, as well as Oklahoma, as in his last western, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). Considering this emphasis on shooting in sequence, what does the fidelity to pro-filmic geography – New Mexico for New Mexico and Oklahoma for Oklahoma – finally signify?

To recap, I previously addressed the assumption of the rural and provincial as a withdrawal from contemporary issues, tracing the American experience to what was marginal, hidden and apparently un-changing instead of exploring the power structures of the centers and large cities. The concern with small towns and isolated rural areas of little apparent significance

that the place photographed is a random place, that one might have selected another as well,” p. 78; second a reader’s letter to the *New York Times* about Satyajit Ray’s *Aparajito* (*The Unvanquished*, 1956) a quote with which Kracauer concludes his book, stating that what is remarkable in the film “is that you see this story happening in a remote land and see these faces with their exotic beauty and still feel that the same thing is happening everyday in Manhattan or Brooklyn or the Bronx.” Kracauer, p. 311.

⁷¹ Jenkins, p. 55.

⁷² As quoted by McBride, p. 288.

⁷³ To cite Manny Farber’s harsh comment on Ford, Monument Valley “hid the fact that he couldn’t care less about the West. It was an escape hatch. He had no curiosity about land or ground.” Farber, p. 377.

could, however, also be considered as an indirect political statement, and as a subtle critique of the classical Hollywood narrative. The itinerary in *Two-Lane Blacktop* lets us glimpse infrastructural networks in transit, as in the generation and distribution of electricity in the ever-present power lines, the hydro dam they drive past near the end, or in the repeated opposite movements of cars and freight trains. The consequences of the sequentially filmed cross-country or costal trajectories emerge from their temporal alignment and succession of individual locations, or what Kent Jones in relation to Hellman has characterized as “a holistic approach”.⁷⁴ Landscape thus emerges as a function of time rather than as a manifestation of a unique identity set apart from the world at large.

Reviewing *The New West*, Lewis Baltz wrote that “Adams’ rigorous detachment, while restraining the temptation to moralize, allows him, nevertheless, to take a humanist stance.”⁷⁵ Such a stance might finally provide the deepest affinity between Hellman’s treatment of continental geography and the “New Topographics,” not the land as a “star” as Ford referred to Monument Valley, or in the pristine idiom of Ansel Adams, but of recognizing grace and beauty in what is random. Just as the itinerant, desolate quality of *The Rain People* and *Five Easy Pieces* might have as much in common with the endemic new realist tradition of Edward Hopper as with the European modernism represented by Antonioni, the new realism as expressed in *Two-Lane Blacktop* would seem closer an to an ‘old’ realist ideal than the critical realism commended at the time. Considered from this perspective, the landscape in the film brings together what Bazin considered the two prime virtues of the Italian neorealists – the use of real exteriors and natural light on the one hand, and the “rejection of the star concept” on the other.⁷⁶

Coda: Going into Orbit

The consistency of the formal features attended above – the liquidity of *The Rain People*, the leveling of exteriors and interiors in Rafelson’s films, the serial structure of *Two-Lane Blacktop* – all emphasize that landscape is mediated. Of course, the comparisons with painting and still photography I’ve been making, as well as the formal vocabulary with which I have described the films, in themselves tend to support notions of landscape in cinema in terms of stasis and autonomy. The effect of immobility in Edward Hopper’s painting, or of dead time in Antonioni’s films, cause a sense of stagnancy that is further accentuated by their concern with surface appearances and

⁷⁴ Jones, p. 182.

⁷⁵ Lewis Baltz, “Review of *The New West*” [1975] in *Reading into Photography*, p. 57-60; 58.

⁷⁶ André Bazin, “An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism (Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation)” [1948], *What is Cinema? Volume II*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971), p. 16-40; 23.

depopulated spaces. In one sense, the observational, objective mode I've been addressing involves a way of looking at the world as an object, and that the world isn't something that we're involved in or able to change but something we perceive from a distance. Recalling Kracauer's and Griffith's evocation of "wind in the trees", we may consider the following discouraging observation made by Andrew Sarris in 1968: "Modern audiences have lost this sense of psychological harmony with nature to the extent that the trees in, say, Antonioni's compositions serve as metaphors of cosmic indifference. The harmonies of Griffith have become the dissonances of Antonioni. The moral order to which Griffith's scenarios refer no longer exists."⁷⁷ Neither sustaining the ethos of Griffith or the vacuity to enunciate existentialist themes in the manner of Antonioni, Hellman instead argued that space isn't neutral. Agreeing with Ciment's impression of a "no mans land" in *Two-Lane Blacktop*, Hellman clarified that this vacuous quality resides in the characters' attitude toward the surroundings rather than the land itself.⁷⁸

Each of the films considered prompts a certain pathos in the characters' escapist yearning for a space of a radically different order. In *The King of Marvin Gardens*, off-season Atlantic City takes on an eerie quality in light of a long gone past: the beachfront boardwalks and the pleasure pier, the casinos, hotels and the Miss America beauty contest. The resonance of the title depends on the fact that the street names for Monopoly, the board game about the purchase, rental and trading of real estate, were based on the layout of Atlantic City. Marvin Gardens, however, is the only location on the game board that doesn't have a correspondence in reality.⁷⁹ After Nicholson's character has returned to Philadelphia, the film ends with an 8mm home movie of the two brothers playing on a beach when they were kids, the projector runs out of film and then there is a fade. Hellman ends *Two-Lane Blacktop* in a similar fashion. Framing the receding vanishing point from the backseat in a final race down an empty airport landing strip, the motion is slowed down till the image freezes, as if stuck in the projector gate, catches fire and burns away. In the last scene in *Five Easy Pieces*, Bobby Dupea hitches a ride north, presumably toward Alaska. Earlier in the film when on his way to Washington, he asked two hitchhikers about their destination and one of them replied that they were escaping to Alaska: "I saw a picture of it. Alaska's very clean. It appeared to look very white to me. Don't you think?"

⁷⁷ Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), p. 51-52.

⁷⁸ Ciment, "Entretien avec Monte Hellman", p. 57.

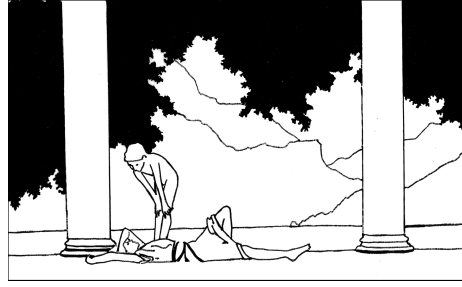
⁷⁹ "Marvin Gardens" on the Monopoly game board actually derived from a misspelling of "Marven Gardens", a housing area outside Atlantic City. Joy Boyer calls attention to the opposite settings, the real and the imagined, in the film: "Much of the board game Monopoly has a basis in the actual geography and street system of Atlantic City; not so Marvin Gardens. This most valuable piece of property is purely fictitious", Boyer, p. 55.

Natalie in *The Rain People* endorses another conventional frontier destination, explaining that she's heading for California because "it's as far west as I can go", and there is also a brief, high-angle shot when she stops at a scenic turn-off at the rim of a valley where the rural countryside can be enjoyed as if a picture. In *Two-Lane Blacktop*, Warren Oates' character, named simply GTO after the car he drives, relentlessly spins tales about places where you can "hang loose", where "roads are straight" or "scars heal", while conspicuously ill at ease in the locations he encounters along the way. Before the final race down the landing strip, the Driver turns to look at a barn by the roadside, the only instance in the film where a character pauses to look at the surroundings in a point-of-view shot. It is a soundless sequence filmed with a handheld, unsteady camera, framing a barn and some grazing horses through the side window.

Exuding nostalgia for a world apart, a rural valley or farmstead, white snowfields or a tropical island, the journeys that the characters undertake in these films mark an attempt to construct a landscape commensurate with their longing. This lack of an affective link with the present environment is spelled out by GTO during a night time drive. While musing about new routes and destinations, he momentarily faces his insistent self-delusion, confessing, "If I'm not grounded pretty soon, I'm gonna go into orbit." As we have seen, there is a discrepancy in the film between the monomaniac drive of the characters and the equal emphasis that is given to each location. Exploratory rather than explanatory, landscape initiates a mode of realism that questions how we look at the world we inhabit, and how we inhabit the world we look at. As Hellman concludes the matter with Ciment concerning the minute specificity of each location, "in the final analysis, all is similar",⁸⁰ though, as Robert Adams would add, "what is routine is also special."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ciment, "Entretien avec Monte Hellman", p. 57.

⁸¹ *Landscape: Theory*, Flattau, Gibson, Lewis (eds.), p. 10.



3 Neither Here nor There

Landscape and Nostalgia in *Badlands*

Have you ever noticed that a patch of sky, perceived through some vent, or between two chimney-spouts, two rocks, or through an arcade, gives a deeper idea of the infinite than some panoramic view from a mountaintop?

Charles Baudelaire¹

In the early winter of 2006 an artwork called *The Construction of Landscape* was featured at an exhibition in my neighborhood. The work consisted of a photograph of a forested lake at twilight placed on an easel. On a heap of sand in the center foreground a full-scale cardboard figure was positioned; silhouetted and with his back turned it was recognizable as the famous *Rückenfigur* of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818).² The exhibit addresses a number of key tenets in landscape studies; how certain compositional elements – the lateral format, the *repoussoirs*, and the twilight – implement unity and depth, but also how landscape was developed in tandem with an ideology of bourgeois individualism that instigated alienation not only by standing apart from a communal experience but also apart from nature. In the Romantic tradition, this faceless, silhouetted figure, conventionally understood as a surrogate for the spectator, silently transfixed before a horizon dividing land and sky became a ubiquitous device for evoking the sublime.

The fullest account of the *Rückenfigur* in Friedrich's paintings has been made by Joseph Leo Koerner in *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, where he calls into question the standard interpretation of how

¹ Charles Baudelaire in letter to Armand Fraisse as quoted by Mary Ann Caws, *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985).

² *The Construction of Landscape* (Janna Holmstedt, 2006), "Landskap" (Landscape).

this device “works to naturalize us as viewers, enabling us to enter more fully into the landscape.”³ Instead, Koerner argues that the *Rückenfigur* insists on our separation from the world on display, emblematic for “a stage within the life of humanity where landscape no longer is lived but viewed.”⁴ If Friedrich’s landscapes refer back in time to a moment of spectatorship in the past, to the original onlooker and contemplator of the scene, the original gaze, this turned figure confesses to our exclusion and belatedness:

That Friedrich’s paintings seem like landscapes already seen, even if we behold them for the first time, suggests the mysterious phenomenon of *déjà vu*. ... The *déjà vu* excites us with an anticipated return, yet leaves us in a state of exile; anticipation becomes finally nostalgia for a place I have never visited.⁵

To resume from the previous chapter, Lewis Baltz, one of the most distinguished of the new topographers, probed this issue when discussing a series of photographs from a housing project in Utah that he took in the late 1970s. Only through the gradual removal from nature due to the advance of empiricism, secularization and individualism, Baltz argues, could this pose of detached aesthetic contemplation emerge: “When we find nature’s processes awesome it is because, rather than in spite, of nature’s remoteness from human purpose. Nature is elsewhere; nature has nothing to do with us; nature’s back is toward us.”⁶ That alienation is endemic to the phenomenon of landscape has often been stated. In *The Dialogical Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, writes: “‘Landscape’ is born, that is, nature conceived as horizon (what a man sees) and as the environment (the background, the setting) for a completely private, singular individual who does not interact with it.”⁷ In theory, this contention has most notably been worked out in Denis E. Cosgrove’s *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* where landscape is historicized as a product of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, culturally and historically determined by the separation and reconstitution of land from biography, livelihood and habitat to a commodity which derives its value from abstract categories like aesthetics and exchange. Despite these sober indictments, such accounts nonetheless seem to imply an original relationship to nature in the past when man didn’t need landscape, and that landscape in turn stands as a sign for a state of innocence to which we can’t return.

³ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion Books 1990), p. 211.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁶ *Landscape: Theory*, Flattau, Gibson, Lewis (eds.), p. 29.

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* [1975], ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin, London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 143.

“The Construction of Landscape” may also bring to mind an image from Terrence Malick’s *Badlands* where the runaway killer, Kit, stands with his back turned and with a rifle mounted across his shoulders silhouetted against the luminous evening sky over the South Dakota plains to which he has taken refuge. The image has become something of an icon of the New Hollywood cinema, epitomizing as it does a range of its salient characteristics: the isolated male figure, the solipsism that gave its name to Kolker’s *A Cinema of Loneliness*, the proclivity for pointless violence and futile escapes, and the barrenness of contemporary America, a ‘bad land’ as the title indicates. It is also characteristic in its allusion to classical Hollywood, in this case to James Dean’s famous posture in *The Giant* (George Stevens, 1956). The title of this chapter, “neither here nor there,” is taken from the voice-over narration in Malick’s film where it refers to the ungrounded existence that Kit together with his teenage girlfriend Holly experience in the desolate areas of the upper Midwest. In the context of this chapter, it’s referring to how nostalgia displaces time as place and imposes one location over another in order to abridge past and present, here and elsewhere.

Finally, nostalgia has also been elaborated upon in relation to photography, famously by Susan Sontag in *On Photography* where she asserts that “photographs promote nostalgia.”⁸ This claim is implicit also in Stanley Cavell’s reflection on the ontology of cinema in *The World Viewed*. In the foreword to the 1979 edition of his book, Cavell draws from Malick’s second feature *Days of Heaven* (1978) to discuss how the screened image in cinema inevitably reflects upon its own origin elsewhere and elsewhen:

Objects projected on a screen are inherently reflexive, they occur as self-referential, reflecting upon their physical origins. Their presence refers to their absence, their location in another place. Then if in relation to objects capable of such self-manifestation human beings are reduced in significance, or crushed by the fact of beauty left vacant, perhaps this is because in trying to take dominion over the world, or in aestheticizing it (temptations inherent in the making of film, or of any art), they are refusing their participation with it.⁹

Though the fact that Cavell supervised Malick’s undergraduate thesis in philosophy at Harvard University in the mid 1960s and that Malick translated Martin Heidegger’s *Vom Wesen des Grundes* as *The Essence of Reason* in 1969, points toward a more extensive context for probing the landscape imagery in the film, and one which has a certain pertinence to nostalgia, it is

⁸ “Photography is an elegiac art,” Susan Sontag writes, “by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.” *On Photography* (New York: Delta, 1977), p. 15.

⁹ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* [1971] (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1979), xvi.

beyond the scope of this chapter.¹⁰ Instead, I will begin by considering how nostalgia has been analyzed as a cultural phenomenon symptomatic of the 1970s. When used to characterize the New Hollywood it's been in the pejorative sense of some retrogressive desire for a less ambiguous past, or, as a substitute, for the movies in which life had appeared so. As the examples above suggest, nostalgia is also a concept with manifold ramifications in relation to landscape, some of which are traced in the first part of this chapter. The subsequent close reading of *Badlands* explores this context in more detail by considering some of the contradictory readings that the film has been subjected to.

Nostalgia as Style and Theme

Few notions have been so persistently evoked in relation to the New Hollywood as nostalgia, usually corroborating with this stern verdict made by James Monaco in 1979: "The most powerful cultural force operating in the seventies is definitely nostalgia; it's going to be impossible, twenty years hence, to revive the seventies; they have no style of their own."¹¹ Two more probing considerations, also made in 1979, have drawn on nostalgia to define the decade. Firstly John G. Cawelti who makes a rather different assessment from that of Monaco when addressing the genre-revisionist work of the period, suggesting that nostalgia might be a prolific, critical activity, a proposal later to be pursued by Timothy Corrigan and Vera Dike.¹² Secondly

¹⁰ Jeff Malpas remarks in the conclusion to his recent study *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press, 2006): "the mood of Heidegger's thinking is nostalgic – it is characterized by the desire for home or for the return to the nearness of home." p. 310. To merely grasp at the surface, the distinctions that Heidegger makes between "Dwelling" and "Being", to-be-in or to dwell on the earth, and of detachment as a determining factor of human subjectivity, would appear to be significant in relation to the ruptures between setting and story, nature and narrative, that will be discussed in *Badlands* later on. So does several passages of Holly's voiceover, as when she talks about the "far-away planet of the world", that she "lived in dread", or when describing their life "in utter loneliness, neither here nor there" in the badlands. This sense of being adrift or suspended seems to tie in with Heidegger's use of *angst*, usually translated as dread, as a fear without object that emerges from the gap between the earths' startling presence and the failure to order or impose limits to define it. For an inspiring discussion on Heidegger's distinction between World and Earth, as well as the concepts of displacement, space and Being, see Miguel de Beistegui, *Thinking with Heidegger: Displacements* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003). Heidegger's influence on Malick is considered by Morrison and Schur and it is also the subject of Marc Furstenau and Leslie MacAvoy's essay "Terrence Malick's Heideggerian Cinema: War and the Question of Being in *The Thin Red Line*" in *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, ed. Hannah Patterson, (London, Wallflower Press, 2003), p. 173-185.

¹¹ James Monaco, *American Film Now* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 283.

¹² John G. Cawelti, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films" [1979] in Grant, p. 243-261; Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls*; Vera Dike, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

by Jean-François Lyotard who used nostalgia to make a distinction between modernity and post-modernity in *The Postmodern Condition*. When the master narratives of Western civilization, the grand quest- and goal pursuits, have lost their legitimacy, Lyotard argued, the artist is left to represent a sense of loss though without being able to specify *what* has been lost: “This is what the post-modern world is all about. Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative”.¹³

Though the similar *rétro* film had been used by French film critics, Fredric Jameson is the alleged originator of the term nostalgia film with which he referred to a tendency in early 1970s cinema to exploit previous styles.¹⁴ Settling for imitating and incorporating the surface gloss of a period look, and thereby eschewing its original contextual significance, Jameson argues that the nostalgia film depicted the past via allusion, paraphrase and pastiche rather than through an analysis of historical circumstances. To Jameson this was symptomatic of the waning historical consciousness that defined the post-modern condition, “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality” capable neither of dealing with history or of inventing styles of its own.¹⁵ Nostalgia film thus surfaces as a reactionary impulse to sooth over the ruptures of the recent past, the social upheavals of the 1960s, by returning to idealized images of a bygone era, primarily the stable values of an imagined 1950s, “the privileged lost object of desire” according to Jameson.¹⁶ Consequently, nostalgia pertains to fiction, not fact, to images, not reality, clinging to a false memory rather than a “deep memory”¹⁷ and to the patina of previous styles rather than a genuine understanding of the past. In an essay with markedly similar concerns entitled “History – A Retro Scenario”, Jean Baudrillard likewise designated the 1950s as the favored locus of nostalgia, one where the last decade of American innocence converged with the last decade of classical cinema.¹⁸

¹³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [1979], trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 41.

¹⁴ Nostalgia was however extensively used by film critics in the 1970s and in retrospect even Jameson himself doubts whether or not he glossed ‘nostalgia film’: “I don’t remember any longer whether I’m responsible for this term, which still seem to me indispensable, provided you understand that the fashion-plate, historicist films it designates are in no way to be grasped as passionate expressions of that older longing once called nostalgia”, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991) p. xvii. For a discussion on *rétro* film in France in the 1970s, see Naomi Green, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, “History – A Retro Scenario”, *Simulacra and Simulation* [1981], trans. Shelia Faria Glaser, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 43-48.

Circumscribing this new brand of nostalgia, Jameson, who also wrote the introduction for the English translation of Lyotard's essay, states that "what is enacted is a nostalgia for nostalgia, for the grand older extinct questions of origin and telos," what he further refers to as a "nostalgic pathos."¹⁹ Thomas Elsaesser's "The Pathos of Failure" contains a passage that anticipates this notion of a "crisis in narrative" observed by Lyotard and Jameson when he suggests that the refusal of motivated heroes and narratives in the New Hollywood cinema might be symptomatic of a more general anxiety:

Clearly in a period of historical stasis, these movies reflect a significant ideological moment in American culture. One might call them films that dramatize the end of history, for what is a story, a motivated narrative (which such movies refuse to employ) other than an implicit recognition of the existence of history, at least in its formal dimension – of driving forces and determinants, of causes, conflicts, consequences and interaction?²⁰

With its 1950s setting and noticeable allusions to popular culture, *Badlands* instantly appears to qualify as a nostalgia film. It was addressed in such terms by Marsha Kinder when, in an article in 1974, she explored a cycle of American films which dealt with a juvenile, innocent outlaw couple traveling through "the nostalgic settings of rural America," referring to Malick's film as an example of this new genre which she defined as "highly self-reflexive and nostalgic."²¹ Kinder's pairing of nostalgia and reflexivity, however, seems to designate a more probing and inquisitive role than the practice of "stylistic connotation" that Jameson referred to.²² Her observation was followed up, with considerable more hindsight, by Timothy Corrigan in *A Cinema Without Walls* where he elaborates on nostalgia as a mode of self-reflection, "more various and complex (and significantly less reactionary) than is often admitted."²³ Rather than yielding to a regressive or complacent state, Corrigan argues, nostalgia might instead provide the very tool with which history and identity can be interrogated. In what follows, it is the triad of setting, innocence and nostalgia that Kinder circumscribes which is considered.

As my concluding remarks in the previous chapter suggested, and despite the contemporary setting of the films discussed so far, nostalgia can be recognized as a persistent undertone of these films. To recall from the previous chapter, characters have frequently been caught in a moment of reverie before a landscape, whether seen, remembered or imagined. In *The Rain People* there is the shot where Natalie stands at the rim overlooking a valley in

¹⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 156.

²⁰ Elsaesser, *The Pathos of Failure*, p. 19.

²¹ Marsha Kinder, "The Return of the Outlaw Couple", *Film Quarterly* vol. 27, no. 4, (Summer 1974), p. 2-10; 3, 10.

²² Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 19.

²³ Corrigan, p. 17.

Virginia and in *The King of Marvin Gardens* the tropical paradise dreamt up by the Staebler brothers; in *Two-Lane Blacktop* the fabled destinations of GTO, and as a variation of this state of reverie, Bobby Dupea's weary departure for some vaguely defined north in *Five Easy Pieces*. When asked by *Sight and Sound*'s Beverly Walker to elaborate on what theme that he wanted to express in *Two-Lane Blacktop*, Monte Hellman concisely delineated, "how much romance is left in a non-romantic world" and how this obsolete romanticism entails "a nostalgia for what cannot be."²⁴ Four years later when Walker asked Terrence Malick about his ideas on *Badlands*, she received a resonant answer:

Nostalgia is a powerful feeling; it can drown out anything. I wanted the picture set up like a fairy tale, outside time ... Kit and Holly even think of themselves as *living* in a fairy tale. Holly says, "Sometimes I wished I could fall asleep and be taken off to some magical land, but this never happened." But she enough believes that there is such a place that she must confess to you *she* never got there.²⁵

Both directors define nostalgia as an impulse governing the characters, as a desire for romance or magic. Rather than a stylized period look, they explicitly state that they wanted to deal with nostalgia as a theme. This calls for a different understanding of nostalgia than the one Jameson circumscribed, and one that I suggest reverberates with the medium of film as well as the intermediality of landscape.²⁶

To begin a consideration of nostalgia as a theme in New Hollywood cinema, we may turn to James Morrison and Thomas Schur's shrewd study of Terrence Malick where they locate *Badlands* at "a time when a series of American films had rendered the outlaw-lovers-on-the-run pop melodrama nearly identical, as a genre, with the forces of the 'new' in the New Hollywood."²⁷ If this newness has regularly been defined as a self-consciously revisionist address of past styles and national myths, its critical impetus has been disputed, for if the lawlessness or discontent of the protagonists might

²⁴ Walker, "Two-Lane Blacktop", p. 37.

²⁵ Beverly Walker, "Malick on *Badlands*", *Sight and Sound*, vol. 44, no. 2, (Spring 1975), p. 82-83; 83

²⁶ With some resemblance to Cavell, Lloyd Michaels has used this play of presence and absence as a framework for his study *The Phantom of the Cinema: Character in Modern Film* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998) where *Badlands* is one of the examples discussed. Michaels also links childhood, landscape and national identity to nostalgia in his introduction: "This nostalgia for the absent object applies to thematized places (Monument Valley and the national myth of freedom) and things ("Rosebud" and the personal myth of childhood innocence)", p. 8. However, we don't need to agree in such ontological claims as Cavell's argument that cinema automatically reflects on its own means of representation or Michaels' proposal that nostalgia is congenial to "the irreversible, entropic nature of the film medium itself" (p.15) to recognize nostalgia as a salient theme in a number of films during the period under discussion.

²⁷ Morrison and Schur, p. xiii.

imply a subversive agenda, their escapist fantasies have rather been suspected of a mindless conformity.

In terms of generic legacies, the derivation of the road movie has generally been traced to how Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 lecture, *The Frontier in American History*, had defined the physical mobility along the westward line of flight as the animating source of American identity.²⁸ Invoking yet undermining the core values of such frontier individualism, the road movies' emergence at the wane of the counter-culture has been interpreted as symptomatic for the paralysis of social rebellion and national regeneration.²⁹ It is significant, however, that Turner's lecture announced the closing of the frontier, defining it as the formative impetus of national character only to conclude that it no longer existed. This ceaseless opening up of new terrain further suggested, as Leslie A. Fiedler noted in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, that "the territory ahead" is "the only real America".³⁰ Rather than a geographic location, the frontier thus appears as a wishful projection, a pursuit toward what Fiedler defines as "an endlessly retreating vision of innocence".³¹ The most conspicuous example of such a spectatorial nostalgia for the "real America" in the road movie would be Billy and Wyatt's sunset entry into Monument Valley in *Easy Rider*. Then again, just like Turner's frontier thesis, Ford's vision was nostalgic to begin with. In Gilberto Perez's definition of Ford's West, it didn't commemorate a better past but a past that could imagine a better future, celebrating the visionary prospect itself by looking "back to a past that looked forward to a future."³²

Future-Past

Composed by homecoming, return (*nostos*) and pain (*algos*), nostalgia originally designated a pathological condition of dislocation and of being separated from the homeland.³³ If W.J.T. Mitchell claimed that landscape has become outmoded as a genre for high art and hence an object of nostalgia, it may also be considered as a symbolic expression of nostalgia in the first place. In fact, one of the pivotal works in the development of landscape theory deals with this theme. In *The Country and the City*, Marxist theorist Raymond Williams addressed how a linear time axis which endorsed a sa-

²⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* [1920] (New York: Dover Publications, 1996).

²⁹ For a recent example, see Brian Ireland, "American Highways: Recurring Images and Themes of the Road Genre", *The Journal of American Culture*, vol. 26, no. 4, (Dec. 2003), p. 474-484.

³⁰ Fiedler, p. 472.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

³² Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 241.

³³ For a historical discussion of nostalgia, see David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 4-13.

cred past and discredited a secular present had been translated into a spatial metaphor of country versus city in a manner that inevitably “gave way to a deep and melancholy consciousness of change and loss, which eventually established, in a new way, a conventional structure of retrospect.”³⁴ The countryside thus came to signify a lost condition of innocence and immediacy, in Williams’ account:

an idea of the country is an idea of childhood: not only the local memories, or the ideally shared communal memory, but the feel of childhood: of delighted absorption in our own world, from which, eventually, in the course of growing up, we are distanced and separated, so that it and the world become things we observe.³⁵

This temporal disparity is also addressed in Susan Stewart’s more recent inquiry *On Longing*. Stewart argues that nostalgia operates to sublimate a feeling of lack in the present by postulating a pure origin in the past. However, the lost object of nostalgic craving is one that we never possessed in the first place: “Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns towards a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality.”³⁶ We can see how these definitions of nostalgia pertain to how the idea of nature in the New World presupposed a pure origin that subsequently had been corrupted, spoiled and blighted by history, culture and convention in the Old World. Landscape may thus be mobilized to authenticate a moment in history, or rather outside it, as well as to symbolically reclaim it. Accordingly, Stewart asserts that, “[t]he prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture”,³⁷ bringing to mind both W.J.T. Mitchell’s definition of landscape and Barthes’ account of how myth makes values and beliefs that are historically and culturally contingent appear as innocent, timeless and nature-given.

I’d like to tie my suggestion of nostalgia’s future-past as commensurate to the logic of how the American landscape was constructed in literature and art in the nineteenth century to a distinct case in point. Making the leap from Jameson’s claim that the inability to conjure up meaningful historical relationships in post-modern times begets a “nostalgia for the present”³⁸ over to nostalgia as intrinsic to the notion of the New World as an entry into a prelapsarian condition, it might be more than coincidental that Robert Hobbs

³⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

³⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 23.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁸ “Nostalgia for the present” is the caption to chapter nine in Jameson, *Postmodernism*, the one that deals with nostalgia film, p. 279-296.

has used the very same phrase when observing that the work of Thomas Cole, the founding figure of the Hudson River School, displayed “a great nostalgia about the present.”³⁹ To bring some specificity to this instantaneous nostalgia, we may consider Cole’s most well-known work, and probably the single most written about American landscape painting from the nineteenth century, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm – The Oxbow* from 1836, painted the same year as Emerson’s seminal essay *Nature* and one year after Cole’s own *Essay On American Scenery*.⁴⁰ The painting depicts a thunderstorm sweeping across a mountain top in the foreground in dramatic contrast to a garden-like pastoral scene in the valley below, fusing the aesthetic modes of the sublime and the beautiful within a single canvas and dramatizing the view as a trajectory from conflict to resolution, or from the wild to the cultivated. Sheltered in a chasm among the rocks the artist himself is situated within the very painting he is working on, looking back at us as if interrupted by the spectator’s gaze. It has also been suggested that the figure refers to a younger Cole, approximately positioned at the spot where he made the first sketches three years earlier, and that the artist thus turns to look back at his future self. An additional sign of artistic intervention are the Hebrew letters for *Shaddai*, “the almighty,” engraved on a hillside in the distance. In this, *The Oxbow*’s status as a prototype for the ensuing tradition of landscape painting is somewhat inappropriate since Cole displays the act of signification that he himself, along with his peers among the nineteenth century landscape artists, would later conceal. It is more typical in that the wilderness that it laments was already a thing of the past, the view from the summit long since a renowned tourist attraction when Cole painted it.

In a dense analysis of the forward/backward look in Cole’s painting, Bernd Herzogenrath explored how past and prospect, reflection and projection, meet within the same frame, proposing that “the painting which Cole is painting *within* the painting – but which we cannot see – presents in fact the

³⁹ Hobbs, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Alan Wallach has studied *The Oxbow* as “a prototypical or paradigmatic work” (80) in the way it established a “visual formula” (82) to depict the national landscape on canvas in “Making a Picture of the View from Mount Holyoke” in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. David C. Miller, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) p. 80-91. Edward S. Casey has written extensively on this painting in his book *Representing Place*. The legacy of Cole’s painting in the work of later artists, most notably Stephen Hannock and Alfred Leslie, has been the subject of a study in its own right, *Changing Prospects: The View from Mount Holyoke*, ed. Marianne Doezema, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). Another testimony to the totemic status of Cole’s painting is the way it frequently been compared to Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, by Scott MacDonald in *The Garden in the Machine* and also in *Imagining America: Icons of 20th-Century American Art*, John Carlin and Jonathan Fineberg, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005). The structuring of landscape into a narrative with a fore-, middle- and background converging with beginning, middle and end is thoroughly explored by Miller in *The Empire of the Eye*.

paradigm of his retroactive landscapes,⁴¹ disclosing a paradox that later would be suppressed. Emerging in the wake of industrialization and tourism in the Hudson River Valley, this pristine scene, where an innocence lost long ago in Europe could be reclaimed, conditioned a “contradictory temporality,” one that simultaneously posed and presupposed a “mythical origin retroactively.”⁴² Herzogenrath’s summary recalls Stewart’s definition of a future-past as well as Perez’s definition of the nostalgia of Ford’s Westerns: “The myth of the American Primal Scene is thus a myth with a surprising similarity between its visions of past and future – what will be regained is exactly what had been thought lost but had actually never been there.”⁴³ In line with this discussion of a projection from the Old World in the guise of a revelation in the New, we may finally note that Thomas Cole was a native of Lancashire, educated in England and Italy, and that John Ford, of course, was an Irish immigrant, both of whom in their own respective medium reified a nostalgic vision of the demise of a new beginning.

Innocents Abroad

As the discussion above indicates, both landscape and nostalgia conditions innocence in order to verify their claims, that is, one has to accept the authenticity, i.e. deny the retroactive construction, of the origin that they refer to. There is an additional paradox here as nostalgia appears to depend on artifacts and mementos, just as characters in the films previously discussed tend to pursue locations merely experienced as an image; Monument Valley recalled from cinema, Alaska from a picture, and Marvin Gardens from the Monopoly game board.

Following a journey from civilization into nature that is narrated in the past tense by an adolescent’s voice-over, *Badlands* makes explicit a latent classical derivation that repeatedly has been broached in relation to the road movie. As he mentions *Easy Rider*, Thomas Elsaesser refers to “the ever present Huck Finn motif in American culture,”⁴⁴ and when grasping at the generic roots of *Five Easy Pieces*, Gregg M. Campbell casts Bobby Dupea as a distorted version of this “archetypical American hero,” defined as “the perpetual adolescent, locked by his creator into the never-never land of pre-pubescence,” further observing that a photograph in the family residence at

⁴¹ Bernd Herzogenrath, “Looking Forward/Looking Back: Thomas Cole and the Belated Construction of Nature” in *From Virgin Land to Disney World: Nature and Its Discontents in the USA of Yesterday and Today*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath, (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2001), p. 83-103; 95.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁴ I refer here to the revised version of the article in *The Last Great American Picture Show*, p. 286 since the original text only refers to Twain implicitly: “*Easy Rider* revives the ever-present motif in American culture about the male couple ganging to escape civilization and women.” Elsaesser, “The Pathos of Failure”, *Monogram*, p. 17.

Puget Sound shows “young Bobby as Huck Finn – straw hat, fishing pole – complete”.⁴⁵ The tales spun by GTO in *Two-Lane Blacktop* further recall the way Huck Finn invents different stories about himself as the journey progresses, and even Natalie teaming up with a hitchhiker in *The Rain People* makes an explicit Huck and Jim pairing as her fellow traveler, similar to the runaway slave in Twain’s novel, is characterized by his childlike behavior and unreserved trust in her.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) has often been described as a work impelled by the author’s nostalgia for his past as a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi, and similar to Cole’s painting merited for having invented an indigenous American pastoral, though it was rather, as Herzogenrath has it, a “retroactive re-construction of a pristine American pastoral”.⁴⁶ By letting the plain-spoken, orphaned Huck Finn narrate an experience of intimacy with the physical world, Twain’s novel has further been claimed as the first colloquial expression of a native landscape, one where word and world congenially flowed in unison with the currents of the river.⁴⁷ The allusion becomes explicit in *Badlands*; addressing an audience in a southern idiom, Holly’s voice-over narration frequently paraphrases that of Huck Finn, as in her pantheistic evocation of “whispering spirits” in the “rustling leaves” of the forest, as does the journey itself, escaping the small town and the oppressive father for the sparsely inhabited Montana.⁴⁸ When interviewed by Walker, Malick also points to the presence of this enduring theme in *Badlands* by drawing from the title of another of Twain’s novels, remarking on the character Holly that “her kind of cliché didn’t begin with pulp magazines, as some critics have suggested. It existed in Nancy Drew and Tom Sawyer. It’s not the mark of a diminished, pulp-fed mind, I’m trying to say, but of the ‘innocent abroad’.”⁴⁹ With this reference to Twain’s *Innocents Abroad* (1869), Malick seems to designate a certain strain of naivety as specifically American. This theme has frequently been observed, for example,

⁴⁵ Gregg M. Campbell, “Beethoven, Chopin, and Tammy Wynette: Heroines and Archetypes in *Five Easy Pieces*”, *Literature/Film Quarterly* vol. 2, no. 3, (Summer 1974), p. 275-283; 280-281.

⁴⁶ Herzogenrath, “Looking Forward/Looking Back”, p. 94.

⁴⁷ For a discussion, see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* [1964] (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 319-341.

⁴⁸ Holly: “I grew to love the forest. The cooing of the doves and the hum of dragonflies in the air made it always seem lonesome, like everybody’s dead and gone. When the leaves rustled overhead it was like the spirits were whispering about all the things that bothered them.” Huckleberry Finn: “there was them kind of faint dronings of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody’s dead and gone; and if a breeze fans along and quivers the leaves, it makes you feel mournful, because you feel like spirits whispering – spirits that’s been dead ever so many years – and you always think they’re talking about *you*. As a general thing it makes a body wish *he* was dead, too, and done away with it all.” As quoted by Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 338.

⁴⁹ Malick continues by stating: “My influences were books like *The Hardy Boys*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huck Finn* – all involving an innocent in a drama over his or her head.” Walker, “Malick on *Badlands*”, p. 82.

Paul Warshow indicted the protagonists in *Easy Rider* as representatives of “the monstrous naive innocence of America.”⁵⁰ Similarly, David Laderman has characterized Kit in *Badlands* as “pathologically naive” while Kinder referred to his “romantic extremism,”⁵¹ and Malick himself finally to Holly’s unconditional belief that “there is such a place” as a “magical land”.

Twain’s chronicle of a group of Americans touring the Old World, visiting the pyramids in Egypt and the Holy Land in Palestine, may in fact provide a key to Malick’s treatment of locations in *Badlands*. Measuring the renowned sites of the Orient and the Biblical lands with the romantic similes he knows beforehand, the narrator in *Innocents Abroad* becomes increasingly disillusioned as the sight-seeing progresses. Interestingly, Twain’s objections are mainly aesthetical, complaining about the scenery’s lack of perspective, its barrenness and dull colors which he rejects as un-picturesque and unsightly. He also implies that the past that once was in the Old World has been displaced as the future of the New, as when the sea of Galilee is unfavorably compared to Lake Tahoe, or when Palestine is described as oppressively confined and impoverished in relation to the spacious and fresh geography of America.⁵² In a sense, Kit and Holly’s journey reverses that of the “new pilgrims” in Twain’s novel, repeatedly projecting images from the Old World onto the American Midwest, viewing native land with foreign eyes as they forge their own monuments and archeological sites along the trail.

***Badlands*: From Daybreak to Setting Sun**

The story in *Badlands* lends itself to a brief summary, and as in my previous discussion of *Two-Lane Blacktop*, I suggest that this simplicity might indicate a concern with conceptual matters. The film opens with the voice of a young girl, Holly, recapitulating how she and her father escaped the memory of a dead wife/mother by moving from Texas to Fort Dupree in South Dakota. Images of tree-lined streets follow, the serenity intruded by a garbage truck and the other protagonist, Kit. In the course of events, Kit shoots Holly’s father who disapproves of their romance and takes her on a similar escape route north “to begin a new life” with further killings along the road until they are finally arrested while roaming the Great Plains.

Explaining that he “wanted the picture set up like a fairy tale, outside time”, Malick’s intention apparently runs against the geographical fidelity

⁵⁰ Warshow, “Easy Rider”, p. 38.

⁵¹ Laderman, p. 125; Kinder, p. 8.

⁵² In “Holy Landscape”, W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that the title of Twain’s novel may stand as a paradigm for a way of studying landscape through its surface appearance, rather than as a repository of myth and history as represented by Simon Schama’s *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). Following Twain, Mitchell makes a double exposure of American sentiments toward the desert and ideas about the Holy landscape in Palestine.

discussed in the previous chapter. It's also evident in a very pragmatic sense. As James Morrison and Thomas Schur note in their study of the director, all of Malick's three films to date "use one distinct location in place of another", with Otero County in Colorado substituting for South Dakota in *Badlands*, "signifying the amalgam of contingency and exactitude that circumscribes the depiction of space in cinema."⁵³ Contrary to Monte Hellman's dictate of never using a place out of context, place out of context may in fact be defined as a major theme of Malick's film. I will defer from discussing formal or stylistic features in this part, instead focusing on the play of references and allusions Malick induces, and the frameworks and projections used in turn by Kit and Holly to make sense of what they observe.

The story is settled within familiar spatial clichés, beginning with the grid street pattern of Rapid City, somewhat reminiscent of Norman Rockwell's idyllic portrayals of 1950s small-town America, and with Kit being from the "wrong side of the tracks", provoking a conflict that leads to the death of Holly's father, the burning down of her childhood home and their escape to a forest where they build a tree house next to a river. However, they don't come empty-handed to this brief sojourn of natural simplicity. The objects they gather at the outset of their journey become talismans for the 'magical land' Holly refers to: the father's stereopticon cards, an issue of *National Geographic*, a scenic color print, *The Adventures of Marco Polo* and the *Kon-Tiki* expedition.

The color print is *Daybreak* (1922) by Maxfield Parrish, a painter whose Edenic fantasies which fused a photographic realism, rich in details and textures, with a romantic exoticism, were widely distributed for households across America, *Daybreak* being his best selling work. Dramatically lit and flanked by two columns as if taking place on a stage, two youthful figures reside on a marble floor in the foreground curtailed by dark foliage while light breaks through the mountain pass on the opposite side of a lake. Holly's voice-over description of their life in the forest seems to draw directly from the Parrish print when she muses, "It was like being in a marble hall," followed by the camera slowly tilting down over the print that adorns their new home. Her comment also makes use of the rhetorical figure of describing topography in architectural terms common in the nineteenth century. By referring to peaks as spires, mountains as domes and temples, and the woods as cathedrals, the man-made, sacred places of the Old World could be denounced merely as a faint echo of the original creation revealed in America.⁵⁴

⁵³ Morrison and Schur, p. 60. If this was indeed a conscious strategy, Malick's fourth film, *The New World* (2006), departed from it, shot in close proximity to the location of the historical events that it refers to.

⁵⁴ Though numerous examples of this use of architectural analogies of castles and cathedrals, spires, arches and ornaments when describing nature in the New World may be cited, an example from Clarence King's *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* [1871] as quoted in

Yet, Holly clings as much to vistas from the Old World. While Kit glances through the *National Geographic* magazine, she spends an afternoon going through her father's stereopticon cards with vistas of various exotic locations, among those the pyramids in Egypt. The first slide displays a palm-fringed canal stretching towards a light-infused vanishing point, and Holly pulls the stereopticon to achieve an illusion of immersion into the imaginary depth of the scene while her voice-over pleads for sleep to take her off "to some magical land". This suspension of disbelief and the optical illusion of perspectival depth that the stereopticon engenders are simulated by the only overt instances of zooms in the film used for the first and the last stereopticon slide. However, the effect of the zoom is one of flattening space rather than of moving through it, it is planar rather than recessional, and the denied entry into another world that Holly desires is also confirmed by her voice-over informing us that "this never happened."

Forced to abandon their forest hide-out, Kit and Holly spend a day in a Victorian mansion, while keeping its owner and maid hostage, before setting out for the South Dakota badlands. Together with Holly's former home, this is the only interior explored at any length in the film. With this in mind, it is striking that in both cases a plethora of landscape paintings decorate the walls. Whereas we may catch a glimpse of a painting by American luminist Martin Johnson Heade, characteristically of haystacks spread across a field, in the rich man's house, there is a reproduction of a painting by Jean Francois Millet with a similar motif in Holly's home. Landscape thus also marks a class distinction. More conspicuously, the camera moves within the frame of a canvas where a herd of sheep is tended by a shepherdess, the kind of motif of which the Parrish print was a kitschy, lowbrow version. As *Day-break*, this painting is set out in a traditional schema with the heraldic figures in the foreground, a placid lake in the middle and a mountain peak in the centre distance. If Holly adopted her "marble hall" metaphor from *Day-break*, the mountain will now become the visual leitmotif for Kit and Holly's yearning to usher into a "magical land."

Their entry into the badlands is rendered in a succession of striking images. In the first, the Cadillac drives along the sharply-edged horizon line, a cloud of dust drawing an exact parallel across the screen, then following a line of telephone poles, and finally, in an ascending crane shot, steering towards the vanishing point of a desert trail. The sequence where Kit surveys

Jussim and Lindquist-Cock (p. 32) might be sufficient: "As I sat on Mount Tyndall, the whole mountains shaped themselves like the ruins of cathedrals – sharp roof-ridges, pinnacled and statted, buttresses more spired and ornamented than Milan's; receding doorways with pointed arches carved into blank facades of granite, doors never to be opened, innumerable jutting points with here and there a cruciform peak, and frozen roof and granite spires so strikingly gothic I cannot doubt that the Alps furnished the models for early cathedrals of that order." John F. Sears has discussed this rhetoric in relation to tourism in "Scenery as Art: Yosemite and the Big Trees", *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), p. 122-155.

the badlands, which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is worth examining in some detail. It is introduced by a pan over an unbroken stretch of the plains, stopping as it frames Kit, his back turned, silhouetted, with a rifle mounted across his shoulders and head slightly bowed, appearing as a scarecrow figure against the luminous evening sky. A series of extreme long shots, crosscut with close-ups of birds and a lizard, follow: low horizons with towering pink-tinted clouds, flashes of dry lightning, and the remote shape of a mountain on the horizon.

Hardly any analysis of *Badlands* has failed to notice how Kit in this sequence mimics James Dean's famous pose in George Stevens' *The Giant* from 1956, approximate to the diegetic time of *Badlands*, a reference that also been confirmed by Malick.⁵⁵ Yet the allusion to *The Giant* ramifies further and in ways that I suggest to be of conceptual significance to Malick's treatment of landscape. The series of distant long-shots of Kit and Holly entering the badlands, for example, emulates the newly-weds' first journey to the Reata Ranch in *The Giant* with graphic preciseness, depicted as a transient dust cloud sweeping over the barren land and then pursuing a line of telephone poles. If Kit's identity is a facsimile of Dean's, who in *The Giant* carried the similar name, Jett, Kit further nicknames Holly "Tex", just like Rock Hudson does with Elisabeth Taylor, though whereas Holly is a displaced Texan in Malick's film, Taylor was displaced in Texas in Stevens'. As previously observed, Otero County in Colorado stands for the Great Plains between South Dakota and Montana in Malick's film, suggestive of how mimetic verisimilitude and geographic redundancy smoothly coalesce in cinema, a displacement enhanced further by this allusion to Texas as it appeared in *The Giant*.

The sequence doesn't merely pertain to a Hollywood past, however. As noted at the outset of this chapter, the stark simplicity of the composition - distilled to the elemental features of a horizon dividing sky and earth and faced by a solitary figure - implement the Romantic landscape tradition of Caspar David Friedrich.⁵⁶ Kit's cruciform appearance adds to this resonance as the solitary cross silhouetted against sunsets, snowfields and oceans which was a recurrent motif in Friedrich's paintings, or as a variation of this, a cruciform tree. The lone cross in the wilderness also became a cherished emblem in American landscape painting, the subject of Cole's last, unfinished suite *The Cross and the World*, and further pursued by his disciple, Frederic

⁵⁵ See, William Johnson's review of *Badlands* in *Film Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3, (Spring 1974), p. 43-46; 46, footnote 4. *The Giant* is also a palpable presence in Malick's next film, *Days of Heaven* (1978) where an isolated house in the Texas panhandle duplicates the Reata ranch in Stevens' film.

⁵⁶ Barbara Novak has discussed how this contemplative and faceless figure "act as a surrogate inviting the spectator into the image" in European and American landscape painting while she observes that Friedrich "emphasizes rather than erases the self," whereas American landscape painters tended to stress an absorption into nature, *Nature and Culture*, p. 185.

Church.⁵⁷ Uniting the transcendental motif of the cross, mediating between the terrestrial and the celestial, with the iconic image of Dean, Kit's posture simultaneously evokes and evades, referring to a Hollywood past, the cross at Calvary and nineteenth-century Romanticism in a manner that instigates an equivalence or canceling out of signs.

One concluding remark on this sequence concerns the atmospheric effect that Malick makes use of, what the director has referred to as the "magic hour," which is the brief interval after the sun has set behind the horizon when the source of light can't be located but when the afterglow remains. This interval between sundown and dusk also harks back to landscape painting, magic hour being the moment favored by German, Scandinavian and American landscape artists in the nineteenth century, inducing a meditative, tranquil mood resonant with their elegiac themes. Malick exploited this atmospheric condition to the full in *Days of Heaven* (1978) which was almost entirely shot during magic hour in accord to a plethora of staple motifs in landscape painting; the cyclical patterns of nature, plant and animal life, seasonal change and agricultural labor.⁵⁸

The suggested transcendence is, however, contradicted by Kit's lack of response. The sequence concludes by returning to his cross-like posture, a full moon has appeared to the left and he turns and strolls towards the camera. Instead, the inventory of the plains brings about another of his acts of commemoration, deciding to bury a seemingly arbitrary assemblage of their tokens and possessions in a pail. Along with these various keepsakes, the stack of stereopticon cards is thrown in followed by a pack of Camel cigarettes, both objects reproducing the same familiar vista of the pyramids at Giza with a camel positioned in the foreground. The immediate visual linkage between Far East and Far West, between sacred site, tourist attraction and trademark logo, reduces them to the same ontological status, in spite of

⁵⁷ In *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama has argued that this motif derived from the fusion of Heimat and the cross of Calvary in Caspar David Friedrich *The Cross in the Mountains* (1807-8), p. 185-242. Though such a causal relation could be disputed, cruciform trees appeared in a number of Church paintings and the motif of the cross in the wilderness would later be depicted in the work of Georgia O'Keeffe. The apotheosis would be the Mountain of the Holy Cross in Colorado, a snow-filled rift valley in the granite face of the wall forming a shining white cross, first to be painted by Thomas Moran in 1875.

⁵⁸ As defined by Nestor Almendros, Malick's photographer on *Days of Heaven*, "magic hour" ensues in "the time between sunset and nightfall", and continues: "For those few moments the light is truly magical, because no one knows where it is coming from." Nestor Almendros, *A Man With A Camera*, trans. Rachel Phillips Belash, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984), p. 182. Almendros testifies to Malick's "exceptional knowledge of painting" and that the film contains "a number of influences from painting" with "references to Wyeth, Hopper and other American artists." He further describes an improvisational approach where an adjustment to the vagaries of the weather and shooting in natural light was part of a conscious attempt to "simplify the photography, to purify it of all the artificial effects of the recent past" and to get back to the silent films "simplicity and their lack of refinement." p. 169.

the first's illusion of three-dimensional space and the second's pastiche of a flat frontal Egyptian imagery.

The tombs at Giza also resonate with the cone-shaped mountain on the horizon that provides Kit and Holly's sole means of orientation in the badlands. At first, Holly's voice-over explicates their goal as "the mountains of Montana" followed by a long shot of a distant rise against an unclouded sky. The same vaporous shape, now against a cloud-streaked sky, appears as Holly continues her chronicle, though this time designating "the mountains of Saskatchewan". As their journey draws to a close, only objects in the remote distance are visible. In contrast to the intimate delineation of the plants, trees and wildlife in the forest, Holly can now merely tag geographical names on the spectral signs of human dwelling far apart and observed from an insurmountable distance, once again echoing Huck Finn when remarking on the sparks of lights on the riverbanks at night. Apparently within the same night's drive, Holly observes "the gas refineries at Missoula", which is in Montana, as a petroleum flare floating in pitch darkness, the cold, blue line of dots that are "the lights of Cheyenne", in the southeast of Wyoming, and as dawn breaks, "the mountains of Saskatchewan" in Canada.

The badlands is finally abstracted to the flashes of the headlights over the earth's crust, steering towards "the far north" while Holly studies a map, though in a manner similar to her fascination with travel literature and tabloid magazines rather than for orientation. Ending their nocturnal ride with a final enactment of romance, they step out to dance to Nat King Cole's *A Blossom Fell* playing on the car radio. Illuminated by the cones of the headlights, the scene evokes the act of cinematic projection, Kit and Holly suspended in the all-encompassing darkness as Cole's crooning turns the badlands into a romantic picture show. As the refrain laments "the dream has ended, for true love died", the blue dots of their headlights become visible on the horizon at dawn, and when the mountain and its promise of escape appears, Kit comments "God, what a sight" while Cole's refrain plays one last time. In its third and final appearance, this violet shape is multiplied by the clouds towering above it. As a concluding act of commemoration during the moments before his arrest, Kit hastily piles a mound of stones approximate to the spot where he is to be captured. As his cross-posture earlier was copied from Dean, the stone cairn, as well as the forged archeological site of the buried pail, might have been inspired by the man-made mountain at Giza, also a monument intended to ensure immortality.

The trajectory from their settlement in the forest and into the badlands may be described as one of continual un-earthing. The ratios of sky to land successively change with horizons framed extremely low and the human presence relegated to the bottom edge of the composition. Consequently, the final journey in the film takes off from the concrete expanses of a military airport as Kit and Holly are flown back to Rapid City, their original point of departure. With a faint smile, Holly gazes out of the window followed by a

shot outside the plane sailing over cloudbanks reddened by the setting sun. Holly's smile hardly seems accurate to the circumstances of the plot but more to this final aerial shot, floating towards the last rays breaking through the clouds. It seems that in order to make the physical world over into a "magical land", it has to disappear altogether.

Story-space vs. Landscape: Strategies of Non-alignment in *Badlands*

The response to *Badlands* has been marked by some puzzlement, it seems, due to the discrepancy between the lucid images on the one hand, what a contemporary review aptly referred to as "their inconsequential beauty",⁵⁹ and the unintelligibility of character motivation and psychology on the other. Two recent examples confirm the persistence of reading landscape as story-space. When Ryan Gilbey in his book about New Hollywood asserts that Malick "integrated landscape into American film-making, showing how it could effect, influence and comment upon the action" and that "the characters are inextricably linked with the land",⁶⁰ it is to accommodate the film within a narrative paradigm which I argue that it intentionally resists. A more thorough analysis along the same lines has been made by Ben McCann. Defending the film against charges of empty aestheticism, McCann refers to the indictment of the nature imagery as "National Geographic supplements" and "ultra-photogenic", recalling Klinger's critique of the travelogues in *Easy Rider*.⁶¹ Instead, he attempts to resolve this excess into symbolism or anthropomorphism, arguing that "environment plays a crucial role in the narrative, governing character emotions and motivations, providing a deeper understanding of the personal stories Malick wants to tell." McCann further observes a "symbiosis of word and image" and a "subtle interplay between human beings and their surroundings", where locations provide "emotional texture and narrative depth", concluding that "the construction and use of natural spaces, assumes a vital aesthetic and narratological function."⁶² On all these points I would disagree, arguing that Malick emphasizes disconnection rather than integration through a set of identifiable formal strategies. Though I'm certainly not the first one to notice these strategies, I attempt to delineate them more specifically in relation to the oscillation between the film's photography and the imaginary geographies endorsed by Kit and Holly.

⁵⁹ Johnson, "Badlands", p. 44.

⁶⁰ Ryan Gilbey, *It Don't Worry Me: Nashville, Jaws, Star Wars and Beyond* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 77.

⁶¹ Benn McCann, "'Enjoying the Scenery': Landscape and the Fetishisation of Nature in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*" in Patterson (ed.), p. 75-85; 79.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 75-76.

Throughout *Badlands*, cues for fusing character viewpoint and environment – the first-person narrative structure, the voice-over and the point-of-view shot – are used instead to inflict distance and discontinuity so that the physical world as seen or spoken about looms up independently of subjective perspective. The sequence where Kit surveys the badlands is a pertinent example. Whereas one would expect Kit’s intent observation to present the object of his gaze, the temporal elision and perspective alterations, swiftly shifting between extreme long shots and close-ups, instead give rise to a mismatch or disjunction between seeing and setting. This tendency in Malick’s work to render the alignment between perception and surroundings dubious by breaking the link between character viewpoint and environment has been observed by Morrison and Schur:

Formally, Malick makes us constantly aware of perspective, by intercutting images of landscape with characters who appear to be looking at something. Yet our awareness remains arrested at a formal level, since the literal anchorage of perspective is frequently snatched away, when it turns out that what we are seeing is not, after all, from the point of view of the character we thought it was.⁶³

Throughout the film, the act of looking at nature (Kit’s survey), describing it (Holly’s “marble hall” monolog), or leaving one’s mark on it (the stone cairn), emerge as an impulse to fix and preserve a transient experience, though the effect is markedly the opposite. Kit and Holly even delineate a rudimentary aesthetic vocabulary when remarking on their meeting place next to a river that it is a “nice place” and that it is the trees and the flowers that makes it so, or when Kit, quite inappropriately, tells Holly to “enjoy the scenery” as they venture into the featureless expanses of the badlands.

This activity also pertains to their concern with ordering events into a coherent narrative trajectory, to mark significant moments, and to define beginning and end. Similar to how Holly’s voice-over impels a retroactive attempt to patch together the scenes into a story, Kit attempts to reconstitute his life in narrative form and to extract moral wisdom from his experiences. It has been argued elsewhere that the film provides a meta-commentary on story-telling, for example, in a recent essay by Jonathan Bignell who proposes that “*Badlands* can be interpreted as a film about how significance is achieved: how stories, narration, fantasies of escape and memory are attempts to give meaning to a depthless surface.”⁶⁴

As if a conscious reversal of the narrative paradigm outlined in *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, where spaces “dramatize individuality” and where props

⁶³ Morrison and Schur, p. 49.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Bignell “From Detail to Meaning: *Badlands* (Terrence Malick, 1973) and Cinematic Articulation” in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, ed. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye, (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 42-52; 45.

hold “psychological import”,⁶⁵ Malick insists on the pointlessness of props – the toaster Kit finds after killing Holly’s father, the lamp he brings from her home, the bottle he spins for direction, the football left by the roadside “considered excess baggage.” This excess or dysfunction also pertains to the treatment of locations. In fact, Malick works out a principle of non-alignment and disjunction by disturbing spatial orientation and disrupting eye-line matches and thus prevents the visual and verbal levels of narration from reconciling. At the same time, *Badlands* evokes a fragmented authorship of landscape, not only in the allusions incited by Malick, but also in how Holly’s voice-over narration consists of a patchwork of stock phrases. Comparing their wayward existence to geographical adventure in a bygone era, Holly refers to journeys on the wide expanses of deserts and oceans, reciting the chronicles of the *Kon-Tiki* expedition during their retreat in the forest, or analogizing the silhouette of a train moving along the level horizon to the caravans in *The Adventures of Marco Polo*. One location is thus imposed over another, from the “palm-clad islands” spotted by the crew on the Kon-Tiki to their own trail toward the mountain rising in the midst like a shadowy island, “for Kit, a magical land beyond the reach of the law” as Holly comments. Preceded by the Parrish print and the pyramid, the cone-shaped mountain becomes an emblem for Kit’s yearning for the everlasting, to leave his mark in history, if merely as a criminal record, driven by images of immortality just as Holly’s voice-over during their early romance time and again speaks “forever.”

Reconsidering Nostalgia Film

In their readings of *Badlands*, Vera Dike and Timothy Corrigan both pay attention to how the immediate familiarity of the settings in the film is contradicted by the stasis or precarious placement of people within them. Dike remarks that Kit and Holly’s lack of integration and interaction with the environment foregrounds “the image as a hardened surface, a thing in itself – a sign.”⁶⁶ Reminiscent of Pop Art and photo-realism, these resonant locations are rendered as “impenetrable”, “two-dimensional” and “flat,” suggesting, according to Dike, that “the American dream itself is shown to be a set of empty pictures,” and hence that “the only way they envisioned participating in the American dream was to *become the image*.”⁶⁷ The self-assertive Dean-posing, the stone cairn, and the buried pail are all suggestive of Kit’s intent self-mythologizing, or in Dike’s reading, of his aspiration to become an image - immortal, frozen, eternalized.

⁶⁵ Bordwell, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 54.

⁶⁶ Dike, p. 60.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.62; 64.

Dike's observations resonates with the post-Vietnam cinema that Timothy Corrigan has referred to as "a cinema without walls," the apotheosis of which he locates within the cycle of New Hollywood road movies from Arthur Penn's *Bonnie & Clyde* in 1967 to *Badlands*. In the former, Corrigan observes that the celebrity-outlaws' gradual acceptance of themselves as images consolidates the final "separation of human perspective and the genre from any sort of logical or natural relation with the history of culture," or put another way, "a culture's failure to naturalise its rituals."⁶⁸ The symptoms of what Corrigan refers to as a "generic hysteria" is an obsessive repetition of generic cues and patterns, a compulsion that finally discloses the lost belief in them as rituals of unification.⁶⁹ Contrary to Jameson's objection to pastiche and allusion, Dike and Corrigan instead observe how nostalgic recycling discloses the symptoms rather than effaces them. In this context, we might also recall the discussion on the Pop Artists' preoccupation with pre-coded material in chapter one, both as a yearning for 'the American dream' and as a recognition that this dream has no external referent or substance beyond the signs themselves.

The contracting effect of the long-lens photography and the toneless voice-over further enhances the impression of Kit and Holly being suspended against a background in which they never appear to be fully integrated. There is then a continual antagonism between the startling lucidity of this epic environment of big lines, low horizons and airy perspectives and the vacuity of the characters, a rift that occasionally is emphasized by the removal of diegetic sound, as in the mute display of dry lightning sparkling on the horizon, of the flames consuming Holly's childhood home, or of the car's trail of dust.⁷⁰ Discontinuity is also underscored by quick fades or dissolves between or within scenes. As the passage from one place to another obtrusively is omitted, each location – Rapid City, the cattle feedlot, the forest retreat, the rich man's house, the badlands, the military airport – comes to appear secluded and aloof. In Corrigan's general observation on the New Hollywood road movie, "the space explored in these films is usually familiar land that has somehow become unfamiliar: the road and the country may be well known, but something has made it foreign."⁷¹ If a dis-

⁶⁸ Corrigan, p. 148.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁰ The exceptional lucidity of the photography evokes the tradition of atmospheric luminism in landscape painting beginning in the late 1850s which has been described by Miller as a reaction against the dramatic vistas and emphasis on topographical features: "The effect is epiphanic. Access to knowledge is not through transformative labor, willful activity, or acquisitive vision, but through a direct identification with the source of power in nature." Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, p. 281-2. The effect of "magic hour" further enhance this kinship to the austerity and silence that characterize the luminist tradition, as described by Jean Mottet, the calm and immobilized quality of the luminist canvas "express as much absence of direction or the impenetrable character of the things as their possible spiritual dimension." *L'invention de la scène américain*, p. 25, my translation.

⁷¹ Corrigan, p. 147.

may be foreignness derives from the landscapes' connotations of progress and selfhood on the one hand and the absence of revelation and insight of those who traverse it on the other, this is further accentuated in the way *Badlands* deter expectations of an anthropocentric space.

Consistent with Dike's observation of how landscape appears merely as a sign among others and Corrigan's outline of a generic hysteria, Anne Latta circumscribed the sense of being cut adrift in *Badlands* as follows: "The impression is of a culture constituted by fragments of narrative, image and social world derived largely from popular media, but in which the magnetic field of traditional morality, the cornerstone of American ideology, has been switched off."⁷² Just like the visual and verbal levels of narration fail to align, the romance and journey in the film doesn't exhort identification, emotional impact or any sense of moral standpoint.

With the comments made by Dike and Corrigan in mind, we can return to the theme of innocence. The two male characters who takes Holly north, her father and Kit, both share a belief that one can begin life anew merely by geographical relocation. Both are further, in their own way, sign makers. However, there is an additional meaning to innocence in Malick's film that doesn't seem to be as easily accommodated within the post-modernist concerns of the interpretations above. Whereas Dike refers to "[t]he simulacral quality of the image", defining them as opaque, hard and flat, Morrison and Schur point to something quite different when observing an "unapologetic reversion to film's photographic heritage," and an imagery that they define as descriptive and autonomous, even oblivious, of characters and story, manifested in the film's "exploratory, pensive, non-rhetorical images of landscape."⁷³ Reduced neither to character viewpoint or resolved into symbolic content, regarded in awe but not portending to explanation or interpretation, these are neither symbols nor signs. I suggest, however, that one doesn't necessarily exclude the other. In fact, they seem to be mutually present, sometimes even within the same image.

Coda: Frameworks

First, we may recall how Thomas Cole located himself and the canvas he was making within the view from Mount Holyoke. Early in *Badlands*, before the killing spree and when the story still concerns more prosaic obstacles to their romance, there is a scene where Kit approaches Holly's father in a vast tract of barren prairie. The father, who works as a sign painter, is adding the last strokes to a huge advertising board. The motif is a colorful, overtly flat, 1950s version of Cole's pastoral – a well ordered scene with a house and

⁷² Anne Latta, "Innocents Abroad: The Young Female Voice in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*" in Patterson (ed.) p. 86-99; 91.

⁷³ Dike, p. 65; Morrison and Schur, p. 50, 53.

garden in the foreground, horses grazing on the square patches of farmland in the middle ground and open sky beyond, though whereas Cole engraved the Hebrew letters for “the almighty” on a distant hillside, the authority to soar above this domestic idyll is “Kauzers Feed & Grain”.

Introduced in a slow dissolve when Kit walks toward the billboard and ending with a remote long-shot lingering in the aftermath of their encounter, the scene recasts the conventional succession of screening a new location. Standing solemnly on the vacant plain far from potential spectators, its presence is as obtrusive as it is puzzling. In a reading of this enigmatic shot, Morrison and Schur pose an analogy between the characters inclination to pose questions in a manner as if they didn’t expect any answer, or that are no proper questions in the first place, and the way that landscapes tend to linger as a question mark, literally suspended in mid-air.⁷⁴ Geographically indefinite yet highly protruding and attention demanding, “the land baffles intelligibility, poses questions on its own, and provokes curiosity, but does not communicate.”⁷⁵ Neither does the film set out to resolve the enigmas it posits, apparently requiring some other kind of spectator activity than deducing narrative and psychological causality from the distributed information.

It has often been observed that the artist’s inquisitive gaze back at the viewer, or his future self, in Cole’s painting is repeated in the question mark formed by the oxbow-shaped bend of the Connecticut River below.⁷⁶ The inquiry seems to concern the signifying and interpreting practice he and the potential viewer engage in. Like Cole on Mount Holyoke, Malick includes the frame that conditions the way Kit and Holly approach each setting they encounter, from the Parrish print, the stereopticon slides and the expeditions of Heyerdahl and Marco Polo, to George Stevens’ film and Nat King Cole’s ballad. The inquiry evoked by Cole’s painting and the billboard concerns the relation between the frame and the physical world, between projection and revelation, and both in turn represent an effort to disclose the retroactive construction of landscape.

The board is filled to the brim, or so it seems. However, in the lower right corner a square panel has been removed, the vacant gap framing a piece of the sky. As a rift or fissure in the surface of the representation, as well as an aperture or vent for new observations to be made, it opens up a window onto a larger, albeit unseen, space. The breach in the billboard may also be considered in relation to a broader set of inquiries that is raised through the film. The map studied by Holly during the night drive and the logistical incommensurability of the locations she observes, the redundancy of place-names and stateliness as when the mountains of Montana become the mountains of

⁷⁴ Morrison and Schur, p. 59-63.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

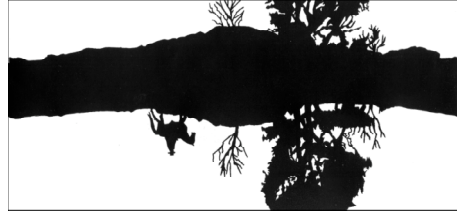
⁷⁶ Herzogenrath, “Looking Forward/Looking Back”, p. 95.

Saskatchewan, and the horizon they pursue, all confess to how these various grids fail to define or locate presence.

The gap in the board formalizes a tension between surface image and recessionary depth that resonates with the startling clarity of the photography and the impression of witnessing a world where meaning is concealed. A sense of incompleteness emerges from the formal emphasis on how the point of view of the camera deviates from the characters and calls attention to what is being omitted, to glimpses of an external world beyond our purview, to subtle changes in the biosphere, to trees, plants and wildlife, or to light beaming through the vegetation or piercing through breaking clouds, to the mute display of lightning flares or the spectral glitter of “the lights of Cheyenne”. Commensurate to how the film asserts its own frame through symmetrical, planar compositions, the square gap simultaneously closes in and opens up, delimits and delineates, asserting itself as a provisional boundary on our access and ability to know.

Such gaps or portals framing the sky are emphasized in all of Malick’s subsequent films: the gateway amidst the wheat fields of the Texas Panhandle in *Days of Heaven*, the roofless bedroom in *The Thin Red Line* (1998), or the opening at the top of a tepee in *The New World* (2006). Evoking a lost ability to see the world as something mysterious and magical but also the medium’s capacity to recapture this sense of wonder, Malick’s approach might best be described by quoting art historian Charles Harrison’s claim that the key attraction exhorted by landscape is that it “provides for a continued engagement, in the context of the visible, with that which is contingently excluded from the possibility of being seen and represented.”⁷⁷ A variation of this gap appears when Kit and Holly are leaving the rich man’s house before heading into the badlands. Strolling around the garden, Holly ponders, “The world was like a faraway planet to which I could never return. I thought what a fine place it was, full of things that people can look into and enjoy.” These lines are read over a seemingly trivial view of a gateway that leads from the backyard to the street outside, further framed by hedges, bushes and a stone wall, while a square patch of rich afternoon light spills on the concrete of the alleyway from the world outside.

⁷⁷ Charles Harrison, “The Effects of Landscape” in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), p. 203-239; 234.



4 Re-call of the Wild

Landscape and Memory in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* and *Deliverance*

I remember riding my horse up around the pines in Crane Valley. Her name was Nellie, and I'd only have a rope around her nose for a rein - a handmade hackamore. ... It was the finest time of my life. There will never be another time like that again.

Sam Peckinpah¹

[W]hat I prefer whenever I see the film are the underwater shots, when the bodies are sinking. The corpse seems to come to life again and I have the same idea about America: beneath the surface, America's dreams and memories do not die, they remain alive.

John Boorman²

Memory is central to the consideration of landscape in American cinema given by Jean Mottet and Maurizia Natali, though they approach the subject from opposite angles. Mottet describes how landscapes were consciously devised to serve a mnemonic function, to be etched in the mind of the spectator and to fix some moral truth. Only posterior to this could memory serve as an agent to connect with sites of the past. For Natali, on the other hand, the landscape-image serves as a vehicle of cultural memory, preserved and transmitted throughout history. As a site for making and sustaining memory,

¹ Quoted in Garner Simmons, *Peckinpah: A Portrait in Montage* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), p. 9.

² Quoted in Michel Ciment, *John Boorman* [1986], trans. Gilbert Adir, (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 132.

and as a channel between past and present, landscape can thus simultaneously connote loss and recovery.

That memories may be sealed as well as unsettled by the sites they are associated with becomes evident from the epigraphs for this chapter. Whereas the ascent and elevation in Sam Peckinpah's remembered Sierras conjures up spatial and temporal distances, the plunging descent described by John Boorman implies their breakdown. This also implies contrary notions of history; a linear, irreversible timeline where the past is irretrievably lost versus one where it lurks beneath the surface. From an autobiographical perspective, these tropes gain additional resonance. Throughout Boorman's memoirs, *Adventures of a Suburban Boy*, there are numerous encounters with rivers, from a drowning incident as a child to excerpts from his diary when making *The Emerald Forest* (1985) with vivid descriptions of the Amazon.³ Peckinpah, on the other hand, cautiously fostered a romantic Western persona grounded in the Sierras of his boyhood as the source for his artistic independence and, through the wax and wane of his career, for an increasingly bitter resentment of the modern world. Though exaggerating his firsthand experience of the old West, it has nonetheless been a dominant concern in the extensive scholarship on Peckinpah, most noticeably when Paul Seydor locates him within an American literary tradition guided by a "masculine principle" extending from Whitman and Emerson to Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer.⁴ To this tradition one might also add James Dickey, the poet from Georgia whose debut novel was *Deliverance*.

There is an intriguing series of circumstances surrounding the two films to be addressed in this chapter. The screenplay for *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (Sam Peckinpah, 1973) was written by novelist Rudolph Wurlitzer, whose first experience as a screenwriter had been *Two-Lane Blacktop*, written on the request of director Monte Hellman. Though Wurlitzer's next script was intended for Hellman, the commercial failure of their previous collaboration made the studio give it to Sam Peckinpah instead, an apt choice considering that Peckinpah had worked on his own adaptation for a movie on the subject of the death of Billy the Kid since the late 1950s.⁵ Turning to *Deliverance*, Dickey lobbied for Peckinpah to direct the film, and the expectation of making it together was mutual.⁶ Due to Peckinpah's notoriety it went to British director John Boorman instead, a choice Dickey re-

³ John Boorman, *Adventures of a Suburban Boy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003).

⁴ Paul Seydor, *Peckinpah: The Western Films: A Reconsideration* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

⁵ Peckinpah's script served as the basis for Marlon Brando's *One Eyed Jacks* (1961). See Swedish critic Jan Aghed's account from visiting the set and talking to Wurlitzer and Peckinpah in "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid", *Sight and Sound. International Film Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2, (Spring 1973), p. 64-69. See also Seydor p. 256.

⁶ According to Peckinpah's biographer David Weddle, Dickey, "lobbied hard for Peckinpah to be signed as the director, but Warners refused." Weddle, *"If They Move, Kill 'Em": The Life and Times of Sam Peckinpah*, (New York: Grove Press, 1994), p. 392.

greted as he considered the final film a betrayal of the themes of his script and novel. Seeking a similar project, Peckinpah made the controversial *Straw Dogs* (1971) in England, a film which shared its basic premise of savagery and survival in an alien environment with *Deliverance*.

Not merely of anecdotal interest, these crisscrossing pre-production circumstances give rise to speculation on how the themes of nature, male bonding and violence would have been treated in the hands of another director. Studied together, I argue that Boorman's adaptation of Dickey's script calls into question wilderness as a redemptive condition where psychological and spiritual conflicts are physically resolved. Defining the tenets of Peckinpah's West we also circumscribe those of Dickey's novel. In both cases wilderness is displaced from nature to memory and sustained in the mind as a source of renewal despite, or rather due to, its demise in the physical world. It is with such a logic of displacements and transfers, recollections and repossessions, that this chapter deals. The first thing to consider is the reciprocal relationship between the Westerner and the region that names him.

Describing the Landscape, Making the Man

As the titles of a series of pioneering works exploring the Western in the early 1970s suggests – John G. Cawelti's *The Six-Gun Mystique* (1971), Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), and Will Wright *Six-Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975) – violence has been a primary concern in research on the genre.⁷ Though usually including some reflection on the setting, or as in Slotkin's case, an extensive historicizing of the frontier, landscape as such hasn't been the subject of much theoretical consideration until more recently.⁸ This seems somewhat paradoxical considering, as Lee Clark

⁷ John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973); Will Wright, *Six-Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975).

⁸ Though Jim Kitses discussed landscape in the Westerns of Anthony Mann in his seminal auteur-study *Horizons West. Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah: Studies of Authorship within the Western* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 66-72, and there is a chapter entitled "Landscape, Violence, Poker" in Philip French *Westerns* (London: Secker & Warburg Limited, 1973), p. 100-134, it isn't until the 1990s that formal and thematic aspects of landscape begins to be addressed more thoroughly, as in Jacques Mauduy and Gérard Henriet, *Géographies du Western* (Paris: Nathan, 1989); Scott Simmon's *The Invention of the Western Film*; and Lee Clark Mitchell's *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). For briefer accounts, see Jane Tompkins, "Landscape" in *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 69-87, Buscombe's essay "Inventing Monument Valley", and the anthology *The Big Empty*, Engel (ed.). For an encyclopedia of Western locations see Carlo Gaberscek's double-volume *Sentieri Del Western: Dove il cinema ha creato il West* (Gemona: La Cineteca del Friuli, 2001).

Mitchell does in *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, that it is “the sole popular genre marked in geographical terms”.⁹ Thematically, no genre deals so compulsively with problems of ownership, property and land-rights, with legitimate claims, access and proper use of the land, and for the unfolding story, topography and logistics are all important.

Yet, would it be viable to deduce a common function for settings in the Western? In an interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma* from 1964, director Budd Boetticher would seem to deter such a task, objecting to what he considered as a painterly style among his colleagues and arguing that the prominence given to the land in the films of John Ford and Anthony Mann distracted involvement in characters and story.¹⁰ Though each of these directors preferred to shoot in strikingly different locations, they all implement a symbiotic relationship between character and setting. Whereas Boetticher’s simple, barren, non-distracting landscape concurs to his focus on individual action, Ford’s theme of community-building is set against the protruding topography of Monument Valley, and Mann, probing the psychology of his heroes, has them exorcising their neuroses after scaling high peaks or plunging into wild rapids. These settings, however different they may be from each other, are comparable in that they transcend the dramatic effect – overcoming obstacles, covering distances, reaching summits – by enforcing a way of being, a condition or state of mind, as much as a way of acting. This is also a central concern in Lee Clark Mitchell’s view of the Western where he observes how masculinity is coded in close proximity to the construction of landscape: “Various as the terrain may be”, he declares, “landscape description always defines the essential attributes of manhood.”¹¹ Mitchell’s book, which studies the Western not exclusively as a cinematic genre but as a fictional medium that includes nineteenth-century novels and paintings, examines landscape as a formal agency that serves as a manual for manhood and a legislator of warranted violence. Though adjustable to whatever anxieties that need to be resolved, the Western retains a formal consistency through its emphasis on landscape description and thematic stability by its preoccupation with manhood.

Another point, discussed at length by Lee Clark Mitchell, is the emphasis on sight as an agency to resolve issues of identity, to make moral distinctions, to guide action and centre value. However, seeing may also entail an act of appropriation, a claiming of land not as a physical but as an imaginative territory, as in Emerson’s famous rumination in *Nature* (1836): “There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate

⁹ Lee Clark Mitchell, p. 4.

¹⁰ Bertrand Tavernier, “Entretien transocéanique avec Budd Boetticher”, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, vol. 27, no. 157, (July 1964), p. 1-18 ; 13.

¹¹ Lee Clark Mitchell, p. 173.

all the parts, that is, the poet.”¹² In the following I am concerned with the imaginative rather than the physical conquest of land, not with competing versions of westward expansion - unearthing facts of class struggle, ethnic conflicts, or genocide - but with the claiming of land in the displaced form of a “‘poetic’ property”, to use W.J.T. Mitchell’s paraphrase of Emerson, one that resists material claim by existing as a source of creative regeneration.¹³ The seminal treatment of how the prospect of a new continent enthused images of an ideal place commensurate to an ideal self was given by Richard Poirier in *A World Elsewhere* (1966), and what he referred to as “the theme of visionary possession” in American literature, the urge “to appropriate space to one’s desires,” and the premise that by way of visionary ability one may “possess an ideal landscape.”¹⁴ The reconstitution from material to moral resource also displaces the more urgent issue of the political and economic determinates behind territorial acquisition by way of analogizing setting and identity, wilderness and creativity, and epic with autobiography.

In the almost identical tributes Boetticher paid to Lone Pine, California where he made his Ranown-cycle in the 1950s (“you don’t need to go anywhere else ... we had sand, desert, a river, mountains”) and Ford to Monument Valley (“It has rivers, mountains, plains, desert, everything the land could offer”), they cast them as self-contained, autonomous worlds. As a universe complete in itself, each setting also became synonymous with the director’s artistic vision.¹⁵ At once unlimited and enclosed, remote and hermetic, this is also what defines the pastoral, in Bonnie Costello’s characterization, “a form of still life, concealing history and temporality and engaging in illusions of timelessness.”¹⁶ It is with such practices of freezing, picturing and containing wilderness that I suggest Peckinpah and Boorman engage in their films.

¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* [1836] in *The American Landscape: Literary Sources & Documents. Volume II. The American Image: Landscape as Symbol and Myth in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Graham Clarke, (London: Helm Information Ltd, 1993), p. 3-29; 5. The titles of Angela Miller’s *Empire of the Eye* and Albert Boime’s *The Magisterial Gaze*, which both studies nineteenth-century landscape painting as a symbolic expression of America’s imperial ambitions, implies that an aesthetic claiming of the land was an integral part of its material conquest.

¹³ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape”, p. 15.

¹⁴ Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place Of Style In American Literature* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 56, 17, 93.

¹⁵ “The great thing about Lone Pine is that you don’t need to go anywhere else ... we had sand, desert, a river, mountains, all the volcanic structures, it’s amazing – it looks like it was built there for the movies ... Burt Kennedy and I just went from one place to another rewriting scenes to fit the rocks which is what you should do.” Mike Dibb, “A Time and a Place: Budd Boetticher and the Western” in *The Movie Book of the Western*, ed. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye, (London: Studio Vista, 1996) p. 161-166; 162. Ford similarly stated, “My favorite location is Monument Valley ... It has rivers, mountains, plains, desert, everything the land could offer. I felt at peace there. I have been all over the world but I consider this the most complete, beautiful, and peaceful place on earth.” As quoted in McBride, p. 288.

¹⁶ Costello, p. 103.

From Manifest to Latent Destiny

The relation between American history and the Western has been the subject of a continual debate. Jim Kitses' pioneering auteur study *Horizons West* from 1969 promptly assured that "the western is American history", though the West as described by Kitses is one that registers as essence rather than historical context, tracing the form to a setting located "at exactly that moment when options are still open, the dream of a primitivistic individualism, the ambivalence of at once beneficent and threatening horizons, still tenable."¹⁷ This reciprocal relation between the tenable and the ideal had, however, already been questioned in one of the first serious considerations of the genre, Robert Warshow's 1954 essay, "The Westerner." Warshow sketches two equally unpromising developments; one toward finitude and exhaustion, where "landscape itself ceases to be quite the arena of free movement it once was, but becomes instead a great empty waste," the other a heightened aestheticism where the setting attains a surreal lucidity "fixed in the dreamy clarity of a fairytale ... so deliberately graceful that everything seems to be happening at the bottom of a clear lake."¹⁸ In their own way, the extremes of drab realism and excessive aestheticism are symptomatic for the diminishing prospects of the genre, either deteriorating along with the values it embodied or being preserved under glass as a relic from the past.

In 1972, the year *Deliverance* was released, a number of patently revisionist Westerns surfaced that would seem to corroborate Warshow's gritty realist mode. In fact, they suggest a complete inversion rather than a reversion of the equation between views and values, for instead of a landscape that measures "the epic courage and regenerative power of the hero", in the words of John G. Cawelti, characters are placed in exteriors of which they exert little control or comprehension.¹⁹ In *Ulzana's Raid* (Robert Aldrich) the increasingly unattractive scenery of Arizona correlate to the coarse depiction of shocking brutality and the last third of the film is set amidst grotesquely crumbled rocks and boulders. There is no moral code to be extracted from this landscape; in fact, it seems to scorn any attempts at idealism. Likewise, the void Kansas plains ventured in *Bad Company* (Robert Benton) only impels indifference, greed and cruelty. Whatever authority or influence nature wields, it is not one of moral inspiration; instead it divests romantic sentiments, especially those associated with Christianity.²⁰

¹⁷ Kitses, *Horizons West*, p. 8, 12.

¹⁸ Robert Warshow, "The Westerner" [1954], *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre & Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 105-124; 114, 120.

¹⁹ Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique*, p. 40.

²⁰ The draft dodgers in *Bad Company* and the destructive military leadership in *Ulzana's Raid* further sustains allegorical readings of the war in Vietnam culminating at the time. Other notable revisionist 1972 Westerns is *The Culpepper Cattle Company* (Dick Richards), *The*

As a final example of an inquiry into the ideology that such phraseology as “open ranges” and “beautiful land” obscures, I’d like to cite Arthur Penn’s *The Missouri Breaks* (1976), a film which explicitly comments on the culture’s own act of self-representation at the turn of the century. In common with several Westerns of the early 1970s, milieux are enveloped in a metaphorical gloom of late autumn, set in “a country that seems just at the peak of ripeness, ready to go to rot,” as one reviewer phrased it.²¹ During the first two minutes there are two extreme low-angle shots framing a field of decaying daffodils looming gigantically in the foreground beneath an overcast sky while three riders emerge from the distance. In the monolog that gradually is overheard a land baron extols the beauty of the land to a cattle-rustler who he is about to hang. Later in the film, his daughter gets into a conversation about her father’s obsession with the land with one of the rustlers:

-All I ever hear about is grass.

-What’s wrong with grass?

-Samuel Johnson said that ‘a blade of grass is a blade of grass. Now, tell me something about a human being.’

-I don’t understand that at all.

-It just means that Samuel Johnson was as bored as I am with nature. We had a famous painter out here last year, natural scenes. That man must have painted ten square miles of canvas, not one human face.

Coincidentally, it has often been argued that such prominent painters like Thomas Cole and Albert Bierstadt turned to landscape as their subject matter simply because they had no talent for painting people. Revising history by reversing the icons of a regenerative landscape, the modes of dreamy clarity and worn realism, predicted by Warshow, don’t seem to be so easily separated on closer scrutiny. When John Orr, almost half a century later, surveys the preoccupation with the past in 1970s cinema, he points instead to how a mode of daydream might loosen up the past, referring to a “cinema of Latent Destiny,” that exhibits “history as reverie” by replacing myth with “an immediate past, a living dream.”²² Orr suggests an individualized, interior linkage to the past rather than history following a predetermined course. In *Pat*

Great Northfield Minnesota Raid (Philip Kaufman), and *High Plains Drifter* (Clint Eastwood).

²¹ Rick Hermann, “The Missouri Breaks”, *Movietone News*, no. 50, (1976), p. 43-45; 43.

²² John Orr, *Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 169.

Garrett & Billy the Kid as well as *Deliverance*, a dreamy, pensive quality has often been observed.²³

Where History Begins

Considering that a monument is commonly understood as something that marks a significant historical event or manifests how a community understands itself, what is the implication of the architectural term that names Monument Valley?²⁴ What events are commemorated at this apparently untouched site? Deriving from the Latin *monere*, to remind, recall, the monument initiates a bridge between past and present through an act of recollection. As Henri Lefebvre observes in *The Production of Space*, the monument's power to stir awe in the beholder resides in its alleged alliance with values and beliefs that stand outside time.²⁵ To give nature the status of a monument – whether in national parks, often used as locations in Westerns, or in nineteenth-century landscape painting, granting nature the stature and importance formerly reserved for historic figures and events – was to promote it as a time capsule of the nation's origin. The act of beholding nature was accordingly to affirm and partake in its purity and permanence.²⁶ Not a memorial of any discernable or datable event in human history, the promotion of wilderness as monument is paradoxically a commemoration of

²³ Michael Bliss, for example, describes how *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* “settles down to an almost languid pace, and the audience falls into a strange dreaminess ... lulled by the repeated shootings and the almost uniform sterility of the landscape.” Michael Bliss, *Justified Life: Morality and Narrative In the Films of Sam Peckinpah* (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), p. 247. Michael Dempsey associates such “dreaminess” in *Deliverance* to the water-like quality of the dissolves, observing that, “every scene is stylized like a reverie.” Michael Dempsey, “Deliverance/Boorman – Dickey in the Woods”, *Cinema* no. 8, (1973), p. 10-17; 14. Boorman also comments on how this dream-mode is associated with the setting rather than with any of the characters: “Desaturation not only lent the landscape a greater reality, but it gave the dreamlike, nightmarish quality I wanted.” As quoted by Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 130.

²⁴ French film scholars, Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, have discussed Ford's use of Monument Valley in a way that relates to my forthcoming analysis of wilderness as a possession or emblem of artistic imagination. The authors argue that Ford transformed this location into “a system of rhetorical figures” (p. 162) where the characteristic features that the mesas display from specific angles are used as mnemonic cues to construct space as a “theatre of memory” (p. 167). What is being commemorated is precisely the director's use of the location, appropriating it to signify his artistic vision: “Ford's strength is that he associated Monument Valley and his own work so intimately that the one is enfolded within the other”, p. 168. Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, “John Ford and Monument Valley” in *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson, (London: British Film Institute, 1998), p. 160-169.

²⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 220-221.

²⁶ As cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points out: “The American monuments that inspire open religious awe tend to be the works of nature rather than those of man. Reverence for sheer size is indicated in the epithets that Americans have attached to natural monuments: the Giant Sequoia, the mighty Mississippi, the Great Plains, the Grand Tetons, the Grand Canyon.” Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful* (New York: Island Press, 1993), p. 242.

the absence of history and culture, or rather, of the very moment before the emergence of historical time.

In this way, landscape may serve as a mediator of a shared origin fixed as a view or prospect. Ironically, what initially connoted a potential to be realized in the future is recast as a custodian of the past. Juxtaposing the different timescales of nature and culture, setting transient history against geological permanency, Monument Valley hence displays a peculiar amalgam of remembering and forgetting. In this context, we may consider that though the Cahulawassee in *Deliverance* is a fictional river, inspired and shot on the Chattooga River in the rugged mountains straddling the border of Georgia and South Carolina, both the names of the actual and the imagined river assert a Native American origin. Previously, I've discussed how empty land functions to sanction imperial acquisition. However, as W.J.T. Mitchell has argued, the efforts of staging an immemorial landscape ripe for colonial exploration might encounter a more elusive antagonist than native inhabitants, namely the "ambivalence" and "resistance" that emerge from the disquieting awareness of an indigenous affiliation to the same land that pre-dates the one projected upon it. Never entirely assimilated or wiped out but still lurking within that prospect, this presence undermines the landscape's "givenness as sight and site".²⁷ There is a remarkable passage in Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* that comments on this latent instability of landscape in the Western:

The gorgeous, suspended skies achieved in the works of, say, John Ford, are as vacant as the land. When the Indians are gone, they will take with them whatever gods inhabited those places, leaving the beautiful names we do not understand (Iroquois, Shenandoah, Mississippi, Cheyenne) in place of those places we will not understand.²⁸

It is, I argue, a similar case of vulnerability and ambiguity that Boorman explores in his adaptation of Dickey's screenplay. However, I'm not interested in reassessments of historical events so much as in the more primary aspect of where the past is set, and of where the past begins.

Below, I draw on what James Morrison has referred to as "mythic self-consciousness" or "mythic over-determinism" in New Hollywood cinema, defined as "a conjunction of archetypal narrative patterns", on the one

²⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction", p. 2. I'm referring to the later half of W.J.T. Mitchell's essay "Imperial Landscape", p. 18-31, which repeatedly refers to the "resistance" and "ambivalence" that arise when divergent concepts and conventions are projected on the same piece of land and thereby disclose the cultural contingency of these conventions. Preceded by indigenous "habits of perception" which still figures in the landscape depicted, Mitchell argues that this encounter gives rise to "an alien vision that stares back into the space of the beholder." W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape", p. 27, 25.

²⁸ Cavell, p. 60.

hand, “and self-conscious patterns derived from European art cinema,”²⁹ on the other. As we shall see, both films assert an awareness of generic legacies, not merely as reflexivity on the part of the director but also within the diegetic worlds. However, as a distinction between classical and post-classical Hollywood, mythic self-consciousness would seem an insufficient criterion. As has often been stated, already a director like John Ford was explicit about the making and value of myths. Neither does a mythic self-consciousness by itself entail a critical perspective since it is equally suited to reinforce as to undermine that mythology. Despite the bitter and dirge-like mood of Peckinpah’s film, I argue that it ultimately celebrates the authority and redemptive meaning of the moral order of the West. In fact, it is so preoccupied with commemorating the passing of a certain impetus or condition, precisely because it accepts these values as a natural expression of the West itself. A similar practice is discussed in relation to how creative imagination and wilderness has been analogized by James Dickey. Boorman’s adaptation, however, drastically alters these premises, instead revealing an urge to retain memory as a disposition toward fantasy and forgetting which finally poses a threat of dissolution.

The Code of Wilderness in Peckinpah’s West

The transformation wrought on the frontier landscape during the shift from a classical to a post-classical western can be mapped out by studying the title sequences of Peckinpah’s first major film, *Ride the High Country* (1962), and his last engagement with the genre *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* a decade later. The opening credit of *Ride the High Country* assembles a score of visual motifs that codifies the bracing, elevated regions of the title as a moral high ground. The sequence begins with a tilt from a sunlit lake to a monolithic bluff towering above it, followed by three graceful pans over ridges and lakes in the Sierras cradled with auburn forests, and concludes with a reversed tilt moving from open sky down the stem of a solitary birch tree. With only four days shooting in the Inyo national forest, a national park formerly eulogized in the writings of ecologist John Muir and the photographs of Ansel Adams, it nonetheless bestows the crucial metaphor for the film’s theme of redemption. Rendering the high country at the close of its seasonal cycle, this passing also encompasses the genre itself, embodied by the veteran Western actors Randolph Scott and Joel McCrea. Mounting the crest of the Sierras, the high country is converted into a place of moral contemplation, a testing ground for character and a site of initiation into the principles of manhood. The crispness of autumn also imparts an atmosphere of purity and transparency that equates the integrity and seclusion of the ideals sustained by the aging lawman played by McCrea. Landscape thus

²⁹ Morrison, p. 229.

becomes an imperative to remain unchanged. In the final shot of the film, McCrea gazes toward the light shining through a mountain pass while he lies dying, and sinks to the ground before this gateway into the high country.

A decade later, nature offers no such remedy; in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, the landscape, and the loyalties and ideals it instigated, remain solely in the realm of memory. Contrary to the tilts and pans in the title sequence of *Ride the High Country*, the first, static image introduces a dull setting; neither mountain, pastoral nor desert, merely a rock-strewn waste. The phrase “My land” is repeated twice within the shot to indicate what has brought about this sterility. In the sepia-toned framing story, set in 1909, that opens and closes the film, Pat Garrett, once himself an outlaw, now a landowner, is gunned down by those who hired him to kill his friend Billy the Kid twenty-eight years earlier.³⁰ The end credits return to this anemic present played over the frozen image of Pat falling out of frame, his outstretched hand before the wagon wheel as if crushed beneath it. Emblematic of the film’s deterministic view of history, the image also reflects the director’s own resentment of technological progress, as when in a typically reproachful manner, he declared, “I detest machines. The problem started when they discovered the wheel.”³¹ Though both films share the theme of characters marginalized by encroaching civilization, the decade span between them can be summarized as a drastic demise of a redemptive order, just as the setting is drained of color and divested of ornamental attributes.

A third instance of commemoration which appears in the end credits of *The Wild Bunch* (1969), Peckinpah’s most acclaimed Western, will help to clarify what this loss comprises. Similar to *Ride the High Country* and *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, the film is structured around opposing environments: on the one hand the Mexican village to which Angel, one of the members of the Bunch, is a native and, on the other, the headquarters of general Mapache, resonantly named Agua Verde, that is, green or stagnant

³⁰ This actualizes the issue of the different versions that circulates of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* which was cut by MGM from just over two hours to 106 minutes for its theatrical release. Peckinpah’s own preview cut wasn’t located and screened until twenty years later, known as the “Turner version” or the “director’s cut,” released on video in 1989 and regularly shown on TCM. Since Peckinpah wasn’t able to make his own fine cut of the film, no definite, final version exists which has caused Paul Seydor to make an extensive case for undermining the legitimacy of the preview version, beginning in the first edition of *Peckinpah: The Western Films* in 1980 and culminating with a “special edition” included on the 2006 DVD release of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, supervised by the author himself. Paradoxically, Seydor’s forged ‘fine cut’ is very close to MGM’s theatrical cut which Peckinpah and those involved in making the film bitterly resented. The removal of entire scenes, shots and lines of dialog, reshuffling the framing structure and Bob Dylan’s score, is sustained by a rather inconsistent argument based on guesswork and personal preferences, trimming the editing to a more conventional and narratively economic pace. Though one is free to speculate on whether or not Peckinpah would have made changes in his original cut if he’d had the opportunity, Turner’s “directors cut,” tentative as it is, is the only one he *did* cut according to those intentions, and hence the version I refer to.

³¹ As quoted by Seydor, p. 330.

water. The film also closes with this contrast. After a series of shots where a gritty wind whirls through the remnants of Agua Verde following an extended shoot-out between the Bunch and Mapache's army, the closing credits return to the bucolic enclave of Angel's village. The ending repeats the Bunch's gracious departure which appeared earlier in the film where they ride off through an arch of lush canopy. Finally, the image freezes and recedes toward the vanishing point. Framed in the same anamorphic, Panavision ratio, the screen itself is thus transformed into an edging of hazy emerald; the suggestion is that of a picture in a frame, a frozen pastoral moment that affirms the final redemption of the Bunch.

Thus, *Ride the High Country* and *The Wild Bunch* poignantly identify a certain setting with the ability for moral action, and death becomes the final act with which its redemptive powers are forever sealed. In *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* the reverse is the case. The setting here stands as a register for Pat Garrett's act of betrayal and the spiritual ruin he has inflicted upon himself and the land alike. Observing that Peckinpah insists on such an absolute correlation between characters and setting, we might ask what, more precisely, finally binds them together? To do so, I suggest that we consider the epithet "wild" to name the gang of outlaws in *The Wild Bunch*.

In his essay, "Picture and Witness and the Site of Wilderness", Jonathan Bordo points out that when the suffix *-ness* is added to the adjective 'wild' it transforms it into a condition or essence.³² Bordo is primarily concerned with the paradoxes involved in subjecting wilderness to representation, a discussion I will return to at the close of this chapter, though for now, I merely cite his delineation of the picture of wilderness as "a proof", "witness" or "certificate" of this essence or condition.³³ In *The Wild Bunch*, the extreme violence, of which the film became notorious, ties into such an essence of the 'wild,' for though wilderness swiftly vanishes from the physical world, it still remains within the stubborn individualists of the Bunch, refusing to submit to a country that has been brought to order but insisting that it should be "like it used to be", as the final line of the film states.

I want here to cite two analyses of Peckinpah's use of the freeze-frame which links its commemorative function to an overwhelming sense of loss. Discussing *The Wild Bunch* within the context of the anti-social tendencies of the 1960s counterculture vis-à-vis an American tradition of social resistance that goes back to Emerson and Thoreau, Asbjørn Grønstad argued that the excessive violence in the film represents the only available means to bridge the widening gap between man and nature, referring to it as "a radical expression of, and reaction to, a feeling of profound loss."³⁴ Remaining as

³² Jonathan Bordo, "Picture and Witness and the Site of Wilderness" in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), p. 291-315; 292.

³³ Ibid., p. 299-300.

³⁴ Asbjørn Grønstad, "Peckinpah's *Walden*: The Violent Indictment of 'Civilization' in *The Wild Bunch*" in Herzogenrath (ed.), p. 167-186; 169.

the sole manifestation of sincerity, Grønstad ties this theme of transcendental violence to how the freeze-frame dissociates the Bunch from their contemporary environment and affiliates them with timeless nature. Sean Cubitt makes a similar case in *The Cinema Effect* which also addresses the ceremonial and commemorative function in Peckinpah's use of freeze-frames and slow motion. Countering the claims made on *The Wild Bunch* as an allegorical treatment of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Cubitt argues that what the film foremost deals with, and unreservedly celebrates, is "a landscape of action" and the refusal to amend to changing times.³⁵ Like Grønstad, Cubitt defines the violence in the film as a symptom of repression and loss, "a frenzy of violence that arises from enclosure."³⁶ As Cubitt points out, the last flashback of *The Wild Bunch* is not a reminiscence of any of the characters, since they are all dead, similar to the flashback-frame structure in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*.³⁷ Instead of being tied to a character, it is the film itself that ultimately performs as witness, or borrowing a term from Peckinpah scholar Michael Bliss, as a "mnemonic device" that seals and shrines this moment, but also celebrates its own act of re-creating it.³⁸

Cubitt continues by pursuing this theme of passing in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* where land politics and commerce have conspired in "a vicious pacification of the landscape and sterilization of its freedoms", yielding a transference from "an old code of honor" to "a new code of business", or what can be rephrased as a decline from the essential condition of wilderness to a relativistic state of commerce.³⁹ There is a definite before and after in this nostalgic scheme. Billy, on the one hand, inhabits "a time in which events matter, decisions are life-and-death, and lives pass into legend." Conversely, Garrett "will inhabit only empty extension, the spatial world of a diegesis deprived of the historical impetus of narrative."⁴⁰ Cubitt also makes an important connection to Peckinpah's persona and his concern "to foster a biog-

³⁵ Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press, 2004), p. 198. Manny Farber provides an apt characterization of this 'landscape of action': "The frame of *The Wild Bunch* is a window into deep, wide, rolling Baroque space; almost every shot is a long horizontal crowded with garrulous animality." Farber, p. 3.

³⁶ Cubitt, p. 215.

³⁷ Depicted in a series of freeze frames as he falls off the wagon, Seydor has suggested that the entire film is Garrett's reminiscence at a suspended moment of death, p. 255-306. For a critique against this reading, see Michael Bliss, p. 219, and Jim Kitses, "Peckinpah Re-visited: *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*" in *The Western Reader*, ed. Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman, (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 1998), p. 223-243; 241, whom both observe that this interpretation is contradicted by the fact that at least half of the film displays events where Garratt isn't present, or of which he has no knowledge.

³⁸ Cubitt here refers to a footnote in Bliss's *Justified Life*: "Peckinpah reminds us at the films end (when our sentimentality concerning the Bunch is at its height) that *The Wild Bunch* is a crafted, storytelling vehicle that creates, and fosters the continuation of, the Bunch's myth ... the film is a mnemonic device that in the future will be used to evoke feelings and ideas," Bliss, p. 322.

³⁹ Cubitt, p. 200.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

raphy grounded in the Californian high country”,⁴¹ associating the artistic compromises under studio filmmaking with the closing of the frontier.⁴²

Peckinpah was eloquent about the personal stake he had in the vanishing wilderness, asserting his boyhood experience of the West, his pioneering ancestors and the stern ethics taught by his father as the principles on which his work as a writer and director was founded.⁴³ The death of Angel in *The Wild Bunch* or of Billy, mostly referred to simply as ‘the Kid’, in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* also seems to link a private sense of loss to the genre’s anti-modernism.⁴⁴ From the benign nostalgia of *Ride the High Country* via the volatile ambiance of *The Wild Bunch* to the bitter lament of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, Peckinpah’s Westerns form an entropic trajectory commensurate with his own career where landscape comes to signify a double loss. Poignantly, the director appears in a cameo performance as a coffin-maker just before Pat kills the Kid, working on a child’s coffin.

By way of a logic where the high country equates with higher values, wilderness with virtue, and a popular genre with autobiography, Peckinpah claims the pre-cultural, pre-civilized origin of the Western ethics, and so also effaces some of the paradoxes that permeate the genre as well as his own work – the aging lawmen in *Ride the High Country* who spent their life taming the West, or the pursuit for material gain that governs the *Wild Bunch*, and more notably his own indictments against technology and capitalism while working in an industry which would be considered the epitome of both. What is irretrievably lost can also become the subject of nostalgic veneration; it is in fact this retreat into the past that ensures its endurance as a timeless value, albeit in the displaced form of memory.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 193.

⁴² Ibid., p. 191: “Creative freedom is, in Peckinpah, the mythic freedom of the Old West, and both are dying.”

⁴³ See “World of Our Fathers: An American Artist and His Traditions”, p. 331-369 in Seydor for biographical details and a discussion of Peckinpah’s self-acclaimed bond with the Old West. Seydor’s otherwise dense and stimulating analyses are tainted by overtly essentialist conceptions of masculinity and of the West, for even though the director grew up in a suburb in Fresno, Seydor states that he “was truly a westerner, in his very bones and marrow”, p. 331. As Jim Kitses points out in a footnote to his analysis of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, Seydor’s “project is to appropriate Peckinpah for a privileged pantheon of American writers ... who represent a tradition, innocent of ideology, centered on ‘the masculine principle.’” Kitses, “Peckinpah Re-visited: *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*”, p. 241.

⁴⁴ To quote two notable moments from *The Wild Bunch*; when crossing the border, a less idealistic member of the Bunch comments that it “just looks like more Texas far as I’m concerned” to which Angel replies, “you have no eyes”; and during their stay in his village an old man ruminates “we all dream of being a child again, even the worst of us, perhaps the worst most of all.”

Rituals of Commemoration: Nostalgia as Mythic Self-Consciousness

As previously suggested, mythic self-consciousness doesn't by itself entail mythoclasm. Peckinpah's insistence on the importance of remembering, peaking with *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*'s sullen indictment against changing times, can instead be understood as a struggle to arrest the values associated with the past at the precise historical moment when they are about to disintegrate. That a mythical self-consciousness is at work is apparent already in the opening sequence, oscillating between sepia and color, moving and frozen images, with narrative titles which indicate historical setting - New Mexico, respectively in 1909 and 1881 - in the same red, period-styled letters as the title of the film and the names of the cast. If the presence of Scott and McCrea in *Ride the High Country* evokes a generic tradition, such intertextual cues are exploited to the full in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* where almost all minor roles are cast with Western character actors (Jack Elam, Katy Jurado, Slim Pickens, Elisha Cook, Chill Wills, Dub Taylor, Barry Sullivan, Richard Jaeckel). Along with the episodic, ballad-styled structure of the film, enforced by Bob Dylan's ballads on the soundtrack and his presence in the diegetic world as a chronicler of the events, the fictional and historic characters which populate this world exhibit a mythic self-consciousness, evident in a passage of Wurlitzer's script that refers to Billy's escape from the prison in Lincoln: "Billy is deeply aware that he inhabits a myth. He and the town people are suspended from mortal time, caught in a ritual larger than any man; each dependent on each other."⁴⁵

As space gets increasingly crowded with enclosures, fences and wandering sheep, characters repeatedly voice a sense of finitude: "country's getting old", "lands getting crowded", or Governor Wallace musing on the "fabulous melancholy" of the rainy New Mexican evenings, hopefully bringing one closer to "some greater design." Gathered on the Governor's hacienda, this greater design, so gracefully laid out in *Ride the High Country*, is beyond reach for the characters as well as the camera, merely suggested by the plants swaying in the evening breeze and the sound of rainfall. Likewise, conventional emblems of masculine energy are absent in the film; there are no rugged, varied topographies, no isolated peaks, no protruding sky or rushing waters. When skies are seen, they are predominantly bleached white-gray, and horizons are generally framed high to make the drab soil dominate the composition. The only way to maintain wilderness is in the displaced form of recollection, and if such reminiscences and anecdotes are frequent in *Ride the High Country* and *The Wild Bunch*, they become the hallmark of the dialog in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* and what Jim Kitses has referred to as "a pervasive telling of stories, anecdotes, histories, incidents, jokes, and gos-

⁴⁵ As quoted by Aghed, p. 66.

sip, constantly flowing around the action and creating a kind of instant nostalgia, a nostalgia for the present, as it were.⁴⁶ More than anything else, the characters seem engaged in a ritual of remembrance, as if the vigor and reality had been sapped out of the landscape and transfused into memory. The structure of the film is not merely episodic, the drifting and then circular movements of Pat's reluctant pursuit of Billy, but also entropic, gradually emptying out options and accumulating loss, just as most scenes involve deaths, departures or farewells.⁴⁷ "At least I'll be remembered" are aptly the final words of Jack Elam's character after dueling with Billy.

Kitses' reading of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* calls attention to the theatrical aspect of the performances, how characters self-consciously show off and strike poses, just as the evocative cast of Western character actors perform as signs.⁴⁸ Self-dramatizing and self-destructing at the same time, Kitses points out that "the movies nostalgia films twice over, the director, characters, and audience, all implicated in a Narcissus-like play of gazes and reflecting surfaces."⁴⁹ This is not merely suggested as a figure of speech; in fact, landscape is very much implicated in this exchange, evident in the montage sequence that follows after Billy has escaped from jail in Lincoln, a succession of five shots lasting almost two minutes that shows Billy and Pat respectively moving through the countryside, Billy in twilight, Pat in daylight. Depicted in slow dissolves, the scarred, eroded plains are momentarily endowed with a kind of grief-stricken, elegiac grace. In one of them, Billy rides along the horizon and descends next to a small lake. Except for a faint streak of twilight, the image is reduced to black and white. As his silhouetted figure dissolves into the background his reflection appears in the water when he, and the pan, stops to pause. The image illustrates one of the central premises in Lee Clarke Mitchell's book, observing that "the West is a setting for self-transformation in which characters reflecting *on* the landscape find themselves reflected *in* it."⁵⁰ Kitses also closes his essay on the film by commenting on this image, circumscribing it as "an inverted Ford icon," a "self-referential sign" and "a post-modern emblem for the genre."⁵¹ Though rather than foregrounding a disjunction between signifier and signified, image and action, aesthetic and ideology, as Kitses proposes, I would argue that the implication seems to be that the genre, and the value system it embodies, is as natural as the landscape.⁵²

⁴⁶ Kitses, "Peckinpah Re-visited: *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*", p. 226.

⁴⁷ "It has been said that every scene in the film is a farewell scene." Seydor, p. 305.

⁴⁸ Kitses, "Peckinpah Re-visited: *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*", p. 227.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁵⁰ Lee Clark Mitchell, p. 133.

⁵¹ Kitses, "Peckinpah Re-visited: *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid*", 241.

⁵² Cubitt's description of this montage comes closer to the one I suggest when he observes that "Billy is remythologized as an emanation of the landscape", p. 204.

The montage ends with Pat striking an equally resonant pose on a summit overlooking a valley, a rare instance of a green setting in the film. Leaning against a tree, Pat picks up his pocket-watch and studies it. Understated in comparison to the machine imagery that permeates many of Peckinpah's films, this tableau is densely suggestive within the context of American Transcendentalism that the director often has been aligned to. "The clock," Leo Marx writes, "is a master-machine in Thoreau's model of the capitalist economy. Its function is decisive because it links the industrial apparatus with consciousness. The laboring man becomes a machine in the sense that his life becomes more closely geared to an impersonal and seemingly autonomous system."⁵³ The clock stands in metonymically for the forces which have caused the demise of the wilderness – measurement, standardization and technology settling a homogenized, networked and well-administrated grasp on the continent.

My concluding consideration of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* is an attempt to locate a recurring formal feature, exemplified by the montage discussed above, within a tradition of commemorating the wild. These are the instances of tableaux in the film, usually at a moment of stillness and solitude.⁵⁴ Tableau here refers to a self-conscious, painterly, theatrical or stage-like display of the setting *as* setting in which it attains an emblematic and authoritative significance.

Reflection and Re-creation: Tableaux, Lakes and Mirrors

In relation to the concern among nineteenth-century American writers and painters to memorialize a moral order about to vanish, becoming valuable precisely because of its irreversible passing, the recurring tableaux in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* are one of its most reflexive aspects. To recall my discussion on nostalgia in the previous chapter, Simon Schama observed about Thomas Cole's painting *The Oxbow* that "the balance between settlement and pastoral innocence, between cultivation and wilderness, has been magically frozen at a moment of perfect equilibrium."⁵⁵ The freeze-frame as discussed by Cubitt might also be considered in relation to the first chapter in Lee Clark Mitchell's book where he examines James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, defining their most characteristic formal feature as the immobilization of action in protracted passages of landscape description, passages where "landscapes are offered as self-sufficient set-pieces – indeed, as stage sets that draw attention to their own theatricality, or as self-

⁵³ Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, p. 248.

⁵⁴ For a discussion on tableaux in Peckinpah's work see Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 170-184.

⁵⁵ Schama, p. 367.

consciously painted canvases.”⁵⁶ Both Cole and Cooper transformed a region along the Hudson River into a landscape of national history, and Cole, as well as his peers among the Hudson River School painters, often painted motifs derived from Cooper’s novels. As a modification of the freeze-frame in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, and in keeping with the ethical imperative of refusing change (Pat: “times have changed”, Billy: “Times maybe. Not me.”), characters tend to congeal into immobility as if captivated by the gravity of the transitory moment they inhabit, fixedly positioned in a moment of repose in the landscape, frozen in a stance of spectatorship rather than in action.

We may further note that these tableaux tend to occur in conjunction with bodies of water; the shallow stream of the Peco River toward which Sheriff Baker, who more than any other character in the film embodies the moral order of the Old West, staggers to die, the raft with the settler-family drifting downstream that Pat observes, and the lake that reflects Billy. As in the governors’ rumination of the “rainy New Mexican evenings” reminding him of a “greater design”, water accentuates the mnemonic function of the tableaux. Though a recurring metaphor in the dialog, water is conspicuously sparse in the film, consistent with the general atmosphere of an ebbing away of what once animated the western frontier, leaving a landscape tapped of vitality. In this context, it is also noteworthy how drinking serves as a displaced form of wilderness in many of Peckinpah’s films. As a ritual of male bonding and initiation it certainly resonates with the “masculine principle” in American literature contended by Seydor, a tradition where ‘spirit’ has retained its dual denotation, as if by drinking one acquires the strength of some wild spirit. Analogous to the draining of the exterior world and the landscape’s anthropomorphic trajectory from youthful innocence to old age, this ritual is drastically reduced from the rowdy intoxication in *The Wild Bunch* to the joyless drinking in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*. Before moving on to the second instance of a vanishing wilderness under discussion in this chapter, the Cahulawassee in *Deliverance*, I’d like to pursue some theoretical ramifications in relation to the image of Billy’s twilight reflection in the lake.

In “Imperial Landscape”, W.J.T. Mitchell designates the reflection in a lake or pool as the epitome of what he refers to as the “double semiotic structure of landscape - its simultaneous articulation and disarticulation of the difference between nature and convention”.⁵⁷ To recap the case he makes, landscape erases its own act of construction and formation of value by imparting a mandate for aesthetic withdrawal and philosophic contemplation of the timeless virtues displayed.⁵⁸ From this perspective, Billy’s

⁵⁶ Lee Clark Mitchell, p. 32.

⁵⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape”, p. 17.

⁵⁸ The reflection of nature *in* nature provides what Mitchell refers to as a “certificate of the Real” by presenting itself as “a *natural* representation of a natural scene”: “The reflection exhibits Nature representing itself to itself, displaying an identity of the Real and the Imagi-

reflection in the lake simultaneously asserts itself as a coded image – the silhouetted, solitary rider – and as a natural image emanating from the land itself.

The surface of a lake as the mediator of pure images can be richly exemplified within the tradition outlined above. In the last of the Leatherstocking Tales, *The Deerslayer* (1841), Cooper describes how the “mirror-like surface” of Lake Glimmerglass, “seems made to let us get an insight into the noble forests,”⁵⁹ and Thomas Cole’s *Essay on American Scenery* dwells at length on the reflective properties of water. Evoking the common analogy between the lake and the human eye, the “purity and transparency” of “the unrippled lake” isn’t praised merely for its pictorial effect, since “the reflections of surrounding objects, trees, mountains, sky, are most perfect in the clearest water; and the most perfect is the most beautiful.”⁶⁰ Unifying nature into a perfect and still image, the mirror of the lake also yields a natural analogy of the artist’s call to fix the elusive image of nature and extract visionary meaning from it.⁶¹ To cite a final instance of “a perfect forest mirror” displaying an idealized, incorruptible icon of nature, we may consider the following description of the surface of Walden Pond by Henry David Thoreau:

Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; - a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun’s hazy brush⁶²

Considered as a mnemonic screen, Billy’s reflection in the lake at once contemplates the generic tradition of which it is part, “an inverted Ford icon” in Kites’ words, and Peckinpah’s claim of first-hand knowledge of the way of life in which the genre was based. This logic comes full circle when the performances ritualistically have been played out in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*. After killing the Kid, Pat turns and shoots a mirror on the wall, leaving him

nary that certifies the reality of our own images.” W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” p. 15.

⁵⁹ As quoted by Simmon, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Thomas Cole, “Essay on American Scenery” [1835] in *The American Landscape: Literary Sources & Documents. Volume II*, ed. Graham Clarke, p. 337-347; 341.

⁶¹ The parallel between the pursuits of the landscape artist, whether by paint or in words, and reflecting bodies of water have been thoroughly studied by James A. W. Heffernan in *The Re-Creation of Landscape: A Study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Constable, and Turner* (Hanover, London: University Press of New England, 1984), observing that in an English nineteenth-century romantic tradition, the mirroring water, “symbolize the very act of artistic recreation”, p. xix. He also discusses the analogical procedure between the artists mind and the surface of the water, and how “reflection memorializes the all-too-fleeting appearance of natural objects”, p. 218.

⁶² Henry David Thoreau. *Walden* [1854] ed. J. Lyndon Shanley, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), chapter 9, “The Ponds”, p. 188.

to stare into his own broken and distorted image. Whereas Billy's refusal to submission is ratified by the reflection in the lake, Pat symbolically destroys the mirror, for in betraying the codes of the wild, he has also betrayed what Robert Warshow in his 1954 essay defined as the primary calling of the Westerner - to preserve "the purity of his own image",⁶³ a calling one might suspect to end in narcissism rather than in a viable ethics.

Deliverance

The urge to preserve a realm of wilderness, if in memory only, is addressed in the opening moments of *Deliverance*. The first anxious line of dialog, "You wanna talk about the vanishing wilderness?" is spoken over a lateral traveling shot moving close along the surface of a lake from the dark foliage of half-submerged trees to the ravaged hillsides of a dam construction. It is followed by a montage of dissolves where bulldozers crisscross the scourged construction site and then the echo from an explosion, or maybe thunder, rumbling through the mist-shrouded, densely-wooded mountains that surround it. The voice describes the Cahulawassee River as a world that will be lost to memory, evoking what it is ("the last wild, untamed, unpolluted, unfucked-up river in the South") in terms of what it will become ("just gonna be a big, dead lake") and urging his audience to partake in a canoe trip before this happens. The recreational river-rafting thus attains a ceremonial significance, a cautiously staged event to repossess a world of unhampered physical immediacy soon gone. While the title of the novel refers to such a baptism or initiation, 'deliverance' proves ironically ambivalent in the film.

Before continuing, three points need to be addressed. First, the labeling of *Deliverance* as a Western despite its contemporary setting, and here I'd like to quote Michael Bliss who has argued that all films Peckinpah made were Westerns regardless of their time and place since "they do investigate and dramatize its values, which are of greater importance than setting."⁶⁴ Yet, considering the conflation of values and settings in the Western, the claim might just as well be reversed. As Bliss himself observes of Joel McCrea's death scene in *Ride the High Country*, he "looks one last time at the high country for morality (to which he had raised his eyes when making the assertion 'All I want is to enter my house justified') before slowly lowering himself to the ground."⁶⁵ It is thus primarily the Cahulawassee itself that instigates the film as a Western, and Boorman poignantly described the weekend-trip as a journey "through American history, in search of its beauty,

⁶³ Warshow, "The Westerner", p. 110.

⁶⁴ Bliss, p. 13-14. I'm not the first to label *Deliverance* as a Western. Michel Ciment, for example, observed: "As always in Boorman's work, the social analysis of *Deliverance* is filtered through a specific cinematic genre: in this instance, an updated Western in which the director turns a number of American myths on their head." Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 124.

⁶⁵ Bliss, p. 57.

its power, its resources and its wealth.”⁶⁶ Yet, except for a rumination on the ‘first explorers’ after passing the first set of rapids, no historical event is mentioned. Generically defined as a remnant of what the New World once was, their symbolic reenactment of a historical moment (“first explorers saw this country”) also entails a way of looking at the landscape (“saw it just like us”). Along these lines, Armando José Prats has circumscribed the frontier’s contradictory status both as a prospect and as a custody of the past:

Westward lies the encounter with America’s own beginnings: in space if not in time, the Western (re)invents the original American moment, the instant when desire, perhaps guiltless still, reconceives the Garden and invests the idea (and thus the place and its impending occupation) with the power to reinstate the prelapsarian order. The prospect consecrates the site where possession – with its intimations of blood and guilt – becomes redemption.⁶⁷

Secondly, my alignment of the two films needs to be specified. Both begin and end with an image of the land that is left after the wilderness has been removed, a territory pacified and barren; in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* it is bounded and fenced in, in *Deliverance* it is literally dammed up, setting up a retrospective structure, a return to that which was before. There is also the significance that water attains in relation to a commemorated wilderness: in the former the characters are separated from water as a source of vitality, watching it, as Pat or Sheriff Baker does, or reflecting in it, like Billy, but never in physical contact with it; in the latter the river instead instigates an immersion into the past, in a very physical sense it taps into history in all its vigorous immediacy. Finally, they share an imagery of burials and coffins, though whereas bodies and coffins go into the ground in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, they come out of it in *Deliverance*.

Thirdly, a brief outline of the story that applies both to Dickey’s novel and script and to Boorman’s film is required. Four Atlanta businessmen decide to go canoeing down a stretch of wild river before the region is flooded by a hydroelectric dam. Each character distinctly typecast; Lewis, for whom the trip is an occasion to validate his survivalist ethos and Bobby, an insurance salesman mocked by Lewis for his physical unfitness, the artistically-minded Drew and Ed, apparently more complex than the others though with no special traits other than a thoughtful, mild manner and thus the one who mediates between them. On the second day, Ed and Bobby who have gone ahead are attacked and sodomized by two locals. The second canoe arrives just after Bobby has been raped by one of them, and Lewis kills the man with a bow and arrow while the other attacker flees. After an animated discussion they decide to bury the corpse in the woods. Back on the river, Drew

⁶⁶ Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 129.

⁶⁷ Armando José Prats, *Invisible Natives: Myth and Identity in the American Western* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 75.

mysteriously falls into the rough waters and the canoes capsize. Carried by the rapids, they are finally trapped in a gorge. Lewis claims that Drew was shot and that the second attacker is poised on the rock above them, though since he has fractured his leg in the rapids, Ed now has to assume leadership. After nightfall, Ed climbs the steep rock and at dawn, spots an armed man on the summit and kills him with another arrow. The second corpse is buried in the gorge and Drew, whose disfigured body they find shortly after, is buried downstream. Arriving at Ainty, a hill community soon to be flooded by the dam, they agree on an alibi to prevent the authorities from dragging upriver.

Now, probing the psychological content of the two works, rifts immediately begin to surface. In Dickey's script, the credits locate "deliverance" as a precise geographic location on a map, and it moves from Ed's ennui with the "futility, well-financed boredom, uselessness, organized tedium" with which his everyday life is defined to an exhilarated awakening after the killing, suddenly aware of the primordial energies which he shares with the river.⁶⁸ Whereas the dialog, action and symbolism in the novel/script present a straightforward maturing plot, Boorman's film begins as a satire of the loyalty and affection bonded by a small group of men in the wilderness, and eventually reverses the premises not only of its literary antecedent but also of wilderness as a private or national mythopoeia.

Dickey and the Wild as Poetic Property

In his addendum to the published screenplay of *Deliverance*, James Dickey expressed his dismay with the changes wrought in his story by director John Boorman, though finding some consolation in the film's rendition of "[t]he main entity the two versions will necessarily have in common", namely, "the river itself".⁶⁹ I argue, however, that the river is precisely where the meaning of the novel and the film deviates. Though Dickey appreciates the physical propinquity with which the Chattooga River is treated, he disapproves of the way Boorman disables and undercuts the main character, "that wondered apologetically and impotently through the thickets and over the clifftops of the set of the movie".⁷⁰ Commensurate with how Dickey in his writing, interviews and letters intently analogizes wild nature and imaginative energy, the latter part of the novel gradually substitutes psychology with landscape

⁶⁸ James Dickey, *Deliverance: A Screenplay* [1972] (Carbondale, Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), p. 8.

⁶⁹ Dickey, *Deliverance: A Screenplay*, p. 156: "The main entity the two versions will necessarily have in common is the river itself, and here I do not believe that my imagination or anyone else's could improve on the Chattooga River used in the film, or on cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond's handling of it. The river in the film is fully the equal of the river in the book, and the sweep and amplitude of the actual running current, the slow stretches, the cliffs, the stones, the rapids, and the force of the water are everything, in Zsigmond's handling, that I could have wished."

⁷⁰ Dickey, *Deliverance: A Screenplay*, p. 157.

description and near the end, there is a passage that describes how the now-vanished wilderness has been internalized into the psyche and body of Ed Gentry, its first person narrator:

The river and everything I remember about it became a possession to me, a very private possession, as nothing else in my life ever had. Now it ran nowhere but in my head, but there it ran as though immortally. I could feel it – I can feel it – on different places on my body. It pleases me in some curious way that the river does not exist, and that I have it. In me it is still, and will be until I die, green, rocky, deep, fast, slow, and beautiful beyond reality.⁷¹

‘Beyond reality’ is the key phrase here, referring to a realm outside the stifling confinement of everyday life where some more authentic state of being can be attained, and thus it is a realm which both escapes and solicits ownership. Dickey achieves this removal from culture to nature through an act of internalization in which the river is claimed as ‘poetic property.’ As one critic perceptively suggested in regard to this passage in the novel, it declares “creativity as possession; the captivating, preservational function of the artist”.⁷² In an essay from 1992, Dickey states that the entire novel derived from an image “of a man standing at the top of a cliff”⁷³ and proceeds by referring to such images as the well-spring of his artistic imagination, “the original image itself, always beyond words,” and to how they turn into “personal possession, ownership” with which nothing can interfere.⁷⁴ Thus the image is asserted as the origin, not the product, of artistic imagination; it is immediate and self-evident, or “powerful and urgent” as Dickey describes his vision, its authenticity further verified by appearing to him while half-asleep. That which is culturally coded in the story – the test against nature, the wild as a realm where sexual and psychological health is restored, violence as a cleansing experience, even the image of the man on the cliff – is displaced as psychic, primordial energy. In so doing Dickey prevents the cultural contingency of the story and imagery that it evokes to enter, claiming a piece of the natural world as ‘poetic property.’ Once absorbed into Ed’s consciousness, the Cahulawassee endures as a repository of vitality and inspiration.⁷⁵

⁷¹ James Dickey, *Deliverance* [1970] (London: Abacus, 1989), p. 236-237.

⁷² Michael K. Glenday, “Deliverance and the Aesthetics of Survival”, *American Literature*, vol. 56, no. 2, (May, 1984), p. 149-161; 156.

⁷³ James Dickey, “Lightnings or Visuals”, *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 57, no. 1, (January, 1992), p. 1-14; 7-8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9, 14.

⁷⁵ In a letter written by Dickey after finishing the first draft of the novel in 1963, he confirmed that reinvigorating violence had evolved as the major theme: “What is emerging from the book as a kind of theme – unbeknownst to me until I got into the material – is that there is a lot of violence in people that doesn’t get a chance to come out in the pleasant circumstances of suburban living, and that this violence takes the form of a kind of unspoken yearning, an unfulfillment in people – men, mostly – and then turns into a kind of poison that they have no way to get rid of. The narrator of the story must be made a kind of vehicle to show this, and then is freed by the secret crime of killing this stranger that is threatening the life of him and

Ed's progress from a discontent suburbanite into imposing self-assurance follows the observations Lee Clark Mitchell made of how the Western landscape restores one to one's proper, given and natural identity. That is to say, one is restored to what one already was.⁷⁶ An analogy between body and landscape, mind and nature, informs Dickey's novel, first by extending the sexual symbolism of the rapaciousness of American culture to the rape of Bobby, second by the suggested homosexual impulses that beset Ed in relation to Lewis whose physiognomy is the main source of his authority and subject of Ed's admiration, and finally through the explicit sexual metaphor with which Ed's scaling of the wall is rendered.⁷⁷ As in the recurring ritual pattern Lee Clark Mitchell observes in the Western, where the male body is mutilated in order to be restored, the violation of masculinity and Ed's vengeance on the remaining mountain man leads to recovery. At loss with one's proper and biologically given nature, "true sexual identity can be recovered only in an unsettled, unrestricted West."⁷⁸

Dickey was not alone to object to Boorman's inadequate treatment of Ed's rite of passage.⁷⁹ A closer look on the critical reception of the film suggests how entrenched the expectation of the transformative power of wild places to aid character development might be, and to what extent it informs interpretations. Robert F. Willison Jr., for example, argued that the film fails to grasp the central theme of the novel where Ed "must be delivered from the nagging doubts about his masculinity" by passing "the test of nature" and

his companions. In other words, murder allows him to enjoy being average, and be content with it, and happy even." Dickey, *Crux: the Letters of James Dickey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 202. This belief is precisely what Boorman would reject in his film: "Philosophically, we had little in common. Dickey's beliefs are not unlike Hemingway's, especially the idea that one attains manhood through some initiatory act of violence. For me, the contrary is true: violence doesn't make you a better person – instead, it degrades you." Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 129.

⁷⁶ See Lee Clark Mitchell's analysis of Zane Grey's seminal Western novel *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), p. 120-149; 136. In an article on Dickey's novel, Keen Butterworth similarly refers to the river as an "imperative to change", "a baptism, a trial by water" (p. 70), and to Ed's experience as a "re-creation" (p. 74). Butterworth, "The Savage Mind: James Dickey's *Deliverance*", *Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, (Spring 1996), p. 69-78.

⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that Wurlitzer referred to his original script of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* as a "love story of two men" intended to explore the sexual ambivalence, "the homosexuality even", implicit in this relation. "But", Wurlitzer continues, "when Peckinpah came into the picture he felt uncomfortable with that. He doesn't want to deal with that sort of thing in his head, so Billy became a simple character – more romantic, less ambivalent." Aghed, p. 66.

⁷⁸ Lee Clark Mitchell, p. 138.

⁷⁹ In interviews, Dickey has specified the literary precedent to his novel to a review he read when he was in college which quoted Van Gennep's concept of "rites de passage" as follows: "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return." See "An interview with James Dickey", David L. Arnett, *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 16, no. 3, (Summer 1975), p. 286-300; 295, and Peggy Goodman Endel's "Dickey, Dante, and the Demonic: Reassessing *Deliverance*", *American Literature*, vol. 60, no. 4, (December 1988), p. 611-624; 612. The later article cannily elaborates on the body-landscape analogies in Dickey's novel.

returning “to civilization with a renewed sense of worth”.⁸⁰ A similar critique was put forward by James F. Beaton who defined the central theme of Dickey’s novel as “the effort of a solitary and enervated imagination to gain a vital connection with what might be called the elemental sources of experience.”⁸¹ In the novel, the Cahulawassee accordingly bestows “a figure for the natural strength and imaginative fluency that Gentry must free from the depths of his psyche.”⁸² Failing to establish the “substantial connection between the natural world and Gentry’s soul”, the film also fails to convey how Ed is restored into “sexual vitality”.⁸³ At the core of these objections is the violation of a basic formal principle defined by Lee Clark Mitchell as “the mutual identity between character and landscape”.⁸⁴

As an edifying agency, instructive of an ideal manhood of integrity and restraint, and as an imperative to improve and recover by modeling oneself in its image, what the landscape most urgently requests is that it should be perceived *as* a paradigm, a natural model or ideal of perfection. If Boorman’s film at one level addresses and deconstructs a set of familiar myths – wilderness as a natural democracy, the one-to-one kill as the ultimate fulfillment of manhood and what Slotkin termed “regeneration through violence” – I contend that its most unsettling aspect is that it denies such anthropomorphic projections and mutual reflections. A visual corollary was achieved by shooting on overcast days and desaturating the colors in the laboratory so that the translucent and reflective qualities of the river were eliminated, making it appear dense and opaque.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Robert F. Willison, Jr., “*Deliverance* from Novel to Film: Where is Our Hero?”, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1, (Winter 1974), p. 52-58; 57.

⁸¹ James F. Beaton, “Dickey Down the River”, *The Modern American Novel and the Movies*, ed. Gerald Peary and Roger Shatzkin, (New York: Ungar, 1978), p. 293-306; 293.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 295.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁸⁴ These objections to Boorman’s treatment of Dickey’s novel are by no means uncontested. Michel Ciment assert that from script to screen, “the moral and philosophical perspectives of the narrative, have been radically modified.” Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 117. Michael Dempsey also observed how Boorman alters and transforms motifs in Dickey’s novel and script to make them more ambiguous, and James J. Griffith, finally, takes Beaton’s reading as a point of polemic: “Dickey and Boorman emphasize two different concepts that share the term ‘nature’” (48). In the former, Ed “draws strength from his surroundings and is eager to outdo himself and become something more than he was.” (54) Boorman however reverses this “maturing plot” (51) of release and redemption: “Ed begins in self-assurance (albeit unexamined) and ends in the fear that he is living a lie. Nature’s energy enters and enhances the human nature of one, and the inability to tap that energy reveals the weakness of human nature in the other.” (56) James J. Griffith, “Damned If You Do, and Damned If You Don’t: James Dickey’s *DELIVERANCE*”, *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 3, (Spring/Summer 1986), p. 47-59.

⁸⁵ “We decided to use only greens, blacks and whites, eliminating reds, yellows and blues. When the weather was fine, we had to wait for the sky to cloud over. That’s why, in the film, it’s either white or black. We also desaturated the colours in the laboratory.” Cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond interviewed in Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 252. “Most of the forest and the water were selected to be shot on an overcast day which eliminates the blue sky and all the

Identification and Transfiguration

The first part of the film vividly evokes a yearning for mutual reflection. Driving down a rough trail towards the river, the canopy overhead rushes over the windshield, making it function both as screen and frame. As described by Michael Dempsey, Boorman here makes “the dream and the dreamer flow together into a single image that abolishes the distinction between the two.”⁸⁶ A moment later, Lewis removes a curtain of dense foliage to get a view of the river, his rapt, “There she is, this is the one” further emphasizing the sense of wish-fulfillment. It’s an overtly voyeuristic look: gazing through the copse shoulder to shoulder, the dazzling reflections cast by the mild countenance of the forest river bonds Ed and Lewis together in reverie, the prospect of the Cahulawassee itself connoting a whole narrative of westward expansion.

If scholars such as Thomas Elsaesser and Michel Ciment have associated the film with the Westerns of Anthony Mann, the imagery seems to connect with the wellsprings of the genre.⁸⁷ Beginning with the mist rising from the rolling hills in the credit sequence, the Cahulawassee evokes the earliest landscape of the Western, both of Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* and of early cinema, one that Scott Simmon has characterized as “lush, woody, and wet: filled with lakes, streams, and canoes”.⁸⁸ If Lewis, the leader of the expedition, might bring to mind the river expedition of Lewis and Clarke, his magisterial interpretations of the wild also recall the tenets of American

reflections in the water which usually makes water very cheerful.” Zsigmond interviewed in Schaefer, p. 319.

⁸⁶ Dempsey, p. 14. As previously noted, several essays have observed the dreamlike quality in Boorman’s film. Beaton takes it as further evidence of Boorman’s confused treatment which merely aims for visual effects as it isn’t clarified who actually dreams this. Beaton, p. 303. On the other hand, Dempsey observes that the film shuns dramatic effect and literary meaning for a more ambiguous rendition attainable only through means available to cinema. The “treacherous surroundings are invariably dream-like, even ghostly,” Dempsey continues, suggesting that “Boorman responds most fervently to images of absurdity and meaninglessness.” Dempsey, p. 13.

⁸⁷ Elsaesser begins “Pathos of Failure” by broaching a series of reminiscences stirred by recent Hollywood films, like “thinking of *The Naked Spur* when watching *Deliverance*”, p. 13. The association to Anthony Mann’s 1952 Western would be due to the repeated scaling of rocks and a climax set within the torrents of a wild river, a trial by water which also appears in Mann’s *Bend of the River* from the same year. The theme of water as a test of character is toyed with some ingenuity in a scene in *The Naked Spur* where the sound of rain filling tin cups and plates put out for washing makes a melodic tune. James Stewart’s leading man, however, notices that there is a false note somewhere and he turns and empties one of the cups which belong to a highly unscrupulous member of the gang he is riding with – a dishonorable discharge from the army shown twice in close-up also makes his morally flawed character explicit in writing.

⁸⁸ Simmon, p. 4. The association to Cooper is further evoked by the voices of the men gradually emerging from the dense woodland, as in the opening of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) – a passage commented by Lee Clarke Mitchell, p. 41 – and more overtly by Ed’s deer-hunt alluding to *The Deerslayer* (1841).

Transcendentalism.⁸⁹ When mesmerized by the first sight of the river musing, “sometimes you have to lose yourself before you can find anything,” he at once paraphrases the New Testament and Thoreau’s *Walden*: “Not till we are lost,” Thoreau pondered, “do we begin to find ourselves.”⁹⁰ Even a line like Lewis’ awestruck “There she is” when first laying eyes on the Cahulawassee appears intrinsically allusive, as in Nick Adams’ “The river was there” in Hemingway’s short-story, “Big Two-Hearted River”,⁹¹ a line which defines the river as a site of absolute and unambiguous presence.

When considered in relation to *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, we may finally note the Christian and Romantic symbolism implied by the cross-formed body. Peckinpah’s film repeatedly associates Billy with Christ in the dialog and on two occasions he conspicuously forms his body into a cross. This cruciform gesture occurs three times in *Deliverance*: mimicked by Lewis when melodramatically extending his arms during the aggravated discussion of whether to bury the dead body or to take it back and stand trial, repeated by the corpse of the mountain man as it is carried through the woods with outstretched arms, and finally, after Drew’s forced apostasy from civilization, ghastly evoked when his body is found lodged against a tree trunk down-river with the twisted limb of his arm bent behind his head.⁹²

If these allusions are indicative of the ‘mythic self-consciousness’ set up by the film, a certain theatrical quality of the landscape is further enforced by Lewis’s proclivity to use it as a backdrop for his grandstanding mannerism – stately posing with an arrow and bow, eulogizing on the “vanishing wilderness”, even appearing to give stage directions to his companions – but also by instances of rapt gazing. The scene where Lewis removes the veil of foliage before the river as if opening up a fictional world makes us aware of the characters as well as our own looking, literally drawing attention to the

⁸⁹ The expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clarke to locate a connection between the Missouri and Colombia rivers was undertaken from 1804 to 1806. Like his namesake in *Deliverance*, Lewis had to make the return trip lying in the bottom of the canoe after he accidentally got shot.

⁹⁰ “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it,” Luke (17.33); Thoreau, *Walden*, chapter 8, “The Village”, p. 171. “Lost” is a key-phrase of the film, repeated within the first few minutes; Ed anxiously “If we’re lost, I don’t want to hear about it”, Lewis replying, “Lost? I’ve never been lost in my life”; Drew admitting to the retarded boy as he outplays him “I’m lost” and repeated again during Ed and Bobby’s encounter with the two mountain men.

⁹¹ Ernest Hemingway, “Big Two-Hearted River”, *In Our Time* [1925] (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p. 177-212; 177.

⁹² The debate about the dead body, which is staged around the stem of a forked tree, also recalls a similar vote taken around a cruciform tree in the wilderness in William A. Wellman’s 1943 Western *The Ox-bow Incident*. In both films, practicing democracy in wild places fails with staggering consequences. The major part of *The Ox-bow Incident* is staged around a tree about to be used for a hanging – the allusion to the Cross at Calvary further emphasized with the three snares that hang from one of the branches – practicing democracy in its most fundamental form in the wilderness, taking a vote of whether to lynch the three suspects or bring them to a fair trial.

framework as the river is edged by leafy boughs. Another occasion is when the canoes pass under a foot-bridge where a boy stands swinging a banjo like a big pendulum, the bridge serving both as a framing device and as a gateway to the pioneer past. And finally, there is the forest glade centered around the forked tree with the dead body where they debate the law.

As moral uncertainty abounds – was Drew shot? Did Ed kill the right man? – the relation between characters and setting is recast. Replacing tropes of passage and penetration with falling and sinking, the film registers a shift; it is no longer nature seen by man but man seen by nature. The attentive yet detached camera seems at one with the primeval forest. Allowing only pointillistic, fractured light to penetrate it conveys an atmosphere of interiority and a presence of unseen forces within it. The pictorial and stage-like effects discussed above are gradually replaced by images of dissolution, dispersion, and liquefaction; most prominent during Ed's nocturnal scaling of the rock which is rendered in a series of lingering dissolves. As the woods transform during the second night, the film slips into a new mode of perception at once intimate and aloof. The roar of the gorge below is muted and replaced by trickling water, and sounds from a more intimate, yet unseen, natural world. This intense presence overwhelms the austere, physical realism that has dominated the film so far, the rock develops a preternatural radiance, trees are edged by phosphorescent light, and the waters foam purple below.

In *Passport to Hollywood*, the book from where the concept of “mythical self-consciousness” derives, James Morrison drew on the exchange between “sameness” and “difference” to show how devices of indigenous genre film and foreign art film interlace in New Hollywood cinema, *Deliverance* being one of his case studies. Morrison's reading here offers a point of contention, though it will help, if inadvertently, to clarify how an ‘alien vision’ unsettles the landscape in *Deliverance*. Arguing that the film simultaneously deconstructs frontier mythology and reinforces the individualism that underpins that mythology, Morrison stresses his point by referring to the contrary attitudes embodied by Lewis and Drew. Whereas Lewis' “status as a guide” on the one hand is certified by “his greater connection to the land”, Drew's death is an inevitable outcome of his mistaken identification with a rural underclass in the backwoods at the beginning of the film, and of his insistence that they should return the dead body and stand trial for the murder.⁹³ By pointing to Drew's “inequality to the demands of nature,” and more importantly to his belief in communication and “identification with otherness” as a sign of weakness and naivety, the story-logic of the film ultimately sustains Darwinist survivalist ethics. Morrison's assertions seem to me to be the

⁹³ Morrison, p. 234-235.

precise reverse of the case. It also by-passes what Boorman has referred to as “the key to the film.”⁹⁴

After arriving in the woods, Drew, the character who seems least taken in by Lewis’s veneration, engages in a musical duel with a retarded boy, attentively swapping chords between guitar and banjo until the music suddenly takes off with captivating force. Morrison refers to the scene as yet another sign of Drew’s whimsy naiveté. I suggest that Michael Dempsey comes far closer when he observes that it is the single occasion in the film that in any positive manner fulfils the transformation Lewis seeks in nature and where the ambiguous deliverance promised by the title bears out. Dempsey describes the scene as:

a sudden jet of ecstasy, transfiguring the land and the men. Only here, as the instruments sing to each other, do we feel that two souls have mingled. Drew, the one member of the group who does not look down on the mountain people, achieves for an instant anyway the rapture that Lewis has promised.⁹⁵

As Dempsey suggests, this scene gives the lie to Lewis’s solipsistic ethics of individual survival and self-reliance. With his faith in communication, social institutions and democracy, a word spoken with contempt by Lewis, Drew’s is an intruding alien gaze. His death, whether accident or suicide, is in a way, as Morrison claims, a consequence of his ability for “identification with otherness”, a capacity which is incongruent with their ritual reenacting of the colonial trajectory of the first explorers and the cult of the Self that it entails. What is more, it invalidates the anthropocentric logic of a mutual reflection between character and landscape.⁹⁶ By the campfire at the end of the first day, Drew plays his part of the musical dialog and then pauses as if waiting for a response, followed by a shot of the eerie stillness of the woodland river.

Coda: Possess/Possessed

Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid and *Deliverance* end with a markedly similar image: the hand of a dead man that reaches out before an inanimate landscape. Whereas Peckinpah’s last Western validates the authority of the past in commemorative tableaux, conventions of picturing wilderness provide a frame or stage for the characters, and us, to enter in *Deliverance*, literally so when Lewis removes the veil of foliage, only to recast the linear impetus of going down-river into vertiginous dislocation, climbing and descending, burying and unearthing. And whereas the solitary rider – a white, male fig-

⁹⁴ Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 130.

⁹⁵ Dempsey, p. 14.

⁹⁶ Michel Chion close his essay on Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*, trans. Trista Selous, (London: British Film Institute, 2004) by quoting a friend telling him that, “the only film to tell the truth about nature was John Boorman’s *Deliverance* (1972), in which nature does not humanise human beings.” p. 72.

ure reflected in the lake – exalts the virtues of the past in Peckinpah’s last Western, the wax-like, white hand that emerges from the power-lake in *Deliverance* conjures this past as a site of unnamable events, cover-up and fabrication. By making picturing and witnessing a primary concern, it brings attention to how land has been transferred into the ‘poetic property’ of landscape, and violence into spiritual deliverance, not only unsettling the authority of the past but also its presumed pastness as something to be concluded or sealed as a shrine and as a moral inspiration for the future.

In closing, I want to return to the consideration of wilderness given by Jonathan Bordo. Two images broached earlier – the one where Garrett picks up his pocket-watch while overlooking a green valley in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* and that of the boy on the foot-bridge swinging his banjo like a pendulum in *Deliverance* – may be recalled in relation to Bordo’s description of the moment consecrated by the picture of wilderness:

It is the moment when the clock started ticking: from this moment, history. While landscape is the stage for European memory, the wilderness is that state or condition that obliterates history by initiating history from that very moment enshrined as visual testament. *Before* is both the posit before memory as it points backward as memory.⁹⁷

From this perspective, Boorman’s *Deliverance*, with the Cahulawassee as a site of burying, forgetting and erasing, discloses the instrumental function Bordo assigns to wilderness in his essay. Through point-of-view shots, Ed repeatedly finds himself in a position of emasculated witness, quite the opposite of the self-possession Dickey imagined, not only of the rape but also when glancing through a window into a backwoods home where he sees an old woman and a crippled child, or the equally unsettling glimpse of the unearthing of the graves at Aintry. Ed is, as one critic pointed out, repeatedly “confronted with a horrible image that will not go away.”⁹⁸ Completing the film’s theme of a past upset and unsettled, the sight through the foliage of the coffins being exhumed at the cemetery duplicates the one where Lewis lifts the veil to reveal the sparkling texture of the river. Beginning as an entry into a site of origin which announces, in Bordo’s words, “from this moment, history”, Lewis’s avowal that “the first explorers who saw this country, they saw it just like us” proves ironically prophetic at the end of the film. The experience on the Cahulawassee becomes something that mustn’t be recounted, and events need to be re-remembered in order to be forgotten. Returning, there is merely the trivial smalltalk at the dinner table, their pledge of silence, Ed’s silent reunion with his family, and Lewis’s last words from the hospital bed, “I don’t remember nothing. Nothing!” Incidentally, both

⁹⁷ Bordo, 297.

⁹⁸ Griffith, p. 53.

Bordo and W.J.T. Mitchell use the legal term ‘alibi’ when discussing wilderness as a posit for national origin.⁹⁹

Whereas the tableaux in *Pat Garrett & Billy* pertinently occur in moments of transit – the streak of twilight when Billy descends by the lake, the red solar flare which cuts across the screen as Sheriff Baker staggers toward Peco River at sunrise, or the setting dusk when Garrett observes the drifting raft – the final shot of shadows reflecting on the blank, impassive water of the power dam that ends *Deliverance* instead stirs a sense of the site looking back at us, returning our gaze precisely through its unreflective and mute presence. As the rising lake settles a smooth, level surface over the wilderness wrought by the Cahulawassee, the incident is muted; however, the dam doesn’t lead to closure or resolution but beckons, without hinting at redemption or reconciliation, to a place beneath it.

⁹⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Holy Landscape”, p. 266; Bordo, p. 309.



5 Daylight Noir and the Dark Side of Landscape

Landscape as Mise-en-Abyme in Chinatown

No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land.

Nathaniel Hawthorne¹

No other period of Hollywood's past has been as readily evoked in relation to the new generation of filmmakers emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s as that of *film noir*, an affiliation contained within the ominous metaphor of 'noir,' as in David Cook's assertion that the late 1960s, "perhaps the darkest in American history since the Civil War, witnessed some of the most original American films since the late forties."² Such accounts have associated a historical moment of upheaval and national insecurity brought about by economic crises and war abroad with subversive impulses erupting within a supposedly affirmative industry. The number of analogies between New Hollywood and film noir which my previous arguments may invite – a gritty

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, preface to *The Marble Faun: or, the Romance of Monte Beni* [1860] (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 3.

² David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Cinema* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p. 631. Richard Martin phrases it similarly, arguing that "it was not until the late sixties, in the wake of political assassinations, race riots, and U.S. involvement in another protracted overseas military campaign that the cinema-going public would once again see a 'dark mirror' held up to American society in the Hollywood renaissance filmmakers revival of film noir." Martin, *Mean Streets and Raging Bulls: The Legacy of Film Noir in Contemporary American Cinema* (Lanham, Maryland, London: Scarecrow Press, 1997), p. 44.

realism furnished from location shooting, the emphasis on style and atmosphere, or the influences of European cinema – foremost testify to the elasticity of both labels. In fact, the way in which film noir and New Hollywood have been discussed might be more similar than the films themselves, both being part of the phenomenon that goes under the name cinephilia.

Not originating from the industry but coined by French critics in 1946, film noir was from its outset a retrospective label, and one which has been open to debate ever since. Alternatively described as a genre, a period, a cycle of films, or more loosely as a mood or style, the affinity between film noir and New Hollywood can in more general terms be circumscribed as an affiliation of bleakness, saturated in an ambience of defeatism and disaffection, and as a shared stance of skepticism toward traditional values and beliefs in American society. At the outset of Paul Schrader's 1972 article, "Notes on Film Noir", the analogy is patently unfavorable for the contemporary Hollywood's "self-hate cinema" which judged against the profound cynicism of film noir is dismissed as "naive and romantic."³ In *A Cinema of Loneliness*, Robert Kolker similarly deduced a kinship to a resigned and cynical outlook bred by an overall sense of social malaise, whereas Elsaesser's "The Pathos of Failure" observed "a scenery that obviously has the sanction and precedent of the *film noir*". However, contrary to Schrader's appraisal, he defines it as unimpeded by the "black romanticism of mood" and "the heavy machinery of fate and destiny" of its moody antecedent, instead affiliating them through "their insistence on the emotional stance appropriate to American realism – negativity".⁴

As we shall see, settings, usually in the margins and fringes both geographically and socially, have elicited comparisons between the periods. Governed by an atmosphere of futility and alienation apparently unsuited to implement political change, it is a milieu that seems to sanction the stance of resignation and defeat Elsaesser referred to, an environment congenial to the negative epitaphs of 'self-hate,' 'loneliness' and 'failure.' There is also the stylistic and intellectual transfers between Europe and America and the supposedly non-classical tendencies of both periods, whether reduced to "patterns of nonconformity", as David Bordwell argues, or, as in Andrew Britton's definition of film noir, "the epitome of everything that a classical film cannot conceivably be."⁵ Whatever the final evaluation, a certain artistic independence bestowed by the B-feature circuit encouraging experimentation, innovation and differentiation have commonly been recognized, the counterpart of which would be the exploitation films made for the drive-in circuits in the late 1960s.⁶

³ Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir" [1972] in Grant (ed.), p. 229-242; 229.

⁴ Elsaesser, "The Pathos of Failure", p. 18.

⁵ Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 75; Andrew Britton, p. 58.

⁶ See Martin, "Industrial Evolution: Conservative Policies, Low-Budget Innovation", p. 11-33.

In light of the contested status of film noir, I adhere to James Naremore's observation that "film noir is both an important cinematic legacy and an idea we have projected onto the past."⁷ That is, on one hand, acknowledging that writers such as James M. Cain or Raymond Chandler, directors like Robert Siodmak and Billy Wilder, or cinematographers like John Alton and Gregg Toland, had a sense of what they were aiming at while on the other hand recognizing the discursive status of film noir. At once generically American and transatlantic, in some aspects notably similar to German expressionism and French poetic realism, and defined primarily through its visual style and worldview, noir became a locus where art and genre, auteur and industry, intersected. As has often been pointed out, film noir emerged as a category of academic interest in America at the exact moment of the New Hollywood.⁸ Defined as a critical or reflexive legacy "operating within and against the Hollywood system"⁹ and as a potent vehicle for formal experiments and social critique, it would have obviously appealed to a new generation of filmmakers.

Probing the discursive nature of film noir, Elsaesser proposed that the auteur-theory allowed French cinephiles to identify artistic value and creative potential within mass production, and ultimately to discover their own gloomy, existentialist sentiment at the heart of dominant culture.¹⁰ Initiated by Godard's *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1959), noir was appropriated by the critics-turned-filmmakers to launch the *nouvelle vague* (Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, François Truffaut). A decade later, the exchange was reversed: *Bonnie & Clyde* written with Truffaut in mind while Polish director, Roman Polanski, was offered *Chinatown*. Between these two films, the periodization of a New Hollywood and the resurgence of film noir coalesce. Stylistically, however, they seem to have little in common. Contrary to Penn's new wave aesthetics, Polanski's *Chinatown* "reached back so seamlessly to the great classic studio films noir of the 1940s that in memory it has almost become one of them," as Jonathan

⁷ James Naremore, "American Film Noir: The History of an Idea", *Film Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 2, (Winter, 1995/96), p. 12-28; 14. Naremore continued to explore film noir as a locus of art cinema within entertainment cinema, as modernism entering Hollywood both in terms of sensibility, themes and formal innovation, in his subsequent study *More than Night: Film Noir and its Contexts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998).

⁸ Eric Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir", *American Literary History*, vol. 9, no. 3, (Autumn, 1997), p. 542-566; 543; Naremore, "American Film Noir: The History of an Idea", p. 24; Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 15.

⁹ Naremore, "American Film Noir: The History of an Idea", p. 23.

¹⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 431-32. Marc Vernet has similarly proposed that film noir "allows one to love the United States while criticizing it," giving "American cinema a cultural label and a critical force validated by Europe," in "Film Noir on the Edge of Doom" in *Shades of Noir: A Reader*, ed. Joan Copjec, (London, New York: Verso, 1993) p. 1-31; 6.

Kirshner remarked.¹¹ In common with my discussion on Boorman's *Deliverance*, this chapter addresses a European filmmaker apparently abiding to a classical economy of unity and meticulous plotting while at the same time setting up a dialectic between the eras. With its rigorously crafted mise-en-scène, it could be argued that *Chinatown* conforms to the story-space from which I have been distinguishing landscape, land obviously being central for the unfolding events and character motivation. However, landscape also ramifies beyond the diegesis to form an inquiry that concerns the generic traditions and hidden agendas of film noir.

Affiliated as eras of what Cook referred to as "lost illusions", respectively through the setback of New Deal and counterculture liberalism, a number of the New Hollywood noirs palpably departed from the original films in one regard. Instead of the oppressive confinement of dark alleys and city streets, noir plots and patterns were now cast in a spacious countryside in broad daylight. In fact, this reversal was so conspicuous that it encouraged a series of proposals of a new genre at the time which asserted the settings as a defining feature. Considering that already the original film noir has been characterized for the way it violates orientation, what does this recasting of film noir from night to day and from city to country finally signify?

The first part of this chapter continues to chart Lee Clark Mitchell's assertion of a "mutual identity between character and landscape". The claim might strike some as improbable, not only considering the urban spaces of film noir but also in relation to Polanski, a director intimately associated with claustrophobic interiors. My contention is that the nocturnal mazes of noir at the same time yielded a drastic reduction and intensified presence of landscape, remaining in the displaced form of reminiscence and private code, even as landscape paintings in the décor. This metonymic presence further tie into a tenet of American isolationism and individualism, the autonomy and purity in both cases depending on their being set apart from decadent surroundings. Following previous arguments made about film noir and American culture in the 1940s, and exemplified by a number of canonical films, the contention inevitably involves some generalizations. It should be clear that my concern is with tendencies in film noir and its surrounding discourses rather than an attempt to seize it through this single aspect. However, I make some suggestions on how this presence interlaces with thematic (alienation, racial anxieties) and stylistic (high-contrast lighting) issues more commonly interrogated in film noir criticism.

Returning us to the desert beyond the fringes of Los Angeles traversed by the counterculture outcasts in *Easy Rider* and *Zabriskie Point* in search of a revived bond with the nation's ancestral origins, the investigation conducted in *Chinatown* brings this search to a dire conclusion. It also discloses how

¹¹ Jonathan Kirshner, "Night Moves (1975): America at Middle Age", *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, (2006), p. 66-67; 66.

landscape, in common with film noir, is a transatlantic phenomenon. By examining the way it links the immigrant community referred to in the title, a stigmatized locus in film noir, to a utopian myth of California, and capital to land, two realms usually kept separate in film noir, I suggest that it brings to light both literally and figuratively the workings of landscape.

This leads us, finally, to my application of *mise-en-abyme*, a term that refers to the mirroring or doubling effect that is produced when a work of art – famous examples being Velasquez’ painting *Las Meninas* (1656) or Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603) – contains a smaller copy of itself, in these cases, an image within an image and a play within a play.¹² If *mise-en-abyme* has become commonplace in post-modern criticism concerned with meta-fictions and self-reflexive devices, its bearing in regard to *Chinatown* is literally in the sense of a landscape within a landscape.¹³ Though it applies more generally to how *Chinatown* stages its noir-plot within a pastoral and pioneer fable, which in turn reframes the regional history of California that it draws from, the pastoral features both as a manifest location and as an artifact within the elaborate décor and set-design of the film.

Film Noir and the End of the National Landscape

Dana Polan has given a bizarre example of the effort to save some affirmative image of a pristine America in spite of the general pessimism that imbues film noir. During a sequence where a jealous wife leaves her husband’s crippled brother to drown in a lake in *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), a Technicolor noir about an embittered marriage, the Office of War Information required that director John M. Stahl should insert panoramic images of the countryside in Maine, an interference which in effect prolonged this disturbing scene.¹⁴ Not merely of anecdotal interest, I suggest that the episode is

¹² The term derives from heraldry but has migrated to visual and literary theory. As Neil Hertz writes: “There is no term in English for what French critics call *mise en abyme* – a casting into the abyss – but the effect itself is familiar enough: an illusion of infinite regress can be created by a writer or painter by incorporating within his own work a work that duplicates in miniature the larger structure, setting up an apparently unending metonymic series.” Hertz, “Freud and the Sandman” in Harari (ed.), p. 296-321; 311.

¹³ Though my focus and contextualization differs, I submit *Chinatown* to the kind of reading it was used to exemplify in Thomas Elsaesser’s and Warren Buckland’s *Studying Contemporary American Film*, namely a “poetics of (unlimited) semiotics” (135) that engage in a detailed reading of the “the marginal details of a film’s style and surface signs” (133) and that explores the films “referential material ... for their ‘semiotic’ potential.” (137) Their analysis also draws on *mise-en-abyme* when describing the film’s intricate texture of allusions and cross-references. In defense of such an approach the authors contend that, “an awareness of the play of surface effects nonetheless amplifies the resonance the scenes have for the viewer: they ‘thicken’ the films semantic texture and ignite surprising flashes of meaning that appear on the ‘worked-over’ (some would say ‘overwrought’ or ‘baroque’) body of a ‘New Hollywood’ studio product such as *Chinatown*.” (135).

¹⁴ Dana Polan interviewed on Swedish radio, “Kulturråd: Bildrutan – Filmens Bilder av Amerika”, Sveriges Radio P1, October 14, 2005.

symptomatic of an ideological function performed by landscape in film noir. Following Polan, along with fellow film scholar Vivian Sobchack and historian David W. Noble, this first part attempts to demarcate this function and how it relates to what's been described as a historical moment of national loss.

Already in the first coherent study of noir, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton's *Panorama du film noir américain* from 1955, it was, among other things, defined through a strong tendency toward disorientation.¹⁵ Whereas academic work on film noir commonly privileged issues of gender, violence and sexuality, space has recently been the subject of extensive scholarship though, hardly surprising, with a focus on urban and suburban settings.¹⁶ If nature is markedly absent in these films, I suggest that it is an imperative absence. As exemplified in the next section, the worldview of film noir tends to be coordinated along the antithetic orders of country and city and the set of binary oppositions that it involves: family farm vs. rented rooms, personal biography vs. anonymity, and agrarian self-sufficiency vs. the transnational flow of a capitalist urban economy. Adhering to this binary logic, the settings of film noir are defined as much for what they are as for what they are lacking, and landscape is frequently asserted as the element that mediates between these polarized conditions.

In his study, *Power & Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950*, Polan recounts a multitude of examples for the conspicuous absence of milieux that reflect identity in a positive manner in film noir. Instead he observes a consistent reversal of affirmative spatial tropes, for example, when referring to *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945) as "a kind of debased farcical version of the American pioneer venture."¹⁷ Polan further associates the way individual initiative is paralyzed by the forces of modernization with a recurring typology of "dead ends, backwaters, marginalia

¹⁵ Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du film noir américain (1941-1953)* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955).

¹⁶ Though almost any study of film noir would include some consideration of the role of the city, it has also been used as a defining concept, ranging from Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* (New York: Free Press, 1997), which conceptualizes the city as a maze or labyrinth and pursues the mythological themes this analogy incites, to Edward Dimendberg's *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2004), which analyses film noir in relation to changing patterns of urbanization and suburbanization during the 1940s and 1950s, drawing on Henri Lefebvre and Siegfried Kracauer. See also Frank Krutnik's essay "Something More Than Night: Tales of the Noir City" in David B. Clarke, (ed.), p. 83-109; David Reid and Jayne L. Walker, "Strange Pursuit: Cornell Woolrich and the Abandoned City of the Forties," p. 57-96, and Joan Copjec, "The Phenomenal Nonphenomenal: Private Space in *Film Noir*," p. 167-197, both in Copjec (ed.); and "The Space of Noir" p. 211-236 in *Noir Anxiety* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) where Kelly Oliver and Trigo Benigno examine the "moral topography" of film noir through a psychoanalytical perspective.

¹⁷ Dana Polan, *Power & Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 270.

to the system: thus, an iconography of a kind of nonspace”.¹⁸ Latching on to Polan in her inventive approach to genre studies, Vivian Sobchack deploys Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope to define a specific time-space configuration in film noir, what she refers to as “lounge time” and defines as “structured in direct opposition to the pastoral idyllic chronotope”.¹⁹ Though Sobchack’s proposal entails a broader concept of rethinking genre, we can note that the premise of ‘lounge time’ is thematically consistent with the impersonal, transitory spaces attended by Polan; the former observing how “innocence is becoming a mark of a vanished past” and the latter that “the loss of a home becomes a structuring absence in film noir.”²⁰

One might object that Sobchack and Polan address spaces of different orders, the former referring to the loss of an intimate sphere of privacy and domesticity, the latter to the generalized trope of a geographical frontier. However, if we turn to Jean Mottet’s *L’invention de la scène américain*, the decisive point that he makes on how a national landscape was devised is precisely the integration of personal and public levels.²¹ Through an act of metonymic displacement in which family values came to represent national values and family membership equal citizenship, the concept of home emerged as the gravitational force through which the dream of a whole nation was conveyed.

In addition to the historical contextualization Polan and Sobchack provide, I want more specifically to situate their proposals of a negatively charged space within an argument made by David W. Noble concerning the troubled notion of a national landscape at the exact historical moment of film noir. In *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism*, Noble examines how the confidence in the nation’s privileged relation with nature was shattered in the wake of World War II and a burgeoning global market economy. When the transnational marketplace replaced the landscape as the defining impetus of the nation, Noble argues, the metaphors of the two worlds, the old of corrupt time and the new of virtuous space, lost their validity; territorial prospects were reduced to the infinite cycle of a global market, men to carriers of income, and the landscape to “a wasteland of soulless materialism”.²² Though Noble’s discussion includes painting, architecture and music, he leaves Hollywood cinema of the period unac-

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 268.

¹⁹ Vivian Sobchack, “Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir” in Nick Browne (ed.), p. 129-170; 163.

²⁰ Polan, *Power & Paranoia*, p. 249, the same formulation appears on p. 290; Sobchack, p. 144.

²¹ Mottet, *L’invention de la scène américain*. For a brief account, see “Idéologie familiale, mythe pastoral et paysage symbolique”, p. 83-85, for a lengthier exposure the last two chapters, “Période Troublée, Maison Revees”, p. 151-169, and “Mise en scène de L’Histoire, Recherche de Paysages Symboliques et Apologie Des Valeurs Familiales”, p. 171-227.

²² David, Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 151.

counted for except for a brief parallel between the tangled webs, mazes and vortex-figures in the paintings of Jackson Pollock, and the film noir hero's entrapment "in a corrupt American society from which there was no escape."²³ In light of Polan and Sobchack's observations, 1940s film noir would, however, appear as a major expression of the anxieties that Noble relates to the end of the national landscape. Along these lines, film scholar Ken Hillis pointed out that the noir protagonists tend to be "reluctant cosmopolitans" beset by a "diffuse nostalgia for prewar isolationism" whereas noir, in Norman M. Klein's more drastic definition, is "a mythos about white male panic – the white knight in a cesspool of urban decay".²⁴

Noble has a personal stake in the anxious response that this paradigmatic shift brought about, starting out as a scholar in the tradition of the symbol-myth school initiated by Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* in 1950, a tradition which Noble defines through its dedication to preserve the unique moment of the national landscape "in memory as timeless myth."²⁵ The historical moment that it venerated was, however, of a highly biased origin, following from Frederick Jackson Turner's declaration of how individualism and democracy had been organically bred along the frontier's line of flight. An air of finality and entrapment was already present in Turner's lecture, however, the East coast filling up with immigrants while the unclaimed land in the West quickly diminished, corrupt European time inevitably claiming sacred American space. "When we lost our free land and our isolation from the Old World, we lost our immunity", Turner pondered.²⁶ The inevitable outcome of this consolidation of a universal, American whiteness and the national landscape, Noble concludes, was a pathological fear of alien intrusion infesting virgin land with inauthentic culture.

Validating this timeless landscape while masking the processes of its making, Noble indicts the national scholars for believing "that their culture was created by nature."²⁷ Though Noble might overstate his polemic against the symbol-myth school, his charting of memory as a catalyst through which the reciprocity between identity and landscape could be reinstated is central to the following discussion.²⁸ Enduring as a moral agency, if not a manifest location, I argue that the need to maintain this relation became all the more urgent within the urban confines of film noir.

²³ Noble, p. 165.

²⁴ Ken Hillis, "Film Noir and the American Dream: The Dark Side of Enlightenment", *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 55, (Spring 2005), p. 3-18; 5; Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London, New York: Verso, 1997), p. 79.

²⁵ Noble, p. 121.

²⁶ Turner, p. 357.

²⁷ Noble, p. xxiv.

²⁸ Leo Marx, for example, one of the most notable representatives of this tradition, dealt precisely with the projective and ideological character of the American pastoral and its origin in European culture.

Dark Passages and High Sierras: the National Landscape and its Other

Let's consider for a moment a scene in Archie Mayo's 1936 adaptation of Robert Sherwood's Broadway play, *The Petrified Forest*, thematically, if not stylistically, a progenitor of film noir in one central regard. On the rooftop of a diner in the Arizona desert, a world-weary writer is being shown some landscape paintings by a waitress. After examining her canvases, he launches into a monolog about modern man's delusory notion that he has conquered nature: "They've dammed it up and used its water to irrigate the wastelands. They've built streamlined monstrosities to penetrate its resistance. They've rapped it up in cellophane, sold it in drugstores." The chaos which afflicts the world at the present, he continues, is "nature hitting back," though ending on a more optimistic note he predicts that this aspiring artist with her unsophisticated yet perceptive demeanor might "be one of nature's own children" about to redeem the modern world. Imparting an opposition between consumerism, capitalism, and environmental engineering on the one hand, and psychical health, nature, and innocence on the other, I'm more specifically concerned with how this rumination is initiated by paintings. In the urban environs of film noir, the national landscape could only exhort its influence in the displaced form of reminiscences of country life, in the infatuation with pastoral talismans - the green, shamrock handkerchief in *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946), Alicia's flowers in *The Big Combo* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1955), 'rosebud' in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) - or even by watching a representation on a canvas.²⁹

Attending to elements of the décor in film noir interiors, one would notice the frequency with which landscapes are present in the literal sense of framed scenes of moonlit lakes, soaring mountains and pastoral farmland. Though this would indicate a convention of art direction at the time rather than a conscious strategy, I suggest that we may think of it in terms of a catalyst. Some films even make this point explicit: in *Dark Passage* (Delmer Daves, 1947), an escaping convict determined to clear his name gets rescued by a woman who's been practicing her skill as a landscape painter in the surrounds of the prison compound; in *On Dangerous Ground* (Nicholas Ray,

²⁹ Though there isn't any consensual pantheon of classical film noir, the coinage initially referring to five features, the most commonly invoked bracketing have been *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) and *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958). Due to its themes, expressionist stylization and retrospective-structure, *Citizen Kane* has occasionally been posited as one of the first film noir. Polanski appears to agree, the "no trespass" sign, "love nest" headlines and the huge political posters in *Chinatown* are all obvious allusions to Welles' debut. Another disputed example that I draw from is *High Sierra* (Raoul Walsh, 1940) which is often grouped with earlier gangster films. For an analysis of how the handkerchief "signifies a forgotten homeland" in *The Killers*, see Oliver Harris, "Film Noir Fascination: Outside History, but Historically So", *Cinema Journal* vol. 43, no. 1, (Fall 2003), p. 3-24; 19.

1952) a painting of a log cabin on a snowy summit not only leads the tormented police detective to the criminal but also to spiritual conversion. Trivial as they may seem, such instances can be traced more generally across film noir in how landscape promotes popular assumptions of simple national virtues threatened by unhealthy influences, foreign, urban, or both.

This polarization is also evident in the title sequences of these two films; the former panning from rolling hillsides and ocean to the prison walls of San Quentin, in the latter the opening credits tunnel down a dark, damp city street while the closing pan moves across snowy ridges in Colorado. The title sequence of *Out of the Past* (Tourneur, 1947) is emblematic in this regard. Allegorizing a fall where the lucid vistas of the Sierra Nevada give way to a world underneath as it descend from the glaciers and forested ranges around Lake Tahoe to the cultivated fields, trodden paths, settlements and signposts below, it encapsulates the sinister, conspiratorial significance that encroaching networks of communication and mobility frequently attain in film noir.

Inheriting the anti-modern persuasion of the Western, the protagonists' moral consciousness is often coded as a function of a rural, Midwest pedigree. An allegiance to the dwindling realities of an agrarian past transpires as a defiance against the dehumanizing forces of the city, as when the newly-released depression era gangster in *High Sierra* (Raoul Walsh, 1940) goes to a park to feel the grass immediately after his parole and then secretly revisits the family farm, or when Dix Handley stumbles to death in the meadows of his boyhood Kentucky farm in the final images of *The Asphalt Jungle* (John Huston, 1950). Likewise, moral deficiency can be coded as immunity to a pastoral influence. The outlaw couple's vain attempt for a healthy romance in *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1949) is displayed in three quick back-projections of stock footage from a national park where they pose before a waterfall, a geyser, and a shimmering lake. However, these vistas are inevitably followed by the neon signs of a casino. For a more understated deployment of this scenario, we may turn to the most likely candidate for the quintessential film noir, Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944). Whereas the insurance salesman Walter Neff and Mrs. Dietrichson meet to plan the murder of her husband in a supermarket surrounded by consumer goods, a possibility of redemption is suggested in Neff's bonding with her step-daughter Lola on a pastoral hill above Los Angeles, and during his only honorable act in the film, warning a fellow in misfortune of the destructive influence of the femme fatale, Neff stands immersed in the greenery surrounding Dietrichson's mansion.

Alongside these general patterns runs an additional axis that needs to be taken into consideration: the hard-edged and high-contrast lighting that is the stylistic hallmark of film noir, an extremity of dark and light which allows little grayscale. Social historian Eric Lott has examined the metaphor of 'noir' literally in terms of blackness by reading the low-key lighting as a

coded reference to the threat of the racial Other.³⁰ Observing that non-whites occupy a marginalized position in the Anglo-centric world of film noir, Lott argues that locales of mixed ethnicity, whether night clubs (*Criss-Cross*, Robert Siodmak, 1949, *D.O.A.*, Rudolph Maté, 1950) or immigrant communities like Chinatown (*The Lady from Shanghai*, Orson Welles, 1948), frequently connote depravity and vice.³¹ Topographical difference is equally implicated in this binary scheme of dark and light, high and low. To draw from my previous examples: nocturnal Mexico versus the bright pastoral lakeside retreat in Maine in *Leave Her to Heaven*; expanses of concrete versus meadows illuminated by morning light in *The Asphalt Jungle*; shining peaks in *High Sierra*, glittering Lake Tahoe in *Out of the Past*, and snowfields in *On Dangerous Ground* as opposed to the tangled, darkly ambiguous cosmopolitan world below.

More commonly, however, landscape is invoked in longing or memory, or as moral code, finding new ways of sustenance within the urban discontent of film noir that further emphasize its condition as a moral rather than material property. In this consolidation of self and land, alienation circumscribed a final refuge of idealism. To conclude the discussion on film noir in its classical context I want to consider the hard-boiled novels of Raymond Chandler, not only for being a conspicuous derivation of *Chinatown* but since his detective hero, Philip Marlowe, arguably constitutes the most eloquent case of the pathetic fallacy discussed above.

In his book on landscape in Californian literature, *The Fall into Eden*, David Wyatt referred to Chandler as “a failed pastoralist,” and observed how the novels are informed with a retroactive structure where “the wrongness of the present place” stands in stark opposition to the “rightness of the past.”³² We may also recall Raymond Williams’s contention in *The Country and the City* that was broached in chapter three. In fact, Williams provides us with a

³⁰ Lott, “The Whiteness of Film Noir”. Without involving the lighting, Deborah Thomas made a similar case: “I would like to suggest that the characteristic anxiety provoked by the contemporary urban setting of *film noir* has its roots, at least in part, in a response to the waves of immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which seemed to make the city no longer the locus of American ‘civilization’ (a native version of white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism) but rather of an antithetical ‘otherness.’” Thomas, “How Hollywood Deals With The Deviant Male” in *The Movie Book of Film Noir*, ed. Ian Cameron, (London: Studio Vista, 1992), p. 59-70; 60-61.

³¹ A noticeable example resonating with the contentions made by Lott as well as Noble would be the ancient disease incarnated by plague-smitten predator-like Jack Palance’s “Blackie” arriving in New Orleans across the sea from the Old World in *Panic in the Streets* (Elia Kazan, 1950). Black and white, night and day figures-of-speech further abound in noir dialog, for example, in *Force of Evil* (Abraham Polonsky, 1949) with lines like “what a black thing to do.” As this example suggests, the monopolization of large-scale capitalism is as much a dark force threatening the American norm as the racial Other discussed by Lott. For further discussion, see Dennis Porter, “The Landscape of Detection”, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 189-201.

³² David Wyatt, *The Fall into Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California* [1986] (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 161.

diagnosis that sums up how the existentialist, self-reliant stance of the hero in film noir ties in with a loyalty to a bygone America: "Value is in the past, as a general retrospective condition, and is in the present only as a particular and private sensibility, the individual moral action."³³

Symbolically re-enacting the codes of honor previously emulated from the natural landscape, now reinforced through memory and preserved through isolation, Richard Slotkin finally observed how the frontier remained in an abstracted version in the hard-boiled detective story, characterizing its protagonist as a somewhat maimed descendant of Owen Wister's knightly cowboy in *The Virginian*. The code Chandler stipulates, Slotkin continues, identifies Marlowe "with the values of an earlier, cleaner America" and thus he becomes a figure "through whom we imaginatively recover the ideological values, if not the material reality, of the mythic Frontier."³⁴ The integrity of landscape is thus a consequence of its absence, signifying precisely those ideals postwar America had become alienated from.

New Hollywood Noir and the Paranoid Pastoral

-Someday I'd like to see some of this country we've been traveling through.

-By daylight, you mean?

This exchange appears in Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* (1949) as the adolescent criminal couple surge across a nocturnal Midwest in search of refuge, a film that apparently exhorted a strong appeal on the New Hollywood, invoked by Arthur Penn in *Bonnie & Clyde* and remade by Robert Altman as *Thieves Like Us* in 1974. However, the criminal couples in these films traverse a sunlit, open countryside, a circumstance that Robert Kolker drew attention to at the time. Incompatible with the dark mood of entrapment and despair in Ray's film, the "lyrical, liberating effect" of placing the escapees "in the open country, in the light instead of the dark, in a world that appears to be free and pure" was dubbed by Kolker as a "new *film lumière*."³⁵

³³ Raymond Williams, p. 180. Marlowe has, of course, also been studied as the prototype for white male panic, misogyny and racism that has preoccupied so many assessments of film noir. For a recent study, see Megan E. Abbott, *The Street Was Mine: White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

³⁴ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 218, 228. Dennis Porter aptly sums up this theme: "The radicalism of the hard-boiled tradition is a radicalism of nostalgia for a mythical past. If any political program is implied at all, it is one that looks forward to the restoration of a traditional order of things, associated retrospectively with the innocent young Republic and its frontier, a traditional order that was destroyed with the advent of large scale industrialization." Porter, p. 181.

³⁵ Robert Philip Kolker, "Night to Day", *Sight and Sound* vol. 43, no. 4, (Autumn 1974), p. 236-239. Kolker compares the opening sequences in Ray's and Altman's adaptations of Ed-

Indeed, all of the major so-called neo-noirs of the New Hollywood - *Point Blank* (John Boorman, 1967), *The Long Goodbye* (Robert Altman, 1973) and *Night Moves* (Arthur Penn, 1975) – draw attention to their use of light and color, respectively through startling color changes, hazy pastels produced by post-flashing and the harsh, erosive glare of daylight. Kolker’s assessment of the intrusion of daylight and color as a generic anachronism unsettling the fated gravity that centered the ‘original’ films was seconded by several writers at the time. In 1976, Larry Gross, for example, referred to a number of titles previously discussed, such as *Badlands* and *The King of Marvin Gardens*, along with *Point Blank* and *The Long Goodbye*, as representatives “of a new, radical genre” which he labels “*film après noir*” and defines through a “principle of dislocation. The ground between individual-centered narrative and the photographed environment is ruptured. The hero is defined precisely as the element suffering this discontinuity. Landscape does not mirror his disorientation as it seems to do in *film noir*. It seems perhaps to cause it.”³⁶ The same year, Leo Braudy referred to a recent tendency of exploring the tensions between individual and community by placing “social outcasts in the midst of a seemingly benevolent nature” in films like *Bonnie & Clyde*, *Deliverance*, *Badlands* and *Thieves Like Us*, grouping them together under the label, “the paranoid pastoral.”³⁷

If an unsettling *mise-en-scène* was already a hallmark of the original film noir, the incongruity of verdant scenery and noir desperation seemed to indicate a more profound moral disorientation. Notable is the expansive two-and-a-half minute pan across a luxuriant Mississippi countryside that opens *Thieves Like Us*, a bucolic setting that is soon disclosed as the State Penitentiary at Parchman. Rather than a reversal of claustrophobia into agoraphobia, or, paraphrasing Braudy, agri-phobia, it can be described as a dispersal of the moral torment that energized film noir. Asserting the innocent appearance of the countryside but resisting its aligned meanings, nature can neither remain as a function of transcendence, nor as source of moral veneration. As much as for the setting, the rupture resides on a formal level: film noir’s constricted compositions in black-and-white replaced with lush colors and horizontal expansion across the screen.

ward Anderson’s 1937 novel *Thieves Like Us*, observing how the enclosed framings and tight close-ups of the former are replaced by a casual, disengaged mode of the latter. As we shall see, Kolker made some similar comments on the presence of the countryside in *Bonnie & Clyde*.

³⁶ Larry Gross, “Film Apres Noir”, *Film Comment*, vol. 12, no. 4, (July-August, 1976), p. 44-49; 44.

³⁷ Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* [1976] (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1977), p. 74. Braudy’s label could also be related to a prevalent tendency in American literature that Leo Marx referred to as “pastorals of failure” which “enact the old hope of recovering ‘the natural’ only in order to deny it.” Marx, *The Pilot and the Passenger*, p. 197.

A similar disjointing effect is apparent in *Bonnie & Clyde*. A fraught relation between nature and the formal properties of the medium is already implied in the pantheistic romance of *Deep Night* musing of “whispering trees above” that accompanies the series of sepia-tinted snapshots in the credit sequence. Throughout the film, windswept fields and foliage are an accentuated motif. Though John G. Cawelti, in an early essay on the film, suggested that the story unfolds within a seasonal cycle, opening and closing in verdant spring, a closer look shows that seasons change abruptly between shots.³⁸ A striking example is when the couple encounters an evicted farmer meandering around his old homestead. While the young outlaws stand before ruffled greenery, the farmer and his family are framed against the parched land and a stringent line of waning trees that remain unstirred by the wind, as if petrified by the historical stasis of the depression.³⁹ The pastoral state momentarily inhabited by the outlaws seems indeed a tenuous condition. In *A Cinema of Loneliness*, Kolker comments that Bonnie and Clyde appear “[u]ngrounded in any reality” and that the posse that finally catches up with them “are as abstract and uncompromising as the landscape.”⁴⁰ As in his assessment of *Thieves Like Us*, Kolker again emphasizes the formal conflict that is incited by placing the noir couple in the bright countryside:

They are as vulnerable and ultimately as trapped as their noir relatives, but it is a vulnerability and entrapment countered by an openness and innocence signified by the country. In American film, as in the classical pastoral poem, the country is conventionally a place whose inhabitants are untouched by corruption, a place that offers security and comfort.⁴¹

No longer obscured in chiaroscuro, shrouded in mist or distorted through extreme contrasts and skewed camera angles, the visibility of the settings, along with new means of amplifying their vividness, seemed to cancel the romance (Elsaesser), expressionism (Gross) and morality (Kolker) that defined the universe of classical noir. The dissents between generic patterns and setting, however, vary considerably between the films. Unlike the spatial ellipses in films like *Bonnie & Clyde* and *Point Blank*, the relation between spaces in *Chinatown* is patently lucid and coherent; indeed, it seems to make a point of emphasizing the passage from one location to another. More importantly, the “classical pastoral” tenet which I have been arguing remained

³⁸ John G. Cawelti, “The Artistic Power of *Bonnie and Clyde*” in *Focus on Bonnie and Clyde*, ed. John G. Cawelti, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1973), p. 40-84; 53.

³⁹ Penn has described the *mise-en-scène* as a reflection of the paralysis inflicted by the depression: “Socially, the people were paralysed by the Depression, for example, the scene in the camp near the end is nearly stylized in its immobility. I was trying to say that everybody else was still – frozen by the atmosphere, by the Depression.” Penn, “Bonnie and Clyde: An interview with Arthur Penn by Jean-Louis Comolli and André S. Labarthe” in Cawelti (ed.), p. 15-19; 15-16.

⁴⁰ Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, p. 39, 37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

a latent force in classical film noir in the form of reminiscence and private code, even as elements of the décor, features both as setting and artifact in *Chinatown*. In fact, one can't be told apart from the other.

Chinatown

A basic premise in my reading of *Chinatown* is that it unites what tend to be separate realms in film noir, capital and land. Whereas money in film noir typically is linked to life-insurances and the stock market, gambling and blackmail, and to equivalent locations like banks, art galleries and casinos, and in its hard-boiled sources to objects like the Maltese Falcon (Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, 1930), the jade necklace in *Farewell, My Lovely* (Raymond Chandler, 1940), or the doubloon in *The High Window* (Raymond Chandler, 1942), *Chinatown* deals with water management, land use and real estate. The simultaneous engagement and estrangement of generic codes which in the previous chapter were referred to as a mythic self-consciousness will be traced to the meticulous manner in which *Chinatown* recreates a classical mise-en-scène of film noir. Within the context outlined above, I argue that features which one might regard as merely decorative – “a scrupulously accurate reconstruction of décor” in the words of the director – also display a sustained, if oblique, series of clues parallel to the investigation undertaken by the film's detective.⁴²

In common with my discussion of *Deliverance* in the previous chapter, a reflexive mode will be traced to stylized set-ups in *Chinatown*. In both cases a European art film director handles generically over-determined, distinctly American material, and as counter to the films by American directors discussed previously, both films pursue meticulously crafted, causal and character-driven trajectories, apparently consistent with the seamless economy of classical Hollywood. The plot is further conditioned by a similar ecological premise: the claim to land and water and the building of a dam. In the flooding of the Cahulawassee in *Deliverance* and the drainage of Owens Valley in *Chinatown*, environmental engineering and capitalism are linked to the sexual implications of water. Finally, in both instances, the director altered the affirmative ending of the original script to the author's dismay, bringing familiar codes into play but denying their resolution.

To briefly outline the intricate plot: Los Angeles detective Jake Gittes is employed by a woman to spy on Hollis Mulwray, chief engineer at the department of Water and Power, whom she suspects of adultery. After the affair has become public, Gittes finds out that he's been set up to scandalize Mulwray who is shortly after found drowned in a reservoir. Hired by the real Evelyn Mulwray and pursuing the clues provided by Ida Sessions, the woman who acted as her impersonator, Gittes begins to uncover a vast con-

⁴² Roman Polanski, *Polanski by Polanski* (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 305.

spiracy to dump prizes of land in the valley through an artificial draught masterminded by Noah Cross, Evelyn's father and former owner of the town's water supply. The young woman with which Hollis was seen is further revealed as the offspring of an incestuous relation between Evelyn and her father, and Gittes swiftly plans for their escape to Mexico. Before the plan is realized, all parties rendezvous in Chinatown where Evelyn accidentally gets killed by the police while Cross reclaims his daughter/granddaughter.

In synthesizing private and public, political and personal, one could argue that *Chinatown* criticizes myth by conjuring up a powerful mythology of its own, filtering accounts of local lore and regional history through generic formula, particularly referring to Southern California water politics in the early twentieth century, the Water Commissioner William Mullholland and the controversy of the building of the Los Angeles aqueduct, what was known as "the rape of Owens Valley." More loosely, it alludes to the region's record of environmental catastrophes, to deluges and droughts that often stirred Biblical allusions, but also to California's long history of discrimination: the agitation against the 'Yellow Peril' that gave ideological impetus to repressive action against the immigrant population of Chinatown, and the 'alien land laws' and the deportation and incarceration into relocation centers in Owens Valley during World War II.⁴³ Reworking these already mythologized events both geographically and historically, the film also forges them with staple elements of the Western: the theme of empire building and legitimate claims to land and water, the killing of a partner and the main street shootout with which it ends. This mythical dimension gains further momentum as the tailing of Hollis Mulwray takes the detective out of his normal habitat and into archaic landscapes which evoke primary Hollywood genres like the Western and the Biblical epic, just as the investigation itself appears to move into older generic territory. Gittes seems to be stepping into the wrong genre as the pans across vast tracts of desert and ocean add an epic sweep that brings about, as John G. Cawelti remarked, "an eerie feeling of one myth colliding with and beginning to give way to others."⁴⁴ It

⁴³ John Walton has discussed how the events of the Owens Valley-Los Angeles conflict was mythologized in popular memory and further transformed by scriptwriter Robert Towne and Roman Polanski in "Film Mystery as Urban History: The Case of *Chinatown*" in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, eds. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, (Cornwall: Blackwell publishers, 2001), p. 46-58. Norman M. Klein has also commented on how the film transforms historical events into allegory: "*Chinatown* may be the Ur-text for L.A. political history, but it obscures as much as it clarifies. It does chronicle many of the fundamentals – that a coterie of boosters and investors persuaded the public to vote for a bond issue in 1906, to pay for the aqueduct that was finished in 1913. There was indeed an 'artificial' draught in 1906, and a conspiracy." Klein, p. 247. For a discussion on the cataclysmic imagery of Los Angeles, see Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

⁴⁴ Cawelti, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films", p. 244.

is the implications of aligning these apparently incompatible settings which will be examined below.

Mulwray's Garden

The effect of *mise-en-abyme* is initiated even before the credits begin with the opaque and cloudy Paramount logo which serves both as a period marker, duplicating the logo's design as it appeared in such canonical noirs as *This Gun For Hire* (Frank Tuttle, 1942), *Double Indemnity*, or *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) while at the same time establishing a visual motif omnipresent in the décor throughout the film. Paramount's "mountain of dreams" is flanked by darkness, set within the square screen ratio of classic noir in a way which also anticipates the stage-wing effect of the theatrically stylized *mise-en-scène* in the film. The mountain itself, a bold granite peak residing over the surroundings and the elevation manifested in the name of the film company, incites a menacing presence, partly through the accompanying music, partly through the obscure, liquid visual which associates it with the element at the core of the plot: water.

Virtually every interior, whether official or domestic, is decorated with prints and paintings of mountainous or bucolic scenes - the offices of Gittes, Mulwray and the Coroner, the restaurant where Evelyn and Gittes meet, the Mar Vista Inn and Ida Session's house, the hallway and bedroom at the Mulwray residence and Evelyn's hideout. Reminiscent of the Paramount logo, a recurring motif is that of a mountain peak towering above a lake within a garland of dark foliage. As Gittes moves through different levels of social stratification these artifacts provide an omnipresent visual leitmotif. The allusive décor is particularly noticeable in relation to films noir directed by John Huston who is cast as Noah Cross, recreating the portraits of horses in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and the stuffed trophy fish in *Key Largo* (1948). The highly-wrought set-design of the latter film seems to be a key reference in this regard, as landscape paintings cover the walls of the hotel lobby where most of the conflict between Bogart's disillusioned idealist and the "city filth" of the Latino gangsters is set, all elegant pastoral lakesides bordered by mountain ridges, visually prominent in almost every shot.

As already indicated, Polanski emphasized the formal quality of the compositions, what William J. Palmer has characterized as "its painterly look, as if he were presenting a series of still lifes through which he allows his characters to move."⁴⁵ This appearance of a stage-set is further enhanced by an element of repetition in the way exterior locations are introduced and re-introduced through identical camera movements; the pans that lead us to Mulwray's mansion, to Evelyn's hide-out or the Hollenbeck Bridge, or the

⁴⁵ William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Seventies: A Social History* (Metuchen, New Jersey, London: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), p. 158.

point-of-view shot that moves toward the Oak Pass Reservoir, all give a sense of ritualized passage from one stage to another.⁴⁶ Particularly striking in relation to the subtext David Wyatt discerned in Chandler's novels, is the scene where a herd of sheep suddenly bursts into City Hall while a conspicuously stereotyped shepherd roars accusations at Mulwray, the pastoral betrayal literally being staged as a trial.

This leads us to the most overt pastoral motif in the film, the garden at Mulwray's stately mansion. Located on a green hill with semitropical plants and a statue of a shepherdess on the front lawn, the backyard leads to a carefully composed set piece with an arc of temple columns flanking the left side, opening up a vista of the countryside beyond. The walled garden, and the tide-pool at its centre, is not only at the core of the investigation, it also contains all the prime ingredients of the pastoral, the first aesthetic category of landscape. Considering Mulwray's position as the founder of the city, it signifies a symbolic representation of an idealistic vision of California.

Of course, in film noir and hard-boiled fiction, Los Angeles, with its lack of seasons, its derivative flora and fauna and eclectic architecture, was more readily featured as a counterfeit landscape than a Promised Land. A case in point would be the opening pages of the first Marlowe novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939). In fact, this sequence is meticulously cited in Gittes' arrival at Mulwray's estate in *Chinatown*, from the "wide sweep of emerald glass" and the chauffeur "dusting a maroon Packard" to the passage into the artificial Eden of General Sternwood's greenhouse.⁴⁷ Closer in terms of garden design is the Grayle house in the second Marlowe story, *Farewell, My Lovely*, which features "a sunken garden" with "busts on light pillars", a pool with water lilies and an additional "wild garden" before a "wall that was built to look like a ruin." When entering this tacky pastoral, Marlowe notices "a Jap gardener at work weeding a huge lawn. He was pulling a piece of weed out of the vast velvet expanse and sneering at it the way Jap gardeners do."⁴⁸ Marlowe appears to take personal offense of this travesty of California's pastoral promise, not least in the presence of the Japanese gardener. Gittes also encounters an Asian gardener pulling grass out of the pond, though I suggest that this alien presence has rather different implications in *Chinatown*. In this film, commended for its painstaking rendition of period Los Angeles locations, the immigrant society that names it is most conspicuous for its sheer absence, denoting, I argue, what art historian John Barrell, in the context of English painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, referred to as "the dark side of the landscape." Barrell's claim is that in rendering the Eng-

⁴⁶ In relation to this argument Barbara Leaming writes that, "Polanski envisioned the ending as an 'opera's finale' in which the cast reappears on stage." Leaming, *Polanski: His Life and Films* (London: Hamilton, 1982), p. 99

⁴⁷ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* [1939] (Cleveland, New York: World Publishing Company, 1946), p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Farewell, My Lovely* [1940] (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), p. 101-103.

lish countryside as a peaceful, romantic pastoral, any visible trace of labor or rural poverty was excluded from the scene and along with it the material conditions through which these landscapes were produced.

Chinatown is literally what is kept in the dark, in Jake's memory and in politics alike, and as much for his bigoted, chauvinist attitude, his background as a policeman in the immigrant ghetto and his craving to forget, Jake is an accomplice in this marginalization. Throughout the film, Asians and Latino-Americans are present as servants and service workers in the margins of the *mise-en-scène*, though usually ignored by the main characters. Precisely because he is a part of it, Gittes is able to manipulate this rhetoric. A patent example is when he asks Mr. Palmer, the manager at the Mar Vista Inn, if they "accept people of the Jewish persuasion". A brief but vital piece of dialog, their mutual understanding of Jewish exclusion can be considered in relation to the ideological function of landscape as Jews within the period context of the film represented a people without a nation, a people disconnected from the land. David Noble pointed to how this exclusion is intertwined with the concept of an American exceptionalism grounded in a national landscape: "These wanderers had not been born from a nation's landscape. They had received no spirituality from the landscape. Their pre-national traditions were bankrupt and could provide no authentic spirituality. Jews and other capitalists were always engaged in a materialistic attack on the nation's spirituality."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the spatial metaphor of the title has usually been read according to symbolic or anthropomorphic standards. Within a noir tradition, it evokes the fear of Oriental intrusion on the western coast, present in Hammett and Chandler adaptations like *The Maltese Falcon*, *Murder, My Sweet* (Edward Dmytryk, 1944) and *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946), though it has been more readily read as a figure for the perplexities in the midst of Watergate and Vietnam, or, in an even more generalized way, "the futility of good intentions" as phrased by scriptwriter Robert Towne who didn't intend it to feature as a concrete location but merely to signify a state of mind.⁵⁰ Throughout the film, Chinatown is defined in terms of illegibility and opaqueness, a place where one can't "tell what's going on", and therefore

⁴⁹ Noble, p. xlv-xlv, see also p. 191-192.

⁵⁰ Robert Towne, "Robert Towne: On Writing" *Projections 6: Film-makers on Film-making*, eds. John Boorman and Walter Donohue, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 109-122; 114-115. For a discussion of Chinatown's allure as a locus of depravity, and how it was "deepened into a metaphor for the ambiguity of modern life," in Robert Towne's screenplay, see Klein, p. 58-62; 61. Klein further comments that in Jack Nicholson's self-directed sequel *The Two Jakes* (1990) "Chinatown itself becomes purely a state of mind, best forgotten." (89). In a recent reading of the film, Dana Polan states that "*Chinatown* crosses some frontiers, but not around issues of race and ethnicity. Indeed, it renders ethnic space ... as something so other and alien to the main patterns of the city that it seems part of another, ineffable geography." Polan, "*Chinatown*: Politics as Perspective, Perspective as Politics" in *The Cinema of Roman Polanski: Dark Spaces of the World*, eds. John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska, (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), p. 108-120; 110.

does “as little as possible”, and as in the final line, “forget it Jake, it’s Chinatown” where amnesia is the only remedy. In this way, the trope of presence and absence in film noir is recast, displaying bucolic enclosures and broad vistas of desert and ocean while the nadir of the city merely figures as a distantly evoked memory. In so doing, it highlights an interrelation between the idealism manifested in Mulwray’s garden and the divisions of ownership and labor which it both demands and obliterates.

The Unintelligibility of Nature

In *Chinatown* greenness is always artificial, the unraveling of the plot navigating through a series of ostentatious, manicured pastorals. The lush, man-made oasis of Echo Park complete with a forest of palm trees, the ornamental garden in Mulwray’s backyard and the orange orchards all underline that benevolent nature exists only as artifact. Though the soundtrack integrates them with the overall biosphere of the L.A. basin, it also distinguishes between nature in the raw (seagulls and flies) and refined (crickets, chirping birds and murmuring water).

The most distinctive unifying feature of the environment is the gilded atmosphere that it exhales. Resonating with the earlier discussion about casting film noir in broad daylight, John Orr has offered a germane observation on how the clarity of focus, color and detail rendered by the Panavision and Technicolor cinematography of John A. Alonzo create a counterpoint to the noir tradition, fashioning “mimetic images of transparency in a world where truth lies still concealed,” generating the incongruity of a “transparent darkness”.⁵¹ It is also a reminder of Southern California as the mythic landscape of the Golden State with its all year sunshine, Mediterranean climate, orange groves and wine orchards, promoted chiefly by virtue of its climate and the sanitizing effects of desert air and light.⁵² If the muted chromatic range denotes a bygone era – what might be defined as a stylistic feature of the nostalgia film – the wheat-golden air also imbues Mulwray’s garden, Echo Park and the desert with an unreal, somewhat menacing quietude.⁵³

⁵¹ Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, p. 172-173. Certainly, noir had been previously shot in color, with *Leave Her to Heaven* as a conspicuous example. Neither was the desert an unfamiliar setting, present in Stahl’s film and put to expressive use in essential film noirs like *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945) and *The Hitch-Hiker* (Ida Lupino, 1953).

⁵² See Norman M. Klein’s discussion on this “myth of the climate” p. 31-38.

⁵³ Cawelti was early to observe these incongruities when he called attention to how “the temporal-spatial aura of the hard-boiled myth” is induced with “something not quite right, something disturbingly off about it. In this case, it is the color.” Cawelti proceeds to notice “occasional moments of rich golden light – as in the scene in the dry riverbed. These moments of warm color often relate to scenes that are outside the usual setting or thematic context – for example, scenes in the natural landscape outside the city – which are themselves generally outside the world of the hard-boiled detective story. ... the presence of color, along with increasing deviations from established patterns of plot, motive, and character, give us an eerie

Virginia Wright Wexman has more precisely defined this effect when observing how realist cues of deep focus and long takes in *Chinatown* are “undermined by repeated images of the fundamental unintelligibility of the natural world.”⁵⁴ Implicit in Wexman’s observation and, I would argue, at the center of the investigation in *Chinatown*, are conflicting ideas about nature, announced in the opening close-up of a series of black-and-white photographs showing adultery committed in a pastoral setting. The ongoing conspiracy in apparently serene landscapes - the dumping of water into the Pacific, the “farmland for sale” signs in the desert, the reflection of Cross bifocals in the pond - gives us the sense that the settings know more than the characters in it, just as Gittes throughout his pursuit bemusedly observes others pondering the terrain: Hollis scrutinizing the desert rubble, picking up a starfish or gazing out over the Pacific, or the Chinese gardener who broods over the grass. This “unintelligibility of the natural world” is also elaborated in the persistent imagery of disease and malady, the crippled henchmen beating Gittes with his crutch, or in Evelyn’s eye with the flawed iris (“there is something black in the green part of your eye”). Foremost, it is evoked in the intricate cluster of allusions surrounding water and breathing and the overall sense of being submerged in a destructive element (“he has to swim in the same water we all do”): the water that percolates through the desert bedrock, the tide pool which literally depends on the breathing of the ocean, that is, the rise and fall of the tide, and the repeated references to water in the lungs. Gittes finally, twice threatened by drowning, has his nose slit and laconically comments that it only hurts when he breathes.

The significance of water has been an often remarked upon feature of film noir,⁵⁵ which occasions a final consideration on the subject of nature in Chandler’s novels. *The Big Sleep* opens and ends with Marlowe, who remains a keen registrar of scenery throughout the novels, overlooking the oilfields that surround the elevated residence of the Sternwood family. Through his resigned remarks on the stale and stagnant sump water that the derricks extract from the soil and the “nastiness” he unravels, social malfunction is associated with environmental depletion.⁵⁶ In an inspired reading of the Marlowe novels, Fredric Jameson has drawn attention to the way

feeling of one myth colliding with and beginning to give way to others.” Cawelti, “Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films”, 244.

⁵⁴ Virginia Wright Wexman, “The Generic Synthesis: Chinatown”, *Roman Polanski* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p. 91-106; 104.

⁵⁵ Schrader observes “an almost Freudian attachment to water.” Schrader, p. 236. “Noir men”, Deborah Thomas writes, “are easily drawn to the tantalising shapelessness of sleep, forgetfulness and even death. It is in this connection that the imagery of water often pointed out as so prevalent in *film noir* is important: on the one hand, solidity and potential fragmentation, on the other hand, liquidity and merging,” Thomas, “Psychoanalysis and Film Noir” in Cameron, (ed.) p. 71-87; 78.

⁵⁶ Marlowe variously refers to “the stale sump water” (15), “the stagnant, oil-scummed water of an old sump iridescent in the sunlight” (156), and “the sump water stagnant and stinking” (157), while “nastiness” is an invective used throughout the novel. Chandler, *The Big Sleep*.

Chandler plays off the irreconcilable orders of society and nature, the latter “a non-space” or “deeper anti-system” which frequently is cued as a liquid condition.⁵⁷ The heavy downpour of *The Big Sleep*, the off-shore casino in *Farewell, My Lovely*, and Fawn Lake in *The Lady in the Lake* all coordinate the axis of the social world with and against “the watery element that is the sign of the nonhuman axis of matter in these novels.”⁵⁸ If Jameson appears to define nature as a more ambiguous category in Chandler’s novels than the pastoral nostalgia that was observed by David Wyatt, and more resonant with the sense of illegibility discussed above, it is still a patently romantic, even sublime, motif, a reminder of a primordial world beyond and beneath the city.

As previously argued, Marlowe’s insistent recollection is also part and parcel of his tarnished romanticism, as when sensing “a faint smell of ocean” in *Farewell, My Lovely* “just to remind people this had once been a clean open beach where the waves came in and creamed and the wind blew and you could smell something besides hot fat and cold sweat.”⁵⁹ In keeping with this transcendental notion, Towne’s original script ended with Evelyn killing Cross in the midst of a rainstorm that brings the artificial drought inflicted on Southern California to an end, thus restoring the power relations between man and nature.⁶⁰

If nature, especially saltwater, connotes the irrational and entropic in *Chinatown*, it is within culture rather than outside it. Parallel with the Arcadian imagery, an instrumental approach to the land in the form of maps, diagrams and construction plans, or in the photographs in the reception room at the Department of Water and Power where Mulwray and Cross pose in front of various grand-scale construction sites, reminds us that this Promised Land has always been envisaged through mediating frameworks. Moving between the garden-like Los Angeles and the drought-parched waste beyond city limits, the film oscillates between what W.J.T. Mitchell referred to as “ideal estate” and “real estate” and it illustrates the point he makes that whereas physical land can be worn out and depleted, landscape is boundless and inexhaustible.⁶¹ Exploring this duality between land as material commodity and landscape as moral emblem, the film locates the immigrant ghetto at a juncture of politics and aesthetics; like the desert it is controlled by a privileged few who depend on the supply of cheap land and cheap labor. If characters in 1940s noir are frequently caught in elegiac reverie, just as Chandler in his novels inserts passages where Marlowe reminisces over a bygone

⁵⁷ Fredric Jameson, “The Synoptic Chandler” in Copjec (ed.), p. 33-56; 52-53.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 55. This damp atmosphere is also carefully evoked in Hawks adaptation.

⁵⁹ Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*, p. 202.

⁶⁰ Towne’s ending can also be considered in relation to a romantic motif of crime being retaliated by water in film noir, like the hurricane in *Key Largo* or the falls that claim the murderer in *Niagara* (Henry Hathaway, 1953).

⁶¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape”, p. 15.

Southern California, Gittes is denied the privilege to contemplate a pastoral gone awry. Instead, the pastoral is disclosed as merely a sham fronting for a privileged patriarchy, a tool to be manipulated for power and profit, and American soil simply as the physical extension of the material desire of the Old World, an analysis contained within the amalgamation of “Water and Power.”

This leads us to what would be the most densely allusive aspect of the film: the casting of John Huston as the mastermind behind the land fraud, Noah Cross, a name which signals omnipotence by aligning Judeo (Noah) and Christian (Cross) theologies. As often been pointed out, Huston’s father-figure incorporates a cluster of extra-diegetic references, first as the father of film noir through his screen adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon*, and secondly by his own Old Testament rendition, *The Bible* (1966), where he played Noah, the original patriarch who re-populated the earth after the deluge. These implications are also manifested in the emblem of the Albacore Club which fronts the land conspiracy: a fish, evoking Christian iconography, and the initials A.C., more commonly read as *Ante Christum*, before Christ, complemented by the Edenic references to Eve and the apple in the name Evelyn and in ‘albacore’ misheard as ‘apple core.’ In Judeo-Christian tradition, the desert wilderness was identified with God’s curse on the land and the garden with God’s promise to Isaiah that “waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert” to make it “blossom like a rose.”⁶² The creation myth in Genesis of how land rose from watery chaos was also the prime trope through which the New World was conceived: Thomas Paine writing on the eve of the American Revolution, or Alexis de Tocqueville half a century later, envisaged a continent rising to the surface after the Deluge to offer a scene where corrupt European man would be reborn into innocence.⁶³

In closing, one final observation of a *mise-en-abyme* effect that occurs near the end of the film as Gittes intrudes on a former client when escaping his police escort. Passing through the living room, a colorful moonlit, pastoral lakeside appears at one side of a door and the image of a radiating Christ-figure on the other. The two motives return shortly after when Gittes sets up a confrontation with Noah Cross in Mulwray’s backyard. As Cross advances through the hallway and enters the garden, the deep focus shot shows the illuminated, Christ-like statue of the shepherdess on the front lawn. Significantly, the tycoon reigning over land and water, controlling both the ecosystem and evolution, is also the only character who sustains a relation to a pioneer past. *Chinatown* thus finally invalidates the central tenet

⁶² The opposition between the desert and the garden in the Bible is discussed in the first chapter of Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness & the American Mind* [1967] (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 8-22. The Biblical quote is from Isaiah Chapter 35, verse 6 and 1 respectively.

⁶³ Catherine A. Holland, “Notes on the State of America. Jeffersonian Democracy and the Production of a National Past”, *Political Theory*, vol. 29, no. 2, (April 2001), p. 190.

through which the national landscape derived its supremacy, the metaphors of the two worlds, the old of corrupt time and the new of virtuous space initially imagined in Renaissance Italy, and of America as an escape from “corrupt European fathers.”⁶⁴ The point is emphasized when Gittes and Evelyn drive through the twilight expanses as the conspiracy starts to unravel. Locating the new owners to what Gittes refers to as “a 50,000 acre empire” in the obituary columns, it is literally disclosed as a land of the dead.

If evil is known to triumph in film noir and Chandler’s novels alike, *Chinatown* stages it through a vertiginous metonymic series “of depths beneath depths” or “Chinese boxes”⁶⁵ which finally render it un-locatable: the garden which is a miniature of an idealistic vision of California, the black spot in the green iris of Evelyn’s eye, the tide pool in the garden and the city within the city that names the film. This uncertainty of origin also applies to the film’s generic derivation: a film noir that is a Western which contains a Biblical narrative. Lastly, the Paramount logo within the archaic screen ratio, a motif which also ramifies into the film’s décor, evokes the “golden mountain” which was the name given to California by the first wave of Chinese immigrants in the mid nineteenth century, portending the illusory landscapes that are charted in the film.

Coda: Screen/Land

Demarcated by *Bonnie & Clyde* and *Chinatown*, we arrive at a rather discouraging defining image of the New Hollywood noir: a silent crowd gathering around Fay Dunaway’s mutilated body behind the steering wheel. Beyond the shared 1930s backdrop of ecological crisis, drought and erosion, *Chinatown* contains a series of allusions to Penn’s film: the omnipresent Roosevelt posters that evoke New Deal liberalism; the motif of broken glass that portends the bullet-cracked windshield with which they end; and most curiously, the conspicuous sign reading “Dept. of Water and Power” in Arcadia, Louisiana where Bonnie and Clyde are finally betrayed.

There is an expansive crane shot that appears roughly halfway through *Bonnie & Clyde* which is particularly striking within the context of a ‘day-light noir.’ As Clyde chases Bonnie through a bright cornfield, the camera ascends while a mass of clouds surge across the vista and lay it in shadow. The scene dissolves into what appears to be an abandoned quarry, the inappropriate location chosen for a picnic where Bonnie is momentarily reunited with her family. In the transition, the countryside reverts into a wasteland with industrial debris jaggging the horizon. The elliptic editing, heavy filters and muffled sound during the family reunion, and the sterility of the largely

⁶⁴ Noble, p. 172.

⁶⁵ Cawelti, “Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films”, p. 249; Elsaesser and Buckland, p. 143.

monochrome, un-articulated ground, convey the impression of an environment unable to sustain its human presence. As described by Penn, the sequence conveys how “the real family had now faded into the position of the photograph. It had no more reality than the photograph.”⁶⁶ Penn seems to suggest a failed mediation: nature disappearing at the same moment that the family congeal into photograph.

The assertion of “the photographed environment” by which Gross defined *film après noir* is conspicuous also in the moist green palette created by French cinematographer Jean Boffety in *Thieves Like Us*. In John Simon’s pertinent description, “the colors have an extraordinarily way of looking as if painted on glass,” evocative, he continues, of “the look of naïve painting.”⁶⁷ Yet, the presence of the countryside is not supplemented by the moral dimension we might expect. A similar incompatibility is asserted in how *Chinatown* combines the opulent classicism of the film’s score, period fashion and sepia tonalities with the anachronistic aspect ratio of the 40mm lens. Clarity of sight, and scope of vision, is countered with an inability to make moral distinctions, accentuated further by the intrusions of epic-archaic settings and their connotations of spiritual quest. In all cases, settings are asserted as landscapes through a denied reciprocity.

In relation to the previous discussion on how the lack of domesticity in film noir still validated the moral significance of home, just as the ruminations about the countryside affirmed its essential virtue, we may again consider Jean Mottet’s contention that the myth of a whole nation was achieved by integrating the landscape with the solid core of family values. A majority of the films that have been considered in the previous chapters has, in one way or another, been about dysfunctional or disintegrating families, or about escaping the family. This certainly applies to the surrogate outlaw families in the films of Penn and Altman addressed above. None, however, approached the issue as austere as *Chinatown*, or concluded it as despairingly as the family reunion with which it ends.

My reading of *Chinatown* indicates that the New Hollywood’s engagement with the national landscape as an instance of reflection had reached a point of termination. Stripped of its projected fictions and Biblical metaphors, the land is nothing but a vacuous tract of indifferent rock and rubble for making real estate deals. In this regard, the casting of film noir in broad, dazzlingly bright expanses is evocative of the various displacements that have been discussed throughout this study. As a final point, we may recall the blank screens of vacant drive-ins that featured so prominently in some early New Hollywood films. In the introduction, I endowed this recurring tableau with an emblematic significance for how the screen and the land, in their capacity of surfaces for national self-projection, might be used to re-

⁶⁶ Lester D. Friedman, *Bonnie and Clyde* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 64.

⁶⁷ Simon, *Reverse Angle*, p. 143.

flect and comment upon each other. In this sense, daylight invites a literal reading; a medium requiring darkness to exhort its magic being brought to light, announcing that a renewed relation between the screen and the land would also have to involve the act of mediation.

If the abandoned venues that appeared in *Midnight Cowboy* and *Targets* referred to legacies that had long since lost their power to convince or inspire, the Skyline drive-in standing on the empty field in *The Rain People* marked an instance of the New Hollywood framing itself, advertising, as it does, *Bonnie & Clyde*. Hardly an intended allusion, though no less resonant, is the last image in *Targets*, made the same year as Penn's film. It was shot by Laszlo Kovacs from the top of a drive-in screen in Los Angeles looking down on the abandoned parking area below. Reminiscent of the high-angle shot of the shadow surging across the cornfield in *Bonnie & Clyde*, a cloud comes in and slowly begins to cover the area, stealthily moving across the concrete expanse. However, Kovacs ran out of film before the shadow had covered the ground completely, and the film fades out while there is still a streak of light at the far edge of the venue and the hills beyond.

Conclusion

In 1975 Michelangelo Antonioni set one of the iconic stars of the New Hollywood adrift in the old world of Europe and Africa. Early in *The Passenger*, the journalist, played by Jack Nicholson, discusses the view of the desert from the veranda of a hotel in Tangier with a fellow traveler, and when questioned about what effect the scenery has on him responds: “I prefer men to landscapes.” On his audio commentary some thirty years later, a graveled-voiced Nicholson recalls a story Antonioni told him about the making of *Il deserto rosso*. Describing the daily drive to the location with the Adriatic Sea on one side of the road and factory ruins on the other, the Italian director confessed that he eventually stopped paying attention to the natural horizon and turned instead to the industrial waste sites “because that’s where man had been.” Then again, as I have been arguing throughout this study, an engagement with landscape is always an engagement with the manmade and with figures of imagination.

1975 has also been used as a benchmark when the end of the New Hollywood has been considered, with *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg) marking the irreversible transition from personal, ambiguous films to escapist entertainment in the high-concept mold. From this perspective, the New Hollywood conforms to a rise-and-fall scenario, and the period has also become a subject of nostalgic veneration in itself, for example, in a number of lavish documentaries in recent years. The trajectory from loose-structured road movies into the folds of generic formula charted in this study seems to concur to this notion of a stylistic and thematic relapse. On the other hand, the reflexive auteur films from which my own selections has been drawn constituted a rather limited section of the studio output to begin with.

If we turn to the second lost illusion that Cook referred to, that the social and political upheavals of the time would transform the political agenda in a liberal direction, the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 has instead been vouched as the terminal point. If, as Cook remarks, Reagan’s background “as a B-film actor made him an ideal president for the era of the Lucas-Spielberg-style blockbuster”,¹ it also offered a convenient framing device, contrasting the widespread insecurity and cynicism during Nixon’s presi-

¹ Cook, *Lost Illusions*, p. xvi.

dency and the compulsion for revisionism and self-examination it incited with the restoration of national confidence during the Reagan era.²

Acknowledging that any period demarcation to some extent is always a fictional construct, my purpose has not been to challenge these overlapping discourses on the New Hollywood but to use them as a framework to carry out research on the cinematic landscape. Along these lines, it would seem appropriate to conclude with a few observations on how a presumed recovery of American exceptionalism in the second half of the 1970s might be discerned as a resurrection of the national landscape, focusing here on what would be its most prominent iconic feature. Encountered in various guises in the study, from the scenic roadside filling station in *Easy Rider* and the “magical land” in *Badlands* to the Paramout Logo in *Chinatown*, it was the mountain that had synopsisized the imperial power and innate morality of the American landscape. Below, I briefly focus on some conspicuous returns to the “Sacred Mountain” in the latter half of the decade.

In Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounter of the Third Kind* (1977), a vision of a monolithic, isolated rock starts to haunt people across America, compelling them to draw, paint and sculpture models of it while remaining unaware of its origin and significance. The vision, however, materializes as the dramatic geologic formation of Devils Tower in Wyoming that turns out to be the site for a new covenant between terrestrial and celestial spheres in the film.³ The following year, similar ethereal chords as those that accompany the spaceship’s descent in Spielberg’s film would resound over the streams, boulders and thick woodland of the Allegheny Mountains in Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter* (1978). It is these elevated regions, more than anything else in the film, which distinguishes and defines America, and they also become the site where the personal and national degradation in Vietnam can be purged.

Taking 1980 as an endpoint for the discussion, I want to elaborate a little more on how this iconography was utilized in two films which share the same spectacular exteriors of the Glacier National Park in Montana. Both further relate scenic beauty to issues of wealth, class, and history, though in slightly different ways. The first is Cimino’s epic interpretation of frontier capitalism in *Heaven’s Gate*, a film which has been charted as the death toll

² See, for example, the last section of James Hoberman’s *The Dream Life* (New York: The New Press, 2003) “Freedomland 1981: Ronald Reagan and the Last Sixties Movie”, p. 399-409, or the concluding chapter in John Hellmann’s *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*, “Toward a New Myth”, p. 205-220.

³ In actuality, the history of Devils Tower had been the marked opposite, formerly a ceremonial center for a number of tribal groups who were denied access to perform their rituals after it had been declared as a national monument in 1906, a conflict Spielberg’s film would revive by inciting a boom in recreational rock climbing. For a discussion, see Wendy Rex-Atzet “Narratives of Place and Power: Laying Claim to Devil’s Tower” in *Imagining the Big Open: Nature, Identity, and Play in the New West*, eds. Liza Nicholas, Elaine M. Bapis, Thomas J. Harvey (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2003), p. 45-69.

of the artistic freedom of the New Hollywood as well as of the Western.⁴ Based on the historical events of the Johnson County War, in common with such landmarks of the genre as Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) and George Stevens' *Shane* (1952), Cimino vowed minute historical accuracy as his chief goal. What is striking is the notion of the wilderness park as a vouch for this authenticity, building the immigrant community at the picturesque Two-Medicine Lake ringed by snow-capped peaks, not only distant from the location of the historical events that the film portrays, but a place which had never been settled.

While in production, Cimino talked at length about the filming in terms of moments of epiphanies and of trying to seize the spirit of the vast glacier-sculpted skyline which the native tribes had referred to as "The Shining Mountains".⁵ However, it wasn't merely the setting per se that provided this authenticity. In more pragmatic terms, cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond described the painstaking efforts to recreate the look of period paintings and photographs, shooting in the same lightning conditions that artists had worked in during the nineteenth century and composing the images as paintings in order to lend the film "the substance of reality."⁶ If the realism of the film thus derives from its fidelity to pictorial records of the West, these images were originally designed to cater to the tastes of an elite class on the Eastern Seaboard, used as promotional material to attract money and governmental support for further expansion, and to attract a leisure class to enjoy the scenic beauty in national parks. Cimino thus places his revisionist account of class struggle on the frontier *inside* a vision produced by those economic interests and power structures which the film sets out to criticize.

Secondly, the Glacier National Park was famously featured in the title sequence of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, opening with the camera rising from the crystalline surface of St. Mary Lake and concluding with the arrival at the Overlook Hotel typical of the rustic, regal architecture of the national park lodge.⁷ Hired to look after the property during the off-season, the aspiring writer Jack Torrance arrives with his family at closing day. Taken on a guided tour by the manager, they're informed about the "illustrious past" of the Overlook when its "seclusion and scenic beauty" attracted movie stars and V.I.Ps, all the "best people", among them four presidents.⁸ To Jack, it is a homecoming, the Overlook conforming to his high-minded self-image as

⁴ Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); Steven Bach, *Final Cut: Dreams and Disaster in the Making of Heaven's Gate* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).

⁵ *American Cinematographer*, vol. 61, no. 11, special issue "On Location With 'Heavens Gate'", (Nov. 1980), p. 1185.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1101.

⁷ The Timberline Lodge at Mount Hood in Oregon was used as the exterior while the hotel interiors are based on the Ahwanne Lodge in Yosemite Valley.

⁸ I refer to the 144 minutes version of *The Shining*.

an artist, and a conspicuously American one at that, relishing a belief that the splendid isolation and spaciousness will free his creative spirits.

It has often been observed that the Overlook, decorated with photographs of the high-class lifestyle and the scenic surroundings, with the star-spangled banner in the Colorado Lounge soaring above the Native American artwork and the unceasing celebration of Independence Day in the Golden Room, is an over-determined signifier of America's past. Considering the commanding view that names the hotel, it is a past that is identified with a way of seeing, and which, in turn, has a certain resonance with the telepathic abilities of Jack's son, Danny, that names the film. In the discourse on American wilderness as a site of spiritual purity and timeless perfection, "shining" was a key phrase: the continental geography reaching "from sea to shining sea" in Katharine Lee Bates' nationalistic paean, the territory viewed from a summit conceived as "a shining prospect", the new world as "a shining beacon" or the Puritans' vision of a "shining city on a hill". The aerial views of Glacier National Park during the title sequence conjure up the serenity that once reigned over the New World, the crisp and almost surreal stillness imposing a sense of infinitude and stasis. Though visually similar to the mountainous sublime in Cimino's films, the glacial effect is menacing rather than reverent, as in the film's ominous catchphrase, "forever, and ever, and ever." In this way, *The Shining* marks a critique, or a parody, of the pristine ideals and the star quality of the glacier ridges that Cimino set out to capture ("Some places have that quality and spirit more than others", Cimino pondered during shooting),⁹ associating it instead with Jack's self-deception and his attempts at reaching for the stars, appropriately ending with the tune, "Midnight with the Stars and You".

Within the context of the interrelated themes of sight, seclusion and paternal authority that is explored in *The Shining*, we may finally consider the penultimate image of the film, that of Jack Torrance's ice-chiseled corpse outside the hedge maze, staring before him with frozen eyes. Recalling the manager's anecdotes about the four presidents that once resided at the hotel and the Indian cemetery on which it was constructed, the national memorial at Mount Rushmore with four presidents carved into the Black Hills of South Dakota, hallowed ground for the Sioux Indians, could signify the subtext of the Overlook. In both cases, the urge to transfix white male supremacy is inextricably linked to the elevated and commanding view of the land.

Taken together, *Heaven's Gate* and *The Shining* confess to the ambiguities of the phenomena that have been described in this study. As a field of conflicting discourses, contradictory claims, and shifting signifiers, landscape has been studied in its instability rather than its permanence. If Cimino stages his critique on frontier capitalism within an eastern elite's vision of the west, *The Shining* tells us, somewhat unconvincingly, that this vision,

⁹ *American Cinematographer*, "On Location With 'Heaven's Gate'", p. 1183.

just like those that haunt Danny, are “just like pictures in a book”. From this perspective, even the stony features of Mount Rushmore are finally as transitory as those of Jack Torrance, waiting to decompose in the spring thaw.

Rather than an emblem of integrity and independence, the mountain can thus be considered as exemplary of the conditional status of landscape. As Robert Smithson liked to point out, before the craze for Alpine scenery during the Romantic era, mountains had been viewed with dread and aversion rather than awe. Like many of the artists who took landscape as their subject in the 1960s and 1970s, Smithson formulated his artistic agenda in opposition to sites such as the Glacier National Park and the misconception that they reproduce by placing man outside nature. This would also explain his fascination with entropy, a concept which inevitably brings the notion of time into the landscape, acknowledging that even geology is subject to a continual process of change. A closer engagement with the physical sites, Smithson believed, would dismantle the idealistic grids and frameworks through which nature has been conceived, though the meaning of his work at the same time derived from its dialectical relation to such frameworks. “How we see things and places is not a secondary concern, but primary”, Smithson stated.¹⁰ I suggest that this assertion of the significance of how we perceive the physical world that we inhabit also applies to the ways in which we perceive it on the screen. In addition, it sums up the assumption that has guided my own inquiry. Though each of the preceding chapters has dealt with different aspects of landscape, they all confess to the fact that the study of landscape is also a study of our reading habits.

* * *

The contention of this study has been that landscape enables new perspectives for analysis and interpretation in film studies. Since landscape is as much a part of its present historical and cultural contexts as an aesthetic and cultural legacy that has been formed and reformed over time, I have argued that a historic circumscription helps to give conceptual shape as it allows for continuities and transformations to be traced across a period. The topic of nationhood has been central to the period examined, the New Hollywood cinema that surfaced between the disintegration of the big studios in the late 1960s and the film industry’s re-consolidation in the mid 1970s. Marked by a series of social and political upheavals, this was also a period of reflexive probing around the properties, practices and traditions of Hollywood cinema.

To study landscape in fiction film can be described as a recasting of how foreground-background or story-setting hierarchies are conventionally un-

¹⁰ Ron Graziani, *Robert Smithson and the American Landscape* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 139.

derstood. Whereas a setting that isn't circumscribed by narration and characterization commonly tends to be taken as evidence of a mannerist slant or a downright failure to tell stories, the thesis has focused on how story patterns and audience expectations are displaced, facilitating a shift from plot, psychology and characters. Central to this definition was W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of landscape as a medium and the distinction he made between the contemplative and the interpretative approaches to landscape, commensurate to the anti-mimetic concerns of modernist art and a post-modernist involvement in deconstruction.

The first discourse, "The Aesthetics of Landscape," traced a number of proposals of a genre of "landscape film," primarily among an advancing American avant-garde in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Whether announced by pioneering filmmakers or latter day theorists, they all described a vocation for isolating and purifying the medium. As a subject in cinema, it is further notable that the implements of media-specificity consistently have been described by way of some other art, whether music, poetry or painting, and that cinema would attain autonomy by emulating other media.

The second discourse, "The Politics of Landscape," addressed semiotic practices of reading and decoding which have explored the textual dimension of landscape. Often relying on an iconographical approach of deciphering and decoding, images of the natural world are traced back to the political and economic interests that produced them. Accordingly, what is discerned is not what the landscape shows but what it hides. Linking these arguments to the key role landscape historically has played in the struggle for national self-definition, such revisionist accounts also reveal how landscape can be turned against itself to become a primary venue of iconoclasm and used as a point of departure for adversary and antagonistic views of the nation. However, if an involvement with decoding and deciphering assumes that there is an empirical, external reality to which the decoder can gain access, a focus on intermedial relations goes beyond such text-world, image-reality, and myth-history binaries. This shift from text to medium was also configured in relation to a transition from structuralism to post-structuralism.

The aesthetic and political discourses on landscape, however, don't exist independently, an assumption which guided the discussion in the first chapter, beginning by asking in what way the films, *Easy Rider*, *Zabriskie Point* and *The Last Movie*, were "about America," as was the stated intention of their directors. Instead of the commonly-observed schism between country and city, I proposed that the West as a site of national origin were at issue in these films, itself fraught with conflicting modes of representation. On the one hand, there was the popular mythology of the frontier, on the other a modernist aesthetics of purity, a tension which further was related to dominant modes of postwar art in America. Both *Zabriskie Point* and *Easy Rider* convey an experience of the land less as identifiable geography than as expansionary energy, a primal experience of space which was discussed in

relation to the tenets of Abstract Expressionism. In *Zabriskie Point*, the subversive energies of the counterculture emerge as a force immanent in the land, cleansing the desert from the commercial imagery which has defiled it. In *Easy Rider*, commonplace signifiers of the nation, like the American flag and pristine landscapes, are asserted but without communicating a higher meaning in the manner of Pop Art. Whereas the former film resolves the conflict between a commercialized myth of the desert and an oppositional, highbrow aesthetics of space, the latter seems intent to preserve the tension between them.

This conflict also delineates the context for *The Last Movie* which makes an extensive critique of the Western's need to revive its mythology against a-historical scenery. Not the primal realm outside society discovered in *Zabriskie Point*, Hopper locates the notion of a timeless West in the medium, and within the various traditions through which it's been reinvented as a site of national origin, from the Westerns of John Ford to the gestural and color-field paintings of the Abstract Expressionists. In this way, the intent to break all levels of illusion and to deconstruct not only the Hollywood Western, the Indians' re-enactment of it but also the film that Hopper is in the process of making comes to comprise the various landscapes charted in the film.

The second chapter considered how the road movie, shot en-route, in sequence and on location with small crews, emerged as a template for semi-independent New Hollywood productions. Charting simplistic narrative paths through unremarkable scenery, these films were frequently referred to in terms of a "new realism." However, despite their commitment to a pro-filmic reality, it was a realism considered as analytically limp, neither living up to the consistency of classical realism nor to the explanatory principle of a critical realism. Not primarily concerned with narration or explanation, this observational and descriptive mode was instead considered in relation to practices in landscape photography at the time. Rather than a direct influence, the comparison rested on a similar tendency to separate the physical setting from symbolism or moral judgment, invalidating the reciprocity that had defined classical Hollywood mise-en-scène as well as traditional landscape photography. The vagrant, desolate quality of *The Rain People* and *Five Easy Pieces* was discussed for how the simultaneous effect of transit and immobility, sameness and difference, encouraged another kind of audience engagement.

The minimalism and consistency with which Monte Hellman renders the continental terrain covered in *Two-Lane Blacktop* allowed for a more thorough comparison with landscape photography at the time. Evenly paced and edited, giving equal weight and presence to each location, a sense of detachment, segmentation and seriality permeates the film. Spurring a consideration of on/off screen space and sound/image relations, it also calls attention to how these locations are interwoven within larger frameworks of biosphere or infrastructure. Exploratory rather than explanatory, this new real-

ism might thus paradoxically have more in common with an ‘old’ realism that merited cinema’s aptitude to capture the transitory phenomena of the everyday world.

One of the most common statements about landscape has been that it is an outcome of the forces of modernity which have distanced us from a presumably immediate relation with nature in the past. Landscape hence comes to stand as a sign for a state of innocence to which we can’t return. The third chapter began with a discussion on how nostalgia has been analyzed as a cultural phenomenon to define 1970s culture and cinema, usually in the pejorative sense of a retro-stylization symptomatic of a lost sense of meaningful historical relations. Understood as a theme and practice, however, nostalgia instead provide a means to reflect on the contingency of history and linearity. In postulating something as lost that in fact never was, nostalgia retroactively reconstructs a point of origin, and in this sense it can be considered as the working principle for how nature in the New World was devised by artists and writers in the nineteenth century.

Throughout Terrence Malick’s *Badlands*, landscape features as exotic artifacts, in paintings, prints and billboards, but also indirectly through romantic conventions like the *Rückenfigur* of Caspar David Friedrich and the golden, unifying light of what Malick referred to as the “magic hour.” The insistent antagonism between the startling lucidity of the photography and the vacuity of the characters has been the cause of much commentary on the film. Whereas some readings have attempted to explain the emphasis on landscape in *Badlands* by resolving it into narrative functionality or symbolism, I contended that this was to accommodate the film within a paradigm which it both resists and reflects upon. Instead we observed how cues for fusing character viewpoint and environment – the first-person narrative structure, the voice-over and the point-of-view shot – are used to inflict discontinuity so that the physical world as seen or spoken about looms up independently of subjective perspective. Neither does the landscape imagery in the film seem to be encompassed by a post-modernist claim of how recycled images and generic patterns have been cut off from external referents. Not portending to explanation or interpretation, these landscapes are neither symbols nor simulacra. Instead, I suggest that they urge an inquiry about the act of mediation, and on attempts to impose meaning, linearity, and origin.

Nostalgia was also a major topic in the two concluding chapters’ consideration of the genre-revisionist work of the period. Chapter four began by addressing the reciprocal relation between character and landscape in the Western, and how wilderness rather than a historical setting functioned as a value located *outside* history. The loss of this value was a theme that increasingly came to dominate the Westerns of Sam Peckinpah, culminating in *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* where it was explored in relation to the commemorative function that tableaux, freeze-frames and reflective surfaces serve in the film. Despite the film’s overwhelming sense of loss, I argued

that the anthropocentric logic of a mutual reflection between character and land nonetheless was sustained, even reinforced, as the wilderness gradually retreated into memory and recollection.

In *Deliverance*, a canoe trip down a wild river similarly attains a ceremonial significance to repossess a world soon lost to memory. While the title of Southern poet James Dickey's novel refers to such an initiation into a more authentic state of being, 'deliverance' proves ironically ambivalent in the film. British director John Boorman's adaptation was also accused by Dickey, as well as a number of critics, for failing to convey the deeper themes of the novel, a response which I argued was indicative of the deep-seated ties between character development and landscape description, and the expectation of the transformative power of wild places. If Boorman's film at one level addresses and deconstructs a set of familiar myths, I argued that its most unsettling aspect was the refusal of reflection and reciprocity. Initially conceived through the lens of pioneering quest, familiar images of passage and penetration literally dissolve during the journey. Instead of a token of a vanished world, the river becomes a site of burying and erasing where events need to be re-remembered in order to be forgotten.

The final chapter considered the resurgence of film noir in the late 1960s and early 1970s and how these periods of American filmmaking have been affiliated through a shared stance of skepticism. However, a number of the New Hollywood noirs notably departed from this legacy by placing noir plots and characters in a spacious countryside in broad daylight, a circumstance which at the time encouraged a series of proposals for a new genre characterized by an even more fundamental sense of disorientation. In a retrospective discussion of the classical film noir, I examined how their urban, nocturnal milieux at the same time yielded a drastic reduction and an intensified presence of landscape. Confessing to its condition as moral rather than material property, landscape remained in the displaced form of reminiscence and private code, even as paintings in the décor. In the New Hollywood's recasting of film noir from night to day and from city to country, nature lost this moral and transcendental meaning, also evident in how ruptures between the setting and the formal properties of the medium were emphasized.

A consistent inquiry of the role of landscape in film noir was made in *Chinatown*, linking the immigrant community referred to in the title to a utopian myth of California. Emulating the ingenious use of décor in the original noir, the film's inquiry into landscape was discussed in terms of a series of mise-en-abymes, the mirroring or doubling effect that is produced when a work of art contains a smaller copy of itself, in *Chinatown* literally in the sense of a landscape within a landscape, as it is featured both as a palpable location and as an artifact within the set design. Displaying bucolic enclosures and broad vistas of desert and ocean while the maze of the city figures merely as a distant memory, *Chinatown* reverses the spatial premises of film noir. The investigation conducted by the film's detective further dis-

closes the relation between land as real estate and landscape as moral emblem, and the supply of cheap land and cheap labor which the vision of a Promised Land at once demands and obliterates. In this sense, the “daylight noir” brings to light the workings of landscape. If the seamless classicism of *Chinatown* is a far cry from the experimental thrust of *The Last Movie* examined in the first chapter, they are similar in their assertion that landscape resides in the act of mediation.

* * *

Contrary to landscape as a repository of stable values, the summaries above propose that it is rife with fractures. If landscape is the product of particular ideologies, as has often been argued, this doesn't imply that meaning is once and for all settled. Neither is the landscape as an icon of national supremacy and spiritual calling unique to America. In fact, it would seem almost obligatory; indicating that investigations similar to this could be conducted in other contexts. As a site of value formation, the landscapes that I have observed in New Hollywood cinema seem discouraging, emerging rather as sites where values lose their moorings, particularly so, it would appear, in those places which seemed at first most familiar.

A strictly theoretical or conceptual consideration of landscape in cinema is likely to have tackled the issue differently. A probable approach would have been to isolate extreme expressions of the cinematic landscape, rather than framing it within a national period context, though no such selection, however varied, could exhaust the subject. So why rely on a period demarcation in the first place? The rationale for this derives from the assumption that landscape is time-based rather than place bound. The retrospective impulse of these films has also encouraged a movement back and forth between Old and New Hollywood, American and Europe, and an engagement with the landscapes that emerge in the transition. Periodization helps to demarcate the mobility of landscape to consider these relations, not to gain access to some independently existing historical moment. As an analytical concept, I have argued that landscape enables new perspectives, that it provides a means for inquiries to be conducted in different ways, and that it can be advanced to reflect on numerous interacting issues, from ideas about nation and nature to underlying assumptions of the classical Hollywood narrative.

At one level, the contribution of the study is a number of analyses, re-reading a selection of canonical films in order to bring specificity and concreteness to the intermediality of landscape. These readings have turned around various interactions and negotiations, oscillating between loss and recovery, guilt and innocence, discovery and invention. As a more general rule, landscape oscillates between surface and depth: on the one hand, expressed as a concern with textures, tonalities and atmospheric effects, on the other, as a probing of deep-rooted aesthetic legacies and the processes in which values,

memories and identities are formed. Whether in the explicit sense of travelogues or the entrenched presence of mise-en-abyme, the study has also come to demarcate a certain typology: the silhouetted figure, the distant mountain, vertical screens against horizontal land, reflections in water, the cross in the wilderness. These figures all in some way signify an instance of mediation, between man and nature, past and present, the visible and the hidden. This study has primarily engaged with the landscapes that emerge when the passage between is stalled or disrupted, and when the act of mediation looms into sight.

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Artworks

- Ask the Dust* (Cindy Bernard, 1989-92)
- Construction of Landscape, The* (Janna Holmstedt, 2006)
- Cross and the World, The* (Thomas Cole, 1846-48)
- Cross in the Mountains* (Caspar David Friedrich, 1807-8)
- Daybreak* (Maxfield Parrish, 1922)
- Every Building along Sunset Boulevard* (Edward Ruscha, 1966)
- Every Building on Sunset Strip* (Edward Ruscha, 1965)
- Highway Patrolman* (Ulrika Gomm, 2004)
- Hotel Room* (Edward Hopper, 1931)
- How I Became a Ramblin' Man* (Rodney Graham, 1999)
- Our Banner in the Sky* (Frederick Edwin Church, 1861)
- Thirty-four Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (Edward Ruscha, 1967)
- Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (Edward Ruscha, 1963)
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- Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (Caspar David Friedrich, 1818)
- Yosemite National Park (A Recollection of Wilderness)* (Ann Böttcher, 2003)

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- 13 Lakes* (James Benning, 2004)
- 3 Women* (Robert Altman, 1977)
- A bout de souffle (Breathless)* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1959)
- Alamo, The* (John Wayne, 1960)
- Aparajito (The Unvanquished)* (Satyajit Ray 1956)
- Asphalt Jungle, The* (John Huston, 1950)
- Avventura, L' (The Adventure)* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960)
- Bad Company* (Robert Benton, 1972)

Badlands (Terrence Malick, 1973)
Bend of the River (Anthony Mann, 1952)
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Big Sleep, The (Howard Hawks, 1946)
Big Trail, The (Raoul Walsh, 1930)
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Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson (Robert Altman, 1976)
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Cinéma, de notre temps: John Cassavetes (Hubert Knapp, André S. Labarthe, 1998)
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Criss-Cross (Robert Siodmak, 1949)
Culpepper Cattle Company, The (Dick Richards, 1972)
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Days of Heaven (Terrence Malick, 1978)
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Easy Rider: Shaking the Cage (Charles Kiselyak, 1999)
Eloge de l'amour (In Praise of Love, Jean-Luc Godard, 2001)
Emerald Forest, The (John Boorman, 1985)
Five Easy Pieces (Bob Rafelson, 1971)
Fog Line (Larry Gottheim, 1970)
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Ulzana's Raid (Robert Aldrich)
Vanishing American, The (George B. Seitz, 1926)
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