

Representing the American Railroad and Monument Valley:
Studies on the Invention and Future of the Cinematic Frontier

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies
Kyoto University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Human and Environmental Studies

by
Tohru Kawamoto

2013

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Abstract

This dissertation examines, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, how Westerns and other films have constructed images of the cinematic frontier, focusing primarily on the American railroad and Monument Valley, but also treating cowboys, nuclear weapons, and the Earth. The five chapters, organized around the cinematic frontier's principal theme of civilization vs. wilderness, address widespread issues including the genre and early cinema, technology and the West, gender and sexuality, the landscape and race, and nature and the environment.

Chapter 1 reassesses Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, released in 1903. Since the 1980s, scholars have questioned the film's status as the first Western, or even as a Western. In contrast, this chapter investigates the differences between *The Great Train Robbery* and the Western genre in general from a more flexible perspective. Chapter 2 discusses the ways traditional Westerns represented railroad trains, or "iron horses." This chapter also examines specific films that suggest a continuity between railroad and nuclear technologies. Chapter 3 offers a gendered analysis of Western heroes, whose bathing images—with their hats on or a cigar in their mouth—evoke their ambivalent positioning between the wilderness and civilization, between masculine and feminine spheres. Chapter 4 charts the process

by which Monument Valley established its status as a national icon. This overview of the valley's history leads into a closer examination of the representations of race and landscape in John Ford's *The Searchers*. Chapter 5 presents a comparative analysis of *How the West Was Won* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. After revealing their contrasting views of nature, the chapter attempts a new interpretation of *2001*'s famous ending, where the Star Child stares down upon "nature" or, more specifically, upon the Earth itself.

Introduction

The Cinematic Frontier, Past and Future

Fewer and fewer persons today are exposed to farm, open land, animals, nature. We bring the land to them. They escape to it through us. My favorite location is Monument Valley, which lies where Utah and Arizona merge. It has rivers, mountains, plains, desert, everything the land can offer. I feel at peace there. I have been all over the world, but I consider this the most complete, beautiful, and peaceful place on earth.

—John Ford, interview with Bill Libby

The outflow canyons and the high land between them reminded Nadia of the landscape of American cowboy movies, with washes and mesas and isolated ship rocks, as in Monument Valley—except here it lasted for four days, as they passed in succession over the unnamed channel, Shalbatana, Simud, Tiu, and then Ares. And all of them had been caused by giant floods, which had burst onto the surface and flowed for months, at rates ten thousand times that of the Mississippi.

—Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars*

In the name of justice, a gunshot rings out, creating civilized order in the wilderness. Set in the late nineteenth-century American frontier, Western films reenacted, dramatized, and repeatedly celebrated this process, eventually becoming one of the most successful American popular film genres. Since 1903, the year that saw the release of Edwin

S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, more than 7,000 Westerns have been produced in the United States (Buscombe, *BFI* 13). They comprised roughly 20–30% of all Hollywood films from the mid-1920s—and presumably even in the 1910s, although no exact calculations exist for this period—to the late 1950s (38, 427). The genre's popularity and influence were so substantial that American presidents were often likened to Western heroes and, conversely, former cowboy actor Ronald Reagan actually served as president. Although the genre has gradually declined since the mid-1950s and eventually found itself “in critical condition in the 1970s and in the obituaries in the 1980s” (Kato, *Eiga janru-ron* 307), the images, rhetoric, ideas, and discourses it cultivated through more than 7,000 films remain rooted in the American mind. Understanding the Western is thus crucial, if not essential, to understanding the national character and identity of the United States.

The Significance of the Cinematic Frontier

What, then, accounts for this particular film genre's prominence and success? What was it that fostered—ironically put—the endless repetitions of similar settings, characters, plots, and themes? The most common answer lies in the appeal of the West—or the frontier—itsself. To recall Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, which he first advanced in his landmark 1893 essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” the settlement of the frontier, or “the meeting point between savagery and civilization,” assumed a decisive role in

creating the American character, encouraging “individualism, democracy, and nationalism” as well as “coarseness and strength,” “[a] practical, inventive turn of mind,” “[the] masterful grasp of material things,” “restless, nervous energy,” and “buoyancy and exuberance” (32, 57, 59). “[T]he advance of the frontier,” Turner proclaimed, “has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines” (34).

The optimism of this statement was belied by a historical concern: three years before the publication of Turner’s essay, the 1890 census announced the disappearance of a frontier line. Turner thus concluded his essay in a pessimistic tone: “And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history” (60). Significantly, however, the frontier’s appeal and attraction he delineated here survived in various media, especially in cinema, even in the twentieth century:

Despite the various versions of its closure, elements of the historical frontier did continue into the modern reality of the twentieth century. These elements not only found expression in literary fiction, but were readily exploited by the booming mass media. . . . And it was the motion picture which would act as the most effective vehicle to extend and crystallize these values and institutions [of the frontier] into the American century. (McVeigh 58)

In what manner, then, was the motion picture most effective in re-creating the nineteenth-century frontier? We will return to this point below.

For now, let us stress the fact that Turner's view of the frontier as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" assumed a crucial role in shaping the view of the West in popular culture. In his groundbreaking 1950 work, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, Henry Nash Smith traced "the impact of the West, the vacant continent beyond the frontier on the consciousness of Americans," through readings of a wide variety of figures and texts, including the often-dismissed dime novels (4). Smith both opens and closes this extensive study with particular reference to Turner's thesis, ascribing its importance to "the ideas of savagery and civilization that he uses to define his central factor, the frontier" (251). In later years, Smith's work encouraged Jim Kitses (1–25), Peter Wollen (94–102), and other film scholars to attempt a unified understanding of Western films or John Ford's films through the framework of the master antinomy of the wilderness and civilization.¹

Of course, as with other influential historical hypotheses, Turner's thesis has come under harsh criticism and controversy. In the

¹ For an overview of the impact of the frontier thesis on both Westerns and the criticism of the genre, see also Langford 54–81. Of course, not every aspect of the genre can be described or explained in relation to the frontier thesis. Indeed, as Langford notes, recent scholars have discussed the limits of reducing Westerns to the frontier theme (61–62). For instance, in his study of 1930s series Westerns, Peter Stanfield contends that this traditional approach "cannot be made to account for the *prewar* Westerns" and calls for "a distinct set of critical strategies" for analyzing them (8, *italics original*).

early twentieth century, scholars questioned Turner's vague terminology and the historical validity of his theory, and, in the late twentieth century, its ideological biases of race, class, and gender.² Patricia Nelson Limerick, a leading New Western Historian, writes pointedly: "Nicknamed the 'f-word' and pummeled for its ethnocentrism and vagueness, the term [frontier] has from time to time landed on the ropes, perilously close to conceding the match" (72).³ We should note, however, that historians and the public perceive the word "frontier" very differently. Even Limerick, known for her anti-Turnerian statements, admits this:⁴

Scholars who are holding on to the use of the word "frontier" and scholars who have rejected it hold one thing in common: the public is paying absolutely no attention to either of us. Look wherever you like—Frontierland, newspaper headlines, book titles, politicians' speeches, promotional literature for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—and it is perfectly evident that the public has a very clear understanding of the word "frontier," and that understanding has no relation at all to the definitional struggling of contemporary historians. (79)

² Among the key concepts that replaced the frontier are Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zones" and Gloria Anzaldúa's "borderlands," both of which bring to light the reciprocal and heterogeneous dimensions of colonial encounters and interactions.

³ The principal tenets of the New Western History, which emerged in the 1980s, are summarized in Limerick, "What on Earth," 85–87. Among them, the rejection of "the notion of a clear cut 'end to the frontier,' in 1890, or in any other year" played a vital role in the conception of this dissertation, especially Chapter 2 (86).

⁴ Limerick's recognition of the frontier's lingering influence on the public is also noted in Slatta 99.

Interestingly, she further states that, “[a]s a mental artifact, the frontier has demonstrated an astonishing stickiness and persistence” (94), which in turn clarifies our fundamental goal—that is, to observe and understand the frontier’s “astonishing stickiness and persistence” in the form of films, especially Westerns.

Indeed, as “a mental artifact,” the frontier can assume different forms, or to borrow James R. Grossman’s words: “As an aspect of our collective consciousness, the frontier has become virtually irremovable. That ‘constructed’ frontier, however, has been anything but immutable” (2). Although here Grossman perceives ideological conflicts in the various manifestations of the frontier, we should also note the unique nature and strengths of each medium. Simply put, literature has its own ways of re-creating the frontier, and cinema has other ways. Corey K. Creekmur aptly describes the distinctive nature of the cinematic frontier as follows:

While the film western was preceded by popular frontier stories in other media, the core elements of the genre, rooted in *visceral images* rather than abstract words, and in *decisive action* rather than sophisticated ideas, seemed to find their perfect expression in the fundamental “motion pictures” that defined cinema itself. In its frequent celebration, through location shooting, of the awe-inspiring western American landscape (most famously, in John Ford’s recurrent depictions of Monument Valley) the film western even aligns itself with the pictorial tradition of the sublime. (398, italics added)

With this passage in mind, we now turn to this dissertation's main subjects: the railroad and Monument Valley (mentioned in the above passage), which themselves constitute "visceral images," provide a rich backdrop for "decisive action," and epitomize civilization and the wilderness, the two sides of the American frontier. A critical reconsideration of these subjects—images that come to mind for many people when they hear the word "Western"—should be an effective way of illuminating the multifaceted relationship between cinema and frontier.

To Monument Valley and Beyond

The film that introduced the railroad to the Western was Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*; Monument Valley entered the Western through John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939).⁵ The emergence of the cinematic medium is often associated with the image of a moving train (*L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* [1896]), whereas the emergence of the Western genre evokes the image of men robbing a train, which signals the disturbance of civilized order (*The Great Train Robbery*).⁶ Indeed, from its earliest stage to the present, this genre has consistently featured the train as both spectacle and symbol. We should note, however, that the very first example, *The Great Train Robbery*, has

⁵ Technically speaking, George B. Seitz's *The Vanishing American* (1925) was the first film to feature Monument Valley, and *Stagecoach* was the second. Unlike *Stagecoach*, however, *The Vanishing American* did not generate a prolonged use of the valley in American cinema. For a detailed discussion of the valley's increasing presence after *Stagecoach*, see Chapter 4.

⁶ For a recent survey of the history of railroad films, see Kato, *Ressha eigashi tokubetsu kogi*.

suffered from genre theorists' revisions since the 1980s (Chapter 1). The film's status as a Western, not to mention its lofty status as the first Western, has been called into question. Meanwhile, Monument Valley, despite its late appearance in the genre's history, now represents not merely the wilderness in the Western, but rather the very genre itself. After all, it was Western films—not novels, paintings, or photographs of the West—that “discovered” this world-famous American landscape. Nevertheless, few studies have examined the history of landscape representation in America together with a close analysis of the use of the valley in Westerns, especially those of John Ford, the “discoverer” of the landscape (Chapter 4).

On the one hand, we deal with these issues surrounding the *invention* of the cinematic frontier, and on the other, we will expand the scope of our analysis into its *future*. Recent currents in American Studies underlie this perspective. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars of the Myth-and-Symbol School, represented by Henry Nash Smith, R. W. B. Lewis, and Leo Marx, published classic works of American Studies that—explicitly or not—resonated with American exceptionalism, the ideological consensus in the uniqueness of the United States. However, from the late 1960s to the 1980s, this ideological consensus was subject to substantial criticism, an outcome of social movements such as the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the women's movement, and the gay/lesbian movement.⁷ Then, in the 1990s,

⁷ For instance, in *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (1973), Richard Slotkin examines the myth of the frontier, intending not to identify the uniqueness of the

American Studies entered another phase. The increasingly multipolar nature of post-Cold War world politics and the globalization of environmental crises have brought a transnational or even planetary turn to the field. We must therefore rethink U.S. history and culture with a new consciousness that is expanded both geographically and historically, yet resistant to the homogenizing logic of global capitalism.⁸ Scholars of Western films, too, cannot and should not divorce themselves from such transnational or planetary concerns. In fact, their growing interest in issues surrounding the U.S.–Mexican border or environmental policy, in the Western and in films beyond the genre’s traditional definition, should be explored in this light.⁹ John Shelton Lawrence’s essay, “Western Ecological Films: The Subgenre with No Name,” represents this trend, as he addresses even the nuclear ecofilm that “recognizes the presence of radioactivity in the West” (38).

Shelton includes in his filmography such science fiction films set

American mind, but rather to reveal the racism and violence inherent in that mythology. The book forms a trilogy with *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (1985) and *Gunfighter Nation: Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992)—a substantial portion of the latter is devoted to the analysis of Western films.

⁸ Among the promulgators of postnational and comparative American Studies is John Carlos Rowe, the author of *The New American Studies*. Rowe’s edited volume, *A Concise Companion to American Studies*, provides a useful overview of this new perspective’s influence on the diverse areas of American Studies. In a similar vein, Wai Chee Dimock, in her volume co-edited with Lawrence Buell, *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, advocates a “planetary” reading of American literature, which takes its measure from “the durations and extensions of the human species itself” (5). Her use of the words “planet” and “planetary” come primarily from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s much-debated concept of “planetary,” which appears in *Death of a Discipline*.

⁹ See, for example, essays collected in Carmichael.

in the West as *Them!* (1954) and *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957). Accordingly, we will discuss science fiction films (and films that feature elements of science fiction) related to the West in an attempt to expand our discussion of the cinematic frontier to an unexpected scale—specifically, from the railroad to nuclear weapons (Chapter 2) and from Monument Valley to the Earth (Chapter 5). *Toy Story 3* (2010) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) are particularly significant here. Focusing for the moment on *2001*, what does a futuristic space-travel film have to do with the West or the Western? We should recall that, as David Mogen notes, “American science fiction is a contemporary reworking of traditional themes of frontier literature. Indeed, the notion that space itself is our ‘new frontier’ is such a deeply established convention that I suspect many writers have utilized it almost unconsciously” (14). What Mogen says here about novels naturally holds true for films, although when he made this observation in 1982, “the comparison of certain kinds of science fiction to Westerns [was] a kind of shorthand, even a cliché. . . . [I]n the context of a serious scholarly argument, Western motifs in science fiction continue[d] to provoke the contempt of critics” (12). Now, thirty years have passed since this remark, and widespread scholarly attention is focused on “Western motifs in science fiction,” presumably entangled with American Studies’ new spatiotemporal consciousness. Among those focusing on science fiction novels, Carl Abbott’s *Frontiers Past and Future: Science Fiction and the American West* and William H. Katerberg’s *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science*

Fiction are two notable contributions, the former of which motivates the title of this introduction.

It is also worth recalling that, while re-creating the nineteenth century frontier on screen, Americans of the twentieth century continuously renewed the concept of the frontier itself—from the land frontier to the aerial frontier, and from the territorial frontier to the technological and commercial frontiers. As for the aerial frontier, David T. Courtwright writes: “By the 1920s and 1930s the American frontier, particularly the nineteenth-century frontier, had become an irresistible metaphor for the country’s growing presence in the air. Writers spun variations on the heroic pioneers from aviation’s ‘long cabin days’ who had conquered the skies, dying with their flying boots on” (6). Indeed, the 1920s were “the Aerial Age,” when “[r]adio shows were ‘on the air,’ planes toured the heavens, and buildings competed with clouds” (Douglas 434)—Rem Koolhaas later referred to the Manhattan skyscraper as “the wide-open spaces of a man-made Wild West, *a frontier in the sky*” (87, italics original). Space exploration was only an extension of the aerial exploration of the 1920s.

Naturally, more advanced technology was required to expand the aerial frontier than the land frontier; and curiously, since the early days of the twentieth century, technology itself has been regarded as the new frontier to be explored. “[W]hen the geographical space that defined the frontier is used up,” says Langdon Winner, “the vision [American ideas about progress] is yet again reformulated, this time defining the frontier as one of scientific and technical advance feeding economic

growth” (53). In this vein, Vannevar Bush, director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during World War II, submitted to President Harry S. Truman a document entitled “Science: The Endless Frontier” (54). Moreover, the proceedings of the Atomic Industrial Forum in 1955 were called “Atomic Energy, the New Industrial Frontier” (63). Notably, this “new industrial frontier” has been involved with the exploration and militarization of the space frontier. Apollo 12 through 17 carried radioisotope thermoelectric generators (RTGs) onboard for experiments on the Moon;¹⁰ President Reagan planned to develop nuclear-explosion-pumped X-ray lasers stationed in space to defend against ballistic missile attacks, which was officially designated as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), yet more commonly known as “Star Wars.”¹¹

With this development of the frontier concept in mind, this dissertation starts with the discussion of the railroad and Monument Valley, the emblems of the old frontier, and then expands its scope to encompass nuclear weapons and the Earth, the emblems of the new frontiers.¹² Let us now introduce the last, but not the least, subject of our research: cowboys. The cinematic frontier of the old West

¹⁰ Due to the cancellation of the landing, Apollo 13’s RTG was never used on the Moon. It now rests at the bottom of the South Pacific Ocean.

¹¹ What Americans feared upon hearing the news of Sputnik in 1957 was that “[a] rocket that could put a satellite in orbit could just as well send a thermonuclear warhead on a ballistic trajectory to the United States” (Franklin 183).

¹² Of course, the renewal of the frontier concept did not end with the space frontier. For instance, in the 1980s, cyberspace was regarded as the next frontier to be explored; and indeed, William Gibson called computer hackers “cowboys” in his cyberpunk masterpiece *Neuromancer* (1984). I leave a detailed discussion of the relationship between cinema and frontiers newer than outer space for future study.

comprises not only the wilderness and civilization, but also the heroes—usually considered cowboys—who mediate between these contrasting spheres.¹³ They serve as the necessary catalyst for both thrilling tales of heroism and the thematic conflict between the wilderness and civilization. Moreover, it is through their bodies and actions that this principal theme most directly enters other dimensions, such as race and gender. As for race, Richard Slotkin convincingly writes: “[T]he frontier hero stands between the opposed worlds of savagery and civilization, acting sometimes as mediator or interpreter between races and cultures but more often as civilization’s most effective instrument against savagery—a man who knows how to think and fight like an Indian, to turn their own methods against them” (16). Indeed, we devote Chapter 3 entirely to the gendered analysis of screen cowboys and deal with racial issues in relation to landscape representation in Chapter 4.

From Porter to Kubrick

The five chapters, organized around the cinematic frontier’s traditional civilization vs. wilderness theme, are structured as follows. The first two chapters focus on the railroad (civilization), the last two on Monument Valley (the wilderness), and the middle one on cowboys (their mediator). The analysis of the railroad and Monument Valley

¹³ In *Virgin Land*, Smith discusses the lionization of cowboy figures in late 1880s popular culture. One should note, however, that, “[w]hatever may be the merits of the dime novel cowboy . . . he apparently has nothing to do with cattle” (111). For a further account of American cowboys in both reality and myth, see Carlson.

eventually leads to that of nuclear weapons and the Earth in Chapters 2 and 5, respectively.¹⁴

CIVILIZATION		THE WILDERNESS
Ch. 1. the railroad		Ch. 4. Monument Valley
Ch. 2. ↓ nuclear weapons	Ch. 3. cowboys	Ch. 5. ↓ the Earth

Table 1: The structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 1 reassesses Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery*. Since the 1980s, scholars have questioned the film’s status as the first Western, or even as a Western. In contrast, this chapter investigates the differences between *The Great Train Robbery* and the Western genre in general from a more flexible perspective by examining the symbolism of Porter’s filmic text, its unique exhibition practices, and the dynamic relationship between these.

Chapter 2 discusses how traditional Westerns represented railroad trains, or “iron horses,” sometimes with contrasting images of live horses. This chapter also examines specific films that suggest a continuity between railroad and nuclear technologies to revitalize the

¹⁴ One may wonder whether a chapter is needed for astronauts or “space cowboys” in science fiction films in relation to cowboys in Westerns. The reason for their absence is primarily because Brian Baker has already conducted a thoughtful comparison of these two types of American heroes in the last chapter of his book *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres 1945–2000*, citing such examples as *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991), *Toy Story 2* (1999), and *Space Cowboys* (2000) (144–57).

conventional Western theme for the post-Fukushima age. The focus lands particularly on the opening scene of *Toy Story 3*, which begins with the image of a train steaming along the track and ends with that of a mushroom cloud.

Chapter 3 offers a gendered analysis of Western heroes, whose bathing images—with their hats on or a cigar in their mouth—evoke their ambivalent positioning between the wilderness and civilization, between masculinity and femininity. Citing various examples from Westerns and other films, this chapter reveals each bath scene's unique characteristics, the differences between the images of men and women bathing, and the male homosexuality underlying these scenes.

Chapter 4 charts the process by which Monument Valley established its status as a national icon, tracing its history back to the emergence of landscape painting in nineteenth-century America. This overview of the valley's history introduces a closer examination of the representations of race and landscape in John Ford's masterpiece *The Searchers*. This analysis highlights the importance of the ocean in Ford's life and its influence on his films, and even on his very use of Monument Valley.

Chapter 5 presents a comparative analysis of *How the West Was Won* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Both films include a large-scale aerial scene that either follows or contains the image of Monument Valley. Interestingly, however, these scenes nonetheless exhibit starkly contrasting views of nature. With this contrast in mind, the chapter attempts a new interpretation of *2001*'s famous ending, where the Star

Child stares down upon “nature” or, more specifically, upon the Earth itself.

Thus, although it primarily examines the railroad and Monument Valley, this dissertation addresses wide-ranging issues concerning the cinematic frontier—including the genre and early cinema, technology and the West, gender and sexuality, the landscape and race, and nature and the environment. Admittedly, each issue deserves its own full-length study; and indeed, concentrating on only one or two of these topics would have made our argument more elaborate on each. However, we prioritize breadth of vision over a narrow specialty, especially as this is the first extended academic study—not to mention the first doctoral dissertation—of Western films undertaken in Japan. Although researchers have produced important works on the American West (Saruya, Tsurutani), Turner and the frontier (Watanabe, Y. Okada), real-life frontier heroes (Kamei), and Hollywood film genres (Kato), Western films have remained relatively marginal in the academic realm in relation to other major genres such as film noir, melodrama, horror films, and war films.¹⁵ It is my sincere hope that this dissertation will both provide a new insight into the Western, and generate more enduring study of this field in Japan.

Finally, a personal note: the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster

¹⁵ Although not entirely devoted to Western films, Kato’s *Eiga janru-ron* includes an enlightening chapter on them. For the English version, see Kato, “The Western.” Outside the academic realm, there are many books on Western films. See, for example, Oka; Osaka and Kawamoto. It is notable that George N. Fenin and William K. Everson’s *Western: From Silents to the Seventies* and Philip French’s *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre* were translated into Japanese in the late 1970s. However, the introduction of overseas scholarly works since then has come to a virtual halt.

in 2011, following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, made me more conscious of my background and of the fact that I was born and raised in Hiroshima, the first city destroyed by a nuclear weapon. So it is no coincidence that Chapters 2 and 5 were conceived after this globally significant environmental incident.

Chapter 1

The Gunshot in *The Great Train Robbery*: Reconsidering the First Movie in the Genre of “Westerns”

Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, one of the most innovative and acclaimed works in early cinema, consists of fourteen shots that depict bandits robbing a train, being pursued, and then being killed by a posse.¹ Smoothly edited for its era, the film nevertheless confuses the modern viewer on several occasions, most evidently when a man in a close shot points a pistol directly at the camera at the film's close (Figure 1.1). Shocked and surprised, we cannot identify this offender (seemingly one of the bandits), nor are we sure where this shot fits into the narrative.² To complicate matters, the Edison Company is reported to have let exhibitors use this shot at the film's start as well—a well-known anecdote of the era, when viewers focused more on spectacle and stimulation than on narrative coherence.³

For clarity, let us provide a shot-by-shot description of *The Great Train Robbery*. After breaking into a railroad telegraph office (shot 1), four bandits sneak on board the train (shot 2). Two of them storm the

¹ *The Great Train Robbery*, like many other films of the period, was shot in the East (New Jersey), but the description in Edison's catalogue (“a typical Western dance hall”) reveals that the story was set in the West (qtd. in Gaudreault 139). For more information on the filming location, see Musser, *Before* 253.

² According to Edison's catalogue, the offender is the gang leader played by Justus D. Barnes (qtd. in Gaudreault 139).

³ For a useful discussion of the representational mode of *The Great Train Robbery*, see Burch; Gaudreault.

express car for the valuables (shot 3), while the others force the engineer first to stop the train (shot 4), then to uncouple the locomotive from it (shot 5). The bandits also rob the passengers outside the carriages (shot 6) and escape on the locomotive (shot 7). Away from the crime scene, they abandon the locomotive in favor of horses (shots 8 and 9). Meanwhile, the telegraph operator, who was pistol-whipped in shot 1, regains consciousness (shot 10). Cut to a dance hall. The news of the train robbery interrupts the dancing, and men burst out of the room with rifles (shot 11), riding into the forest to pursue the criminals (shot 12). The posse exchanges gunfire with the bandits and kills them all (shot 13). Cut to the close shot of a man aiming and firing a gun at the viewer (shot 14).

Travel and Crime

Although many still believe that *The Great Train Robbery* was the first Western movie ever made, recent film scholars have been skeptical of this. Edward Buscombe, in his concise guide to the Western genre, notes: “In later years some have challenged the claim of *The Great Train Robbery* to be regarded as the first Western, on the grounds either that it is not the first, or that it is not a Western” (*100 Westerns* 70). The first of these challenges simply amounts to the fact that “there are earlier films with a Western theme, such as *Cripple Creek Bar-room Scene* (1899)” (70). This argument, however, cannot affect the description of the genre’s history. One can simply state, as Buscombe himself does elsewhere, that, although it may not be the first Western,

“There is no denying that *The Great Train Robbery* is a major advance on such productions” (*BFI* 23).

The second challenge (it is not a Western) is more problematic. How is it possible that the film anyone should regard at once as a Western is not actually a Western? The answer lies in Charles Musser’s 1984 essay, “The Travel Genre in 1903–1904: Moving Towards Fictional Narrative,” which is widely known for its bold defiance of the common wisdom regarding Porter’s film:

The Great Train Robbery was not primarily perceived in the context of the Western. . . . At first the nature of the exhibition site and the showman’s programming gave the exhibitor the opportunity to emphasize the film’s ties to either the travel genre or the genre of crime. (131)

Travel films (or travelogues) were extremely popular in the era of early cinema; the “phantom ride” genre in particular simulated a railroad trip with images taken from a moving train—the camera was usually mounted on the cowcatcher. Travel films discovered a most fruitful relationship with trains with the introduction of Hale’s Tours in 1904, theaters specifically designed to have the audience sit in a railroad carriage-like room shaking in sync with phantom ride films, sometimes accompanied by fake whistles and manmade wind. But what does *The Great Train Robbery* have to do with travel films? According to Musser, the film was presented in Hale’s Tours theaters in later years and achieved new popularity (“Travel,” 129–30). Interestingly, in this

setting, the film was first introduced by a phantom ride, and then by the close shot of the man with a six-shooter (shot 14) that would otherwise conclude the film. Musser notes that this environment would radically change the viewer's reception:

The viewers, having assumed the roles of passengers [through a phantom ride film], are held up. The close-up of the outlaw . . . reiterates the spectators' point of view, brings them into the narrative which follows, and intensifies their identification with the bandits' victim. (130)

However, Musser also stresses the influence of British-made crime films on Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (130). In fact, a comparison of Porter's text and British filmmaker Frank S. Mottershaw's 1903 film *A Daring Daylight Burglary* reveals striking similarities in plot structure, action choreography, and cinematography. For example, shot 4 of *The Great Train Robbery*, where a robber hurls an engineer from the moving train, mirrors a shot of *A Daring Daylight Burglary*, where a burglar hurls an officer from the roof of a house; both shots were filmed with a substitution stop trick to replace an actor with a dummy while the camera was stopped. Porter's frequent reliance on British films has been analyzed by other film scholars as well, including a noted French film historian, Georges Sadoul, who unflinchingly branded this American pioneer a "copyist," and yet admitted a certain amount of innovative quality and originality in *The Great Train Robbery* (429, 432–37).

The American West in Drama

Musser thus moves Porter's film into the context of the genres of travel and crime. But two questions arise: where does the modern viewer's impression of a prototype of the Western in *The Great Train Robbery* come from? And how does Musser explain this? We now consult Musser's 1991 book, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company*, which discusses *The Great Train Robbery*, but in a subtly different manner:⁴

A Daring Daylight Burglary, which the Edison Company had duped and marketed in late June, was particularly influential in creating the framework within which Porter produced *The Great Train Robbery*, even though American popular culture provided the specific subject matter. Edison's 1901 *Stage Coach Hold-up*, a film adaptation of Buffalo Bill's "Hold-up of the Deadwood Stage," served as one source. The title and initial idea for the film were suggested, however, by Scott Marble's melodrama. (256)

To recall his 1984 essay, Musser states that Porter "chose a particularly American subject which was part of the still limited Western genre which had not yet been established effectively in the cinema" ("Travel," 130–31), and never goes into the details of the "particularly American subject." In contrast, in his 1991 book quoted above, he specifies Buffalo Bill's "Hold-up of the Deadwood Stage" and Marble's play of the same title as Porter's film as the sources of *The Great Train*

⁴ Musser discusses the film in his 1990 book, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, as well, but his focus is more on the representational mode of the film than the genre (352–55).

Robbery, although these points both require further explanation.⁵

Marble's *The Great Train Robbery* is a frontier melodrama (Figure 1.2).⁶ Born in late eighteenth-century Europe, melodrama became an established stage genre in the United States in the following century, especially in the form of frontier melodrama, the most suitable setting for a thrilling story of good vs. evil. Several notable works of this stage genre featured the railroad, which comes as no surprise given that the settling of the frontier is what drove railroad construction.⁷ For instance, playwright Henry C. DeMille—father of Cecil B. DeMille, the director of *Union Pacific* (1939)—wrote a frontier melodrama entitled *The Main Line* with Charles Barnard in 1886. Within this context, Marble's *The Great Train Robbery* debuted and soon succeeded in 1896.⁸ Frontier melodrama later became a source for Western films, along with dime novels, from which the films often borrowed basic plots and characters.

“Hold-up of the Deadwood Stage” was the most popular program of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show—a staged rescue of a stagecoach assaulted by Indians and/or outlaws.⁹ In 1883, William F. Cody, known

⁵ Musser does refer to the play of the same title at one point in his 1984 essay, but he does so without even identifying the playwright's name (“Travel,” 130).

⁶ For a good survey of frontier melodrama, see Hall; Bank.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the relationship between the railroad and the American theater, see Sartwell.

⁸ Marble's *The Great Train Robbery* is composed of four acts. The attack and chase scenes in Porter's film correspond, respectively, to Marble's Acts III and IV. Hall notes that the dance hall (which he describes as a bar-room) in the film is a variation of the saloon in Marble's Act II (184).

⁹ The program had other names, such as “Startling and Soul-Stirring Attack on the Deadwood Mail Coach.”

as Buffalo Bill, initiated an outdoor spectacle of frontier settlement accompanied by acrobatic shooting and horse riding, “The Wild West, Rocky Mountain, and Prairie Exhibition” (later called “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show”), which was another, and perhaps the most important, source for Western films. This new form of entertainment quickly swept both America and Europe. The company performed for Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee at Windsor Castle in 1887 and received the special blessing of Pope Leo XIII at the twelfth anniversary of his coronation in 1890. They also attracted a few million people during the course of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair.¹⁰ Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show and its later imitators thus encouraged the commodification and mystification of the history of Western settlement prior to the emergence of Western films.

Musser clearly states that the Edison Company had adapted the popular program of Buffalo Bill’s show to the screen before they produced *The Great Train Robbery* (*Before* 256). In the same volume, he also writes that the company had previously made films featuring performers of the show—*Buffalo Bill* (1894) and *Sioux Ghost Dance* (1894), to name but a few (50).¹¹

The Name of the Genre

Thus, it becomes clear that *The Great Train Robbery* benefited substantially from the traditions of frontier melodrama and from

¹⁰ Because the show was not an official part of the Exposition, Buffalo Bill set it outside the fair grounds.

¹¹ For more information on these films, see Musser, *Edison* 125–26.

Buffalo Bill's show. Unlike his 1991 book, however, Musser's 1984 essay remains largely silent on this point, focusing more on the neglected context of the travelogue.¹² Considering Musser's overall success in his argument, this early omission appears to be only a minor oversight. The problem lies in that, since the publication of the essay, some scholars have expanded Musser's statement without considering his 1991 book and without differentiating between Porter's film and the Western genre, as exemplified in the following passages:

Surprisingly, film historians have revealed that *The Great Train Robbery*, a "true classic of the Western genre," initially belonged to the then very popular railway subgenre that incorporated the spectacle of a moving train. (Kitano 34)

Inspired by the popular 1896 play of the same title by Scott Marble, *The Great Train Robbery* has long been credited as the first western movie, but a western is not what Porter or Edison had in mind. *The Great Train Robbery* was produced in an attempt to cash in on a trend set by a popular cycle of British-made crime films. But with its train robbery, frequent gunplay, and chase through the woods on horseback, *The Great Train Robbery* has become for filmmakers and filmgoers alike the prototype of the American movie western. (Lewis 30)

¹² In his 1984 essay, Musser also writes that the success of *The Great Train Robbery* "did not encourage other Westerns but other films of crime" and cites examples of this ("Travel," 130). We should note, however, that he excludes from the list, perhaps intentionally, such films set in the American West as *Tracked by Bloodhounds or A Lynching at Cripple Creek* (1904) and *The Hold-up of the Leadville Stage* (1905), both filmed in Colorado. For more information on these films, see Erish 36–39.

These observations are from introductory books on American cinema (published in Japan and the United States, respectively). *The Great Train Robbery* certainly contains elements of the genres of travel and crime, but these two genres taken together, let alone separately, never prove able to fully describe it. The latter citation refers to Scott Marble's play, but without defining it as a frontier melodrama, and quickly moves to "a popular cycle of British-made crime films." This erroneously implies that Porter made a Western by sheer coincidence, having rather intended simply to imitate the British films, although the filmmaker consciously and skillfully exploited the sources of the Western genre.

Admittedly, however, *The Great Train Robbery* cannot stand as a pure Western.¹³ Rick Altman (34–38), Steve Neale (*Genre* 39–42), and Nanna Verhoeff (*West* 108–26), who all rely on Musser's 1984 essay, argue that the Western genre itself was not fully established until roughly 1910, several years after the release of Porter's film. Evidence for this assertion can be found in the absence of the term "Western" from earlier film descriptions. In the early days of American cinema, what we now call the Western was variously labeled as "western comedy,

¹³"Porter," according to Musser, "asserted that he made 'the first Western' but identified it as *Life of a Cowboy* (Edison, May 1906), not *The Great Train Robbery*" ("Divorce," 286). Altman, on the other hand, indicates that "[i]t wasn't until much later in the decade [of 1900] (and probably not by the 1906 date of *Life of a Cowboy*) that the Western took on the self-conscious trappings of an accepted genre" (35). Erish contradicts both of these scholars: "Unlike Altman and Musser, William Selig did recognize *The Great Train Robbery* as a Western, or at least as an attempt at creating one. . . . Such films, he thought, would be more realistic and believable when produced in genuine western locations . . ." (35). These quotations reveal the degree to which *The Great Train Robbery* has become a controversy.

cowboy picture, Indian romance, historical film, military picture, Frontier drama, or simply comedy, drama, or topical film” (Verhoeff, “Westerns,” 689). Only around 1910 did the common use of the term “Western” come into general usage. In the 1910s, the American film industry first achieved relative stability, standardizing the entire process of production, distribution, and exhibition in the spirit of Frederick W. Taylor’s scientific management. The transition from short films to features, the introduction of the star system, and the relocation of film companies to southern California all occurred during this period, and in this rapid institutionalization of American cinema, the genre of the Western also began to take shape.

Of course, it is important to explore the diversity of the pre-1910 Westerns without imposing ahistorical preconceptions on them. The problem with Altman, Neale, and Verhoeff, however, is their tendency to reduce pre- and post-1910 Westerns to a rather straightforward dichotomy. *The Great Train Robbery* has suffered the direct impact of this either-or analysis. In fact, reading these scholars makes it seem almost a taboo to remark on any similarities between Porter’s film and post-1910 Westerns. Certainly, the formal Western genre did not exist before 1910, but the story is more complex than that. The filmic text often contradicts the discourse that surrounds it, a fact of which these scholars must be fully aware; yet they stress the discontinuity between *The Great Train Robbery* and post-1910 Westerns. Their approach is understandable if we consider that such a discontinuity allows readers to more easily grasp the fundamental change in the epistemology of the

genre; in addition, it enables the scholars to distance themselves from the teleological and essentialist historical view that has garnered harsh criticism from the field of film studies at large. But is *The Great Train Robbery* really as different and distant from later Westerns as they insist? We would like to investigate, more flexibly and accurately, the differences between *The Great Train Robbery* and the Western genre in general, neither naïvely asserting that it is a Western on the basis of subjective impressions, nor immediately denying its membership in that genre on the basis of historical discourses.

We introduce this analysis with a statement of Altman's to contextualize the issue:

In fact, it might reasonably be claimed that many of the pre-1910 films produced in the West by Essanay, Kalem, and Selig were actually not Westerns. That is, they may have imitated the outward trappings of the currently popular Wild West shows, and offered identifiably Western scenery, but always in association with a dominant already existing genre, and without the civilization versus savagery plot motifs that later come to characterize the genre. (36)

Altman here distinguishes the post-1910 Westerns from their pre-1910 counterparts. Prior to this passage, he situates *The Great Train Robbery* within the genres of travel and crime as usual, relying on Musser's 1984 essay (34–35). But what if the film does contain a seed of “the civilization versus savagery plot motifs that later come to characterize the genre,” and what if the “association with a dominant already

existing genre” sprouts that thematic seed?

Vehicles and Hats

Charles Musser’s recent essay on early cinema and related media, “A Cornucopia of Images,” deals with the image of horses; on one occasion, he refers to *The Great Train Robbery* as an example of the Edison Company’s work that prominently displays horses on screen (27). Like his other works, this is an enlightening essay, and a most intriguing point is the shift in the very subject of his discussion—from the train to the horse—which reflects the equally abrupt shift in the subject of photography in *The Great Train Robbery*. Shots 1 through 8 display the train, whereas shots 9–12 showcase the horses. While Musser treats these vehicles separately, their relationship to one another in Porter’s film merits particular attention.

A Daring Daylight Burglary, an aforementioned British crime film, also portrays both vehicles: a horse ambulance taking the injured officer away at one point in the story, and the burglar slipping into a train to evade his pursuers at another. *The Great Train Robbery*, however, treats these vehicles more daringly than does *A Daring Daylight Burglary*. The British film records no exciting action on the moving vehicles, except for riding and loading, whereas the American film depicts a fight on the train (shots 3 and 4) and a shooting from atop the horses (shot 12), both shot in motion. It also juxtaposes these two vehicles in terms of both narrative and mise-en-scène; the bandits leave the locomotive in shot 8 to escape on horseback in shot 9.

In the world of the Western, the horse and the train often comprise a set of contrasting images as part of the thematic opposition between the wilderness and civilization. A classic example can be found in the opening scene of Michael Curtiz's *Dodge City* (1939), in which a stagecoach challenges a train to a race, the latter's subsequent victory clearly marking the advance of civilization. ("New technology must replace the old," writes Slotkin [289].) The horse and the train in *The Great Train Robbery*, though not as obvious as in *Dodge City*, are likewise absorbed into the genre's thematic conflict, which in turn directs our attention to another set of contrasting images, the cowboy hat and the silk hat. These costumes establish the metaphorical conflict in shot 1: in the foreground, we see cowboy hats worn by the bandits threatening the telegraph operator, and in the background, silk hats are worn by the train passengers gazing calmly out of the window.

Cowboy hats characterize not only the bandits, but also the posse that pursues them. To elucidate the intricate and complex relationship between these two groups, we must conduct a close examination of shots 6 and 11 (Figures 1.3 and 1.4), the details of which are described in Edison's catalogue as follows:

Scene [shot] 6: Exterior scene showing train. The bandits compel the passengers to leave coaches, "hands up," and line up along the tracks. One of the robbers covers them with a revolver in each hand, while the others relieve the passengers of their valuables. A passenger attempts to escape, and is instantly shot down. Securing everything of value, the band terrorize the passengers by firing

their revolvers in the air, while they make their escape to the locomotive. (qtd. in Gaudreault 138–39)

Scene [shot] 11: Interior of a typical Western dance hall. Shows a number of men and women in a lively quadrille. A “tenderfoot” is quickly spotted and pushed to the center of the hall, and compelled to do a jig, while bystanders amuse themselves by shooting dangerously close to his feet. Suddenly the door opens and the half-dead telegraph operator staggers in. The dance breaks up in confusion. The men secure their guns and hastily leave the room. (139)

The slight commotion in shot 11 has been considered a moment totally irrelevant to the narrative. Even Tom Gunning writes: “This dance and the dude gag (in shot 11) basically stall the narrative progression in favor of a bit of spectacular entertainment” (130). The important thing, however, is that this seemingly unnecessary episode allows shots 6 and 11 to share the same content: cowboy hat owners (the posse/the bandits) shoot silk hat owners (the railroad passenger/the tenderfoot, both played by Gilbert M. Anderson).¹⁴ Each set of gunshots, however, signifies something quite different. The westerners shoot close to the tenderfoot’s feet in shot 11 in a symbolic assertion of the freedom of the frontier, rather than to disturb the order of civilization, as the bandits do with lethally malicious intent in shot 6. The gentility of the silk hat is simply out of place in the old frontier atmosphere.

¹⁴ Anderson also played one of the bandits, an ironic choice of casting, considering that he would later become the first Western movie star we know as “Broncho Billy.”

The symbolic and visual structure of the film can now be analyzed as follows:

THE WILDERNESS	CIVILIZATION
the horse	the train
the cowboy hat	the silk hat
the bandits	train passengers
the posse	the tenderfoot
lawlessness	order
freedom	constraint

Table 2: The symbolic and visual structure of *The Great Train Robbery*.

Note, however, that the posse eventually deviates from this structure, defeating the bandits on their side to establish civilized order (Figure 1.5). The effect of this behavior is to subtly intensify, rather than to confuse, the thematic conflict between the wilderness and civilization. With the outlaws driven away, the train can run safely, and as a corollary, more silk hats representing the constraining force of civilization can enter the frontier. Although later Westerns (including *Dodge City*) handle this conflict in more sophisticated ways, *The Great Train Robbery* paved the way for them with symbols of the conflict reasonably and logically arranged in the text.

We might expect every film scholar to reach this conclusion, but that is not the case. Verhoeff, for instance, mentioning neither horses nor cowboy hats in the text, states: “In fact, when we compare it to

Parade of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, this 1898 one-reeler could be considered an earlier Western than *The Great Train Robbery*" (*West* 122–23). Our analysis reaches the opposite conclusion. It seems fairly obvious which film, if necessary, one could call a Western—the 1898 film that merely “features a pageant of actors from Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show passing in front of the camera” (Verhoeff, *West* 123), or the 1903 film that depicts the process of creating civilized order in the wilderness with images arranged in a rational narrative?

Having addressed the thematic imagery of the film, we must also explore the travelogue aspect of *The Great Train Robbery*. It, too, contributes to our analysis, supporting the film’s status as a Western.

Gunshot and Viewer

First, it should be stressed that a film about the creation of order in the wilderness does not automatically convey its thematic importance to the viewer: without drawing viewers into the screen, the film cannot engage them in the narrative of events. Even a gunshot in the name of justice at the climax would not sway them emotionally on purely symbolic grounds. The common techniques for drawing the viewer into the screen are Point of View (POV) and Reverse Angle (RA) shots; however, these were not fully established until the 1910s.¹⁵ Neither

¹⁵ For a precise account of the development of POVs and RAs, see Salt 95–97, 137–38. George Albert Smith’s *Grandma’s Reading Glass* (1900) is widely known as one of the first films to use POVs, but Mikiro Kato considers D. W. Griffith’s *The Redman and the Child* (1908) as a groundbreaking text that refined POVs for narrative development and the identification of the viewer with the protagonist (*Eiga to wa nani ka* 184–91).

POVs nor RAs were used in *The Great Train Robbery*, an absence that prevented—or at least limited—the viewer’s participation in the events on screen.

Presenting the same film in the Hale’s Tours theaters, introduced by a phantom ride and the close shot of the outlaw, solved that problem. In this environment, the viewer was placed in the position of the bandits’ victim.¹⁶ Musser certainly emphasizes this identification (“Travel,” 130; *Before* 265), but does not fully explore its significance within the overall textual structure. As discussed above, *The Great Train Robbery* deals with the wilderness vs. civilization theme, effectively contrasting the means of conveyance and the style of apparel. The viewer, then, does not merely identify with the bandits’ victims; we should say, rather, that the viewer witnesses the crisis of civilized order within the film’s symbolic structure. Indeed, owing to this dynamic relationship between the symbolism of the text and the mode of exhibition, the viewer experiences the creation of order in the wilderness as an impending problem, rather than an irrelevant event.

Historically, no other place was more suitable for the combination of a running train and an appalling crime than the American West, where there was a high frequency of train robberies. On October 6, 1866, the Reno gang held up an Ohio & Mississippi

¹⁶ Several narrative films incorporated phantom ride images within a text, such as G. A. Smith’s *The Kiss in the Tunnel* (1899) and Biograph’s *Holdup of the Rocky Mountain Express* (1906). The Biograph film closely resembles the Hale’s Tours version of *The Great Train Robbery* in both style and content (a train hold-up). However, this film has neither *The Great Train Robbery*’s close shot of the outlaw nor a counterpart of the dance hall scene.

passenger train in Seymour, Indiana. This is generally regarded as the first peacetime train robbery in the United States, which would soon be replicated in the Far West by Jack Davis and his gang, who held up a Central Pacific passenger train just east of Verdi, Nevada, in November 1870 (Patterson 111–12). Train robbery flourished more in the West than in the East simply because, as R. Michael Wilson explains, “The express cars [that traveled in the West] carried gold, silver, and the other mineral wealth from the many mines of the West, as well as rich payrolls to keep those mines operating” (4). Just a few years before the production of Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery*, Butch Cassidy and his gang of miscreants gained nationwide attention through a series of successful train (and bank) robberies.¹⁷

To make a further case for the significance of Porter’s film, let us expand the discussion of Buffalo Bill’s “Hold-up of the Deadwood Stage.” Of particular interest is the fact that, as Paul Reddin explains, “To fill the Deadwood stage with passengers, the announcer asked for volunteers” (77). In other words, these volunteers experienced the disruption and subsequent recovery of civilized order within the imaginary world of the show. This privilege, however, applied only to a handful of people in a vast audience that sometimes numbered more than ten thousand. “Those selected were usually prominent people in the community, reporters, and celebrities,” writes Reddin (77). The

¹⁷ In his 1991 book, Musser refers to the train robbery in Portland, Oregon, in September 1903, and suggests its influence on the production of the film version of *The Great Train Robbery* (*Before* 257–58), although he never comments on the historical affinity between the train robbery and the American West.

revolutionary aspect of the Hale's Tours version of *The Great Train Robbery* was that it expanded this privilege to every viewer, turning each one into the bandits' victim. Indeed, the main strength of film as a visual medium has been identified in its ability to manipulate the viewer's gaze, and the Hale's Tours version of *The Great Train Robbery* was remarkable in its successful exploitation of this specific phenomenon within the context of American culture relating to the frontier.

Porter's film thus became a highly "cinematic Western" as a result of its connection to the travel genre. Admittedly, the film differs greatly from the post-1910 Westerns in the actual mode of the viewer's participation in the events on screen. In such later Westerns as *The Great K & A Train Robbery* (1926) and *How the West Was Won*, the viewer is more likely to identify with the hero who fights the bandits than with the travelers they attacked, with a distinctive individual than with an unindividualized crowd. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that the cowboy hat-wearing outlaw forced the viewer, or a passenger in the film, to comprehend the creation of civilized order in the wilderness as a personal, impending problem. This impact on the viewer makes *The Great Train Robbery* a significant moment in the history of the Western genre.

We shall end this chapter with Jesse James, for the association between Jesse James and train robbery is so strong that the invention of this crime is sometimes mistakenly ascribed to him. Long touted as a Robin Hood of the old west, Jesse James has attracted a number of

filmmakers who either mystify or demystify him. We should therefore note that in post-1910 Westerns, train robbers would also sometimes become the object of the viewer's self-identification, as exemplified in Henry King's *Jesse James* (1939) and George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969).¹⁸ This trend might reflect American society's ambivalent feelings toward technology, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

¹⁸ Of course, it is possible that, even in *The Great Train Robbery*, the viewers identify themselves with the bandits, for they have more screen time than the other characters. Moreover, some may even consider them attractive, at least more so than the civilized but helpless train passengers. Still, it cannot be denied that, in the Hale's Tours version of the film, the manipulation of the viewers' gaze forces them to identify themselves with the passengers first, whether they like it or not.

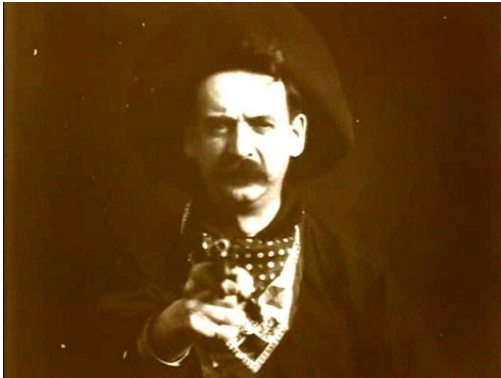


Figure 1.1: The man points a pistol directly at the camera in *The Great Train Robbery*. Vci Video, 2003. DVD.



Figure 1.2: Scott Marble's *The Great Train Robbery*. Poster. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



Figure 1.3: The bandit shoots the train passenger in *The Great Train Robbery*.



Figure 1.4: The westerners shoot close to the tenderfoot's feet in *The Great Train Robbery*.



Figure 1.5: The posse chasing the bandits in *The Great Train Robbery*.

Chapter 2

From Iron Horse to Atomic Bomb: Technologies Old and New in the American West

In this chapter, we shift our focus to several films, whether Western or otherwise having to do with the West, produced between the 1920s and the 2010s and featuring the railroad in various manners. Nearly twenty years ago, Edward Buscombe (“Railroads”) and William K. Everson each offered a succinct overview of the representation of railroads in the Western.¹ Although their studies remain seminal, and this chapter certainly benefits from them, it seems necessary to update them from the perspective of the present time. Specifically, the relationship between technology and the American frontier should be reexamined from the context of the post-Fukushima age, which has increasingly necessitated a transnational, planetary-scale imagination. However, we should begin by examining how traditional Westerns represented nineteenth-century technology to provide background and support for our new approach.

Horse vs. Iron Horse

In the early 1860s, when the East already had an extensive railroad

¹ Whereas Buscombe focuses on the development of the railroad’s symbolism, Everson discusses the differences in the cinematic use of trains among sub-genres (comedy Westerns, “B” Westerns, Western serials, television Westerns, etc.).

network, the West remained barren of iron horses; the earlier discovery of mineral wealth such as gold and silver, however, had fostered the dream of connecting both coasts by rail. President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862 made this dream feasible, and it was finally achieved when the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads (built eastward from Sacramento, California, and westward from Omaha, Nebraska, respectively) met at Promontory Summit, Utah, on May 10, 1869—a glorious day for all Americans, for the connection of the two railroads was expected to promote the reunification of the United States, recently divided by the Civil War.

John Ford's early masterpiece, *The Iron Horse* (1924), is notable for its passionate rendering of the first transcontinental railroad as a symbol of national unity. It opens with a series of title cards, one of which states, "During the Civil War the United States was divided not only into North and South but also into East and West by a seemingly impassable barrier of prairie, desert and mountain," and ends with a scene representing the uniting of that division, the joining of the two lines' locomotives (Central Pacific's "Jupiter" and Union Pacific's "116") at the railroad completion ceremony.² The film's shooting is reported to have met with serious difficulties related to climate: "The wintry conditions Ford and his company encountered on the Nevada location . . . were much like the conditions encountered by the men who

² This is a cinematic reenactment of Andrew J. Russell's well-known photograph, *East and West Shaking Hands at Laying of Last Rail*. Another important Western that showcases this moment is Cecil B. DeMille's *Union Pacific*.

built the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s” (McBride 147). This hardship is observable throughout the film and consequently renders its finale, the completion of the railroad, all the more festive and celebratory.

When I first saw the film, however, what most immediately impressed me was a shot comprised of Indians, horses, and rails, rather than one of whites, iron horses, and rails (Figure 2.1). It emerges in the climactic battle scene, where the Pawnees, who are friendly and cooperative with whites, come to the rescue of the railroad workers attacked by the Cheyennes.³ Here, the Cheyennes ride in a line from right to left, traversing the point where the half-built rails end, whereas the Pawnees, who pursue them, ride straight toward the configuration of rails in the foreground, as though moving along the future tracks. The shot lasts only several seconds, but its careful composition lingers in my mind.⁴ Interestingly, in this film entitled *The Iron Horse*, it is the movement of real horses that Ford chose to render in such a beautiful manner. Indeed, not only in this particular shot, but throughout the battle scene, the horses outdo the iron horse in their force of presence and impact on the viewer.

Yet *The Iron Horse* consistently maintains its positive view of the railroad, although in the nineteenth century, both positive and negative

³ For an elaboration on representations of race and ethnicity in *The Iron Horse*, see Kalinak 23–39.

⁴ Ford refined the linear movement of the horses in his later Westerns, such as *Stagecoach* and *The Searchers*, as a geometric figuration that Shigehiko Hasumi defines as one of the director’s cinematic signatures (*Eiga no shinwagaku* 32–34).

views coexisted. The railroad not only represented unity (connecting different places and cultures), progress (bringing civilization to the wilderness), and democracy (transporting passengers of different classes equally, at least, in speed), but also symbolized destruction (extinguishing nature and the traditional ways of life) and oppression (generating monopolist capitalists who would exploit the poor, particularly farmers). We should ask, then, how this spectrum of railroad symbolism is addressed and depicted in Westerns after *The Iron Horse*.

Let us first discuss Michael Curtiz's *Dodge City*, released in 1939.⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 1, the film opens with an exciting race between a stagecoach and a train (Figure 2.2). This recalls for some viewers the historic race between Peter Cooper's steam locomotive called "Tom Thumb" and a horse-drawn car on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad on August 28, 1830. Surprisingly enough, the horse won that race, but only because Tom Thumb's blower belt snapped. In fact, the railroad's investors were so impressed with the power of the locomotive that literal horse power soon came to be replaced by steam (Wolmar 14).

⁵ Like other Westerns, the backstories of both *Dodge City* and *Jesse James* make use of numerous historical modifications, some of which deserve special mention. The former film sets the first steam train run to Dodge City in 1866, but the town's first house was not built until 1871, and the railroad did not arrive there until 1872. Significantly, this emphasizes the West's rapid change after the Civil War and the railroad's contribution to it. The latter film depicts the train robbery as Jesse James's first attempt at crime, whereas in reality he first gained attention for a series of bank robberies. Moreover, the film attributes the death of Jesse's mother (Jane Darwell) to the railroad agents' bomb attack, but Jesse's mother actually survived the incident and, eventually, her son. Consequently, "[a]s far as we can tell, Frank and Jesse are peaceful farmers thrust into outlawry by the violence of the railroad" (Slotkin 299).

In the opening scene of *Dodge City*, set more than thirty years after Tom Thumb's defeat, the train easily overpowers the stagecoach, although the latter fares relatively well. Prior to the start of the race, a man in a suit in the passenger car celebrates the speed of the train: "Twenty-three miles in one hour and fourteen minutes. Gentlemen, that is moving." After the race, another man, Colonel Dodge (Henry O'Neill), explains what the railroad signifies: "Gentlemen, that's a symbol of America's future: progress. Iron men and iron horses. You can't beat them."

Another 1939 Western, *Jesse James*, directed by Henry King, offers a different view of the railroad. The film begins with a title card stating: "After the tragic war between the states, America turned to the winning of the West. The symbol of this era was the building of the trans-continental railroads." The viewer might expect another story of national reconstruction, as in *The Iron Horse*, but the next card immediately belies this: "The advance of the railroads was, in some cases, predatory and unscrupulous. Whole communities found themselves victimized by an ever-growing ogre—the Iron Horse." Indeed, the next sequence depicts railroad agents forcing poor farmers to sell off their lands at give-away prices. Thus, as Slotkin writes, "where *Dodge City* sees railroads as progressive and corruption as the work of criminal interlopers, *Jesse James* sees the railroad itself as corruption and its building a criminal invasion of an agrarian community" (296).

Jesse James (Tyrone Power) responds to this "criminal invasion"

through criminal means—train robbery. As noted in Chapter 1, *Jesse James* represents the set of Western films that treat train robbers as heroes rather than villains. Let us elaborate on the robbery scene, or “a staple of the James cycle” (R. Collins), with special reference to *The Great Train Robbery*. While the bandits in Porter’s film board the train stopped at the water tower, Jesse James jumps from his horse to catch the train as it runs through the forests. He then capers along the car roofs to the engine room, which is shot in beautiful silhouette, and orders the engineer to stop the train where his gang awaits him.⁶ The bandits, now all together, rob the passengers as in Porter’s film, but—crucially—with gentlemanly manners. When a lady holds out her jewelry, Jesse’s brother Frank (Henry Fonda) tells her, “No ma’am. No jewelry. Thank you just the same, though.” Frank also says, as he collects passengers’ pocketbooks, “Don’t forget to sue the railroad for everything you give us because it’s responsible.” This line underscores the function of the train robbery as a resistance to “the rampant commercialism of the railroad” (Slotkin 301).⁷

In the 1920s, when John Ford directed *The Iron Horse*, Americans were enjoying an unprecedented economic boom and placed their absolute faith in the industrial technology that created it. However, the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and lasted through most of the

⁶ Later films have made frequent reference to this roof leaping. A recent and popular example is *Toy Story 2*: in the climactic airport scene, cowboy Sheriff Woody capers along the roofs of baggage trailers, instead of passenger cars, against a background of buildings towering like buttes.

⁷ It is equally important that the film lacks a counterpart to *The Great Train Robbery*’s safe-cracking scene.

1930s, severely complicated this view. Technology was now regarded both as a culprit for the recession as well as a possible savior therefrom: “As [Warren I.] Susman has observed, at the same time that Americans were celebrating the technological future in the ‘Land of Tomorrow’ at the 1939 New York World’s Fair, the Gallup Poll revealed that most people nevertheless believed technological development caused the unemployment of the Great Depression” (Spigel 47). Arguably, the contrasting representations of the railroad in *Dodge City* and *Jesse James*, both released in 1939, resonated with the public’s ambivalent attitudes toward contemporary technology.

As Buscombe notes, “[the] enthusiasm in the Western for the railroad as the bringer of progress continued for the next two decades [the 1940s and 1950s]” as in *Duel in the Sun* (1946) and *Carson City* (1952) (“Railroads,” 208). This comes as no surprise, considering the development of industry and technology during and especially after World War II. However, *Jesse James*’s alternative view of the railroad “becomes an even more explicit and central theme in some Westerns of the 1960s and 1970s” as in *The Professionals* (1966) and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) (208). This presumably coincides with the awakening of environmental consciousness and the distrust of technology in the 1960s. Even the views of John Ford, despite his mystification of the railroad in the 1920s, underwent a radical change.

Death of a Stagecoach

In April 1863, in the thick of the Civil War, Union Colonel Benjamin

Grierson and his 1,700 horsemen conducted a raid deep into Confederate territory, which historians refer to as “Grierson’s Raid.” John Ford’s 1959 Western *The Horse Soldiers* deals with this raid, particularly with its climactic battle at Newton Station, fought to upset the Confederate supply line. Christian Wolmar writes: “[T]he military value of the railways was recognized in Europe right from the start. . . . It was the American Civil War, which lasted for four years, however, that saw the first sustained use of railways for military purposes” (95). The general acceptance of this strategy naturally led each side to target the other’s railroads for destruction. Another well-known Union attempt to disrupt the enemy’s supply line was “Andrews’ Raid” in April 1862, which in later years inspired at least two films: Buster Keaton’s *The General* (1926) and Walt Disney Productions’ *The Great Locomotive Chase* (1956).

It follows that it is not unusual for a Civil War film to treat the destruction of railroads. The point, however, is that John Ford, who once invigorated the Western genre with a story of the railroad’s construction, now depicts its destruction in *The Horse Soldiers*. Indeed, it is painful to watch as Union soldiers rip rails from their ties and bend them with heat. The director himself avoids treating this as a heroic deed, although he could reasonably have done so, as it is a successful operation for the Union. At the bar, John Wayne’s Union colonel, modeled after Grierson, recklessly gulps down whiskey, listening to his troopers destroying the railroad outside; and when a trooper rides into the bar on horseback, triumphantly shouting, “Railroad’s been

destroyed for eight miles!” the colonel, outraged, throws him out. His violent reaction stems partly from his past as a railroad builder—a backstory that is intriguing not simply because it adds irony to the overall operation, but also because the shift the protagonist has taken in his mission reflects the shift in the director’s theme, from railroad construction to destruction.⁸

Although *The Horse Soldiers* itself does not suggest the railroad’s negative side, the next John Ford/John Wayne Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, finally crosses that line. Set in the early twentieth century, the film’s opening sequence depicts a steam train making a stately arrival at Shinbone station, and later we see an old long-distance stagecoach covered with years of dust at an undertaker’s shop (Figure 2.3). Clearly, the prosperity of the former is responsible for the latter’s decline. This is the logical conclusion of the race between the two vehicles in *Dodge City*, although this 1939 Western never indicates—or even hints at—the bleak future that awaits the stagecoach. It is, after all, no less valuable as a symbol of the old frontier than the railroad, a status reinforced by another 1939 Western, *Stagecoach*, the first true Ford/Wayne collaboration.⁹ With this in mind, it seems particularly interesting that the Ford/Wayne Western cycle ends with *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, a film representing

⁸ In reality, Grierson was a former music teacher, not a railroad engineer.

⁹ Wayne’s appearance in Ford’s films dates back to *Mother Machree* (1928). The director, however, never used him in a major role until *Stagecoach*.

the death of the stagecoach.¹⁰ Moreover, this death is symbolically echoed by that of John Wayne himself, whose body lies on the other side of the wall.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance contrasts the destinies of two men: Tom Doniphon (John Wayne), a gunman who reluctantly creates order in the town of Shinbone but never seeks or achieves recognition for it, and Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart), a lawyer who wishes to, but cannot, civilize Shinbone by himself and ironically ends up replacing Doniphon as the town's hero. The film uses a flashback structure in which Stoddard, now an aging U.S. senator, recounts for reporters the truth about his legendary duel with Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin), the notorious outlaw of the West: he confesses that, contrary to popular belief, it was not he but Doniphon, the man in the coffin without his boots on, who killed Valance. Jim Kitses writes: "In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Ford suggests that the mythic properties of the genre as he developed and articulated them were fabrications. His attitude toward the domestication of the West was different now. The heroic sacrifice of the pioneer is buried, forgotten, papered over by myth" (125)—in other words, Ford here exposes the deceptive nature of the Western genre and, by extension, of the history of the American frontier.

On the train back to Washington, the conductor brings a new spittoon to Stoddard, saying, "We're gonna make 25 miles an hour or

¹⁰ The last Ford/Wayne collaboration is *Donovan's Reef* (1963), which is not a Western.

bust a boiler trying. And we wired ahead to Junction City. They're gonna hold the express for you. Rance, in two days and two nights you are gonna be right back in Washington." These remarks naturally bring to mind the opening scene of *Dodge City*, where the man in the suit admires the speed of the train, but this time the triumphal tone is lost. For further emphasis, when Stoddard thanks the conductor, his reply freezes him: "You think nothing of it. Nothing's too good for the man who shot Liberty Valance." The film ends with a long shot of the train traveling through the countryside, neither challenged by a stagecoach nor attacked by outlaws. It runs alone on the land of the West—or rather the deceptive history of the frontier—from which American identity and pride once emerged.

Technology in the Valley

In short, the Western genre, which had accorded the highest possible praise to the railroad in *The Iron Horse*, began to look at its negative side in *Jesse James*; it is the latter approach that gained dominance in the 1960s and 1970s. Admittedly, however, this broad trend analysis oversimplifies the explanation. Even in the 1960s, *How the West Was Won*, whose release coincided with that of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, treated the railroad as a positive insignia of progress. Indeed, we can examine many other important Westerns featuring the railroad and analyze them from myriad other perspectives.¹¹ For instance,

¹¹ Although the subject exceeds the scope of this dissertation, I have long been interested in how Western films represent clocks and watches. The genre's use of space has comprised a focus of almost all studies; however,

Lindsey Collins, in her refined analysis of *3:10 to Yuma* (the 1957 original and its 2007 remake) and *Tycoon* (1947), has focused on how the modern railroad influenced the symbology of masculinity. In a similar vein, the remainder of this chapter approaches the theme of the railroad from a new angle—that is, treating the relationship between railroad and nuclear technologies on the American frontier.

First, let us consider a recent animated film to highlight the issue—*Toy Story 3* (2010). Its opening shot instantly captures our attention, showing us a train steaming across Monument Valley with the MittenButte in the right background (Figure 2.4). This image misleads those who have never been to the area, because there is neither a railroad running through it nor a train station near it. This remark notwithstanding, that this shot nonetheless appears normal and natural, perhaps even to those who have been there, is of great significance; we will return to this point below.

Train robber One-Eyed Bart (Mr. Potato Head) and cowboy Sheriff Woody appear on screen. Since we know that Woody is the hero, we naturally expect a pro-civilization and technology plot, but *Toy Story 3* amusingly deviates from this. Both law enforcement and outlaws use technologies newer than the railroad, such as a sports car

its use of time is, in fact, equally intriguing. The railroad in the Western should also be considered from the temporal viewpoint because, historically speaking, the advent of the railroad promoted the proliferation of clocks and watches. Lynne Kirby, although not interested in the Western genre itself, comments on the relationship between the railroad, a clock, and narrative temporality in Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (55); this argument should be expanded to such later Westerns as *High Noon* (1952), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), and *Back to the Future Part III* (1990), to name a few. I leave this analysis for future study.

(Aliens), a high-tech spacesuit (Buzz Lightyear), a built-in force field (Slinky Dog), and a piggy spaceship (Dr. Porkchop [Hamm]), although this amusing technology comes to an alarming conclusion. Dr. Porkchop pushes the button labeled “Death by Monkeys,” and a yellow barrel falls from the spaceship. As the barrel hits the ground and explodes, an enormous number of red monkeys, now out of the barrel, form a mushroom cloud—a red apocalypse under the blue sky (Figure 2.5).

Moments later, however, the scene cuts to a child’s room where a little boy, Andy, is playing with his toys, revealing the entire scene to have been only a child’s fantasy. And yet, the significance of this scene is not to be underestimated: it not only foreshadows the climactic scene, in which the toys are nearly burned in the incinerator, but also, as is often the case with fantasy, condenses important cultural memories and histories in an unexpected fashion. In what follows, we will demonstrate the extent to which the intricate relationship between nature and technology, spanning more than a century, informs this opening scene that lasts less than five minutes.

In the history of the United States, no railroad has ever been constructed in the Monument Valley area, although in my childhood I saw such a scene depicted in a Japanese *gakushu manga* (comic book designed for teaching children), titled *Oinaru seibu: Tairiku odan tetsudo no kansei* [*The Great West: The Completion of the Transcontinental Railroad*], edited by Kaname Saruya and Osamu Tezuka. Specifically, buttes reminiscent of Monument Valley are recognizable in the backgrounds of the drawings of the first

transcontinental railroad (both on the cover and inside the book), as though the valley's landscape had been relocated onto the railroad line (Figure 2.6). John Ford depicted both the transcontinental railroad and Monument Valley in his career, but only in different works (the railroad in *The Iron Horse*, the valley in *Stagecoach*, and several others). In contrast, the cartoonist of the abovementioned *gakushu manga* (Bunta Tsubota), consciously or unconsciously, combined them within a single text through the flexibility of the *manga* medium.

In this context, Andrew J. Russell's *Temporary and Permanent Bridges and Citadel Rock Green River*, a well-known photograph of the transcontinental railroad against a massive rocky formation, merits particular attention (Figure 2.7). As the title specifies, the rocky formation in the background is Citadel Rock in Green River, Wyoming, not Merrick Butte in Monument Valley on the Utah/Arizona border. In the foreground, the temporary and permanent bridges epitomize the fast-paced and challenging process of railroad construction. Russell's photograph thus serves as an eloquent testimony to the transition of the American sublime from natural to technological.¹² Nancy K. Anderson analyzes it as follows:

With an artist's eye, Russell selected his view so that the magnificent rocky tower shaped by the forces of nature is juxtaposed with the man-made structures (the water tower and stone bridge supports), which mimic its form. Acknowledging

¹² David E. Nye carefully traces this transition in *American Technological Sublime*. See also note 23 of this chapter. We return to the concept of the sublime in Chapter 4.

both the technological triumph of the railroad and the scenic grandeur of the Green River landscape, Russell's photograph records change and progress. As a mediating or conciliatory image, the photograph also suggests that the natural and technological sublime could coexist. . . . (244)

One may even recognize a dialectical, rather than codependent, relationship between nature and technology: the harsher and more inhospitable nature is, the more emphasized the counterforce of technology will be.

In American art of the 1860s, the railroad's representations underwent a significant change. Whereas previously its depiction was largely limited to the landscapes of the East, the railroad now began to appear in the photographs of the West. In addition, paintings essentially incorporated the railroad into the ideal of pastoralism, harmonizing it with idyllic nature (or, in Leo Marx's term, the "middle landscape"), while photographs often accentuated the awe and wonder inspired by both technology and nature.¹³ Russell's acclaimed photograph exemplifies this phenomenon; and in the following century, when Monument Valley became a symbol of the West, a confusion of cultural memory replaced Citadel Rock in Russell's photograph with Merrick Butte or the valley's other rocky formations. This transposition explains why the opening shot of *Toy Story 3*, or the combination of the steam train and the valley, appears natural—even familiar—when in

¹³ As Barbara Novak explains, "The photographer, having already accommodated one machine within his artistic practice, had much less difficulty than the painters in accommodating still another" (153).

reality no railroad runs through it.

There was, in fact, a musical Western produced more than sixty years before *Toy Story 3* that anticipated this twenty-first century animation in its use of Monument Valley: *The Harvey Girls* (1946), one of MGM's Judy Garland films and the fifth film to feature Monument Valley. At the film's start, when Garland sings *In the Valley (Where the Evening Sun Goes Down)* on the vestibule of a Santa Fe railroad passenger train, the iconic Merrick Butte and other rocky formations appear in the background (Figure 2.8). This is, of course, not a CG shot but a rear projection shot typical of the era's Hollywood cinema. With the interval of sixty years between them, *The Harvey Girls* and *Toy Story 3* support a case for the longevity of the desire to combine the imagery of the railroad and the rocky landscape.¹⁴

The Nuclear Frontier

As previously stated, *Toy Story 3*'s opening scene ends with the image of a mushroom cloud boiling upward in the Monument Valley sky. Although most viewers would consider it utter nonsense, this image, too, merits a historical account. In fact, the American West provided as rich a backdrop for nuclear development in the twentieth century as it had for railroad construction in the nineteenth.¹⁵ The intertwining of

¹⁴ It is also notable that, in *The Harvey Girls*, Garland's presence feminizes the railroad and the coming of civilization it symbolizes. We examine the Western genre's gender structure in Chapter 3.

¹⁵ We should remember that in almost every aspect of nuclear development—from uranium mining to nuclear bomb testing, even to nuclear waste disposal—American Indians have been more grievously afflicted than any other group of Americans. This tragedy began at the earliest stage of the

the West and nuclear technology is readily attested by the following examples: Los Alamos National Laboratory (the home of the Manhattan Project), Trinity Test Site (where the first atomic bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945) (both in New Mexico), and Nevada Test Site (where at least 928 nuclear tests were conducted from 1951 to 1992).¹⁶ The West was, and still is, “the nuclear frontier.”¹⁷

Several cultural texts have emphasized the often-unnoticed continuity between the geographic and nuclear frontiers. Of particular interest is the richly illustrated 1955 booklet of the United States Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) distributed in the vicinity of the Nevada Test Site to reduce public anxiety about the ongoing nuclear tests.¹⁸ Crucially, some of the drawings feature familiar imagery of the West to neutralize the new technology’s strange and hazardous nature. For instance, in Figure 2.9, a horse-riding cowboy calmly watches a mushroom cloud rising over the mountain as if it were as natural as a rain cloud, implying that nuclear tests are just as safe as everyday meteorological phenomena. From the present viewpoint, however, it is

Manhattan Project: “To build Los Alamos, the US government first seized land from the Pueblos of San Ildefonso and Santa Clara and from the heirs of a land grant originally held by Ramón Vigil, then imported a scientific elite and effectively divided local communities according to race and class” (Goodman 483).

¹⁶ 100 of these were atmospheric and 828 underground.

¹⁷ I borrow the phrase “nuclear frontier” from Patrick B. Sharp’s *Savage Perils*, although he uses it to refer to the “rubble-strewn wilderness” depicted as the aftermath of nuclear war in American future stories, where “the survivors ha[ve] to battle with manifestations of savagery in order to establish a new America out of the wreckage of the old.” According to Sharp, this imaginary nuclear frontier comprises both “the wasteland imagery of literary Modernism” and “the frontier imagery of the nineteenth century” (172).

¹⁸ The digitized version of the booklet is available at http://www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/atomic_tests_nevada/.

difficult to discern in this image anything other than heavy-handed black humor. It was Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) that made the combination of a cowboy and a nuclear weapon into an effective form of black humor. In the climactic scene, cowboy hat-wearing Major T. J. "King" Kong (Slim Pickens) rides through the sky astride a nuclear bomb, leading to the outbreak of total nuclear war (Figure 2.10).

While this naturally reminds us of the opening scene of *Toy Story 3*, even more important to our argument than *Dr. Strangelove* is *Carolina Cannonball*, a 1955 science fiction musical comedy film that establishes a unique association between railroad technology, nuclear technology, and the American West.¹⁹ Although the 1950s saw an increase in the fear of nuclear testing and war, the hopes for "clean" nuclear power eventually replaced this fear: this is the age when President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered the "Atoms for Peace" speech at the U.N. (1953), and Walt Disney Productions televised the educational program titled *Our Friend the Atom* (1957).²⁰ The film *Carolina Cannonball* also deals with nuclear energy, but to entertain, not to educate. The heroine (Judy Canova) and her grandfather (Andy Clyde), who own a steam tram named the "Carolina Cannonball," find an atomic-powered guided missile (of course, fictitious) left in the

¹⁹ In *Kagami no meiro*, Kato discusses the cinematic use of the railroad in comedies set in the West such as *The General*, *Go West*, and *Carolina Cannonball* (80–81).

²⁰ In the 1950s, although many horror films exploited the fear of radiation exposure, some comedy films irreverently laughed it off. Among these were *Living It Up* (1954), a Martin and Lewis film, and *The Atomic Kid* (1954), a Mickey Rooney film. For an analysis of the latter film, see Okuda.

Nevada desert (Figure 2.11). Mistaking it for an airplane's wing tank, they unwittingly replace the Cannonball's punctured boiler with the missile's engine. Now atomically driven, rather than restored to its former state, the Cannonball speeds across the desert at an uncontrollable rate.

We should not dismiss this story as pure fiction: in the 1950s, researchers at the University of Utah actually studied the practical possibility of an atomic-powered locomotive, although it was soon abandoned for economic and safety reasons. (Furthermore, H. Roger Grant reports: "While discussions centered on atomic-powered locomotives, the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe [Railway] toyed with the idea of using an atomic bomb to shorten its route across the Mojave Desert in California" [112]. Fact is indeed stranger than fiction.) In *Carolina Cannonball*, the atomic-powered train travels across the Nevada desert, a timely setting considering the 1951 opening of the Nevada Test Site. Of course, a train carrying an atomic bomb, rather than equipped with a nuclear reactor, is a cliché of 1980s and 1990s action films, such as *Broken Arrow* (1996) and *Atomic Train* (1999), both set in the American West. But comparing *Carolina Cannonball* to these films reveals the earlier film's true uniqueness, that is, its reference to the *production* of nuclear energy as well as its *consumption*.

The railroad in *Carolina Cannonball* connects the former gold mining town to its nearby city, Las Vegas. Three foreign agents visit what is now a ghost town, looking for the atomic-powered guided

missile left somewhere in the desert. What is noteworthy is their claim to be uranium prospectors. Historically, the American West was a treasure trove of uranium deposits, causing a uranium rush in the 1950s, reminiscent of the previous century's California gold rush: "Separated by a century from the California gold rush," writes Limerick, "the uranium rush replicated many of the familiar patterns, even if jeeps had replaced burros and Geiger counters had replaced pans and rockers" (*Legacy* 161). The AEC was behind this boom—it launched a series of programs to stimulate the domestic production of uranium, most notably guaranteeing the minimum price for high-grade uranium-bearing ores. As is well known, young geologist Charles Steen made a fortune off his singlehanded discovery of a rich uranium deposit in Utah, later calling it *Mi Vida* ["my life"]. This boom even inspired the creation of a popular board game, *Uranium Rush*.²¹ The game's box featured the motto "Make a million dollars!" and the image of a cowboy seeking a uranium deposit, carrying a Geiger counter (that looked more like a small missile) under his arm and leading a mule at his side. Uranium deposits were discovered not only on the Colorado Plateau but also in other areas of the West, including Nevada, where the *Carolina Cannonball* story was set. This locale, too, makes the film more than pure fiction.

Let us now return to the opening scene of *Toy Story 3*. Although the real-life Monument Valley has never witnessed an atomic bomb detonation, its surroundings, part of the Colorado Plateau, were an

²¹ For a good discussion of this game, see Amundson 17–19.

important uranium mining area. The man who attracted both the film and mining industries to the area was Harry Goulding, the local trading post owner. In 1938, Goulding met John Ford, who was working in the pre-production phase of *Stagecoach*, and showed the director photographs of the valley; four years later, he took Denny Viles, vice-president of the Vanadium Corporation of America (VCA), to the uranium deposit east of the valley. Crucially, most of the uranium used for the Manhattan Project came from the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), but with supplemental contributions from Canada and the Colorado Plateau, including the Monument Valley area (Pasternak 51; Kuletz 143–44). The valley was thus a contributor to—if not a direct site of—the first nuclear device detonations.²² With this in mind, *Toy Story 3*'s mushroom cloud should be taken as a symbol rather than a meaningless childhood fantasy. The production staff was probably unaware of this historical background. The scene more likely resulted from their subconscious associations of stereotypes about the West (e.g., railroads, rocky deserts, outlaws, aliens, and mushroom clouds), a set of associations that, nonetheless, and quite eerily, unearths the hidden history of the valley as a component of the nuclear frontier.

Historically, then, how did railroad construction lead to nuclear development? What was the relation of the West to this technological “progress”? As discussed above, the harshness of nature underscores

²² For an extensive survey of uranium mining in the area, see also Witkind and Thaden.

the counterforce of technology. Indeed, since the West was synonymous with inhospitable natural features, taming it with rails and ties signified for Americans, more definitively than any other event, the infinite possibility of technological progress. Figuratively speaking, Americans' confidence in technology was built upon and expanded by railroad tracks across the West. Note that, despite its historical roots, this confidence was artificially bolstered by works of visual art, such as Russell's photograph (Figure 2.7), that stressed both the natural and technological sublime through carefully selected compositions. It seems reasonable, then, to suppose that this confidence survived the hazards of westward expansion and later underpinned nuclear development in the same area (as well as other technological advances including space exploration).²³

Thus, the nineteenth-century experience of mastery over nature served as the underpinning for the twentieth-century development of technological devices capable of destroying the whole Earth. Of course, it was scientists who defected from Europe who assumed a central role in developing the first nuclear bombs. Yet, without Americans' historical confidence in technology, that process of invention would have been much more difficult and, indubitably, delayed for years.

²³ Nye's *American Technological Sublime* attempts to "trace the continual discovery of new sources of popular wonder and amazement, *from the railroad to the atomic bomb and the space program*" (9, italics added). In fact, Nye analyzes, rather critically, the American people's reception of atomic power as a variation of the technological sublime in the 1950s: "Atomic power reaffirmed man's control over nature, both in the awesome explosions of the bomb and even more impressively (it was thought) in the use of this power for peaceful purposes" (235). This perspective was highly influential in the analyses of *Toy Story 3* and *Carolina Cannonball*.

Whatever the production staff's intentions may have been, the child's fantasy in *Toy Story 3* encourages us to consider this continuity between railroad construction and nuclear development (which in turn ascribes greater significance to the investigation of traditional Westerns' ambivalent attitudes toward the railroad). In the history of the American West, these technological events are not as separate as they might seem at first sight.



Figure 2.1: The Cheyennes (front) are pursued by the Pawnees (back) in *The Iron Horse*. 20th Century Fox, 2007. DVD.



Figure 2.2: A stagecoach challenges a train to a race in *Dodge City*. Warner Home Video Japan, 2005. DVD.



Figure 2.3: An old stagecoach caked with years of dust in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Paramount Home Entertainment Japan, 2003. DVD.



Figure 2.4: A train steams across Monument Valley in *Toy Story 3*. Walt Disney Japan, 2010. DVD.



Figure 2.5: An enormous number of red monkeys constitute a mushroom cloud in *Toy Story 3*.

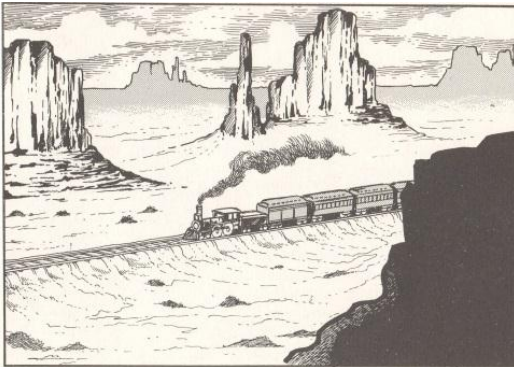


Figure 2.6: A train runs through Monument Valley-like buttes in a Japanese *gagaku* manga. *Oinaru seibu: Tairiku odan tetsudo no kansei*. Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1988.

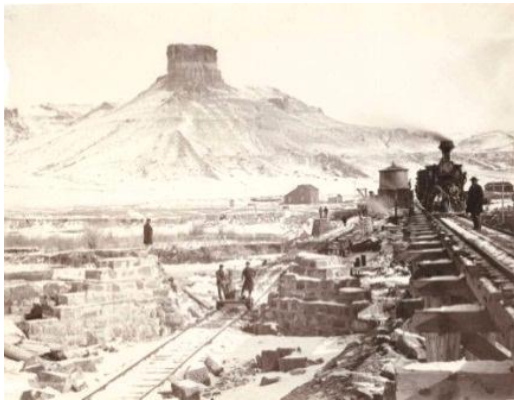


Figure 2.7: The transcontinental railroad against a massive rocky formation. Andrew J. Russell's *Temporary and Permanent Bridges and Citadel Rock Green River*. Courtesy of Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.



Figure 2.8: Judy Garland sings against a background of Merrick Butte of Monument Valley in *The Harvey Girls*. Junesu Kikaku, 2004. DVD.



Figure 2.9: A drawing of a cowboy watching a mushroom cloud arise, from the AEC's 1955 booklet, *Atomic Test Effects in the Nevada Test Site Region*. Washington, D.C., Jan. 1955.



Figure 2.10: Major T. J. "King" Kong falls through the sky astride a nuclear bomb in *Dr. Strangelove*. Sony Pictures Entertainment Japan, 2002. DVD.



Figure 2.11: An atomically-powered guided missile and a steam tram in *Carolina Cannonball*. Nostalgia Home Video, n.d. VHS.

Chapter 3

Cowboys and the Scent of Soap: Body/Gender/Sexuality in Male Bath Scenes

To date, Hollywood cinema has shown an insatiable enthusiasm toward women's bath and shower scenes.¹ The image of an actress bathing acquired an almost mythic glow with Gloria Swanson in *Male and Female* (1919), which was immortalized with Janet Leigh in *Psycho* (1960). Between these stars, and even after Leigh, countless actresses—famous or not—have bathed and showered on screen, which has been harshly criticized as direct evidence of the sexual exploitation of the female body in film. In contrast, men's bath scenes have been largely ignored and unexamined, even though prominent male stars such as John Wayne, Marlon Brando, and Clint Eastwood have bathed on screen. What are the cultural significance and implications of their bathing images? Is there any difference between the representation of men and women in their respective bath scenes? This chapter addresses these questions in the context of some of Hollywood's most memorable male bath and shower scenes, mainly in the Western, for no other genre has depicted male bodies in the bath more frequently or delicately.²

¹ This chapter is most deeply indebted to the thought-provoking analysis on male and female bath scenes in Kato, *Buredo ranna ron josetsu* 114–20 and *Hyosho to hihyo* 110–16.

² Buscombe has compiled a useful, though not comprehensive, list of male bath scenes in the Western (“Baths”).

Indeed, this chapter will advance our understanding of the cinematic frontier, which comprises not only the wilderness and civilization, but also the cowboys who mediate between them.

The Scent of Soap

Curiously, male bathers in the Western are often wearing something or holding something in their hands. In *The Hallelujah Trail* (1965), Burt Lancaster appears in as many as three bathing scenes, always with a cigar or a glass in his hand; and in *The Rounders* (1964), Glenn Ford and Henry Fonda both bathe with their cowboy hats on as if by agreement. They are neither fully naked nor totally engaged in the act of bathing. Place your hand over the lower half of Figure 3.1 (Fonda in *The Rounders*), and you cannot tell that he is enjoying a bath. But why do cowboys exhibit such a half-hearted attitude toward bathing, even though they are frequently depicted doing it?

To answer this question, we should return to the genre's thematic conflict of the wilderness vs. civilization, following Martin Pumphrey's approach in his essay, "Why Do Cowboys Wear Hats in the Bath? Style Politics for the Older Man." Western heroes are by definition a mediator between the wilderness and civilization, who enjoy their freedom in the wilderness but, if necessary, contribute to the creation of civilized order, even risking their lives for it. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in the Western, the wilderness and civilization are coded as masculine and feminine spheres, respectively. Western heroes are "thus faced not simply with bridging the divide

between civilisation and savagery but with straddling the ambiguously experienced frontier between masculinity and femininity” (52). This condition requires them to tone down their masculinity when moving from the wilderness to civilization, the sphere of the feminine. Although masculine toughness is indispensable for the establishment of civilized order, the heroes must contain it to settle down, if only for a while, in the society that needs their protection. “Quite simply, the hero’s masculine toughness must be partially feminised” (52).

Therefore, Western heroes bathe. In order to achieve a smooth entrance into a civilized (i.e., feminized) world, they need to wash off the traces of the wilderness. But they encounter a stumbling block. It is possible for Western heroes, naked and sudsy in the bath, to feel too detached from their own masculinity. Their feminization is necessary, but only to a level that leaves intact their toughness and ability to protect civilization—at least outwardly. This motivation explains why cowboys wear their hats or smoke cigars in the bath. Indeed, Pumphrey argues, “while they have given a central place to codes of cleanliness, they have consistently masked male nakedness that getting clean might be expected to involve and have been evasive about the interest in male display it might be assumed to imply. Cowboys do not only wear hats in the bath. Trousers, shirts and a range of visually authentic underwear have served the same purpose” (51). These items, in other words, have served as a safety net to deter the over-feminization of cowboys.

Let us pursue this perspective and posit that the Western is a genre that has accorded special importance to minute changes in its

heroes' bodies. To wash off dust, to shave a beard, to groom hair, to wear after-shave or cologne—all these seemingly subtle changes in the heroes' bodies influence the development of a narrative and resonate with fundamental conflicts of the American frontier (adventure vs. settlement, savagery vs. refinement, freedom vs. order, and above all, the wilderness vs. civilization). In the best-known scene of John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946), the town's barber sets Henry Fonda's hair and sprays him with cologne, while outside the shop, as if responding to the refinement of his body, the townspeople head toward a partially built church, signaling the gradual advent of civilization. In *My Darling Clementine* and the other finest works of the genre, small and subtle changes in heroes' bodies can exceed the importance of their spectacular actions, such as horse riding or shooting.

From this perspective, we will present detailed analyses of men's bath scenes in the Western. Pumphrey's instructive essay does not cite as many bath scenes as its title ("Why Do Cowboys Wear Hats in the Bath?") may suggest. In fact, his focus falls more on the general meaning of male display than on the specific interpretations of male bath scenes, and such scenes serve only as a facilitator in his wide-ranging argument. Although the persuasiveness of this essay has critical merit, here we draw our focus to the unique characteristics of each bath scene and their implications.

Cleanliness and Strength

The ambivalent positioning of Western heroes between the wilderness

and civilization, between masculinity and femininity, is artfully evoked in their bathing images—with their hats on or a cigar in their mouth. One may wonder, however, whether these symbolic items sufficiently compensate for their loss of masculinity. As if to remove this doubt, cowboys sometimes seek to prove their masculinity in more explicit ways. Glenn Ford offers a fascinating example in *Cowboy* (1958). Like many other Western heroes, Ford enjoys a cigar and whisky in the bath, and yet he does more than that. Noticing a cockroach crawling on the wall, he swiftly switches from a sponge to a gun (symbolizing virility) to shoot down the black-brown insect (Figure 3.2). Thus, Western heroes are always ready for violent action, even in the bath.

Likewise, John Wayne offers eloquent examples. In real life, this Western icon “was fastidiously clean, well groomed, and had great taste in clothes. He liked the feel of his skin after he had taken a hot shower with Neutrogena soap and put on freshly laundered clothes” (Roberts and Olson 280). Wayne must have enjoyed his bath scenes in film as well, but washing his body with soap is not enough in the world of the Western. In *War of the Wild Cats* (1943), he punches a young Indian who points a gun at him after his bath (obviously, a politically incorrect scene from the present perspective). In *Big Jake* (1971), he shoots a white villain who attacks him while he is taking a shower, with a rifle somehow hidden in the shower stall.

A more brilliant example can be found in Samuel Fuller’s *Forty Guns* (1957), starring Barry Sullivan and Barbara Stanwyck. Like Wayne in *War of the Wild Cats*, Sullivan first takes a bath and then

fights a villain, but with greater spectacle and intricacy (typical of Fuller's films). In the bath scene, Sullivan and six other men bathe peacefully in separate tubs in the outdoor bathing yard, whereas in the battle scene, he slowly but resolutely walks down the street toward the villain before pistol-whipping him (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). One may ask whether the distinctiveness of each scene breaks the logical continuity between them. Fuller skillfully solves the continuity problem with the white towel that Sullivan drapes around his neck in the battle scene. That is, this small visual connection between the two scenes joins cleanliness and strength in the hero's body.

For male audiences, Western heroes who balance toughness with cleanliness provide an ideal role model. *Cowboy* suggests this purpose. At the film's close, Jack Lemmon, who has been fascinated by Glenn Ford's manliness, bathes in exactly the same manner as his hero in the earlier scene, not only smoking a cigar but even going so far as to also shoot a cockroach crawling on the wall. This aptly and somewhat satirically mirrors the male audiences' attempt to identify with Western heroes in the bath.

But we must also note that, in some bath scenes, only the man's unmanly appearance stands out, revealing clean but weak male bodies. Sidekicks exhibit this phenomenon more often than the heroes.³ Michael Curtiz's *Dodge City*, a film already discussed in the previous chapter, offers a classic example. On his arrival at Dodge City, a

³ In later Westerns, heroes are more frequently subject to this phenomenon, such as Dustin Hoffman in *Little Big Man* (1970).

booming railroad town, Errol Flynn's sidekick, Alan Hale, soaps himself down fully naked in the bath, and thereafter becomes increasingly "feminized." Having changed into decent clothes, Hale attends a women's temperance union meeting. When a huge fight starts at the bar, he resolutely joins it, only to be beaten unconscious. Worse yet, Hale is unjustly accused of being responsible for the fuss, and when he is about to be hanged at the plaza, it is Flynn who must come to his rescue.

Whereas *Dodge City* depicts a bath scene in a railroad town, the 1965 film *Cat Ballou*, known for its parodies of traditional Westerns, showcases a bath scene in a railroad train. Here, Reginald Denny's villainous town boss takes a bath in his gorgeous private railroad car, revealing a too civilized, and therefore "feminized," body (Figure 3.5). Interestingly, in terms of gender politics, the train is robbed by Jane Fonda's ex-schoolteacher—now outlaw—and her gang. Upon hearing that the train has been held up, Denny, clad in only a towel, says to Lee Marvin, one of the gang, "Get along with it. I'm trying to take my bath," only to be stripped of his towel in front of the other passengers.⁴

Male and Female

With these analyses in mind, let us now explore the differences between

⁴ *Cat Ballou* also includes Marvin's bath scene. He cleanses himself before the confrontation with the man who killed Fonda's father. Although this sounds like a familiar manner for a Western hero, who is required to balance toughness with cleanliness, this comedy film adds a twist to it: after his bath, Marvin is laced into a tight corset by a young Indian—like Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)—to flatten his round belly.

the representations of men and women in bath scenes, looking at the Western and other genres. The first difference is the suggestiveness of their nudity. Men expose less skin than women in the bath, or at least their skin is not the viewer's focus. As we have explained, men bathe partially clothed or with distracting props in the Western. This applies to other genres as well. For instance, in John Huston's film noir, *Key Largo* (1948), a gangster boss (Edward G. Robinson) holds a cigar and glass in his hands while bathing.⁵

Here are more extreme examples. In the comedies *One Week* (1920) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959), Buster Keaton and Tony Curtis bathe fully, rather than partially, clothed. Of course, there are reasons for their actions: Keaton falls through the chimney into the bathtub by accident, while Curtis jumps into it as an alibi for staying in the bathroom. Yet it is noteworthy that "women" bathe fully naked in contrast to these men in both films, thus illustrating a crucial difference motivated primarily by gender. The "women" here are Sybil Seely, who plays Keaton's wife in *One Week*, and Tony Curtis, disguised as a woman in *Some Like It Hot*. In Figure 3.6 from the latter film, Curtis appears on the right. Prior to this moment, pretending to be a woman, Curtis appears to be naked, up to his chin in the bubbles. But here, as he stands up and returns to being a man, it becomes clear that he was bathing fully clothed. In other words, this single scene reveals

⁵ Gangsters' bath scenes tend to stress their fastidiousness and eventually their nervousness. Sometimes the focus is not so much on their naked body as on their luxurious bathroom, a sign of their hedonism and wealth, as illustrated in Al Pacino's bath scene in *Scarface* (1983).

the difference motivated by simple outward appearance between bath scenes featuring males and females.

The second difference is the presence or absence of action. Men are often caught in the middle of action during or around their bath scenes. This cancels out the implications of skin exposure. That is, aggressive action overrules the passivity of being exposed, as illustrated in *War of the Wild Cats* and *Forty Guns*. Otherwise, that passivity would result in the feminization or castration of men who bathe, as demonstrated in *Dodge City*. A similar example can be found in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's extravagant epic film *Cleopatra* (1963). Here, Richard Burton (as Mark Anthony) applies goat's milk to his face in the bath to soften his beard, symbolizing feminization within the bath scene itself. *Cleopatra* also shows that bath scenes carry the risk of a dishonorable change only for men. Earlier in the same film, Elizabeth Taylor (as Cleopatra), while sitting in the bath, dismisses a messenger from Rome in her typical dignified manner.

The aforementioned examples corroborate the analyses of film scholars and cultural historians concerning the images of men, specifically their nudity, which can be roughly summarized as follows: men are often equipped with accessories to make them seem less exposed (Bordo 28–29); they are doing something or stand ready for action (Dyer 270); and if marked as the object of an erotic glance, they are either punished or feminized (Neale, "Masculinity," 281, 286). But as Peter Lehman insists in his counterargument to film theorists (including Neale), one should not disregard important exceptions to

existing formulas, however convenient theorization and generalization might seem (34–37).⁶

This holds true for men’s bath scenes as well. Indeed, male bathers are sometimes as eroticized as their female counterparts on screen, whether explicitly or implicitly. Western films are of particular interest here, for, given that the genre targets male audiences, these scenes inevitably evoke issues of homosexuality (Kato, *Hyosho to hihyo* 110–13).⁷ While the preceding sections have discussed the Western’s bath scenes in relation to the genre’s thematic conflicts (the wilderness vs. civilization, masculinity vs. femininity), the next section explores the underlying male homosexuality in these scenes, focusing on Westerns of the post-1960s.

From Clean Body to Sexual Body

Historically, baths have served not only purposes of cleanliness, as in the Westerns mentioned above, but also sexual purposes—prostitution

⁶ For another counterargument to Neale, see Mitchell 150–87. Here, from the standpoint that “masculinity is not evident *prima facie* in the Western—not simply a blunt biological fact (a matter of correct anatomical parts, as it were)—but is as well a cultural fiction that must be created, then re-created,” Mitchell attends to Western heroes’ convalescence from physical torture. “The frequency with which the body is celebrated, then physically punished, only to convalesce, suggests something of the paradox involved in making true men out of biological men, taking their male bodies and distorting them beyond any apparent power of self-control, so that in the course of recuperating, an achieved masculinity that is at once physical and based on performance can be revealed” (154–55, 155).

⁷ *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), which Kato describes as “a text that symbolically satirizes the Western’s underlying male homosexuality” (112), is highly conscious of this point. After his opening nude shower scene, Jon Voight’s cowboy-hatted hustler becomes an object of homosexual, rather than heterosexual, desire, despite his hopes to the contrary. For a gendered analysis of the film, see also Tsukada 145–54.

in bathhouses dates back to ancient Rome. The use of bathhouses by screen cowboys was nonetheless restricted to the former under the Motion Picture Production (Hays) Code's regulations. The gradual erosion of the Code's power in the 1960s, however, allowed screen cowboys to interact sexually with women in the bath (consider, for instance, Jason Robards's amusing bath scene with Stella Stevens in *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* [1970]), which accompanied a paradoxical phenomenon: heterosexual intercourse increased the overall suggestiveness—and eventually the homosexual appeal—of male nudity. The male body, though displayed as a subject of heterosexual desire within the film, readily becomes an object of homosexual desire outside the film, in the darkness of movie theaters. This is a sexual body in a dual sense, simultaneously desiring and being desired.

Clint Eastwood manifests this duality in *Coogan's Bluff* (1968), Don Siegel's police film, actually a modern Western in disguise. Eastwood bathes just before he moves from Arizona to New York—from the wilderness to civilization. This seems reasonable for the film's status as a modern Western and the actor's persona as a Western hero. What surprises us, however, is the opening shot of the scene, a close-up of Eastwood's wet, naked chest, which engages the viewer with the erotic image of his skin (Figure 3.7). The pre-1960s Westerns offer no equivalent to such bold fetishization or eroticization of male nudity. Certainly, at the end of the scene, Eastwood drags his girlfriend into the bath and holds her, as if to assert his heterosexuality, but this cannot negate the initial homoerotic display of his body. We may, then,

advance an argument that the scene portrays homosexual appeal in a heterosexual display.

Sam Peckinpah's masterpiece Western *The Wild Bunch* (1969) includes a significant steam bath scene that associates male nudity with homosexuality *within* the text. First, we should recall that, as Christopher Sharrett notes, "Some critics observe half-seriously that Dutch [Earnest Borgnine] appears to be gay since he doesn't enter the brothel in the scene just before the Battle of Bloody Porch" (89). Sharrett cites further grounds for this queer reading. For example, "[during the final massacre,] Dutch throws himself in the line of fire as he reaches for Pike [William Holden]; the two men collapse looking at each other, Dutch saying Pike's name several times" (90). On one occasion, he also refers to the steam bath scene, noting the absence of Borgnine's "horsing around with whores" (89). The problem with Sharrett, however, is that he seems ignorant of the following two points: the historical affinity between steam baths and homosexuality—which we will explain in the next section—and the homosexual interaction between Borgnine and Holden during the scene.

Let us now elaborate on that interaction. Holden puts his left foot on the stone fence of the steam room, which reveals a deep scar left by a bullet on his upper thigh. As he massages his thigh with his hands, the raised edges of the scar expand and contract (Figure 3.8).⁸ Borgnine, who is sitting beside him, drops his gaze on that convulsing crevice

⁸ Certainly, on the narrative level, Holden's scar symbolizes his dark past of having lost his female lover, but this does not negate Borgnine's homoerotic gaze upon it during the steam bath scene.

(Figure 3.9). This subtle moment conveys the scene's sexual undertones. We can easily find a sexual link between the scar and the gaze. Indeed, sexual interpretation of a wound or scar is a common practice in art. In *Kirisuto no shintai* [*Christ's Body*], Atsushi Okada discusses several paintings that associate the wound on Christ's side with lips or labia (235–42). Holden's old scar, its writhing movement, and Borgnine's gaze upon it—images that Peckinpah emphasizes in this Western generally known for its scenes of bloodshed (“dance of death”)—should be understood in this same light. At the very least, paying attention to these images would render the bond between Holden and Borgnine, which culminates with their literal deaths in the final massacre, all the more important and beautiful.⁹

Arthur Penn's *The Missouri Breaks* (1976) offers a more explicit and blatant example. As Marlon Brando soaps himself in the bath, Jack Nicholson appears and levels a gun at him to avenge his brother's death. This encounter, which at first seems to take the form of a traditional Western showdown, takes an unexpected turn as Brando turns his naked back to Nicholson (Figure 3.10). Bewildered at this sight, the avenger can only shoot the bathtub and leave the room. The water flows noisily out of the bullet hole. The scene's sexual innuendo is self-evident: Brando's naked back, a phallic gun pointed at him, and the ejection of hot liquid clearly constitute a metaphor of men's homosexual intercourse.

⁹ For a gendered analysis of the film, particularly the final scene, see also Tsukada 138–45.

This bizarre bath scene gives us the impression that the Western genre has reached its breaking point. Indeed, the genre died its first death with Marlon Brando's naked back. According to statistics, in 1977, a year after the release of *The Missouri Breaks*, only seven Westerns were made, marking the lowest production in the genre's history (Buscombe, *BFI* 426).

Steam Baths, Homosexuality, Asia

To further explore the homosexual meanings of men's bath scenes, let us digress for a moment from the Western and discuss Anthony Mann's film noir, *T-Men* (1947), which includes a formidable murder scene in the steam bath: Charles McGraw locks Wallace Ford, who betrayed a counterfeiting gang, in the sauna room and kills him slowly and callously by turning the steam up to the maximum. It is worth recalling that, in film noir, steam in any form (e.g., fog, mist) often foreshadows the characters' dark future. In this scene, however, steam serves not only as a metaphor but also as an actual weapon that cuts short the betrayer's future. But what does this appalling murder mean in the context of our queer reading?

First, let us explain the historical affinity between steam baths and homosexuality in the United States, referring to Allan Bérubé's illuminating essays. At the turn of the twentieth century, when "all sex acts between men were illegal and condemned as 'crimes against nature,'" steam baths and other bathhouses became gay establishments "where men could be anonymous and intimate with each other"; and

during World War II, “[t]housands of servicemen went to the baths in New York City,” feeling that “they deserved this one last chance to enjoy other men in the freedom of the baths” (“History,” 189, 195). It is significant that, in those days, “[g]ay men, as well as women, discovered that the war mobilization also gave them new opportunities to come out” (“Marching,” 386).

Because of this homosexual context, Hollywood films, particularly those produced under the Hays Code’s regulations, tend to fulfill at least one, if not both, of the following two conditions when depicting steam baths.¹⁰ The first is female presence, which distracts the viewer’s attention from potential male homosexuality. In fact, in the aforementioned scene from *The Wild Bunch*, Warren Oates and Ben Johnson (but crucially, not Earnest Borgnine) bring Mexican prostitutes into the steam room. The same effect can be achieved more simply by mentioning women in conversation. For instance, in *Love in the Afternoon* (1957), Gary Cooper talks to John McGiver about his feelings for the heroine (Audrey Hepburn) in the steam room, and precludes the potential of their homosexuality. Quite ironically, then, men seem unable to enjoy a steam bath without women, at least on screen. The second condition is a spatiotemporal distance from contemporary U.S. society, which justifies the existence of homosexual

¹⁰ The treatment of homosexuality in Hollywood cinema was virtually prohibited by the following statement in the Hays Code: “*Sex perversion* or any inference to it is forbidden” (italics added). The statement was partially revised in the early 1960s, but Hollywood cinema nonetheless remained largely silent on homosexual issues for several decades, or in Vito Russo’s words, “Homosexuality had come out of the closet and into the shadows” (122).

overtones, if indeed there are any, as irrelevant to the viewer's own life. A representative example can be found in Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934), where the Roman senators massage their half-naked bodies with oil in the bath, a homoerotic image from the remote past.¹¹

The importance of *T-Men*'s steam bath scene lies in its audacious disregard of both conditions. The scene is set in contemporary U.S. society and entirely omits women from appearance on screen or mentions in conversation. The film even seems to stress the homosexual connotations of steam baths. Susan White's thorough analysis of the film's sexuality, "T(he)-Men's Room: Masculinity and Space in Anthony Mann's *T-Men*," is highly instructive in this matter. For example, she finds homosexual innuendos in an anti-counterfeiting investigator's remark, "Have you ever spent ten nights in a Turkish bath *looking for a man*?" noting that "there were many contemporary newspaper accounts of police infiltration into bathhouses where homosexual encounters were reputed to occur" (102). She also highlights the steam bath scene's homoerotic atmosphere, describing it as follows: "Moxie [McGraw], clad only in a towel and sweating profusely, looms over the Schemer [Ford], who realized he is about to die. . . . Moxie backs him up against the wall, craning his neck to look down upon the smaller man, in the kind of two-shots normally reserved for intimate heterosexual moments" (108) (Figure 3.11). Although

¹¹ Yet, there is a limit even to this condition. Indeed, despite its spatiotemporal distance, the exchange between Laurence Olivier and Tony Curtis in the bath scene of *Spartacus* (1960) was cut because of its apparent homosexual innuendos (Russo 121–22).

homosexual innuendos are not uncommon in film noir, a heterodox genre of Hollywood cinema, nothing else, even in this genre, matches the boldness of the steam bath scene in *T-Men*.

Of course, *T-Men*'s representation of homosexuality is highly problematic, as is the case with other films noirs. Ford is violently killed in the steam bath (vaguely suggestive of the Nazi slaughter of homosexuals in gas chambers), although the cruelty of the scene may arouse the viewer's resentment against heterosexism. But what historical conditions motivated this extremely violent scene? "The tolerance that some homosexual men and women experienced during the war proved to be all too temporary," writes Bérubé. "Many patriotic lesbians and gay men saw their wartime freedom disappear as the country they fought for began to turn against them with the advent of peace" ("Marching" 391). This ideological shift might have influenced the suggestion and subsequent negation of homosexuality in *T-Men*'s steam bath scene.

Moreover, *T-Men* exercises not only heterosexism but also Orientalism, sometimes simultaneously. Once again, White's argument is useful here. Attending to Ford's frequent chewing of Chinese dragon liver in the film, she asserts that "his body is a site of conflict between Eastern and Western medical practices" (101). Chinese dragon liver thus adds Asianness to Ford, in addition to the steam baths' homosexuality. Thus, his body integrates two kinds of otherness, Asianness and homosexuality. "The metonymic link between the Orient and homoeroticism is . . . a staple of film noir," adds White (101). In

short, *T-Men*'s bath scene disposes of this metonymically linked, doubly othered male body.

Eastwood and His Last Cigarette

This section focuses on Clint Eastwood's bath scenes, which epitomize the diversity and complexity of his body images.¹² Interestingly, Eastwood's artistic awareness of each film's thematic context and each character's unique qualities leads him to add something different in each bath scene, imbuing male representation with new shades of subtlety. Also important in our context is that Eastwood, known as the last Western star/director, frequently references the genre's tradition of bath scenes even as he transforms it, even in different genres.¹³

Eastwood's first bath scene appears in Don Siegel's *Coogan's Bluff*, the aforementioned 1968 police film, where he holds his girlfriend in the bath. An amusing variation of this can be found in Siegel's Western *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (1970). At the film's close, Eastwood, having forcibly entered Shirley MacLaine's room, bathes with her with all his clothes on. Note that, naked or clothed, Eastwood invariably displays his superiority to women.¹⁴ In *High Plains Drifter* (1972), the first Western directed by Eastwood, he tactfully reverses this male/female hierarchy. As Eastwood himself bathes with a cigar in

¹² For a cogent account of the characteristics of the images of Eastwood's body, see Matsuura 5–24.

¹³ Apart from the films mentioned in this chapter, Eastwood also has bath scenes in *Play Misty for Me* (1971), *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), and *Firefox* (1982).

¹⁴ Of course, in *Two Mules for Sister Sara*, Eastwood's body (fully clothed) cannot be an object of the viewer's homosexual desire as in *Coogan's Bluff*.

his mouth, someone bursts into the room and levels a gun at him; this sounds like a familiar Western situation, but the scene stands out in that the would-be killer is a woman. Moreover, Eastwood, who quickly killed three villains in an earlier scene, is nearly struck by her bullets. (Yet it is also important to note that he avoids the bullets by submerging himself, the cigar still clamped in his mouth, thus remaining a superhuman hero.)

More than twenty years later, in *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), Eastwood is struck by a woman's gaze rather than her bullets. This melodrama includes two bath scenes featuring Meryl Streep, who plays Eastwood's love interest, one by herself and the other with Eastwood. The noteworthy scene, however, depicts Eastwood removing his shirt and washing in Streep's yard as she secretly gazes upon him from an upstairs window.¹⁵ This clearly marks Eastwood's body as an erotic object, but crucially, he is neither embarrassed nor feminized throughout the film. Compare this to William Holden in *Picnic* (1955), who exposes his half-naked body to female stares in the yard scene and is later humiliated by a drunken woman in the picnic scene.¹⁶

In *Honkytonk Man* (1982), Eastwood attempts to humanize himself, after having repeatedly played a superhuman hero. At one point, when Eastwood takes a bath outdoors, a bull with horns (instead of a woman with a gun) attacks him by way of protecting his territory.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the structure of the gaze in *The Bridges of Madison County*, see Foery.

¹⁶ He is stripped of his shirt in public. For a refined analysis of male representation in *Picnic*, see Cohan 164–200.

Eastwood submerges himself, a cigarette in his mouth, as in *High Plains Drifter*; however, knowing that this ploy cannot stop the bull's attack, he jumps out of the water, clad in only a towel, and escapes. It is his nephew, played by Kyle Eastwood (Clint's son), who fights the bull instead. Set in the Great Depression, *Honkytonk Man* depicts the fragility of Eastwood's body and his teaching (although mostly by negative examples) of courage to his nephew, all interwoven in this seemingly unnecessary bath scene.

His body's fragility, expressed through action in *Honkytonk Man*, manifests itself fully in *Gran Torino* (2008). In preparation for death, Eastwood peacefully takes a bath in his house, displaying his body's obvious signs of aging and decreased musculature (Figure 3.12). Eastwood displays this shrunken, wrinkled body quite naturally and without hesitation, a surprising gesture for a formerly hyper-masculine Hollywood star. This gesture presents a striking contrast to John Wayne, who, in his last film *The Shootist* (1976), bathes in preparation for death much as Eastwood in *Gran Torino*, but never exposes his skin on screen.¹⁷

It is also noteworthy that Eastwood again smokes a cigarette in *Gran Torino*, but unlike the scenes in *High Plains Drifter* and *Honkytonk Man*, the cigarette continues to burn without getting wet. Even so, the cigarette does not secure the hero's masculinity as in traditional Westerns. As he lights it, Eastwood says to his dog, a reminder of his dead wife, "Yeah. I know, I know. Give me a break, will

¹⁷ The camera is set outside the bathroom.

you? It's the first time I've ever smoked in the house. Let a man enjoy himself, would you, girl?" This remark implies his wife's superiority over him and presages his death. In fact, this is the last time Eastwood lights a cigarette on screen. In the film's climax, shortly after the bath scene, the hero stands in front of the gangsters' guns, and as he puts a cigarette in his mouth and pulls a lighter from his jacket, the gangsters, mistaking it for a gun, unleash heavy gunfire on him.

These actions and props connect *Gran Torino* to *Forty Guns*, Samuel Fuller's 1957 Western discussed above. These films use similar props (a towel/a lighter) to link bath and duel scenes, although they are crucially different in the heroes' body images that the linkage establishes. The myth of cleanliness and strength no longer prevails in *Gran Torino*. Instead, the director/actor stresses his body's mortality, the inevitable nature of senility, and death. Eventually, however, this radical break from the convention of male representation makes Clint Eastwood an exceptional—even mythical—Hollywood star today.



Figure 3.1: Henry Fonda takes a bath with his hat on in *The Rounders*. MGM, 1994. VHS.

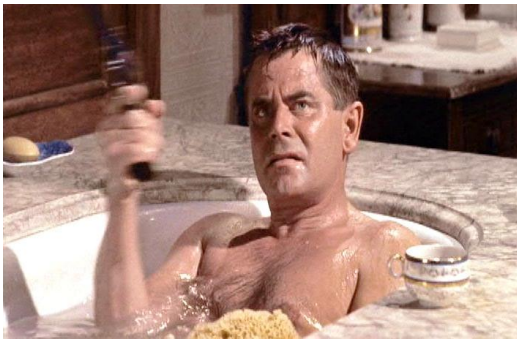


Figure 3.2: Glenn Ford switches from a sponge to a gun in *Cowboy*. Sony Pictures Entertainment Japan, 2007. DVD.



Figure 3.3: Barry Sullivan and others in the baths in *Forty Guns*. Kinokuniya Shoten, 2006. DVD.



Figure 3.4: Barry Sullivan walks down the street with a towel around his neck in *Forty Guns*.



Figure 3.5: Reginald Denny takes a bath in his private railroad car in *Cat Ballou*. Sony Pictures Entertainment Japan, 2007. DVD.



Figure 3.6: Tony Curtis stands up from the bath in *Some Like It Hot*. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment Japan, 2006. DVD.



Figure 3.7: Clint Eastwood's naked chest in *Coogan's Bluff*. Universal Pictures Japan, 2005. DVD.



Figure 3.8: The scar on William Holden's thigh in *The Wild Bunch*. Warner Home Video Japan, 2006. DVD.



Figure 3.9: Ernest Borgnine drops his gaze to William Holden's scar in *The Wild Bunch*.



Figure 3.10: Marlon Brando turns his naked back to Jack Nicholson in *The Missouri Breaks*. Warner Home Video Japan, 1991. VHS.



Figure 3.11: Charles McGraw and Wallace Ford face each other in the steam room in *T-Men*. Classic Media, 2005. DVD.



Figure 3.12: Clint Eastwood lights a cigarette in the bath in *Gran Torino*. Warner Home Video Japan, 2008. DVD.

Chapter 4

John Ford's Monument Valley Revisited: A New Perspective on the Quintessential American Landscape

"I'll take you home again, Kathleen
Across the ocean wild and wide."¹

Whether amidst the dust of the location or in a crowded theatre, the undulating landscape of Monument Valley, stretching between northern Arizona and southern Utah, always infuses the viewer with awe and excitement.² It was only about seventy years ago, however, that this unique geographical configuration formed by millions of years of erosion gained nationwide, even worldwide, recognition. In 1938, when John Ford went there to shoot his classic Western *Stagecoach*, the valley existed in relative obscurity, but eventually it rose to the status of the quintessential American landscape, not to mention an emblem of the cinematic frontier's wilderness. What, we might ask, were the social and cultural conditions that motivated this remarkable evolution? And what place does it now hold in the history of landscape representation in America?

¹ These lyrics are from "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen," a song written by Thomas P. Westendorf in 1875 and sung by Ken Curtis and the Sons of the Pioneers in John Ford's *Rio Grande* (1950).

² For a concise survey of the valley's history and the life of the Navajo there, see documentary *Monument Valley: Navajo Homeland* (2006).

This chapter charts the process by which Monument Valley was lifted from obscurity to the status of an American icon, tracing its history back to the emergence of landscape painting in nineteenth-century America. However, this inquiry does not end here. The overview of the valley's history in American culture is followed by a closer reading of its representation in cinematic texts, an investigation that has not yet been conducted in a satisfactory fashion. In particular, this chapter treats *The Searchers*, one of the masterpieces of Ford's oeuvre, intending not to reaffirm the cultural significance of the landscape identified above, but rather to renew it. *The Searchers* has been both praised and criticized for its representations of race, but what are the relationships between these and the methods of landscape representation with which they are inevitably intertwined? This question is considered in detail, which in turn necessitates a description of the characteristics of Ford's representation of the valley from a new perspective, using a metaphor concerning the neglected side of the director's life and imagination. The combination of a multi-aspectual inquiry and a metaphorical description will help distinguish our analysis from the previous literature on this subject.

As will become evident, our intention is not to cover the entire representation of Monument Valley in film, but rather to present an interpretation of one aspect of the valley that still merits social and aesthetic reevaluation today.

The Advent of Monument Valley

Landscape has long assumed a significant role in promoting the cultural independence of America.³ In the early to mid-nineteenth century, when the country had already achieved political and economic independence, but was still part of the European cultural sphere, the untamed nature of America, something believed lost in those already-modernized countries of Europe, attracted much attention from painters and, later, photographers who viewed it as a marker differentiating the New World from the Old.⁴ As the westward movement progressed, this interest likewise shifted from the wilderness of the East to that of the West, and the Rocky Mountains in particular gained wide popularity.⁵

Meanwhile, an aesthetic concept that had swept eighteenth-century English society was given new life in the society of nineteenth-century America: the sublime.⁶ To recall Edmund Burke's classical argument, the sublime is an aesthetic category for analyzing the experience we have when confronting something vast, fearful, and incomprehensible

³ For a broader investigation of the place and function of nature in American culture, see, for instance, essays collected in Engel.

⁴ Novak provides a detailed study of landscape painting in the nineteenth century and its cultural context.

⁵ After the Civil War, the relationships between American landscapes and national identity were further strengthened by the creation of the national park system and the development of domestic tourism, which continued into the twentieth century. Shaffer offers a thorough discussion of this subject. See also Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

⁶ Although an extended discussion cannot be carried out here, the sublime, loaded with more meanings than in Burke's argument, has been widely employed to analyze key aspects of the modern world. Maurizia Natali, for instance, uses the notion to discuss shock-and-awe spectacles in American visual culture, their ideological and psychoanalytical impact on the viewer, and their contribution to the reenactment of the country's imperial fantasies.

that causes in us a delightful awakening from our indolence in spite of—or because of—the resultant disturbing awareness of human insignificance. This paradoxical exaltation at the core of the concept rendered it highly appealing to an American society that was then increasing in political, economic, and cultural power, and this explains its import from Europe in the nineteenth century. American cultural figures of the day declared the prosperity and unity of the country by asserting that American—not European—landscapes were the ones worthy of being called sublime, providing a common source of pride for their citizens who were without a common cultural background.

American landscapes known at the time were not, however, necessarily all that distinct from their European counterparts. The Rockies, for instance, had similar mountain scenery to the Alps, though they were quite different in scale. But the late nineteenth century witnessed the discovery of an evidently uniquely American landscape: the Grand Canyon. Nowhere in Europe was a counterpart to this immense gorge to be found, with its many colorful strata carved by the Colorado River over millions of years. It is also worth stressing that, as Nye points out, the landscape of the Grand Canyon contained “virtually all of the elements Burke associated with the sublime in natural landscapes, including power, vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence, vastness, infinity, magnificence, and color” (10).

Monument Valley can be seen in this same light. In his seminal essay, “Inventing Monument Valley: Nineteenth-Century Landscape Photography and the Western Film,” Edward Buscombe has already

suggested this interpretation. There, distinguishing relatively American landscapes (e.g., the Rocky Mountains) from absolutely American landscapes (e.g., the Grand Canyon), he classifies Monument Valley in the latter category (121–27). With its bleak yet stunning rocky hill landscape, Monument Valley, too, could serve as a sign of American uniqueness and greatness. Interestingly, however, it took another half-century for this peculiar landscape to burst into the spotlight of American culture, although, as we shall explain later, the timing was more than a simple coincidence.

The reason for such a long delay of the advent of Monument Valley in the American mind was simply that, as Buscombe notes, “It was then, when John Ford first went there [in 1938], the furthest point in the continental United States from a railroad—180 miles” (“Inventing,” 125). Most Americans at that time had never visited or even heard of the place; when *Stagecoach* was released in 1939, there were only two advertisements that overtly featured the landscape (Poague 91). Its present worldwide recognition owes much to the film’s critical and commercial success, which then encouraged at least three other directors to use it as a backdrop in their films within the space of several years: *Kit Carson* (1940), *Billy the Kid* (1941), and *The Harvey Girls*.⁷

⁷ Monument Valley appeared in a few cultural texts even before *Stagecoach*. George Herriman, for instance, used the distinctive rock formations for backgrounds of his comic strip, *Krazy Kat*, since the 1910s (see Drabelle). In fact, as we mentioned in note 5 of the Introduction, *Stagecoach* was not even the first film featuring the valley; it was George B. Seitz’s *The Vanishing American*, an early successful example of a “pro-Indian” Western, although the film was not influential enough to raise

It was not, however, with *Stagecoach* that Ford's use of the valley and its iconic status in American culture was fully established. Joseph McBride writes: "Compared with Ford's later Western classics shot in Monument Valley, *Stagecoach* contains a relatively small number of scenes actually shot there and none featuring John Wayne or the other principals. . . . Only the first seven days of that schedule [forty-seven days of shooting] were spent in Monument Valley" (290). Even the famous, or rather infamous, "Indian attack" scene in the film was shot in Lucerne Dry Lake in California's Mojave Desert, not in Monument Valley.

But after the war, the valley gradually and steadily strengthened its presence, as Ford shot a series of Westerns there, such as *My Darling Clementine*, *Fort Apache* (1948) and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949). The frequency of its appearance on the screen increased, as did Ford's choices of camera placement in the area. Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, in carefully tracing the development of Ford's shooting in Monument Valley, regard *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* as a turning point (166): Ford shot an entire film there for the first time, and, more importantly, inserted self-referential outdoor shots. "*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* is . . . characterized by at least five panoramic shots which refer back to the previous films. . . . The audience is invited to evoke the films which have gone before" (166). Indeed, one can argue that Ford here demonstrated to the viewer his mastery of shooting at that location. Subsequently, he added three more Westerns

the landscape to an iconic status.

to his Monument Valley canon—*The Searchers*, *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960), and finally *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), one of which we will discuss later in detail.⁸

The valley's increasing presence after 1939 and especially in the postwar period was also conditioned by the social circumstances of the time. This was the period during which America, prompted by the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, suddenly shifted onto a war footing, eventually bringing victory to the Allies with minimal damage on the mainland. Based on the momentum it had established during the war, America was able to establish a new political, economic, and cultural hegemony in the postwar world. It is not hard to imagine what role Monument Valley came to play with its rocky hill landscape during this at least seemingly glorious period of transition. As mentioned above, in nineteenth-century America, the sublime landscape functioned as a shared symbol of the uniqueness and superiority of this multicultural nation; Monument Valley was then newly "discovered" and distributed throughout the world just as such an ideologically laden landscape as the Grand Canyon had been in the previous century.⁹ (Most of the later appearances of the valley in media, though often clichéd as in Marlboro

⁸ *Wagon Master* (1950) and *Rio Grande* are often considered to have been filmed in Monument Valley, but McBride notes that they were actually filmed 120 miles north of there, around Moab, Utah (288).

⁹ Significantly, the postwar period also saw a reappraisal of the sublime—a new aspiration to immensity and grandeur—in the American art world, which is most prominently recognizable in Barnett Newman's well-known essay, "The Sublime is Now." For a good survey of this tendency, see Alloway 31-41. Some scholars observe in this revival of the sublime a belief in American exceptionalism and superiority similar to those found in eighteenth-century discourse on the sublime, although one should not forget to respect the uniqueness of each artist's works in addition to the tendencies they have in common. See, for instance, Balfe.

ads, could also be understood in this respect.)

Ford's representation of the valley is, in fact, most prominently characterized by the stunning size contrast between the rocks and the characters, which inspires a feeling of the sublime in the viewer. Film critics have enthusiastically praised these soul-stirring images of contrast. For instance, let us refer to Figures 4.1 and 4.2 (*Stagecoach*; *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*). Their ideological effect aside, these extreme long shots of tiny human figures against massive buttes are undeniably overwhelming—this is all the more true since the viewer is identified with these miniscule figures throughout the course of the narrative. Such images can be found in other directors' Westerns as well—Clarence Brown and Maurice Tourneur's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1920) and Raoul Walsh's *Pursued* (1947), to name but a few. Western films, with a number of exceptions, have preferred deserts and canyons as their settings to mountains, trees, and lakes since the early stages of the genre's history (Buscombe, "Inventing," 118–19). It was nevertheless John Ford who presented these images in the most dramatic fashion, engraving them most deeply in the minds of Americans and people all over the world.

Another important feature of Ford's representation of the valley is its omnipresence. In his Westerns, Monument Valley could be transferred to any late nineteenth-century American frontier. Though it is actually located on the Utah/Arizona border, Ford used the valley as a stand-in for southern Arizona in *My Darling Clementine*, Texas in *The Searchers*, and even Oklahoma in *Cheyenne Autumn*. (Don Graham

half-jokingly writes: “[In *The Searchers*,] Monument Valley is transported to the Panhandle [of Texas]. One can drive forever in the Panhandle and never find those gorgeous red buttes” [73].) This, curiously enough, homogenized the diverse landscapes of the American West—making it seem as though the peculiar rock formations existed everywhere—and thereby privileged the valley as an American symbol. In other words, the transposition of landscape from one place onto another qualified this local scenery as a representative of the entire West. Here lies another key to the valley’s wide popularity, though this feature is less clearly recognizable in the films of other directors—most of them rendered the valley faithfully to actual geography, except for Stanley Kubrick, who used it during the protagonist’s space journey in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. (For more on this, see Chapter 5.)

The discussion we have presented above, however, offers only a static reading of the quintessential American landscape, an understanding that is pictorial and photographic but not cinematic at all. Film is a medium that depicts, to borrow Samuel Fuller’s famous remark, “love, hate, action, violence, death—in one word, emotion” in the flow of time and space in the narrative.¹⁰ Landscape in film therefore cannot be considered separately from the narrative and the characters inhabiting it. Indeed, Buscombe notes the necessity of analyzing Ford’s use of Monument Valley in relation to the narrative

¹⁰ This remark is addressed in Jean-Luc Godard’s *Pierrot le fou* (1965).

(“Inventing,” 127), but leaves the detailed research untouched. The following sections will begin the process of carrying that project forward.

Circular Narrative and Racial Representation in *The Searchers*

As mentioned earlier, each of Ford’s Westerns portrays Monument Valley from a different real-life location. This omnipresence, however, can also be recognized within a single text, namely, that of *The Searchers*, a clear representative of this phenomenon.¹¹ In this film, one of the most critically acclaimed Westerns ever made, the buttes and mesas are almost constantly present on the screen while two men track down an abducted girl over five years. The landscape, as a result, seems to cover a much wider spread than it actually does. This peculiarity becomes immediately clear upon a comparison of the film to *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Forrest Gump* (1994), two of the later American films that include a sequence filmed on the same location, where Monument Valley comprises only a part of the landscape during the protagonists’ journeys. Even when the differences in the objectives of their travels are considered, it is still hard to deny that there is something unusual, even unnatural, in the representations of landscape in *The Searchers*.

How, then, can we interpret this in relation to the narrative as the film unfolds? Joan Dagle’s “Linear Patterns and Ethnic Encounters in

¹¹ Another notable example is *Cheyenne Autumn*, where the buttes and mesas never disappear from the screen while the Cheyenne migrate from an Oklahoma reservation to their Wyoming homelands. I leave a detailed discussion of this film for future study.

the Ford Western” is highly suggestive in this regard.¹² Skillfully blending narratology and post-colonial theory, Dagle points out: “In the Ford Western, [the] movement away from linearity [of story and narration] in the postwar period is coincident with an increasingly complex investigation of the racial implications of the Western’s meta-narrative” (102). That is, the more interracial interaction and the subsequent merging of racial identities progress, the more the spatiotemporal complexity and vagueness of the narrative increase. As usual, Dagle treats *The Searchers* as the most conspicuous example of this (119–28). Since landscape in film is essentially constructed in—and therefore bound up with—the flow of time and space of the narrative, her argument seems to logically overlap with—or at least can be applied to—our argument on landscape representation, as we will explore later in detail.

In order to clarify further Dagle’s point, the film’s controversial and innovative racial representation needs explanation. The 1950s were the heyday of revisionist or “pro-Indian” Westerns, an aftereffect of the wartime democratic propaganda that had awakened the awareness of social minorities.¹³ A great number of Westerns in this period, such as *Broken Arrow* (1950) and *Apache* (1954), put themselves at odds with the traditional depiction of the Indian-white relationship. *The*

¹² For another interesting reading of the valley in the film, see, for instance, Hutson. Hutson here points out the parallelism between “the holes or laconisms in the landscape” and “the inexplicable holes in the story” (198).

¹³ For a further discussion of the cycle, see Slotkin 366–78; Neale, “Vanishing.”

Searchers is arguably the most complex of these, so complex that it “cannot easily be slotted into the liberal, pro-Indian cycle” (Neale, “Vanishing.” 9). Instead of simply inverting the “whites good, Indians bad” dichotomy, the film calls into question the very gesture of drawing a boundary between these two races. More interestingly, this is done not by casting a mixed race hero (as in *Flaming Star* [1960]) or an Indian heroine brought up by whites (as in *The Unforgiven* [1960]), but by casting a white hero and then establishing a mirror-like relationship between him and an Indian chief.

Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), the white hero of the film, hates Indians. But this hatred does not derive from a racial difference; on the contrary, it derives from his sameness with them. Ethan is disgusted by Indians because he cannot help seeing in them his own hideous nature—insatiable sexual and destructive impulses. Ford scholars have often pointed out that the story of the film properly begins when the Comanche chief, Scar (Henry Brandon), acts out Ethan’s repressed desire: Scar rapes the wife of Ethan’s brother, whom he secretly loves, and even massacres his brother’s family that he cannot be a part of despite his desires to the contrary. (A claim to the film’s racial stereotyping can thus hardly be dismissed; yet one should also not overlook how Ford used it to demystify the white hero’s persona, as we shall explain below.) The only survivors are their youngest daughter, Debbie (Lana Wood), and their adopted son, Martin (Jeffrey Hunter), who is one-eighth Cherokee with otherwise white heritage.¹⁴ Scar takes

¹⁴ Debbie’s elder sister, Lucy (Pippa Scott), is also taken away alive,

Debbie into captivity, while Ethan, accompanied by Martin, starts on a journey in search of the missing girl. The search for the white female captive by the white hero is, of course, one of the most basic Western plots, but *The Searchers* adds a new twist to it. As the journey drags on, and as Debbie moves from childhood to marriageable age in Comanche society, Ethan's motive shifts from rescuing Debbie to killing her. As Slotkin aptly puts it, "search and rescue" transforms into "search and destroy" (467). Ethan's racist feelings are so deeply embedded in him that he thinks a "racially tainted" white woman, even if she is a blood relative, deserves only death.

But what strikes us most is that, as Ethan's hatred for Indians is disclosed, so also is his "Indianness," or his closeness to the despised racial other. None of the other whites know them better than he does. It is true that the hero of the Western film is by definition a mediator between civilization and the wilderness—in terms of race, the territory of whites and that of "the savages"—and is therefore usually represented as a man with considerable knowledge of Indian customs and ways of life. The radical nature of *The Searchers*, however, lies in that this knowledge not only proves the hero's skillfulness in mediating between those contrasting worlds, but also "includes an intimate acquaintance, even an identification with stereotypically 'savage' qualities" (Slotkin 465). Surprisingly enough, Ethan massacres the Comanche as they do whites, and mutilates their dead bodies in ways based on their beliefs and customs. At one point in the story, he shoots

but soon found to have been killed.

the eyes of a buried Comanche, explaining that, in the beliefs of the Comanche, an eyeless body “can’t enter the spirit land” and “has to wander forever between the winds”; near the end of the film, he even scalps a dead Comanche, this time Scar, who is said to have scalped Martin’s birth mother.

Like many scholars, Dagle treats the sequence in which Ethan and Scar meet as a manifestation of their mirror-like relationship (123–24). After years of wandering, Ethan and Martin finally locate and confront the Comanche chief. What characterizes this confrontation is, first of all, a well-formed shot/reverse shot cutting between the now longtime enemies, Ethan and Scar, literally and blatantly establishing them as mirror-images of each other (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). The sequence likewise discloses their mirroring in various ways, but above all that mirroring becomes evident in the verbal exchange that follows. As an accusation of marrying a white woman, Ethan says to Scar: “You speak good American for a Comanch’. Someone teach ya?” A few moments later, Scar responds to him: “You speak good Comanche. Someone teach you?”—a striking remark that alludes not only to their pairing but also, and more importantly, to the white hero’s intimate contact with a non-white woman. What is revealed here, in other words, are the traces of interracial interaction inextricably entangled with his command of the Comanche tongue.

The film’s daring representation of race had been widely studied even before Dagle. What distinguishes her essay from most of the previous works is the attention to the parallelism between the

vagueness of the racial representation and that of the spatiotemporal representation in the same film, the latter of which she sees in the repetition of images and sounds that remind us of the well-known opening sequence (121); the obscurity of temporal and spatial markers during the protagonists' journey (121); and the insertion of a complex flashback sequence in the middle of the film that is rarely seen in Ford's Westerns (125–26). Dagle rightly relates these external complexities to the internal ones concerning the racial identity described above.

There is likely to be some dissatisfaction with Dagle's argument, however. First, she stops short of enumerating some of the contortions of spatiotemporal representation in *The Searchers* and does not fully explore the idiosyncratic nature of the film's landscape representation that is interwoven with the space and time of the narrative. Dagle describes Monument Valley in the film as "the space of cultural confrontation" and "the landscape of a psychological journey" (122). While these are valid characterizations, she nevertheless fails to closely examine the innovation of Ford's representation of the valley, its intriguing impression on the viewer, and the director's peculiar imagination behind it. Second, she treats space/landscape and characters as two interrelated but separate entities and overlooks the significance of their interaction, which the film carefully explores. Indeed, what seems to be lacking is a phenomenological perspective that regards characters as bodily beings living in, or rather with, space/landscape. The aims of the next section are, then, as follows: (1)

to redescribe the film's landscape representation in a more vivid and evocative way suited to its uniqueness and originality, and (2) to reexamine the dynamic relations between the characters and the world that encompasses—even constitutes—their beings.

Across the Ocean Wild and Wide

We have already seen that, due to its omnipresence, Monument Valley in *The Searchers* seems to extend almost endlessly in the flow of time and space of the narrative. Fully appreciating this unexpected spread, then, stimulates our metaphorical imagination and leads us to wonder whether Monument Valley is no longer a land with buttes and mesas but rather a vast sea with islands of various sizes. That is, it begins to appear not as a desert of sand and rocks, but as an archipelago.¹⁵ We should recall here that J. A. Place, in discussing *The Searchers* in her classic book, *The Western Films of John Ford*, states: “Ford uses it as Homer used the sea. It is rather like the sea in its changes, its colors, its moods” (171).

Although Place does not offer a detailed explanation, the analogy between *The Searchers* and the *Odyssey* is pertinent: Monument Valley in the Fordian text can rightly be compared to the Mediterranean Sea of the Homeric text in its imaginary size (vast enough for several years of

¹⁵ In his recent work, *Gunto-sekai ron*, cultural anthropologist Ryuta Imafuku illuminates the transboundary cultural imagination of some of the world's greatest artists from a new epistemological standpoint—a standpoint that understands the world not as isolated continents but as an archipelago. This reflects the remarkable practice of Édouard Glissant's “archipelagic thinking.” The following section is partly indebted to his work.

wandering), its rolling scenery (undulating with rocky hills or islands), and its disorienting magnetism (preventing the travelers from proceeding immediately to their destination).¹⁶ Ethan and Martin are then, as it were, the drifting sailors of the American West.

John Ford was a man of the sea.¹⁷ His well-known statement at a Director's Guild meeting in 1950—"My name is John Ford. I make Westerns."—often associates him with the dry land of the Southwest, but a further review of his biography reveals the importance of the ocean in his life. Born in Cape Elizabeth and brought up in Portland, both coastal towns in southern Maine, he sailed for his father's homeland, Ireland, in his twenties. He took two long voyages to the Far East in his thirties and bought a ketch that he was going to use as an alternate home in his early forties. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, he made war documentaries for the Navy Department in the Pacific with his own photographic unit, part of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). There is no doubt that these maritime experiences exerted a profound influence on his sea films, such as *The Long Voyage Home* (1940) and *They Were Expendable* (1945). Is it, then, an unreasonable assumption that the same holds true for his Westerns? That is, does not the same rhythm of the U.S. Marines sailing through the Philippine Islands in *They Were Expendable* reverberate in *The Searchers*, where Ethan and Martin thread their ways through a series of buttes and

¹⁶ Day presents a detailed comparison between *The Searchers* and the *Odyssey* in terms of character formation and narrative structure.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the relationship between Ford and the sea, see Silver 22–29.

mesas?

From such a point of view, we can shed new light on the often forgotten but beautiful scene in *The Searchers* that Shigehiko Hasumi has praised as a “magic moment” in his thought-provoking discussion on the various throwing gestures in Ford’s films (“John Ford”). After a brief reunion with the now-grown Debbie (Natalie Wood), Ethan and Martin, knowing that she has already been absorbed into the alien society, pitch a tent by the creek near the Comanche camp for the next day’s negotiation with Scar. Irritated and disappointed, Ethan picks up a small rock at his feet and throws it into the creek, which gently ripples the surface of the water; then, as if responding to the spreading waves, Debbie suddenly appears on the top of a sand hill across the creek and comes down from it (Figure 4.5). It is indeed a “magical moment” in which it seems as if the ripple Ethan caused surged over the land and brought Debbie back to him on its reactive waves. It is even reminiscent of the breathtaking scene in D. W. Griffith’s *The Unchanging Sea* (1910), in which the sea waves crashing against the shore take the long-missing husband back to his wife (Figure 4.6). Ford’s unique directing here imbues the land of the American West with the semantics of the sea.

Also noteworthy is the film’s frequent use of dissolves. According to Peter Stowell, *The Searchers* has 41 dissolves within 675 shots, whereas *Stagecoach* has only 18 dissolves within 636 shots (133). In narrative cinema, the dissolve is often a vehicle for indicating the passage of time; since *The Searchers* tells a story that covers five years,

Ford's decision to link a considerable number of shots with dissolves seems perfectly reasonable. It should be added, however, that, as Peter Lehman writes, "At times he [Ford] uses dissolves within scenes which do not in any sense require their continuity broken" (Luhr and Lehman 111). This encourages us to put forth a more flexible and productive interpretation: those dissolves can be construed as an artistic device providing a sea-like seamlessness and mobility to the landscape that unfolds in the film, which would otherwise be segmented and immutable, rather than merely as an index of the passage of time (Figure 4.7). Monument Valley in *The Searchers* is thus like the sea in a montage as well as in a *mise-en-scène* ("its changes, its colors, its moods" [Place 171]).

In this amorphous landscape—a space not only complex, vague, and twisted, but also changing, fluctuating, and even intertwining with another space—live the unsettled and unsettling travelers who ceaselessly merge their identity with the cultural other. But this statement by itself is not enough to fully grasp the dynamics between landscape and characters. We should say, rather, that it is this landscape that prompts and makes possible the cross-cultural negotiations between the self and the other and the constant transformations of their identities. Landscape is, as Mikiro Kato defines it, "a mobile place, or an emotional device, in which human beings have varied experience ranging from stupidity to revelation" (*Hyosho to hiho* 129), and, as Kato asserts, in spite of their physical constraints, some filmmakers have succeeded in scrutinizing that

complex interaction between landscape and characters (123–33). He cites Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni as examples, and to that list we should add John Ford—at least as far as *The Searchers* is concerned. The film’s innovative racial representation would be much less vivid, persuasive, and compelling if Ford did not allow us to experience the ever-shifting landscape through the eyes and bodies of the leading characters.

But here we might ask: do cross-cultural encounters between the self and the other in an amorphous landscape only cause hatred, jealousy, and revenge, as in Ethan’s case? Is it impossible to escape from the vicious cycle of mutual hatred and violence? At first, it may seem so; yet later Ford suggests that an alternative answer is possible. For while traveling through the landscape, Ethan himself has, though somewhat in spite of himself, effected a gradual transformation in his racist attitude. After the bitter reunion with Debbie, Ethan tells Martin that he has decided to leave all his property to him; on the one hand, this signifies Ethan’s abandonment of Debbie, but this also signals his acceptance of Martin, whom he had despised for his part-Cherokee lineage. Significantly, Ford helps us to apprehend this transformation less through the dialogue than through the shifting and changing landscape that encompasses and embraces the white hero.

Ethan is not an observer of the landscape; rather, he is a resident—even a participant—of it. In the aforementioned rock-throwing scene, it was Ethan who mobilized the landscape, drawing Debbie back to him across the sand hill. It can be said, then, that this

act anticipates Ethan's acceptance of Debbie in the climax scene, although at this moment he mercilessly brandishes his gun at her—in other words, the attractive force Ethan mobilized from the landscape foretells the later disappearance of his repulsion toward Debbie. There is, in fact, a correspondence between the rock-throwing scene and the climax scene, where Ford once again makes Debbie run down a sand hill, this time pursued by Ethan (Figure 4.8). In this scene, when she stumbles at the entrance of a cave under the hill, at the very moment the viewer expects him to kill her, Ethan reaches for her and lifts her up in his arms, saying: "Let's go home. Debbie." (Figure 4.9). The correspondence is, then, as follows: in the rock-throwing scene, Ethan picking up a rock is followed by Debbie's descent from the hill (Figure 4.5); whereas in the climax scene, Debbie and Ethan descend from the hill, and then he holds her up—a beautiful alternation of downward and upward motion as if the imaginary waves Ethan caused in the former scene still continue. This is how Ford visualizes "search and destroy" once again turning it into "search and rescue" (Slotkin 467).

For a further understanding of the interaction between the landscape and the characters, we should also take a look at the heroine of the film, Laurie (Vera Miles). Laurie is Martin's lover who awaits his return at home throughout the story, and is hence less associated with the landscape. Ford scholars have recently devoted increasing attention to her because it is in Laurie that the white society's racism emerges in its most remarkable and visible form. As Gaylyn Studlar observes, although "Westerns normally are expected to assert the good

woman's role in bringing civilization to the frontier and maintaining it there," the white heroine in *The Searchers* delivers a "bloodthirsty speech . . . while [quite ironically] she sits in her white wedding dress" (54). At one point in the story, Laurie insists to Martin that he should abandon his beloved sister, saying: "Fetch *what* home? The leavings of a Comanche buck . . . sold time and again to the highest bidder . . . with savage brats of her own?"¹⁸

This is certainly a surprising remark. More important, however, is that this "bloodthirsty speech" comes between the two occasions of Ethan's acceptance of his "racially tainted" relatives, Martin and Debbie. In such a way, Ford encourages us to compare the reactions of Ethan and Laurie—the former a drifter, the latter a settler—against their racial others, only one of whom shows a significant, if slight, possibility of changing his racist attitude. Consequently, a simple yet profound truth is revealed: although drifting in an amorphous landscape and subsequently merging with the racial other can cause a chain of hatred, it is also the only effective way to foster interracial understanding, solidarity, and tolerance. Landscape is indeed "a mobile place, or an emotional device, in which human beings have varied experience ranging *from stupidity to revelation*" (Kato, *Hyosho to hiho* 129, italics added).

The Searchers does leave many questions "unanswered and

¹⁸ While delivering a "bloodthirsty" speech against Debbie, Laurie does not seem to mind Martin's part-Cherokee lineage, which indirectly endorses the white society's deeply rooted discrimination against "Indianized" white female captives. For a concise discussion on this subject, see Slotkin 461–73.

unanswerable” (Dalge 126), which could be taken as a virtue or a weakness. We are never told why and when Ethan decides to save Debbie instead of killing her; neither are we sure whether he completely abandoned his racist thinking, since Ethan, having taken Debbie home, leaves alone without saying a word at the film’s close.¹⁹ That said, we may still conclude that, in *The Searchers*, Ford carried out an extraordinary cinematic attempt—allowing the viewer to live the problem of racial heterogeneity and the difficulty/possibility of mutual understanding through the unprecedented rendering of a landscape that was ever-changing, ever-shifting like the sea.²⁰

Endless Field

Whether one stresses its vertical sublimity in a single image or its horizontal spread in an interracial narrative, Monument Valley assumes different, even contrasting, roles. As we have seen, it can serve as both a privileged sign of American unity, uniqueness, and superiority, and as

¹⁹ In contrast, Martin enters the house of Laurie’s family with her. Martin’s bath scene in the middle of the narrative is worth mentioning in this context. There, Laurie jestingly douses him with water—a reminiscence of Donald Crisp’s bath scene in *How Green Was My Valley* (1941)—and thus reverses the traditional male/female hierarchy of the Western. (According to Buscombe, this action was not scripted [*The Searchers* 45]). Yet, this bath scene does not have a negative connotation for the male bather. Indeed, as Studlar notes, Ford’s films sometimes “break down gender polarities to suggest the accommodation of masculinity to feminine values” (46). (For a detailed analysis of male bath scenes in the Western, see Chapter 3.) Also, note that there is no equivalent to this scene for Ethan, and that this difference between the two “searchers” corresponds to the difference in their actions at the film’s close—one enters the house and the other leaves.

²⁰ Another “unanswered and unanswerable” question is how we should “read the ‘new’ Western family that includes the assimilated, or recovered, or hybrid bodies of Marty and Debbie” (Dalge 126). Ford treated the issue of the reintegration of released captives into white society in his later Western, *Two Rode Together*.

an evocative stage of racial merging in a country once assumed to be uniform. John Ford in *The Searchers* used the valley as a dynamic, archipelago-like space, where the self, like the waves of the sea, inevitably encounters, superimposes itself on, and passes into the racial other. This introduction of the aspect of race and the metaphor of the sea aims to represent a new, more mature stage in the study of Monument Valley, though it still remains as but one tentative reading of the quintessential American landscape in cinematic/cultural texts. When Ford died in 1973, Woody Strode, who collaborated with the director on four films (including *Sergeant Rutledge*), said at the funeral: “He should be buried in Monument Valley” (qtd. in Sinclair 212). Perhaps his soul rests there. Yet the Monument Valley he and other artists represented should continue to live on in the vast, even endless field of our interpretations.



Figure 4.1: Human figures against massive rocky formations in *Stagecoach*. Criterion, 2010. DVD.

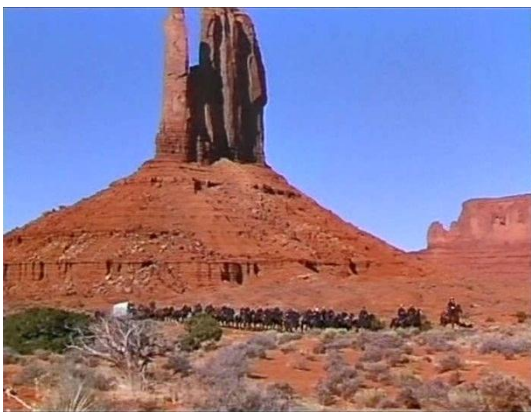


Figure 4.2: A similar image to Figure 4.1 in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. Turner Home Entertainment, 2002. DVD.



Figure 4.3: A close-up of Ethan (John Wayne) in *The Searchers*. Warner Home Video Japan, 2006. DVD.

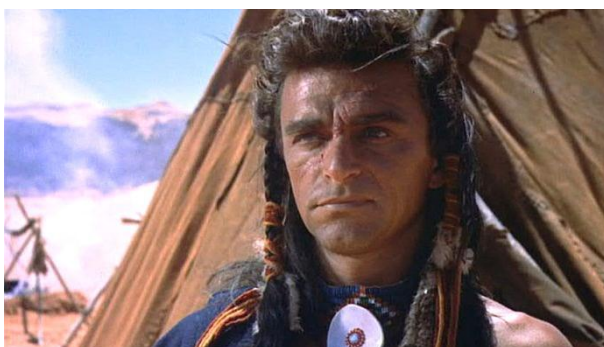


Figure 4.4: A close-up of Scar (Henry Brandon), Ethan's mirror image, in *The Searchers*.



Figure 4.5: Debbie (Natalie Wood) appears coming down from the top of a sand hill across the creek in *The Searchers*.



Figure 4.6: The wave sweeps men to the shore in *The Unchanging Sea*. Kino Video, 2002. VHS.



Figure 4.7: A dissolve links two shots of Monument Valley in *The Searchers*.



Figure 4.8: Debbie, pursued by Ethan, runs down a sand hill in *The Searchers*.



Figure 4.9: Ethan lifts Debbie up in his arms in *The Searchers*.

Chapter 5

The Politics of Seeing Nature: Emerson, *How the West Was Won*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*

[E]ven our eyeballs, what little you can see of them between
the lids, have taken on a coral pink, the color of the dunes.

—Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaires*

In the last year of the twentieth century, NASA's Mars Global Surveyor photographed mesas and buttes reminiscent of Monument Valley on the Elysium Plains. This image, published as part of an article intriguingly entitled, "NASA Probe Explores 'Martian Monument Valley,'" sets off in many a strong sense of *déjà vu*. For in 1968, some thirty years prior, similar images—this time of the real Monument Valley—were utilized by Stanley Kubrick in his classic *2001: A Space Odyssey* in depicting his protagonist's space journey. Here, what is worthy of our attention, and what will be one of the critical issues addressed in this chapter, is the peculiar way in which the protagonist sees this landscape. While the preceding chapter explored the relationships between landscape and race, this chapter focuses instead on the politics of seeing nature—a subject that has been widely examined in the fields of literary studies and art history, but not yet in film studies. Kubrick's masterpiece looms large in this context because it not only deals with the theme of seeing nature in a truly unique fashion, but also expands it to that of seeing

the *planet*. Indeed, this chapter aims to stretch our discussion of the cinematic frontier to a planetary scale, just as in Chapter 2 our discussion on the railroad in the West ultimately reached out to reveal the relationship between railroad and nuclear technologies. But first, it is necessary to turn our gaze once again onto the portrayal of nature in nineteenth-century America.

1836: An Eye's Odyssey

In accordance with previous literature on this subject, let us begin with Ralph Waldo Emerson. No one represented more vividly the American mode of seeing nature than this nineteenth-century poet-philosopher. Emerson's view of nature was summarized in his strange but evocative metaphor, a "transparent eyeball," appearing in his 1836 essay, *Nature*:

Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (8)

The primary goal of the transcendentalism that Emerson espoused was the awakening of the divinity residing in every human being. But how could one accomplish this? For Emerson, the answer lay in nature. Since the revelation of God could be studied in nature, which was itself a special correspondence to the human mind, one could rouse one's inner divinity by deeply absorbing oneself into nature. When this

attempt at self-awakening was expanded to the national level, Emerson's thought took the form of what Oliver Wendell Holmes called "America's intellectual Declaration of Independence." But here, the poet-philosopher's attitude toward nature constitutes our primary focus.

Emerson relied primarily on sight when confronting nature.¹ He lived in the ocular-centric nineteenth century that witnessed the development of optical devices such as telescopes, microscopes, cameras, and notably, panoramas. His reliance on vision was, however, extreme and exceptional: no one but him became a pure ocular being, or the "transparent eyeball." In the well-known caricature of the passage above drawn by Christopher P. Cranch (Figure 5.1), Emerson is only one step short of a complete transformation into the "transparent eyeball," barely able to support his gigantic eye with his thin appendages. However nonsensical it might have looked, losing his body would have been a perfectly favorable situation for Emerson, for it would allow him to break free of the constraints of the material world.

But this was not all. Emerson also wrote in the same essay: "If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them" (24). To complicate the matter, Emerson's "transparent eyeball" here made transparent the object of its gaze. The double meaning inherent to the word "transparent" should be noted: on the one

¹ My explanations here are most directly indebted to the detailed analysis of Emerson's *Nature* in Noda 94–109.

hand, it denotes the disappearance of a body, while on the other, it refers to the elimination of vagueness and ambiguity. Having liberated himself from physical limitations, Emerson proceeded to transform nature and its incomprehensibility into a transparent, comprehensible object. We should conclude, then, that the poet-philosopher did not see nature at all, despite his claim to the contrary; rather than nature itself, he saw in it only what he wanted to see, namely “causes and spirits.” Figuratively speaking, Emerson dyed nature in his favorite color—the color of transcendentalism.

Care must be taken, then, not to be deluded by the seemingly neutral tone of the word “transparent” in discussing Emerson’s view of nature. From an ideological standpoint, we may posit that Emerson’s eye was in fact neither transparent nor colorless; rather, contrary to its appearance, it was harmful to nature, unilaterally forcing transparency onto it and then suffusing it with its own preferred hue from on high. If we accept the position that America has controlled and dominated nature since the nineteenth century while simultaneously praising it as a marker of national identity, then it can be assumed that this paradoxical attitude was already and clearly evident in Emerson. Certainly, a number of twentieth-century writers—Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, and Barry Lopez, to name but a few—have radically challenged this view, but it is not our intention to analyze this position in detail since much has already been written about it.² Let us rather

² See, for instance, Noda 19–31, 145–64. For a discussion of the views of Abbey and Dillard on nature and technology, see, respectively, Scheese; Legler.

examine the relationship between Emerson's *Nature* and Hollywood films that has not yet been explored.

From Emerson to Cinerama

As a specialist in American cinema, I find that reading Emerson's *Nature* alongside his assertions about the transparent eyeball always brings to mind the 1962 Western *How the West Was Won*, an epic about three generations of a pioneer family filmed in the Cinerama process. The development of widescreen cinema in the 1950s was pioneered by Cinerama, but this format, which first saw commercial use in 1952, involved serious technical difficulties. The three 27mm lenses mounted on the camera made close-up cinematography and traditional backlighting almost impossible (Belton 94). Cinerama thus temporarily abandoned narrative films that required these techniques and instead specialized in travelogues, a documentary genre capable of increasing the appeal and value of the widescreen. This strategy proved remarkably successful, and the first Cinerama feature *This is Cinerama* (1952) became one of the biggest hits of the 1950s, with box office profits of over \$32 million, compared to the production cost of only \$1 million (Belton 99). This success—all the more surprising since the film could only be shown in a handful of theaters equipped with special projectors—encouraged the production of other Cinerama travelogues: *Cinerama Holiday* (1955), *Seven Wonders of the World* (1955), *Search for Paradise* (1957), and *South Seas Adventure* (1958).

The importance of travelogues in an examination of the politics

of seeing nature lies in their frequent use of scenery. Indeed, sometimes it is not humans, but rather nature that plays, as it were, the leading role in such films. Travelogues reached their full bloom in the first decades of cinema, as explained in Chapter 1, but continued to enjoy popularity during the classical Hollywood era (Ruoff, “Filmic,” 13). Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack’s early expedition films (most notably, *Grass: A Nation’s Battle for Life* [1925]) and James Fitzpatrick’s two travelogue series from the 1930s to the early 1950s (*Traveltalks: The Voice of the Globe* and *Vistavision Visits*) are representative of this, and the release and subsequent success of *How the West Was Won* should be considered in this light. However, *How the West Was Won* and other Cinerama travelogues also had a distinctive feature: the extensive use of aerial cinematography, for which Paul Mantz, an acclaimed stunt pilot, flew his converted B-25 bomber both in the United States and overseas.

In the meantime, gradual technological improvements eventually enabled the production of narrative films in the Cinerama format, resulting in the releases of *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1962) and *How the West Was Won*. Yet the latter film uses aerial footage from *This is Cinerama* in both its prologue and its epilogue in order to draw on the lasting appeal of travelogues—a reasonable commercial strategy. The epilogue is of particular importance here because it is followed by a shot of Monument Valley set in the 1880s, the third year of which saw the death of Emerson. In fact, the narrative of the film covers the period from the 1830s to the 1880s, which

coincides exactly with the period during which the poet-philosopher was active. In this way, this dramatic epilogue aerial scene provides an intriguing bridge between the 1880s and the middle of the twentieth century, when the film was released. Most importantly, it points us toward the ideological resonance that exists between Emerson's *Nature* and *How the West Was Won*.

Near the film's close, when George Peppard's marshal and his family ride to their new home, Monument Valley appears on the screen; and then, the camera position changes to create an overhead view of the American West (Figure 5.2), reminding us of the following line from *Nature*: "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes" (8). Despite the difference between the forest in the East and the desert in the West, the gesture of looking down on nature from a privileged viewpoint is exactly the same. Moreover, the camera soars into the air of the West and looks across the vast landscape, as if visualizing another line from *Nature*: "I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (8). Also noteworthy is the gradual change in the landscape: we see first the desert (Monument Valley and the surrounding area), and then a dam (the Hoover Dam), an open-air mine, fields, a lumber yard, and finally the cities (Los Angeles and San Francisco [Figure 5.3]). This undoubtedly reflects the process of the technological conquest of nature. Whereas the nineteenth-century poet-philosopher dyed nature in the color of transcendentalism, the Cinerama Western dyes it in the color of

American civilization, again unilaterally transforming it from high above.

As mentioned earlier, Emerson shaped his view of nature according to the development of optical devices. It is worth stressing that Cinerama is, as its name suggests, a direct descendant of the nineteenth-century panorama, which also provides collateral evidence of the ideological resonance between *Nature* and *How the West Was Won*. In the next section, we will further explore the history of visual culture and its relevance to American society.

Nature and Visual Culture

Since the Renaissance, in accordance with modern philosophy privileging human reason as the source of meaning and value, Western visual culture has sought an ideal, transcendental point of view. Robert Barker's first panorama that opened in Leicester Square, London, in 1794, foreshadowed the ocular-centric nineteenth century—a circular room with a large painting wrapped around the inner wall, providing the spectator inside with a seamless view of a broad landscape. Barker's panorama was a phenomenon reflective of the spirit of the age, rather than his personal invention. Indeed, such a “panoramic” view was widely recognizable in contemporary literature and paintings—an excellent American example would be Thomas Cole's *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow)*, the appearance of which coincided with that of Emerson's *Nature* in 1836.

Although the emergence of cinema is usually ascribed to the exhibition of the Lumière Cinématographe at the end of 1895, no less important to our discussion is that of Raoul Grimoin-Sanson's Cinéorama at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Rather than feature a painting, the exhibition offers a panorama with a 360-degree movie screen onto which ten roughly synchronized projectors cast moving images taken from a hot-air balloon (Komatsu 77). The Paris Exposition and the subsequent Buffalo Exposition of 1901 were also remarkable in film history for their use of a panning tripod to produce filmed panoramas, or panning shots, of exhibition sights (Friedberg 86–87). Indeed, in the sense that any film can create the illusion of all-seeingness through camerawork and editing, movie theaters in general, not Cinéorama or Cinerama theaters in particular, can be regarded as more advanced descendants of Barker's panorama.³

Let us now focus more on *what* is seen than *how* it is seen. American visual culture was in this respect characterized by a deep affection for the country's own nature. Stephan Oettermann, in his excellent account of panorama history, asserts: “[Unlike Europeans,] Americans were not especially interested in Versailles or the ruins of ancient cities [for the subject of panoramas]. Americans were interested in their own country and the American frontier they were pushing westward” (323).⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, nature

³ For a useful discussion on the relationship between panoramas and movie theaters, see Kato, *Eigakan to kankyaku no bunkashi* 3–21.

⁴ In the United States, moving panoramas were more popular than fixed, circular ones. For more information on this, see Oettermann 313–44, 378–82.

was an embodiment of the national identity for Americans in the nineteenth century, which partly explains why Emerson and Cole had such deep affection for it. Also noteworthy is the rise of the American Grand Tour. While the original Grand Tour, which reached its peak in the eighteenth century, was a journey undertaken within Europe by Europeans (mainly the British) seeking cultural education, the American Grand Tour of the nineteenth century was the exploration of American nature by none other than Americans themselves in search of their own national identity. Among the popular destinations were the Hudson River, the Catskills, Lake George, the Erie Canal, Niagara Falls, and Mount Holyoke, where Cole painted *The Oxbow* (Sears 4, 56).

In the middle of the nineteenth century, again as stated in the previous chapter, the interests of Americans shifted from the wilderness of the East to that of the West, where they found more distinctive and compelling features of their country's geography. The Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone—now representatives of the American West—were explored and represented repeatedly in painting and photography. Early filmmakers were naturally attracted to these places. The Edison's company filmed a series of actualities in Yellowstone in 1897, followed by the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company in Yosemite in 1902 (Peterson 87–88, 97). The early twentieth century saw the launch of the “See America First” publicity campaign, a nationalistic campaign designed to redirect American tourists' destinations from Europe to the American West. Even in the 1910s, this encouraged the production of films focusing on the

landscape of the American West—what might be termed, to borrow a phrase from *Moving Picture World*, “‘See America First’ pictures” (qtd. in Peterson 92).⁵

We may then call *This is Cinerama* the ultimate “See America First” picture that emerged in the 1950s. Although the film takes the viewer to both Europe and America, its nationalistic flavor is readily imparted by the title of the last sequence, “America the Beautiful.” The success of this ultimate “See America First” picture, which itself features the Grand Canyon and Yosemite, also coincided with the postwar increase in the number of tourists to national parks, where national pride and the demand for recreation could be satisfied, although *How the West Was Won*’s aerial scene (i.e., footage taken from *This is Cinerama*) completely lacks the conservationism that characterizes national parks. Soaring up in the sky in a proud expression of the technological conquest of nature, the scene displays the magnitude of human arrogance and hauteur, and it is precisely in this respect that Kubrick’s *2001* becomes all the more meaningful.

2001: An Eye’s Odyssey

Though a comparison between *How the West Was Won* and *2001* might seem odd at first sight, there is a historical premise for it. “Kubrick,” according to David Hughes, “saw that it might be possible to make a science-fiction equivalent [of *How the West Was Won*], also using the three-camera Cinerama process, and even took to referring to his own

⁵ For a detailed account of this campaign, see Shaffer.

project privately as *How the Solar System Was Won*" (148). While in the end Kubrick decided to use a different widescreen process and changed the title first to *Journey Beyond the Stars* and then later to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, his original intention for this film remains pertinent to our current discussion.⁶ Moreover, the completed film shares a significant similarity with the Cinerama Western, that is, the insertion of a large-scale aerial scene that either follows or contains the image of Monument Valley toward the end of the film.⁷

2001 tells a story of human evolution. Four million years after humanoid apes learned how to use bones as weapons, their descendants undertake a space journey to Jupiter; David Bowman (Keir Dullea), the captain of the spaceship, takes an ultimate evolutionary step beyond the planet, which we will explore later in detail. The film suggests the involvement of black monoliths in the entire process, but who made them and what their intentions are remain a mystery. No wonder that *2001* is sometimes viewed, on the one hand, as a metaphysical science-fiction film, and on the other hand, as an alluring travelogue of the space frontier, displaying breathtaking space scenery with carefully chosen music. These two aspects are artfully combined in the "Star Gate" sequence, in which Bowman travels through a series of dazzling, hallucination-like spaces. Though the sequence is most vividly

⁶ After the release of *How the West Was Won*, Cinerama shifted from its original three-strip format to the single-lens anamorphic format. As John Belton notes, though its brand name and special theaters continued to be used, "Cinerama in the mid-1960s was no longer Cinerama" (110). *2001* was one of those "Cinerama" films mostly made in Super Panavision 70.

⁷ According to Vincent LoBrutto, Kubrick himself asked cinematographer Robert Gaffney to shoot aerial footage of Monument Valley for his film project (288).

remembered for its opening slit-scan scene, of particular relevance to our discussion is the later scene in which Bowman flies over an uncanny planet inside the Star Gate—this is where we witness Monument Valley.

In the novelistic version of *2001*, which Kubrick's collaborator Arthur C. Clarke wrote in parallel with the production of the film, Bowman is absorbed into the Star Gate that opens up inside the monolith, or *the monolith as the Star Gate*, exclaiming: "The thing[monolith]'s hollow—it goes on forever—and—oh my God!—it's full of stars" (206).⁸ In a reconsideration of Clarke's novel not as a reflection of the 1960s counterculture, but as a precursor to the 1980s cyberculture, Takayuki Tatsumi asserts that *the monolith as the Star Gate* represents a "kind of super-computer" or a "cyberspace matrix scanning, resolving, and rebuilding the accumulated data of human life" (48). Tatsumi's theory is suggestive for our discussion as well, allowing us to insist that, in the film version, *the monolith as the Star Gate* has "scanned, resolved, and rebuilt" the data of *How the West Was Won*—more specifically, the epilogue aerial scene and the shot of Monument Valley that precedes it. Since there is no reference to Monument Valley in the novel, this deserves our particular attention as a specific feature of the film. But exactly how was the data of the Cinerama Western reconstructed? What is the meaning of this reconstruction?

⁸ As is well known, Kubrick obliged Clarke to delay the publication of the novel until the film's release. For a detailed account of the making of both the film and novel versions, see Krämer.

Let us now refer to Figure 5.4, the opening shot of the aerial scene of film *2001*, and compare it to Figure 5.2 from *How the West Was Won*. The special color effects in Figure 5.4 aside, we notice the similarity between these two shots in geographical configuration, as both were actually filmed in the American West. (For clarity, I include Figure 5.5, the same image as Figure 5.5 but without its color effects.) While the location of Figure 5.4 is not identifiable, the third shot is evidently the one filmed in Monument Valley, further strengthening the connection between these two films: the towering rock formations known as Totem Pole and Yei Bi Chei, which John Ford beautifully and delicately portrayed in *Fort Apache*, *The Searchers*, and *Cheyenne Autumn*, are recognizable.⁹ Of course, the use of the Western landscape in science fiction films is in itself a common practice, as exemplified in the recent blockbuster *John Carter* (2012), based on Edgar Rice Burroughs's beloved novel *A Princess of Mars* (1917). Even the special color effects of *2001*'s aerial scene can be seen as a mere device for adding an overlay of mysteriousness to the familiar Western landscape. What, then, is the significance of *2001*'s aerial scene?

The images filmed in the American West are eventually relayed by the images filmed in the Hebrides, Scotland. Unlike in the aerial scene of *How the West Was Won*, where the cityscape replaces the landscape, the bleak landscape and seascape remain intact. Colors of contrast incessantly collide with each other, and the difference between

⁹ *How the West Was Won*, too, features Totem Pole and Yei Bi Chei, though not in the ending scene that we have discussed in this chapter.

land and sea is no longer clear. What surprises us most, however, is the insertion of extreme close-ups of Bowman's eye, which quickly changes its color to that of the landscape and the seascape (Figure 5.6). This is, then, the opposite of Emerson's transparent eye: the eye here changes its color in accordance with nature, rather than dyeing nature with the color it prefers. Thus the scene creates, in Barry Keith Grant's words, a "sense of extreme sensitivity to the point of merging with nature rather than conquering its secrets" (81). Although the subject of the gaze (Bowman) and its object (nature) are shown separately, as in classical Hollywood cinema, they are nonetheless mutually penetrated on the level of color. The boundary between human and nature is subtly yet surely displaced. One may call this phenomenon a transition from "human/nature" to "human-nature": Emerson and the Cinerama Western slash human and nature to privilege the former, whereas *2001* deletes that slash, visually hyphenating them. The colorful eye in Figure 5.6 is an image of human-nature.¹⁰

It is certainly true that the Star Gate sequence was constructed under the influence of American experimental films: the kaleidoscopic color effects and the critical analysis of the act of seeing bring to mind the films of Jordan Belson and Stan Brakhage, respectively; the slit-scan device was conceived and built by Douglas Trumbull, the

¹⁰ To recall literary history, the 1960s witnessed the rise of nature writing with an increase in environmental awareness. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the bible of environmental activists, and Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, a document of human-nature correspondence, were published, respectively, in 1962 and 1968, coinciding with the releases of *How the West Was Won* and *2001*.

special photographic effects supervisor of *2001*, who was inspired by John Whitney's works. But the originality of *2001* lies in its use of these experimental films' methods for the reconstruction and deconstruction of Hollywood cinema. Kubrick's film not only proposes an alternate mode of seeing nature, but it goes far beyond that by first imitating the aerial scene of *How the West Was Won*, which represents the traditional mode of seeing nature, and then subverting it from within, a unique practice for a director who built his career in Hollywood.

While *How the West Was Won* ends with the aerial scene, *2001* comes to a climax only after its own aerial scene. But before analyzing that climax, a comment is warranted on the character most pertinent to the film's theme of seeing: HAL 9000, the rebellious artificial intelligence installed in the spaceship. It is not until Bowman defeats HAL that he acquires a new eye capable of merging and mingling with nature. This seems perfectly reasonable, considering that HAL is literally an all-seeing, dominating eye with the function of monitoring and controlling the operations of the spaceship. Bowman ends the confrontation with HAL, which is often compared to that of Ulysses with the Cyclops, and reaches another dimension of vision.¹¹ So too, we would assert, should the viewer watching through Bowman's eyes. But do we really see nature in that dimension even after leaving the aerial scene? This is what the film's famous ending calls into question.

¹¹ In the sequels to the novelistic version of *2001*, HAL resurrects and eventually merges with Bowman into one entity; these sequels require a different account from that of the film version of *2001*.

The Star Child's Lesson

After the aerial scene on the uncanny planet, Bowman finds himself in what looks like a hotel suite—according to Clarke's novel, "his hosts had based their ideas of terrestrial living upon TV programs" (287)—where he undergoes a series of startling transformations. Bowman first sees an older version of himself, more wrinkled and gray-haired, and then disappears with it left behind, the process that is repeated a couple of times. Once again, the distinction between the subject of the gaze and its object loses its meaning. They are, in fact, two expressions of the same thing. Having reached the last stage of aging, he then transforms into the fetus known as the Star Child—described by Tatsumi as "the effect of the monolith-as-computer-matrix sampling, remixing, and cutting up Bowman and his bio-history" (49). The next scene, set in outer space, first shows the Moon shining brightly on the dark screen, and then the Earth slowly coming up into the frame; this is followed by, surprisingly, the Star Child, who seemingly directs his wide-open eyes onto the blue planet (Figure 5.7).

This is where the film and the novel part ways. According to Peter Krämer, "Kubrick developed *2001* as an optimistic antidote to the apocalyptic conclusion of *Dr. Strangelove* [that is, annihilation by nuclear weapons]" (11), hoping that "extra-terrestrials could offer an alternative to humanity's self-destruction" (20). Thus the novel ends with the Star Child destroying nuclear weapons orbiting the Earth (although some readers interpreted that this anticipated the destruction

of the planet itself).¹² Nevertheless, the film neither describes this destruction nor mentions nuclear weapons: “Kubrick’s last-minute changes,” Krämer explains, “removed what had been one of the project’s most important themes, namely that extra-terrestrial intervention was needed to counter the threat of extinction” (51). Vincent LoBrutto notes that “[t]he idea [of the Star Child detonating nuclear weapons] was in the shooting script but eventually Kubrick felt he had done that particular idea already for the ending of *Dr. Strangelove*” (275) . Or perhaps the director simply felt that it would undermine the “intensely subjective experience that reaches the viewer at an inner level of consciousness” (Kubrick 47) for which he was ultimately aiming.

In any case, the disappearance of nuclear weapons foregrounds the theme of seeing nature, which is now expanded to that of seeing the whole planet. But what does this image of the Star Child seeing the Earth signify? To answer this question, let us first review the history of our planet’s representation in the late twentieth century.¹³ Today, Earth imagery abounds in our daily life, a situation, in retrospect, created by the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union. When human beings reached outer space, Earth imagery came into widespread use. Notable examples stem from the space-related endeavors of the

¹² In the early 1970s, Clarke, although denying that the destruction of the Earth was his original intention, acknowledged the validity of this pessimistic reading in view of the ongoing environmental destruction (*Lost* 239).

¹³ Extensive research has not yet been done on the history of the Earth’s representation, but Garb, Spellacy, Jacobs, and Sachs (110–28) each offer useful starting points for discussion.

1960s. The 1964–65 New York World’s Fair was symbolized by the Unisphere, a large globe encircled by three rings representing the tracks of Yuri Gagarin, John Glenn, and Telstar 1.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Stewart Brand, the flag-bearer of the counterculture, originated a campaign for NASA to release a photograph of the whole Earth in 1966, and he published it three years later as the cover of his newly launched, now legendary, magazine, *Whole Earth Catalog*. This was the first time people saw the whole—not a partial—picture of the blue planet. Furthermore, in December of the same year, the Apollo 8 crew took a beautiful photograph of “Earthrise,” the semicircle of the Earth rising on the desolate surface of the Moon, which soon captured the hearts of people all over the world.

Nature photographer Galen Rowell later dubbed the Earthrise photograph, which represents the beauty and fragility of the planet, “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken” (qtd. in Coulter). It is no surprise, then, that such imagery gave momentum to the environmental movement from the 1960s onward. Yaakov Jerome Garb, however, contends that such imagery, particularly the whole Earth image, is “used to cultivate attitudes that are *destroying* the Earth” (18, italics original) because “[i]t fosters false illusions of detachment and independence from an Earth on which we are still inextricably and crucially dependent” (20). “The whole Earth image,” he observes, “has reduced the Earth to an object that is of graspable size and complete

¹⁴ Coincidentally, Kubrick and Clarke first encountered each other on April 23, 1964, the opening day of the Fair (LoBrutto 260).

visual accessibility. Thus, it lends itself well to the expression of another modern fantasy: that humans and their technologies contain the Earth, rather than being contained by it” (24).¹⁵ Significantly, the problem Garb points out is identical to the problem we see in Emerson. That is, if, as we have concluded, the nineteenth century poet-philosopher dominated nature from a privileged viewpoint, we should also conclude that modern people have done the same thing to the Earth since the advancement of space exploration.¹⁶

But even before the space age, people stared down at the Earth from the outside. No photograph of the planet existed yet, but we most certainly had globes. While it was in the Age of Exploration that globes first became popular, the historical event most relevant to our discussion is World War II. It was a total global conflict, whereas World War I was fought mainly in Europe. This necessitated that the commanders have a more comprehensive view of the world as represented in globes, rather than in world maps, which arbitrarily divided it. In this context, we should note that memorable images of a globe/the planet were used in such war films as *The Great Dictator* (1940), Charlie Chaplin’s anti-fascist opus, and *Prelude to War*, the first of Frank Capra’s “Why We Fight” series. More importantly, however, a few years after Chaplin’s Hynkel (a parody of Hitler)

¹⁵ Among popular posters Garb lavishly cites in his essay, the cover image of the April 1984 issue of *Esquire* merits particular attention, which shows a woman in a bikini lifting up a globe without effort (24). Here the Earth looks light both in weight and importance.

¹⁶ Legler also associates Garb’s argument with Emerson’s story of the eye (243–45).

danced with a balloon globe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was gazing at a 50-inch globe in the Oval Office to develop military strategies, which was recorded in a 1942 photograph (Figure 5.8)—a precious photograph of a man who carefully forecasts the hegemony of the planet.¹⁷

What surprises us here is the striking similarity between Figures 5.7 and 5.8, the images of the Star Child and Roosevelt looking at the planet/the globe, which also reminds us of Figure 5.1, the image of Emerson looking at the forest. This association allows us to assume that the Star Child, too, is trying to control the object of his gaze, namely the Earth. We should, however, construct a different, more productive reading of the Star Child with adequate reference to the earlier scenes. First of all, considering Bowman's acquisition of the eye that merges with nature and his subsequent incarnation into the Star Child, one can insist that the fetus in Figure 5.7 also has that new eye, looking at the Earth free from the dominant mode of seeing nature. Barry Keith Grant, whom we have already mentioned, reads the Star Child as such. After discussing the characteristics of the aerial scene, he maintains that "2001 suggests that we learn to be more open to nature. . . . [T]he star child can see beyond our terrestrial limitations, perceiving with a new, widened consciousness even while still encapsulated within the enclosed but transparent cosmic womb" (81).

This is a persuasive view, but we can go much further beyond it. Rather than simply stating that the Star Child perceives "with a new,

¹⁷ For a historical account of Roosevelt's globe, see Spellacy 45–46.

widened consciousness,” let us ourselves perceive the Star Child in a new and different manner from the previous literature on *2001*, which has, regardless of its research purposes, almost always discussed the *human* (or *post-human*) side of the Star Child—a reasonable view considering that the fetus was modeled after Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, or superman.¹⁸ But, as the name indicates, the Star Child is no less a *star* than a *human*, literally floating in the dark universe. Is it, then, an unreasonable thing to stress its *star* side as well as its *human* side, and then to state that the Star Child is an amalgam of a *human* and a *star*? Or perhaps, the Star Child can be regarded even as an amalgam of a *human* and the *planet*—namely, the Earth. This is an image of “human-the Earth.”¹⁹ What corroborates this reading is the identical relationship between the fetus and the planet that Kubrick visually informs, and indeed, they create a beautiful symmetry in Figure 5.7, as if each is looking at the other’s mirror image. The limited edition Blu-ray of *2001*, recently marketed by Warner Home Video and Amazon.co.jp, uses this symmetrical shot for the inner sleeve, and interestingly, the planet and the fetus, placed to the right and the left of the sleeve, fold down on one another when the Blu-ray case is closed, as if they were two expressions of the same thing (Figure 5.9). Of course, one can easily dismiss this as an example of Kubrick’s long-term inclination toward symmetrical composition. We need to

¹⁸ Nietzsche is indeed a rope, tied between Emerson and the Star Child since he developed the concept of *Übermensch* under the influence of Emerson.

¹⁹ In this sense, one should call the fetus the “Planet Child” or “Earth Child.”

stress, however, that the film has already displaced the boundary between human and nature in the aerial scene, transforming “human/nature” into “human-nature,” and blurred the distinction of the subject of the gaze and its object in the hotel scene. It is precisely this context within the text that allows us to see an image of “human-the Earth” in the Star Child. The problem with Grant is, in other words, his dualistic view of the Star Child and the Earth—the one who sees and the object of his sight—which only serves to reiterate the traditional view of nature that the film has subverted, although ironically Grant himself has noted this subversion in his discussion of the aerial scene.²⁰

The film’s last shot shows the Star Child rotate to face the camera, as if now the viewer is his mirror image (Figure 5.10). This image, though shocking at first sight, delivers a forceful message to us, which is in direct opposition to Garb’s definition of the fantasy of Earth imagery: “humans and their technologies are contained by the Earth, rather than containing it.” Each viewer is, in the end, a figure of “human-the Earth,” a being ultimately inseparable from the planet, whether he or she heads to the Moon, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. And yet, whether we are able to reach this conclusion depends solely on our eyes—the eyes that have traveled through the Star Gate with Bowman—and our courage to use them properly when confronting the

²⁰ Grant, who reads *2001* from the viewpoint of gender studies as well as that of ecocriticism, is more interested in the invisibility of the Star Child’s genitalia than the identical relationship between the fetus and the planet, asserting that “the star child’s gender is indeterminate” and “[t]he star child is a new human who, in its openness to creation, has transcended patriarchy’s characteristic binary thinking about gender” (82).

symmetry of the Star Child and the Earth. In short, equally implanted in this symmetrical image are both the limitations of our eyes and the possibility of overcoming them.²¹

2154: An Eye's Odyssey

In 2009, about forty years after the release of *2001*, an epic science fiction film that would change the history of cinema even more drastically than Kubrick's masterpiece was released: James Cameron's 3D film *Avatar*, which broke the worldwide box-office record of his own blockbuster *Titanic* (1997). In this film, which is set in the year 2154, humanoids called Na'vi use their tails to commune with animals and plants on Pandora, a moon of the planet Polyphemus—an ecological rendering of an alien species suitable to the tastes of the twenty-first-century viewer. However, what is worthy of note here is the film's visual reference to *2001*'s aerial scene at both its beginning and end, which juxtapose the aerial shot(s) of Pandora's nature and a close-up of the protagonist's eye(s). Although a close examination of these scenes and a detailed discussion of the politics of seeing nature in 3D films are beyond the scope of this dissertation, our ecocritical reading of Emerson, *How the West Was Won*, and *2001* will surely

²¹ Based on the "apparatus theory" of Jean-Louis Baudry, Ira Konigsberg insists that "[s]pecial effects cinematography in the science fiction film has continued to push the spatial perception of the viewer further and further—but it does so in a circumscribed and predetermined way, influenced by the nature of the filmic frame but also by Renaissance painters and the Western ideology" (69); and to him, *2001* is no exception. Although this is a valid argument, putting too much emphasis on the apparatus side of the film would obscure critical aspects within the text, such as the subversion of the traditional mode of seeing nature in the aerial scene, on which we have elaborated here.

provide a useful starting point for such research.

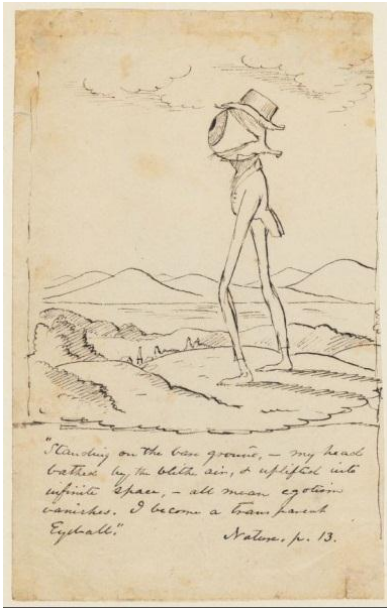


Figure 5.1: Christopher P. Cranch's caricature of Emerson. *Emerson the Mystic*. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Am 1506 [4]).



Figure 5.2: The landscape of the American West in *How the West Was Won*. Warner Home Video Japan, 2008. Blu-ray.



Figure 5.3: The cityscape of San Francisco in *How the West Was Won*.



Figure 5.4: The landscape of the uncanny planet in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Warner Home Video Japan, 2012. Blu-ray



Figure 5.5: The same image as Figure 5.4, with color effects removed.

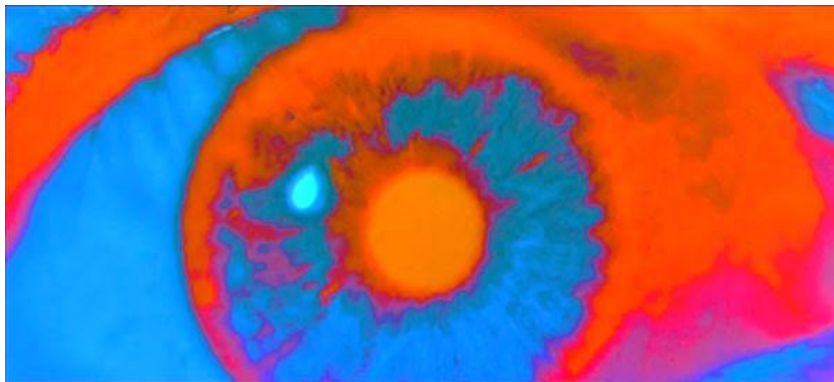


Figure 5.6: An extreme close-up of Bowman's eye in *2001*.



Figure 5.7: The Star Child looks at the Earth in *2001*.



Figure 5.8: *President Roosevelt Examines a Globe Presented to Him by the U.S. Army.* Courtesy of Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

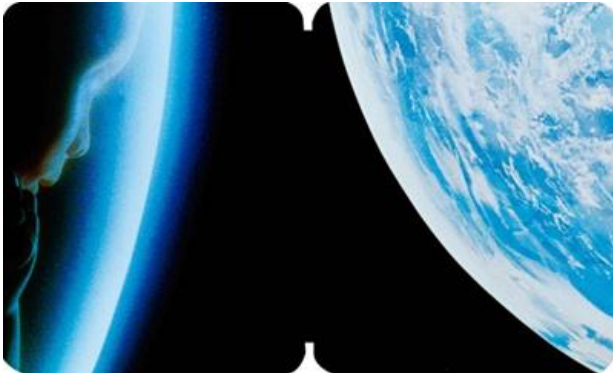


Figure 5.9: The inner sleeve of the limited edition Blu-ray of *2001*. *Amazon.co.jp*. Web. 14 May 2012.



Figure 5.10: The Star Child rotates to face the camera in the last shot of *2001*.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the Introduction, Americans of the twentieth century were engaged in a constant renewal of the concept of the frontier—from the land frontier to the aerial and space frontiers, and from the territorial frontier to the technological and commercial frontiers. The epilogue of *How the West Was Won* perfectly exemplifies this conceptual renewal in that it replaces the image of the desert with that of modern buildings (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Notably, 1962, the year of the film's completion and release, witnessed a series of crucial events concerning the space and technological frontiers, some delightful and some dreadful: John Glenn's orbital flight, the first by an American (February), the resumption of U.S. nuclear tests in the atmosphere (April), the launch of Telestar 1, the first active telecommunications satellite (July), and the Cuban missile crisis that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war (October).¹

Undoubtedly, the United States has led the world in the fields of nuclear development and space exploration. It achieved the first

¹ Technically speaking, *How the West Was Won* had its world premiere in London on November 1, 1962 and was released in the United States the next year. For an account of the situation of American society and cinema in 1962, see Schaefer. The United States conducted its atmospheric nuclear test at Johnston Atoll in the Pacific Ocean on November 4, 1962, which was nine months before the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty in Moscow. Incidentally, the last atmospheric nuclear test on the Nevada Test Site was conducted on July 17, 1962; the warhead tested here was called "Davy Crockett," after the hero of the old West.

nuclear explosion in 1945 and the first moon landing in 1969, although the Soviet Union was the first to launch a satellite and a human into space. It was American astronauts who popularized Earth imagery, the subject of Chapter 5. And as concluded in Chapter 2, the technological advances of modern America, including nuclear development and space exploration, were underpinned by the country's past experience of mastery over inhospitable nature in the West by means of railroad technology. Coincidentally, 1962, the year that we noted above, was exactly a century after President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, which authorized the construction of the first transcontinental railroad.

Based on this historical recognition, this dissertation has examined how Westerns and other films have constructed images of the cinematic frontier, focusing primarily on the railroad and Monument Valley, but also treating cowboys, nuclear weapons, and the Earth. In this process, it has addressed widespread issues including the genre and early cinema, technology and the West, gender and sexuality, the landscape and race, and nature and the environment. Let us briefly summarize the points of our argument.

- Although scholars have questioned *The Great Train Robbery's* status as a Western on the basis of its historical connection to the travel genre, a more careful reading of the filmic text and its exhibition practices reveals that *The Great Train Robbery* in fact became a highly "cinematic Western," paradoxically as a result of that connection. The film not only depicted the process of

creating civilized order in the wilderness with symbols logically and reasonably arranged in the text, but also allowed the viewer to experience this process as an impending problem, rather than as an irrelevant event.

- The Western genre gave the highest possible praise to the railroad in *The Iron Horse* in the mid-1920s and began to look at its negative side in *Jesse James* at the end of the 1930s, which approach gradually gained dominance in later years. The opening scene of *Toy Story 3* can be interpreted as a condensation of the historical relationship between technology and the West, however nonsensical it might appear at first sight. It suggests that Americans' confidence in technology, which led to the development of nuclear devices in the twentieth century, had been built upon and expanded by the construction of railroad tracks across the West in the nineteenth.
- Since the wilderness and civilization are coded as masculine and feminine spheres, respectively, Western heroes, whose mission it is to mediate between these contrasting spheres, need to adjust their masculinity, yet resist over-feminization. Their strange habit of bathing with their hats on can be understood in this gendered context, but should also be examined in relation to the genre's underlying male homosexuality. It is Clint Eastwood who, throughout his cinematic career, has added new twists to the genre's tradition of bath scenes, revealing new shades of subtlety to male representation.
- On the one hand, John Ford's representation of Monument Valley can be placed in the tradition of American landscape painting and photography; on the other, it should be interpreted in relation to the director's lifelong maritime experiences. In *The Searchers*, Ford artfully depicted the valley as if it were an archipelago on

the levels of both montage and mise-en-scène. What differentiates *The Searchers* from other 1950s revisionist Westerns is its careful exploration of the issue of racial merging through an amorphous landscape that is ever-changing, ever-shifting like the sea.

- Both *How the West Was Won* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* include a large-scale aerial scene that either follows or contains the image of Monument Valley, but nonetheless exhibit starkly contrasting view of nature in their respective scenes. While the Cinerama Western slashes human and nature to privilege the former, *2001* deletes that slash, visually hyphenating them. The hyphenation of human and nature expands its scale into that of human and planet in *2001*'s famous ending. Yet, this interpretation is possible only when we ourselves practice the alternative mode of seeing advocated within the text.²

This is the first extended academic study of Western films undertaken in Japan, and for this particular reason, I deemed it necessary to return to the genre's core, or its fundamental subjects, although at first I hardly knew where to begin. Yet gradually, two images—the railroad and Monument Valley, which epitomize civilization and the wilderness in the Western—came to occupy my interest. The representation of these images in the genre's most noted works (*The Great Train Robbery* and *The Searchers*) had not yet been explored in a satisfactory fashion. Furthermore, I was intrigued by the

² This dissertation is, as stated in the Introduction, organizes itself around the cinematic frontier's traditional civilization vs. wilderness theme; however, the reader should have noticed that, as the chapters progress, such a dualistic view of the world is in fact gradually brought into question. This is partly because of the author's desire to provide a more nuanced account of the Western genre, and partly because of the anti-dualistic nature of such complicated works as *The Searchers* and *2001*.

possibility of reconsidering these images within the context of the globally significant issues that we face today through a reading of science fiction films, and films that feature elements of science fiction, related to the West.

In 2013, Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* celebrates its 110th anniversary. Hopefully, this dissertation, completed in this commemorative year, will contribute to a greater understanding and awareness of the significance of Western films, whose images, rhetoric, ideas, and discourses remain deeply engraved in the American mind.

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