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The Outlaw Machine, the Monstrous Outsider and Motorcycle Fetishists: Challenging Rebellion, Mobility and Masculinity in Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* and Steven Spielberg's *Duel*

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the ways in which Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963) and Steven Spielberg's *Duel* (1971) draw on and challenge selected road movie conventions by adhering to the genre's traditional reliance on cultural critique revolving around the themes of rebellion, transgression and roguery. In particular, the films seem to confront the classic road movie format through their adoption of nomadic narrative structure and engagement in a mockery of subversion where the focus on social critique is intertwined with a deep sense of alienation and existential loss "laden with psychological confusion and wayward angst" (Laderman 83). Following this trend, Spielberg's film simultaneously depoliticizes the genre and maintains the tension between rebellion and tradition where the former shifts away from the conflict with conformist society to masculine anxiety, represented by middle class, bourgeois and capitalist values, the protagonist's loss of innocence in the film's finale, and the act of roguery itself. Meanwhile, Anger's poetic take on the outlaw biker culture, burgeoning homosexuality, myth and ritual, and violence and death culture approaches the question of roguery by undermining the image of a dominant hypermasculinity with an ironic commentary on sacrilegious and sadomasochistic practices and initiation rites in the gay community. Moreover, both *Duel's* demonization of the truck, seen as "an indictment of machines" or the mechanization of life (Spielberg qtd. in Crawley 26), and *Scorpio Rising's* (homo)eroticization of a motorcycle posit elements of social critique, disobedience and nonconformity within a cynical and existential framework, hence merging the road movie's traditional discourse with auteurism and modernism.

Keywords: independent film, avant-garde and experimental film, road movie, masculinity, *Scorpio Rising*, *Duel*.

INTRODUCTION

The paper analyzes the ways in which Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963) and Steven Spielberg's *Duel* (1971) draw on and challenge selected road movie conventions by adhering to the genre's traditional reliance on cultural critique revolving around the themes of rebellion, transgression and roguery. Interestingly, both works are generally credited with revolutionizing the road movie's narrative fluidity. In this context, *Scorpio Rising*, seen as "the jewel of the avant-garde's surrealist school" (Lounsbury) and a sexualized biker gang film that culminated in the rebel image of *Easy Rider*, probes a malignant sector of American society by featuring marginal subcultures and new rebels of 1960s America. Meanwhile, *Duel* is structured around the open road serving as "the domain of the monstrous outsider," which typically coincides with 1970s quest and outlaw road movie aesthetics permeated by a sense of disillusionment, cynicism and irony rather than freedom, romanticism and visionary rebellion (Hammond 17). In particular, both films appear to confront the classic road movie format through their adoption of nomadic narrative structure, focus on driving sequences and engagement in a mockery of subversion where the focus on social critique is intertwined with a deep sense of alienation and existential loss "laden with psychological confusion and wayward angst" (Laderman 83). Alongside narrative strategies, this effect is also achieved through a skillful use of montage, including collage, low-key lighting, seamless editing, and a rock music soundtrack (*Scorpio Rising*), as well as fluid camera movements, interior car shots or menacing low- and high-angle moving shots (*Duel*).

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SCORPIO RISING

It seems that *Scorpio Rising*'s reputation as a landmark and profoundly influential experimental picture, as well as one of the most representative and commercially successful films of the 1960s American underground and art cinema, is deserved. Not only did the film confirm Anger's major talent as an artist and director, but it also remains the most frequently rented title in the Filmmakers' Cooperative's repertoire to this date (Suarez 115). Widely considered a cult classic due to its transgressive, subversive and often obscene imagery, the film pays tribute both to avant-garde cinema, particularly Bunuel's, Eisenstein's and Bruce Conner's legacy, and various forms of pop vernacular targeted primarily at American youth of the 1950s and 1960s (see e.g., Allison 462). The former influence is mostly evident in the film's adoption of some typically

avant-garde themes and stylistic traits, including the use of collage technique or preoccupation with technology and utopian possibilities of mass culture artifacts (Suarez 115). Meanwhile, the latter trend manifests itself in Anger's celebration of astrological and cosmological phenomena, namely the dawn of the Age of Scorpio and the downfall of the ascetic reign of Christianity, as well as his incorporation of popular imagery of the period associated with the motorcycle cult.

Interestingly, Anger's appropriation of this kind of iconography marks a departure from the first phase of his filmmaking largely devoid of pop culture references or historical and socio-political contexts. On the other hand, *Scorpio Rising* continues the early works' reliance on self-conscious irony, duality, homosexual desire undertones, excessive *mise-en-scène* or fascination with masquerade, appearances and style (Suarez 117). Although the film's focus is on depicting the lifestyle of the neo-Nazi New Jersey bike gang and the gay subculture, the artist is far from offering a traditional reading of these phenomena. Lowry argues that

Anger's manipulations of the culturally overloaded imagery of Nazism, sado-masochism, and the occult finally result in a film which refuses to conform to any dominant, edifying reading whatsoever—an almost unparalleled achievement which should earn *Scorpio Rising* an enduring place in the artistic annals of the 1960s, a decade remembered for the challenges it posed to ruling ideology. (41)

Indeed, the narrative, though dominated by a homoerotic plot and gay perspective, is seen as highly ambiguous in its juxtaposition of violence and eroticism that clearly resonates with “gay desublimation of mass culture” (Suarez 116). Suarez discusses this trait further by suggesting that the picture's ambiguity results from “the confluence of . . . two contradictory paradigms of mass culture: modernist condemnation, and pop celebration of its expressive potentials” observed in Anger's simultaneous attempt to “glamorize the marginal group's rebelliousness” and seemingly decry its “self-destructive behavior” (115–16). A similar effect is achieved with the film's peculiar composition structured around thirteen segments scored to some pop songs with explicitly heterosexual lyrics. Released between 1962 and 1963 and authored by artists such as Elvis Presley, Ricky Nelson or Martha and the Vandellas, the soundtrack “mounts a dialectical collision between images and music to reveal the strains of romanticized violence, morbidity and homoeroticism” (Lowry 41) and, with its deliberately unnatural selection of music and non location sync-sound recording, qualifies as “ontologically Other” (Brothy 310).

MACHO ON THE ROAD? THE FETISHES OF MOBILITY AND (HOMO)EROTICIZATION OF THE MACHINE

Except for its engagement with marginal milieus and mass culture, *Scorpio Rising* can be considered emblematic of the broader trend of the 1960s archetypal road movies best exemplified by *Bonnie and Clyde* or *Easy Rider*, particularly in the way it borrows from *The Wild One* and echoes certain sensibilities of countercultural paranoia. Suarez enumerates a number of narrative motifs common to Anger's work and the aforementioned mainstream films:

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All of these films sympathetically depicted the adventures of a group of outsiders and outlaws who end up being destroyed by repressive social forces: *Easy Rider* and *Bonnie and Clyde* are two cases in point. They signaled the breakthrough into mainstream filmmaking of young actors, directors, and sensibilities close to the counterculture. Both films depict the outlaws' aggressive marginality, estrangement from "straight" society, and subcultural values—associated with the drug world in *Easy Rider* and with crime in *Bonnie and Clyde*—in stories which culminated in their heroes' demise. They were self-conscious genre films which often commented on and revised the traditions they were reworking. . . . Their attitude toward their popular sources was analogous to *Scorpio Rising*'s: they partook of zest for rebellion encoded in mythologies and images from the media and popular culture, and of the paranoia that viewed destruction as the endpoint of difference and marginality. In this respect, these films were simultaneously an homage and an elegy to popular myths. (131)

Similarly, Mills notes that the film

coincides with a full-scale paradigm shift in the road story between 1964, when CBS's television series *Route 66* went off the air and Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters filmed their road trip to the East, and 1969, when *Easy Rider* rocked Hollywood studios with the profitability of the rebel image. The metamorphosis of the road story accelerates in the 1960s, traveling through mainstream audiences and marginal subcultures, picking up along the way new rebels to feature and new market niches to satisfy. (110)

Simultaneously, *Scorpio Rising* seeks inspiration from the 1950s and 1960s Beat spirit (Sterritt 210) or what Mekas referred to as the new wave of art films known as the Baudelairean Cinema and characterized by explicit homosexual content and the language of "disengagement and new freedom" (85). According to Dyer, the latter trend focused on adventurous sexuality, initiated by the Beat movement and understood as

a manifestation of the mobility of identity or bisexuality broadly defined as openness to all kinds of sexual practices and objects (118). At that time, however, these tendencies were not considered part of the gay liberation movement, but rather of a more personal and diaristic cinematography concerned with exploring “the exhilarating instabilities of the necessary fiction of identity” (Dyer 173). Likewise, as noted by Mills, Anger’s work reveals a queer double consciousness and destabilizes identity by drawing on binary oppositions, such as Hollywood versus underground film, macho biker versus male homosexual, Hollywood rebels like Dean and Brando versus pop artists like Nelson and Presley, individual rebellion versus containment, or emblems of Jesus versus those of Nazism (112). Mills further contends that

the most transgressive message of *Scorpio Rising* is that a text cannot hold its meaning steady when a viewer invests it with desire, and what we have seen so far and will continue to find is that viewers continuously revitalize the road story with private and communal fantasies that are also historically specific. (114)

Although *Scorpio Rising* cannot be classified as a road movie per se, it clearly embraces some of the conventions of the genre, particularly the emphasis on driving, which becomes the crux of the plot, and the motif of a journey, as undertaken by motorized rebels, which provides the film with a distinctive framework. However, it seems that apart from encompassing the representation of travel as an explicit and implicit critique of American society and pop culture, the picture opposes the genre’s iconic features by challenging its linear, open-ended plot and character structure, as well as use of the interstate highway system and vast landscape heightened with “pit stops” like diners, bars, sundry detours, motels or gas stations as the central *mise-en-scène*.¹ Somewhat in contrast to Laderman’s argument that the road movie’s “deliberate rebellious impulse is conveyed primarily

¹ The road movie, as defined by Corrigan or Cohan and Hark, presents technological means of transportation as “self-descendant of the nineteenth-century train” (Corrigan 144) and traditionally places them at the center of the narrative: “The significance of technology in the road movie, differentiating its quest narratives and wandering protagonists from those of the Western, has as much to do with representing modernity, its historical achievements as well as its social problems, as it does with reiterating masculinist fantasies of escape and liberation” (Cohan and Hark 3). Laderman further suggests that “while often preserving from this literary tradition a focus on the learning experiences of the traveling hero in an unfamiliar setting, road movies rearticulate the quest motif in the ‘increasingly mechanized’ framework of automobile modernity” (13).

through two narrative pretexts: the quest road movie (descending from *Easy Rider*) and the outlaw road movie (descending from *Bonnie and Clyde*),” *Scorpio Rising* inclines toward neither of these two narrative modes (20). Although transgression and liberation are clearly linked with mobility, Anger distances himself from adhering to the motif of roaming or driving away from the crime as a means of self-discovery and pursuing freedom. Instead, the filmmaker presents the viewers with a complex and contradictory narrative “built around the ironic interaction of thirteen popular songs with the same number of schematic episodes in the life of a motorcycle gang,” particularly their preparations for the Halloween party and final motorcycle race of the year (Sitney 102), and based on “specific myths or mythological figures to convey a new cosmology or typography of universality among its contemporary characters and settings” (Verrone 119).

Interestingly, akin to *Easy Rider*, the theme of automobility and conventional car use are replaced with that of riding and the bike itself or, as advertised in the 1960s by Harvey-Davidson, the “outlaw machine” that more explicitly expresses the gang’s outsider status and addresses the cultural tensions of the day. Here, the motorcycle is not juxtaposed against a romanticized image of American wilderness, but against the fetishes of mobility and bourgeois commodities, including the bikers’ leather and denim clothes, and hence becomes an object of sexual desire and gay fantasy, as well as an emblem of the rebel spectacle rather than of evocative road travel. Anger calls this measure “a definite eroticization of the automobile, in its dual aspect of narcissist identification as virile power symbol and its more elusive role: seductive, attention-grabbing, gaudy or glittering mechanical mistress paraded for the benefit of his peers” (qtd. in Sitney 125). Similarly, Mills pinpoints that “Anger’s caressing pan shots foreground the sexual aspect of the motorcycle’s mechanical power and mobility, emphasizing the ritual nature of both bike culture and homoerotic fantasy” (114).

EISENSTEIN’S MONTAGE AND THE SUBVERTED MALE GAZE

In terms of editing, *Scorpio Rising* refrains from the use of some typical 1960s and later road movie conventions, such as flash-forward scene transitions, rapid back-and-forth montage sequences or traveling, tracking, zoom, low-angle, frontal and rear shots, whose aim is to aesthetically convey “the unleashing of spiritual energy through a politicized driving” and “the sensation of freewheeling mobility” (Laderman 70–71). Instead, Anger seeks inspiration from Eisensteinian montage in his synthesis of surreal

framing, lighting, imagery and fictional re-creation with documentary and found footage, which, according to Verrone, might serve as “a prime example of an avant-garde adaptation through appropriation” (119). As noted by Osgerby, Eisensteinian montage is particularly evident in the way the artist “intercuts the visceral images of motorcycle subculture with a catalogue of media allusions, a jarring collision that climaxes with the blasphemous juxtaposing of Hitler and Christ” (128). To create such abstract compositions, mostly in the form of jagged montage sequences rife with images of pop culture icons, the filmmaker combines occasional seamless editing and pans with close-ups and broader shots that imply both spatial, as well as temporal continuity and the subverted male gaze seen through the lens of mysticism and homoeroticism (Verrone 119). Below, Sitney comments on Anger’s rapid montage, including horizontal and vertical pans, collage, low-key lighting or steady and slow camera movements that expose the film’s mythographic nature:

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From the very first shots—the unveiling of a motorcycle in a garage, then a series of horizontal and vertical pans of bike parts, lights, shining chrome fenders, young men oiling gears—it is clear that the texture of the film is unlike anything Anger has done before. This is a film almost without superimposition, filtered lights, or isolated figures in blackness. Anger still uses the coordination of the offscreen look, especially in collaging foreign material. The low-key lighting makes possible a lush pastel view of motorcycle cushions, lights, and portions of chrome with stars of light reflecting off them. As usual the camera movements are steady and slow, but the rhythm of the film as a whole is much quicker than anything Anger had ever made before. (104)

It seems then that such a choice of editing aims to play with notions of myth, ritual and the occult, particularly evident in the portrayal of Scorpio as a rebellious Christ-, Hitler- and Devil-like figure with a dialectical personality, rather than to invoke the idea of travel or transcendence. Sitney refers to *Scorpio* primarily as a mythographic film since

it self-consciously creates its own myth of the motorcyclist by comparison with other myths: the dead movie star, Dean; the live one, Brando; the savior of men, Christ; the villain of men, Hitler. Each of these myths is evoked in ambiguity, without moralizing. From the photos of Hitler and a Nazi soldier and from the use of swastikas and other Nazi impedimenta, Scorpio derives ecstasy of will and power. (106–07)

Anger confirms this interpretation himself by describing his work as a “conjunction of the Presiding Princes, Angels, and Spirits of the Sphere

of mars, formed as a 'high' view of the Myth of the American Motorcyclist. The Power Machine seen as tribal totem, from toy to terror" (qtd. in Sitney 103).

Likewise, whereas a skillful montage of found footage and a rock and roll music soundtrack "weaves an ironic 'blasphemous' critique of modern culture" (O'Pray 56) and ultimately serves as "a death mirror held up to American Culture" (Anger qtd. in Cott), road movie iconography rests on the homoerotic outlaw formula where, however, a largely fragmented motorcycle journey does not represent the genre's conventional quest for personal fulfillment and sexual freedom. Instead, while exploiting "the alternative sexuality of homosexual riders," *Scorpio Rising* offers "overtly sexual images of homoeroticism largely divorced from the act of riding itself" where

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the toughness and virility associated with the motorcycle was transferred onto hard-bodied, hypermasculine males posed in spiked leather and chains, iconography of the leatherman who became a staple of gay culture in the bars of New York and London and eventually a character in pop music's Village People. (Alford and Ferriss 143)

Except for a motorcycle drag race sequence, a sense of traveling and movement is symbolically conveyed in the recurrent motif of a queer erotic quest, "revolving itself in sado-masochistic subsection to the desired but terrifying Other" (Baker 452). It is also expressed in the opening scenes of unveiling, polishing and fitting the motorcycles, which reflect American culture's obsession with "fetishised icons of chrome and steel, violence and speed (velocity and amphetamine), leather and rubber," then replicated in the gang's clothing (Baker 452). In his analysis of the role of mythological systems in *Scorpio*, Rowe links the machine with a symbolic representation of death on the highway, which partly coincides with the late 1960s politicized and rebellious road movies' narrative closures "where the road rebels are martyred by the forces of conservative society" (Laderman 81):

The machine (now a motorcycle) is totemized into a tool for power: the "charioteer" is Death (the ultimate "dream lover" by Romantic standards). Violence replaces the poetic extension of personality and violent eroticism is combined with the tragic death of the highway hero ("the last cowboys"). (Rowe 21)

On the other hand, however, *Scorpio's* ending is clearly devoid of a sense of romanticism and martyrdom as intertwined with the symbolism of the open road; as one of the cyclists crashes in the race, the film culminates in death seen as a sacrifice demanded by Scorpio (Sitney 106).

It appears then that Anger himself repudiates his heroes, who ironically embody the archetypal characters of the motorcycle and drive-in biker film, and hence deconstructs the myth of the American motorcyclist whose rebel image becomes appropriated by the gay community.

DUEL

In contrast to *Scorpio*, *Duel* is a ninety minute low-budget quest road movie based on a short story and screenplay by Richard Matheson (originally published in *Playboy*) and directed for Universal television.² The first theatrical feature and directing debut of the soon-to-be-auteur Steven Spielberg, the film received generally favorable reviews from studio executives, critics and audiences and is often hailed as one of the greatest TV movies of all time, as well as a masterpiece of suspense, editing and camerawork. Along with *Sunday Express* and *Jaws*, it is classified as part of the director's early work concerned with creating "a sense of energy, obsession and pending doom" rather than exploring notions of childhood and fatherhood, which would become a crucial theme of his later movies, such as *E.T.*, the *Indiana Jones* trilogy and *Hook* (Le Gall and Taliaferro 38). According to Spielberg, while partly inspired by his own teenage experience of highway phobia, the script "was almost a once-in-a lifetime story . . . In all the years that I've been making movies, I have not found anything as potentially fraught with suspense and tension as *Duel*" (qtd. in Bianculli 23). Gordon notes that the picture "partakes of elements of both the Hitchcock and the horror film," which aims to engage the viewers and allows them to identify with the protagonist, widely considered an allegory of Everyman:

Like most Spielberg films, *Duel* is a carefully calculated roller-coaster ride, programmed for thrills—although it also has a certain psychological profundity. . . . The film is filled with surprises. The apparently psychopathic truck driver (or perhaps the truck itself) toys with the hero David Mann in a sadistic cat-and-mouse game, applying gradations of violence to initiate him into the code of the duel, gradually stripping away his civilized restraints until he is ready to kill or be killed. Similarly, Spielberg plays with his audience, tricking and shocking by gradually building suspense, momentarily slackening it, fooling us when we are off guard, and then screwing the tension to an almost unbearable level in the climax. (14)

² *Duel* was shot in just sixteen days and edited in less than two weeks (Spielberg qtd. in Fonda 2).

Indeed, Spielberg himself referred to his work as “a statement about American paranoia” and “an exercise in paranoia” where the fear of the unknown and David Mann’s sense of isolation and anxiety are greatly enhanced by an evocative imagery, Billy Goldenberg’s eerie score and minimal dialogue (qtd. in Taylor 78). Unsurprisingly, this trend renders the film an easy fit for the context of the 1970s postclassical, countercultural and depoliticized road movie permeated by a defeated, detached and ironic tone, as well as devoid of a sense of purpose or excitement.

EVERYMAN ON THE ROAD: FROM CAR ANXIETY TO MASCULINE ANXIETY

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In many 1970s road movies, cultural and socio-political critique is often replaced with individual existential and psychological concerns influenced by the postwar European cinema’s auteurist and modernist approach to filmmaking. On the other hand, Klosterman argues that *Duel* “eliminates the idea of a road trip as some sort of spiritual quest” and instead “it exclusively ties its story to the most fundamental elements of the genre: vehicles, people, and the nonmetaphorical physicality of the earth itself” (135). Similarly, Lynes notes that Spielberg’s “dramatic technique of never revealing the driver of the tanker truck to the audience” deliberately dehumanizes and mystifies the offender, hence not only obscuring his motive, but also literally drawing the viewers’ attention to road travel in one of its most simplistic forms: that is, structured along vehicular culture, violence and survival, which still remains an essence of the genre (21).

According to Laderman, most pictures produced during this particular decade³ are “laden with psychological confusion and wayward angst, . . . [and] adopt a nomadic narrative structure” in which “driving on the open road becomes an allegory of a personal search through life’s meaningless landscape,” hence invoking “a forlorn mood of wandering” and “a deep sense of alienation” (83–84). Though the tension between rebellion and tradition can still be detected, “the genre’s core conflict with conformist society has been internalized, ‘rebellion’ thus becoming an amorphous anxiety about self”:

³ Some landmark titles that reflect this trend include *The Rain People* (Coppola, 1969), *Five Easy Pieces* (Rafelson, 1970), *Two-Lane Blacktop* (Hellman, 1971), *Vanishing Point* (Sarafian, 1971), *Badlands* (Malick, 1973), *Scarecrow* (Schatzberg, 1973), *The Sugarland Express* (Spielberg, 1973), *Paper Moon* (Bogdanovich, 1973), *Thieves like Us* (Altman, 1974), *Road Movie* (Strick, 1975) and others.

Often exuding a deeply antisocial mood, these films nevertheless minimize overtly rebellious gestures against society; that is, the rebellion here is filtered through an enigmatic dramaturgy of apathy. This apathy in turn inflects both the movement of the narrative and the development of characters, producing a paradoxical sense of “standstill” while moving. (Laderman 83–84)

Laderman lists particular traits of the early 1970s road movies, which also resonate with Sontag’s “aesthetics of silence,” with their obscure introspection and psychological dissolution: “(1) a more pronounced dramatization of the genre’s fusion of the human and automobile; (2) consequently, a more ‘mechanized’ (dehumanized, ‘empty’) development of character; (3) a more fragmented, aleatory narrative structure; (4) a road trip symbolic of emotional malaise” (84). Elsaesser further argues that such films may be distinguished by a self-reflexive storyline centered around an unmotivated hero’s journey and the expression of a “pathos of failure” rather than “goal-oriented moral trajectories,” which stems from “a post-rebellious lassitude” reflected in a more cynical attitude toward the American values (13–15).

Following such narrative and character development, *Duel* focuses on the relationship between the human and the automobile on a road trip while employing a strongly linear and segmental structure in which every action is a self-contained and semi-independent unit within Mann’s journey (Buckland 72). According to Morris, despite a slim plot and lack of dialogue, the theme of rebellion and roguery, evident in the protagonist’s rising (suburban) frustration, is already connoted in the film’s opening scene:

Speeding, the unseen motorist, ignores a “STOP” sign. Ensuing events suggest he has become complacent, cocooned in his ordered existence, about venturing into a competitive and alienated society, particularly—as hinted retrospectively—while angry. This equally connotes rebellion, a will to push boundaries and behave lawlessly. *Duel* does not endorse his suburban frustrations, which it arguably satirises. Rather, in withholding information about precise motivations and frequently adopting the pursuing tanker’s position, it sadistically delights in testing both the protagonist’s reasonableness and his resolve. It also becomes an attack on the spectator who, knowing little, is unable to judge with certainty—yet who, because unawareness removes potential obstacles, is facilitated in projecting conflicts onto the scenario. (21)

Although most scholars propose a psychological interpretation of the picture, which hints at the hero’s paranoia against the truck driver, women and his state of masculinity or repressed homosexuality, the opening sequence

clearly shifts the viewers' attention to the recurrent motif of mechanization of life, which is mirrored in the primal confrontation between man and the machine (also considered the Thing), Plymouth Valiant and the oil tanker and, finally, suburban and rural America. Indeed, some critics read *Duel* as "the apotheosis of the car-chase movie" or "a pure highway pursuit" (Aldiss 175) where Mann, who represents bourgeois values, is challenged to a duel, seen by Spielberg as an indictment of machines and a manifestation of late 1960s and early 1970s technophobia: "And I determined very early on that everything about the film would be the complete disruption of our whole technological society. . . . And specially, where the truck was concerned, I wanted it to be the true, perfect, perpetual-motion machine" (qtd. in Crawley 26). As implied in a 1978 interview with Dave Pirie, the director's intention was also to express his critical view of American suburban life: "The hero of *Duel* is typical of that lower middle-class American who's been insulated by suburban modernization . . . [and] that never expects to be challenged by anything more than his television set breaking down and having to call the repair man" (105). Similarly, in his essay "The Complete Spielberg?," Auty suggested that the picture's major theme "is not primarily the story of Everyman's escape into the never-never. It is suburban life in all its contradictions, as a kind of mysterious lake of social and libidinal possibilities which have no direction in themselves" (277).

On the other hand, it seems that the film's focus on road travel and its narrative attention to mobility create what Orgeron calls "the seductive illusion of motion by locking the viewer's gaze into the three elements that make up the road film—subject, vehicle, and landscape":

Seduced by motion, the road movie viewer actively agrees to be passive—to be a passenger—and is liberated in his/her identification with the presumably liberated on-screen road traveler. The viewer figures into the equation as "passenger" and is left "riding along" wherever the subject(s) of the road film takes him/her. (104)

It can be argued, then, that, in line with some of the genre's visual tropes, many shots are based on the viewer-as-passenger schema (Musser 38), which intensifies sensual illusions produced by an almost palpable spectacle of motion and dramatizes the act of visual appreciation. Murphy purports that, due to its reliance on these and related modes of representation, *Duel* may be considered exemplary of the highway horror sub-genre defined as

an offshoot of the wider American horror film tradition that has certain similarities to the road movie genre but which also dramatises its own

culturally and historically specific set of concerns explicitly related to the societal impact of mass automobility and the creation of the Interstate Highway System (IHS). (2)

Murphy further elaborates on how the highway horror film explores the relationship between a road journey and the American landscape:

In the Highway Horror film, journeys made via the highway inevitably lead to uncanny, murderous and horribly transformative experiences. The American landscape, though supposedly “tamed” by the highways, is, by dint of its very accessibility, rendered terrifyingly hostile, and encounters with other travellers (and with individuals whose roadside businesses depend upon highway traffic) almost always have sinister outcomes. (2)

Moreover, Spielberg’s work follows the highway horror film’s incorporation of a clear-cut structure, a resolution or at least a considerable degree of narrative closure, as well as tendency to envision journeys westward where the road provokes anxiety or imprisons the characters and is often linked to “the theme of transformation of identity” (Ireland 476). Particularly, Murphy notes, *Duel* employs the Highway Nemesis narrative in which “the American highway becomes a nightmarish no-man’s land in which the conventional rules of law, order and polite society hold no sway” and which “almost always comes down to duelling versions of American masculinity, usually coded as middleclass (the protagonist) and working class (the antagonist)” (40). Hence, the act of rebellion and roguery not only takes the form of a deadly cat-and-mouse race where an average law-abiding citizen is confronted with a blue-collar truck driver or a monstrous adversary; it also illustrates a broader phenomenon in which “the anonymity and lack of external authority of the highways encourages homicidal aggression towards fellow road users” (Murphy 39). Murphy interprets *Duel* as “a portrait of a contemporary America” where a fight for survival between a persecuted middle class protagonist and a homicidal antagonist reflects the cultural and political crisis of the late 1960s, particularly the public reception of Nixon’s policy of “Vietnamisation” (46). On the other hand, the film simultaneously depoliticizes the genre and maintains the tension between rebellion and tradition in which the former shifts away from the conflict with conformist society to masculine anxiety. The latter is expressed in the picture’s finale and the loss of innocence of the protagonist who has finally triumphed over a faceless menace, yet at the cost of becoming an oppressor himself, which also marks “the return of the sunbelt man to raw nature” (Wasser 50).

TRAPPED IN NO MAN'S LAND: POVS, FRAMES AND MIRRORS

To intensify the drama of the depicted events and settings, *Duel* exploits road movie aesthetics to an almost unprecedented extent, which is already evident in the film's opening sequence whose theatrical version begins with

a fixed, low-angle point-of-view shot from the bumper of the car as it pulls out of the garage of a middle-class home and, through a series of dissolves, drives through a suburban neighborhood, into downtown Los Angeles, and eventually out to the highway, thus visually reinforcing the character's departing the safety of suburbia and entering the wilderness, which is characterized by the isolation of David's car on the highway and the barrenness of the mountain landscape. (Kendrick 30)

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This measure not only establishes the narrative as plausible by implying the inauthenticity and conformity of Mann's complacent suburban existence, but it also literally engrosses the viewers in the Los Angeles urban landscape and the open roads of California Highway 14. To achieve such an effect, Spielberg draws upon a series of lap-dissolved shots, diegetic sound, voiced-over internal monologues and phantom ride conventions. Interestingly, the latter are invoked by positioning the camera in front of the car to provide the spectators with the automobile's point of view rather than driver's, who still remains unseen at that point, thus setting up "the triumph of the sunbelt sprawl over the traditional city as the car leaves the crowded streets of Los Angeles" (Wasser 49–50). Meanwhile, in the remaining sequences, the filmmaker relies primarily on montage and "chains of point-of-view-shots," which enable the spectators to closely align with the driver (Derry 254). Morris makes a similar observation by noting that "this point-of-view—the angle events are seen from—largely coincides with the metaphoric point-of-view, in the sense of opinion or judgment, implied by the invisible, absent narrator" (22).

Interestingly, when filming the hero inside the car, Spielberg utilizes front or side windshield and rearview mirror shots by placing the camera on the back seat and attaching it to the passenger's front door or locking it down on the hood, which might be indicative of entrapment and potential threat. Morris particularly emphasizes the role of mirrors and screens in reinforcing internal focalization, which, by definition, "implies metaphors of looking through a lens: consequently angle, distance, focal length, inclusion or exclusion, filtering, clarity or distortion" and consequently enforces an intense identification with Mann (25). Apart from the genre's common use of point-of-view shots, Spielberg relies on framing devices, such as long, deep-focus, aerial or side-by-side traveling and tracking shots with the aim of introducing sublime western scenery

and conveying “a visceral sense of traveling at a hyperhuman, modernized speed” (Laderman 15). McBride contends that both tension and suspense are effectively built on pacing, shot selection or rhythm and intensified by means of fast cross-cutting and shooting with multiple cameras from various angles, which creates a classical *mise-en-scène* and is typically reserved for action and chase sequences (205). It seems, then, that the theme of rebellion is also connoted at the level of editing, which, while imposing the first person narrative, not only evokes the open road, but also a sense of entrapment, lack of security and impending danger.

CONCLUSION

As seen, while addressing the genre’s traditional focus on cultural critique, transgression and roguery, *Scorpio Rising* and *Duel* both challenge and adhere to the postclassical road movie’s narrative paradigm and visual tropes. Following this trend, Spielberg’s film addresses rebellion by foregrounding car and masculine anxiety issues, represented by middle class, bourgeois and capitalist values, the protagonist’s loss of innocence, and the act of roguery itself. Meanwhile, Anger’s poetic take on the outlaw biker culture, burgeoning homosexuality, myth and ritual, and violence and death culture approaches the question of roguery by undermining the image of a dominant hypermasculinity with an ironic commentary on the sacrilegious and sadomasochistic practices and initiation rites of the gay community. Moreover, *Duel*’s demonization of the truck, seen as “an indictment of machines” or the mechanization of life (Spielberg qtd. in Crawley 26) and *Scorpio*’s (homo)eroticization of a motorcycle posit elements of social critique, disobedience and nonconformity within cynical and existential frameworks, thereby merging the road movie’s traditional discourse with auteurism and modernism. Whereas the former centers on car anxiety and portrays the automobile as a menace (Mottram 103), the latter, which also exemplifies “the transformative potential in the commodity,” depicts a motorcycle in a fetish form that “conflates a sexual with consumer seduction” and thus renders “the dominant society’s commodities the metanarrative of gay culture” (Moore 76, 80). In this sense, both pictures tend to personify the featured (outlaw) machines or related objects and, although they shift away from the activist spirit of the late 1960s road movies, they still retain elements of visionary rebellion by mocking stereotypical masculinity (*Duel*) and appropriating macho culture (*Scorpio*). Therefore, while occasionally relying on highly perceptive riding and driving sequences, which unfold passing landscapes as “a narrativized screen space” and convert them into objects of visual pleasure (Friedberg

184), *Scorpio* and *Duel* offer an alternative reading based on exposing commodity fetishism and remapping the image of a dominant male power substituted with that of a rebellious biker, being part of the gay collective, and a rebellious driver representing either submissive middle class (Mann) or excessive working class (truck driver) masculinity.

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