The Eternal Outsider:
The Western Hero as Existential Archetype

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Abstract

This thesis explores American western films of the 1945-65 period. The primary purpose of the thesis is to analyse the western's outsider hero in relation to literary-philosophical versions of French existential heroism. It therefore begins by examining processes of cultural exchange between America and France. The thesis then goes on to identify and compare the nature of outsider-ness as configured by both western and existentialist outsider figures. As a result, individualism emerges as their common constituent. That said, the thesis transcends the individualistic co-ordinates of the outsider figure through the employment of an ontological mode of critique. This involves the application of key ontological concepts such as autonomy, alienation and absurdity to the western's outsider figure. These are suggested by the ontological mode of being he inhabits, which is designated as the authentic in-itself. Consequently, the creative interpretation of western representations and narratives in light of existentialist concepts becomes possible. Recast in ontological terms, the western is found to provide a more fully worked out treatment of individual autonomy than that offered by the existentialist works from which it derives. This is due to the western's non-societal context, a mythical space which enables a presentation of individual autonomy unconstrained by the societal configurations which beset the existentialist outsider. With this in mind, the western's positive presentation of autonomy and the power it confers is contrasted with existentialism's negative view, which emphasises the alienation and punishment of the societal outsider. At the same time, both forms ultimately affirm that autonomy is unattainable within societal configurations, the western by its reliance on a mythical context, and existentialism through its presentation of the punishment attendant upon the outsider in a societal context. Conclusions such as these demonstrate the distinctive contribution that an ontological critique of the kind undertaken by this thesis can make to the study of the western hero.

Acknowledgements

Introduction
The Eternal Outsider:
The Western Hero as Existential Archetype

By Ruth Griffin

The central aim of the thesis is to view the western hero through the lens of existentialism, in order to undertake an ontological exploration of a hero figure frequently analysed in purely ideological terms. With this in mind, the application of existentialist ideas and concepts enables the western hero to be re-examined in terms of the type of ontological being-in-the-world he encapsulates, namely the mode of the in-itself. This non-societal mode of existence tends to be attributed to individualism, but existential analysis of the kind undertaken by the thesis recasts this loner status as signifying an ontological state as well as an ideological one. Understood in this way, the western hero has implications for the nature of existence, of differing modes of being-in-the-world, which will be approached through such related concepts as autonomy, authenticity, anomie and alienation. A strong emphasis will be placed upon situating such ontological states in their non/societal context, since this is crucial to their inflection through the western hero, a phenomenon which will become apparent when compared with his existentialist counterpart in Chapter Two. Meanwhile, in the latter half of the thesis, I explore masculinity, freedom and violence—key strands of the western narrative—as expressions of the autonomous self.

The lone gunman hero yields the most points of contact with that of the existential outsider, namely a lone status in relation to society, and so is most suitable for ontological type of analysis of the kind undertaken in the thesis. The thesis employs a wide-ranging methodology in order to explore this figure, drawing its source material mainly from French existentialist literature, French existentialist philosophy, philosophical criticism, and works which fall within the film/cultural studies sphere. In this way, the methodological approach of the thesis can be described as a form of conversation between the interlinked realms of philosophy, literature and film. As

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such, its claim to originality is based on the creative reading of westerns in light of existentialist ideas and concepts, coupled with a theoretical framework which aims to go beyond traditional individualistic readings of the western hero's lone status by means of ontological analysis. This involves the application of existentialist concepts to representations of the western outsider figure and the texts in which he appears, in order to establish the mode of being-in-the-world which he can be said to represent, together with its implications for the relationship between the individual and societal context. This ontological approach therefore transcends the individualism of the outsider by exploring the existential essence of outsider-ness in its various permutations, together with the implications this suggests for societal modes of being as presented by the western. With such issues in mind, the western will be reconfigured into a narrative concerning the clash between non-societal and societal beings, which can be further sub-divided into the mode of the in-itself, the-one and the being-for-others, rather than as merely a conflict between the individualism of the mythical Wild West and the encroaching forces of civilisation, as alternative ideologically orientated readings tend to propose.

There are various reasons behind the choice of mainly French, literary existentialism as a crucial source for much of the thesis, not least the wide diversity of work defined as "existentialist". As Walter Kaufmann noted concerning the difficulties of classification, 'existentialism is not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets'.[1] It is therefore partly due to practical considerations that I have chosen specific forms of existentialist work, most especially those of a literary nature written by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. This is not an arbitrary selection, however. It is based on the timeframe that Camus and Sartre's work shares with the western, significant for cultural analysis of the period exemplified by the notion of cultural exchange outlined in Chapter Two. Even more significantly for the concerns of the thesis, however, both forms revolve around the autonomous individual, and, in turn, related concepts like individualism, freedom, and the relationship between the individual and society. For instance, Sartre's view of morality[2] is highly applicable to

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[1] Kaufmann, W. ed. 1975. *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*. London: Meridian. p. 11.
[2] This is the case in his early work, before the shift to Marxism and the social self discussed in Chapter Four.

that of the western hero, in that it involves notions of individual self-discovery and journey towards autonomy suggestive of romanticism, even within the complex social structures in which Sartre writes. As Mary Warnock notes, 'It is impossible not to be involved in the political and social situation in which one finds oneself, but the way through it must be found for each one by himself'.[3] A philosophy of action is also central to many forms of existentialism; the notion of an existential project presupposes active self-creation on the part of the individual, rather than a lapse into determinism and passivity. Although, as I maintain in Chapter Three's exploration of masculinity, the westerner does not display this urge to project himself into an unknown future, rather, is fixed in essence, nevertheless the active element of existentialism resonates with the westerner's world view: 'He [Camus' Outsider][4] is—and here he is a perfect though unintentional illustration of what Sartre regards as existentiality—immediacy of action created anew from moment to moment'.[5] Even more specifically, the existentialist code of ethics, particularly prominent in Camus' philosophy, is especially relevant to an understanding of the western hero's value system, a feature which is therefore one of the central concerns of the thesis. Nor is the linkage of the two philosophers' work in this way coincidental, as friends and philosophers working at similar times within the field of existentialism.[6] As a result, Camus and Sartre are frequently linked in some sections of the thesis, most notably in Chapter Two. At the same time, I am aware that, 'no two men could have felt the times more differently',[7] reflected by my overall focus on Camus' version of existentialist outsider-ness, which is most closely related to the western's outsider figure and the contemporary cultural climate.

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[3] Warnock, M. 1978. 3rd ed. *Ethics since 1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 127.

[4] Square brackets hereafter denote my own insertions of words within quotes. These are intended to aid the reader's understanding and/or rephrase the quote for the purposes of narrative flow.

[5] Pollman, L. *Sartre and Camus: Literature of Existence*. New York: Frederick Ungar. p.133.

[6] Indeed, these features have frequently led to joint considerations of their work, for example S. Beynon John's assertion that, 'In intellectual power, coherence, and originality, Albert Camus may not be the equal of Jean-Paul Sartre—with whom he shares certain affinities', a statement which in itself presupposes the validity of such comparisons. Germaine Breé makes the connection even more explicit, both by entitling a book *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment* [London: Calder & Boyars], and articulating the relationship in terms of the cultural moment: 'What had drawn Sartre and Camus together for a short while was a brutal and stark crisis [which] made them the spokesmen of the mid-century years'. Ibid., pp. 248-249.

[7] Ibid., p. 249.

One of the distinctive qualities of the thesis lies in its usage of literary philosophy, thereby signalling an assumption that this form is a valid medium for the transmission and critical analysis of explicitly philosophical ideas. It is certainly the case that both professional writers and philosophers have employed literary forms, notably the novel, in this way. This is particularly so in the case of Camus, primarily a novelist and journalist, but one who aimed to transmit his philosophical and political ideas via the literary/theatrical medium. This can be viewed as typical of contemporary French practice, 'to do with the philosophical presuppositions of dramatists such as Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Marcel and Camus…all of them have in common a conviction that moral and philosophical dilemmas must be approached from a concrete, human standpoint…they find the theatre, in so far as it works through individuals towards ideas, a natural vehicle of expression'.[8] In a similar manner, Sartre used the literary form widely; novels, plays and essays, as well as the more traditional philosophical treatise, despite the fact that he is usually categorised as a professional philosopher. Furthermore, in Warnock's estimation, 'Sartre is a literary not a philosophical giant',[9] and Sartre himself deemed it important to delineate the two methods of writing, while not privileging either form, stating that:

> Philosophy has a technical language that one must use—changing it whenever necessary, if one is forging new ideas. It is this accumulation of technical phrases which creates the total meaning, a meaning which has more than one level. Whereas in a novel, what produces the larger meaning is the superimposing of meanings within a single phrase—from the clearest, most immediate meaning to the most profound, the most complex meaning.[10]

Even Sartre's mode of analysis in what is generally regarded as a philosophical text, *Being and Nothingness*,[11] uses a number of literary devices, for example, phrases and parables, as he himself acknowledged when interviewed:

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[8] From the introduction by John Cruickshank to Camus, A. 1965. *Caligula and Cross Purpose.* Middlesex: Penguin. p. 20.
[9] Ibid., p. 12.
[10] Extract from 'Self-Portrait at Seventy', an interview with Michel Contat, which appeared in, 'Le Nouvel Observateur', June 23, 1975. The interview is taken from Sartre, J.-P. Tr. Paul Auster. & Lydia Davis. 1978. *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays.* London: Andre Deutsch. p. 9.
[11] Sartre, J.-P. 1998. *Being and Nothingness.* London: Routledge.

Michel Contat: *And have you ever reproached yourself for including in Being and Nothingness phrases that were too literary, such as "Man is a useless passion," which is excessively dramatic.*[12]

Jean-Paul Sartre: Yes, I made the mistake—and most other philosophers have made it too—of using literary phrases in a text whose language should have been strictly technical. That is, the meaning of the words should have been unequivocal.[13]

This would suggest that in Sartre's view, the two mediums should be distinct, but as these boundaries are not strictly delineated in practice, I draw extensively on the literary/philosophical form. Certainly, this approach differs from those typically adopted towards more traditional modes of philosophy. As such, my mode of critical inquiry reflects the overlap between literary philosophy and philosophical literature, a confluence that Leo Pollman describes specifically in relation to Sartre's literature, although his words equally apply to literary philosophy as a whole:

> it presents itself as a literary reality, which as such carries a philosophical meaning, but is also, in its form and content, intimately related to its philosophical meaning. It would therefore seem legitimate to say that a purely literary analysis of this work is not capable of exploring even the full literary reality because the philosophical reality is inextricably implicit within it.[14]

It is, then, the existentialist outsider and literary philosophy which provide the main point of overlap between the apparently very distinct realms of philosophy and the western, thereby providing the focal point of the thesis. It is important to stress that this is only one in a number of possible approaches to the outsider figure. Potential alternatives include analysis of its relationship with earlier forms of hero such as the adventurer, knight and warrior, as well as female/feminist variants, all of which necessarily lie outside the scope of the thesis. Instead, during the course of the thesis I maintain that an analogy can productively be drawn between two ontological types, the outsider and the western hero, and that in light of this, an exploration of the mode of ontological being embodied by the western hero becomes possible. That said I am not making claims for a direct correlation between the westerner and the existentialist outsider in the sense of equivalence. They are certainly not identical, though they can

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[12] The italics are retained from the original text.
[13] Sartre, 1978. op. cit., p. 9.
[14] Pollman, op. cit., p. 1.

both be seen in terms of the non-societal in-itself as I go on to argue. Rather, ontological analysis can be a productive tool for conceptualising the westerner in a way that seeks to offer a fresh perspective on a familiar heroic type, whose outsider-ness could more conventionally be viewed as being a product of the ideology of individualism. An existential analysis of the type undertaken by the thesis, then, is able to go further than this, by proposing that the western hero figure has ontological implications, chiefly that he conveys the non-societal self more convincingly than the existentialist hero can, due to the mythical non-societal context from which the type derives. In this way, the western hero embodies existentialist concepts such as autonomy more effectively than the societally-inflected existentialist hero.

In more general terms, the westerner can be identified and analysed in terms of outsider-ness due to a number of commonalities with the existentialist outsider, and it is here that the relevance of ontological analysis becomes evident. It is important to note that the existence of the western's outsider figure, which I analyse in terms of a specific mode of existential being, is not being taken as evidence for conscious intent on the part of contemporary filmmakers, a notion which would at any rate be particularly difficult, if not impossible, to prove. However, the emergence of this particular figure can be argued to capture a prominent element in the intellectual climate of the era, as I argue in Chapter Two. This can be seen in the influence of existentialist ideas upon the cultural formations of contemporary America, evident in the literary work of Norman Mailer, for example, in addition to filmic themes. Likewise, the impact of American culture on French cultural forms is particularly marked in French film criticism, for example the work of the *Cahiers du Cinema* journal, which displayed a marked tendency towards a critical analysis of Hollywood film during the 1950s and 1960s. This engagement with American culture is not confined to film criticism by any means. For instance, in the field of literary/philosophical analysis, Sartre's essays clearly reveal his interest in American culture, and will accordingly provide source material for the discussion of these influences, which focus upon the relationship between existentialism and American culture. It will be suggested that this phenomenon can be at least partially be attributed to the dynamic of cultural exchange between Europe, particularly France, and America after the Second World War, and so the film texts used will principally

be drawn from this timeframe, primarily, but not exclusively, 1945-1965. Not coincidentally in light of the central concerns of the thesis, this also represents the peak period for existentialism's prominence in European and American culture. However, once again, this is not to make claims for a direct or unmediated link between Hollywood film, specifically the western, and existentialism, although it is likely that the philosophy exercised at least some degree of influence upon members of the cultural elite both in America and elsewhere, a common cultural climate from which there is no reason to suppose film-makers exempt.

This peak can partly be attributed to shifts in values during the twentieth century, particularly during the period encompassing the two World Wars. In this way, existentialism's interest in the autonomous individual becomes the logical outcome of the erosion of grand narratives and certainties so frequently observed by commentators, who view them as symptomatic of a whole raft of contemporary historical and cultural forces. In this way, Camus and Sartre's version of existentialism and its influence on popular culture can certainly be characterised as emblematic of its cultural moment, for example that it, 'made articulate many of their [his contemporaries] own feelings: their sense of the failure of nineteenth-century humanist assumptions; their suspicion of such great rallying words such as "freedom", "justice", "honour", "discipline"; their awareness of the thorough breakdown of so much religious and political idealism'.[15] Moreover, Camus himself specifically located his ideas in this era when reflecting on his work in the 1955 preface to *The Myth of Sisyphus*: 'It [*The Myth of Sisyphus*] attempts to resolve the problem of suicide…without the aid of eternal values which, temporarily perhaps, are absent or distorted in contemporary Europe… Written fifteen years ago, in 1940, amidst the French and European disaster, this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism'.[16] This is manifested through existentialism's focal concerns: the individual, individualism and autonomous freedom in tension with societal configurations, further indicating loss of faith in social systems occurring at a specific historical moment. Consequently, 'on the whole [existentialism] is seen now as a somewhat eccentric

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[15] Camus, 1967, op. cit., p.17.
[16] Camus, A. 1975. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Middlesex: Penguin. p. 7.

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and local part of history, and the developments in ethics since 1960 have certainly not been along existentialist lines'.[17]

These observations are based on a specific, and narrow, definition of existentialism, however. Perhaps Kaufmann is clearest on this distinction between what might be termed the broadly existentialist frameworks found in the narrative themes or atmosphere in many "existentialist" literary works. Themes relating to nihilism and absurdity, for example, appear in such works as *Crime and Punishment*[18] and *The Trial*[19] analysed in Chapters Two and Four respectively. Sartre and Camus, meanwhile, offer a more politically inflected version of the philosophy, which will be investigated in more depth than the literary variants owing to their philosophical credentials, which are particularly pertinent for ontological analysis.[20] In the same way, the western can also be seen as emblematic of its historical and cultural moment. While its focus on the individual is in part derived from a formal convention, for example, the romantic adventurer figure, its popularity at this time could be argued to signify a lack of confidence in societal values and a consequent refuge in individualism evident in the narrative frameworks of both the western and existentialism. Consequently, such shared concerns constitute the basis for my ontological analysis of the mode of being projected by the western and existentialist outsider figures.

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[17] Warnock, op. cit., p.135. That said, in a 1972 interview Sartre stated that, despite his widely publicised turn to Marxist activism: 'If a label is absolutely necessary, I would like 'existentialist' better'. [Sartre, 1978, op. cit., p. 60]. He does, however, concur with Warnock's assessment to the extent that he admits that by this time, 'no one calls me "existentialist" any more except in textbooks, where it doesn't mean anything'. Ibid., p. 60.

[18] Dostoyevsky, F., 1997. *Crime and Punishment.* London: Penguin. Another of Dostoyevsky's works, *The Brothers Karamazov* [Middlesex: Penguin], focuses on the existence of God: 'if there were no God, he would have to be invented. Man has actually invented God. Cited in Crane, B. 2001. *Man is a Mystery. It Must be Unraveled... A Collection of Dostoyevsky's Thoughts on the Human Condition from Anger to Youth.* Lincoln, N.E: Writers Club Press. p. 78.

[19] *The Trial,* [Kafka, F. 1953. London: Penguin]. *The Castle,* [1957, London: Penguin] also explores similar themes.

[20] For Sartre, the political and existentialist realms are inseparable, since he argued existentialism to be autonomous within Marxism. See Sartre, 1978, op. cit., p. 60.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis pivots around analysis of the western hero in light of existentialist ideas and concepts. As such, I begin by mapping the field of study by examining a number of different approaches to the western in Chapter One. Chapter Two, meanwhile, situates the western hero in the context of the process of cultural exchange between the US and France, before going on to compare and contrast the western and existentialist hero figures via ontological analysis. The purpose of this method is to identify the mode of being-in-the-world embodied by the outsider figure and the implications this holds for representations of the western hero. With this in mind, I identify a number of key ontological characteristics, which can be seen as the product of the ontological mode of the in-itself exhibited by both the western and existentialist outsider figures. This is designated as being the non-societal self, which I argue to be manifested in its essential form due to the western's mythical, non-societal context. As previously stated, this focus on the individual nature of the western hero transcends ideological interpretations by highlighting the consequences of hyper-subjectivity—autonomy— for modes of existence-in-the-world. As a result, the differing forms of non/societal selves represented by the western narrative and its representations of outsider-ness have important implications for nature of individual autonomy within, and external to, societal formations, combined with the possible pathologies attendant on such modes of being, such as the alienation and anomie displayed by the societally imbued existentialist outsider.

These characteristics of the in-itself, such as autonomy, authenticity, alienation and anomie form the backbone of Chapters Three, Four and Five, because they manifest themselves in key themes such as the "masculine" quest for freedom, violence, justice and death, which become expressions of the mode of being, or negation of being, projected by the western outsider figure, namely, the exercise of the autonomous self in necessarily non-societal forms. Finally, the Conclusion presents a broad overview and assessment of the overall work. Here, I condense the central findings of the thesis, suggesting the implications these hold for the non-societal, autonomous self as projected by the western's outsider figure, in addition to signalling new directions of inquiry arising from the overall concerns and findings of the thesis.

Chapter One
Approaches to the Western

Introduction

The western film genre and, in turn, its heroes, have been analysed using a variety of approaches drawn from humanities and social studies disciplines. The purpose of this chapter is to map the field of study and to position the methodology of the thesis in relation to these, and so the chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I review a selection of the most prominent and influential approaches to the western, encompassing such areas as historical/literary studies and film/cultural studies approaches; scholarship and genre; structuralism; film-philosophy and, finally, post-modernism and spectatorship. Once such theoretical ground clearing has taken place, I turn to a consideration of the methodology of the thesis itself by situating it in relation to the previously discussed approaches, initially in relation to the turn to philosophy in film studies and traditions of cultural contextualisation. I then consider some of the ways in which existentialism can be employed as a methodological tool via a comparative study of both the hero types and the ideological frameworks offered by the two forms. This can convincingly be formulated as a conversation between the two cultures, resulting in the possibility of an existentialist reading of the western hero undertaken by the thesis. With this in mind, the lone western hero is examined in terms of ideas and concepts drawn from existentialist literature, enabling an ontological analysis of the western and existentialist outsider figures. I argue that the feasibility of such comparisons derives in part from the concomitant cultural exchanges between France and America during the post Second World War era, arguably responsible for the emergence of the individual outsider figure in a number of "masculine" film genres.[1]

I then turn my attention to issues that underpin the thesis as a whole such as the relationship between cinema and culture, text and context, the impact of the Second

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[1] I explore such gender categorisations in Chapter Three. While a detailed study of such genres as *film noir* and the road movie lies outside the confines of this thesis, I will nonetheless refer to them where relevant. For instance, I present *noir* in terms of the psychoanalytic approach later in this chapter.

World War on American and European culture and, crucially, the notion of cultural exchange between France and the United States and, in turn, its influence on cultural discourse.[2] In fact, this dynamic has generated much useful source material for this project, not only from French film critics who have long concerned themselves with the philosophical analysis of Hollywood film—*Cahiers du Cinéma* critic André Bazin's work on the western,[3] for instance, proving particularly useful for mapping genre boundaries—but much more crucially for the concerns of the thesis, the literary variant of existentialism which constitutes the majority of my existentialist source material as explained in the introductory chapter.

Once this review of the theoretical and methodological field is complete, I consider the western as a film genre before finally condensing the main methodological components of the thesis and laying the groundwork for the next chapter.

The Western: Critical Perspectives

The western has been approached using a variety of methodologies, although sustained scholarly activity has been partial, concentrated around essays, anthologies and collaborative works rather than the substantial and sophisticated critiques evident in relation to a number of other film genres.[4] *The Movie Book of the Western*[5] and *Back in the Saddle Again*[6] are fairly typical of this trend towards collections, for they present an interesting and diverse selection of pieces by film writers who have gained prominence in other areas of film research. In *Back in the Saddle Again*, for instance,

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[2] The notion of cultural exchange between France and America underpins the entire thesis. However, a detailed discussion of the phenomenon appears in the next chapter.

[3] The two main pieces referred to in the thesis are 'The Western: Or The American Film Par Excellence', and 'The Evolution of the Western', both in Bazin, A Tr. & ed. Hugh Gray. 1972. *What is Cinema? Volume 2*. London: University of California Press. The French interest in the genre is further evidenced by J. L. Rieupeyrout's work used by Bazin; [Rieupeyrout, J. L. 1953. *Le Western ou Le Cinema Américain Par Excellence*. Paris: Editions du Cerf], which I have unfortunately been unable to source for further inquiry. Indeed, Rieupeyrout's interest in the western even extended to producing an introductory guide to the lives of the inhabitants of the Wild West: Rieupeyrout, J. L 1984. *The Wild West (Everyday Lives)*. London: Dragon.

[4] Both the horror film and female melodrama, for example, have been extensively analysed particularly by feminist scholars.

[5] Cameron, I. & Pye, D. eds. 1996. *The Movie Book of the Western*. London: Studio Vista.

[6] Buscombe, E. & Pearson, R.E. eds. 1998. *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*. London: BFI.

Steve Neale, who is noted for his work on genre studies, particularly film comedy,[7] contributes a piece on racial representations in the western, which represents one of the main critical approaches to the western, the genre critique.[8] This is partly indicative of the nature of the genre itself due to its formulaic tendencies. As a result, the western's self-contained stylistic boundaries are particularly suited to—and can be said almost to invite—this type of analysis. At the same time, the main premise of genre theory is itself problematic, namely the paradox involved in the attempt to analyse films in terms of pre-determined sets of characteristics derived from the very films under scrutiny, a circularity that has frequently been noted in analysis of the approach.

Noël Carroll is another writer unfamiliar to western criticism appearing in the same collection, although in contrast to Neale, his main area of specialism is film-philosophy.[9] 'The Professional Western: South of the Border', concerns the Mexican border/hero-as-mercenary strand of the western,[10] while *Back in the Saddle*'s additional topics range from the conventional—John Ford with special reference to Monument Valley—through to relatively unfamiliar territory, for example, the television western,[11] singing cowboys,[12] and the connotations peculiar to cowboy

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[7] See, for example, Neale's influential work from 1980. *Genre*, [London: B.F.I], which was partly responsible for a resurgence of interest in the arena of genre studies. His work specifically on the topic of film comedy includes the book from 1990, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* co-written with Frank Krutnik. London: Routledge.

[8] Steve Neale, 'Vanishing Americans: Racial and Ethnic Issues in the Interpretation and Context of Post-War "Pro-Indian" Westerns', in Buscombe & Pearson, op. cit., pp. 8-28. Critiques of the western specifically in terms of race tend to be limited to revisionist interpretations of films and do not therefore constitute a substantive perspective. See, for instance, Tag Gallagher, 'Angels Gambol Where They Will: John Ford's Indians', in Kitses, J. & Rickman, G. eds. [1999. *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight. pp. 269-275]. Similarly, I do not focus on gender criticism in this chapter either, but see Pam Cook, 'Women and the Western', in ibid., pp. 293-300 for an example of such work. Granted the prominent place of masculinity within the thesis's overall concerns, however, I make use of various forms of feminist critique in Chapter Three. Meanwhile, Phillip French's *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*, [London: Secker & Warburg], offers a good starting point for genre studies of the western.

[9] For instance, the co-edited work, Bordwell, D. & Carroll, N. eds. 1996. *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. London: University of Wisconsin Press, covers such topics as film theory and aesthetics, the psychology of film and historical analysis of film. I discuss film-philosophy later in the chapter.

[10] Noël Carroll, 'The Professional Western: South of the Border', in Buscombe & Pearson, op. cit., pp. 46-62. Examples of such films include *Vera Cruz*, [1954. Directed by Robert Aldrich. USA: U. A.], and *The Wild Bunch*, [1968. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. USA: Warner Bros.], respectively.

[11] William Boddy, '"Sixty Million Viewers Can't Be Wrong": The Rise and Fall of the Television Western', in ibid., pp. 119-140.

[12] Peter Stanfield, 'Dixie Cowboys and Blue Yodels: The Strange History of the Singing Cowboy', in ibid., pp. 96-118.

costume.[13] This broad spectrum of criticism is typical of the contemporary western film anthology, and can be said to fall within the remit of cultural studies analysis, which I consider in more detail later in the chapter.

Meanwhile, the heuristic trajectory of *substantive* western scholarship arguably commenced with the literary-historical position, which emerged as a corollary of the genre's ostensibly historical setting.[14] This method critiques the western largely in terms of its historical co-ordinates and ideological framework, and explores how these have impacted on narrative and figurative portrayals by employing ideological and historical concepts drawn from American history. The concept of "Manifest Destiny" is a case in point; a notion promulgated by US leaders in the 1840's in order to justify aggressive American expansionism. This concept forms the basis of many fictional and empirical works concerning the historical West, and relates to an idealised sense of mission which supposedly granted the colonisers natural, even God-given, land rights, owing to a number of capabilities which rendered them naturally superior to the primitive "savages", who were, in contrast, characterised as childlike. This alleged inferiority meant that, for the colonisers, the Native Americans automatically abnegated their land rights to those more greatly suited for subjugation both of land and indigenous population, thereby rendering it a "natural" process, rather than an inherently exploitative one.

Historical approaches take a number of forms. Douglas Pye, for instance, blends historical and allegorical interpretations derived from the cultural and historical context of the film's production, although the rationale that governs this strategy is rarely addressed: '*Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970) is perhaps the locus classicus of the Vietnam Western, not only because of its scale and ambition, but because it very clearly exemplifies the reversal of values and some of its attendant dangers'.[15] Furthermore, Pye regards the director's vision as being inextricably linked with the film's narrative purpose, which typifies the *auteur* mode of criticism, a theory whose

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[13] Jane Marie Ganes and Charlotte Cornelia Herzog, 'The Fantasy of Authenticity in Western Costume', in ibid., pp. 172-181.
[14] By "ostensibly", I mean that, while the western is set on the frontier at a specific time in history, this has more to do with ideological than historical concerns, a feature to which I will return in Chapter Four.
[15] Douglas Pye, 'Ulzana's Raid', in Cameron & Pye, op. cit., p. 263.

characteristics and limitations will be addressed shortly, since it exemplifies another major critical perspective on the western:

> The attack on White American civilisation and the critique of America's involvement in Vietnam implied by the virtual extinction of the Cheyennes are clearly not opportunistic responses in Penn; they seem to spring from despair about individual and political solutions that is in itself a product of the apparent failure of liberalism as a political and social stance (one can trace the development in Penn's earlier films).[16]

Meanwhile, Jennifer Peterson historically contextualises the themes of *Johnny Guitar*[17] in relation to the cultural concerns of the decade, stating that, 'Such a conflict between a righteous individual wrongly scapegoated and an angry community is particularly significant to the film's early 1950's context as an implicit (and explicitly stated) critique of McCarthyite anti-Communist fervour',[18] going on to draw a direct parallel between the director's political allegiances and the themes presented by his films: 'Once a member of the Communist party himself, Ray was surprisingly not blacklisted, though he was sympathetic to the plight of those who were'.[19]

Peter Stanfield also contextualises his work historically and culturally, this time, though, in relation to an entire western sub-genre, that of the singing cowboy. He argues, for instance, that: 'The history of the singing cowboy is intimately tied up with the process of making Country music respectable and therefore marketable. It was the image and mythology of the cowboy that provided the most accessible means of repressing the vulgarity of Southern vernacular music, while simultaneously suggesting a classless and uncontroversial image of white supremacy'.[20] Stanfield goes on to apply these premises to Gene Autrey's work, positioning the films in relation to the Depression era and arguing that they were: 'not just star vehicles, but also addressed the difficulties his audience confronted in making the socio-economic change from subsistence farming to a culture of consumption, from self-employment

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[16] Ibid., p. 263.
[17] *Johnny Guitar*, 1953. Directed by Nicholas Ray. USA: Republic. I offer an ontological analysis of the film in Chapter Five.
[18] Jennifer Peterson, 1996. 'The Competing Tunes of Johnny Guitar: Liberalism, Sexuality, Masquerade', in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., p. 322.
[19] Ibid., p. 323.
[20] Stanfield, in Buscombe and Pearson, op. cit., p. 100.

to industrial practices and wage dependency, from rural to urban living',[21] in a move reflective of his intention to reclaim the singing cowboy from his former critical oblivion: 'The 1930s are something of a black hole in criticism of Western films'.[22]

Further demonstrating the employment of historical methodologies, this time in an overtly ideological sense, Jon Tuska maintains such approaches to be 'principally preoccupied with the social and psychological aspects of the systematic distortion and misrepresentation of our past and the possible influence this common practice in Western films exerted, and continues to exert, on the national character of Americans'.[23] Elaborating on this methodological theme, he goes on to state that, 'it is my intention to employ the concept of historical reality as my basic standard of evaluation'.[24] Underlying this conception of historiography, though, is the problematic notion that there exists a "reality" which can be accessed, an issue which for Dominic La Capra is inevitably generated by historical approaches: 'Reality is an inference— often a shaky one, always a problematic one. It is becoming more difficult, even for practitioners of the craft resistant to theory, to confide in an epistemology of documentary realism that presents the text as a simple transparency'.[25] This illustrates one of the inherent flaws in the approach, for example the virtual impossibility of uncovering the "objective facts" concerning the historical American West besides those of a relatively unproductive kind, dates of battles and the like.[26] Moreover, the western hardly constitutes appropriate source material for investigations into historical "fact". After all, historical evaluation is entirely the wrong vantage point from which to view any kind of fiction film, "historically" based or otherwise.

That said, Tuska's attempts to interrogate the western's history in terms of both representational and actual historical context and content is not rendered entirely invalid. Tuska himself problematises the approach by drawing on a range of

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[21] Ibid., p. 115.

[22] Peter Stanfield, 'County Music and the 1939 Western: From Hillbillies to Cowboys', in Cameron & Pye, op. cit., p. 22.

[23] Extract from the introduction to Tuska, J. 1985. *The American West in Film: Critical Approaches to the Western*. London: Greenwood. p. xiv.

[24] Ibid., p. xv.

[25] From the introduction to LaCapra, D. 1978. *A Preface to Sartre: A Critical Introduction to Sartre's Literary and Philosophical Writings*. New York: Cornell University Press. p. 21.

[26] Even such apparently objective data as this can be open to debate, however.

viewpoints in order to define the nature of "historical reality", culminating in the observation that, 'the historian must be willing to admit that this historical construction is at best only probable and provisional'.[27] He further justifies his position by contrasting it with those critics who attempt to deny the importance of the western's historical basis when engaging in film analysis, illustrating potential consequences of this by citing a confrontation[28] over possible interpretations of *The Searchers*:[29]

> In his [Pilkington's] view Ford's film was a myth about the past and, as such, has no relationship whatsoever to historical reality and cannot be approached in that fashion. I must disagree and one of my most fundamental reasons for disagreeing is that Native Americans were not, and are not, *mythical*. A film about the righteousness of killing Indians is making an ethical statement and the significance of such a statement must play an integral part in any critical approach to the film.[30]

This reveals tensions between cultural theory and film history, and further highlights the implications this might have for film interpretation and analysis. Whether these critical positions are *necessarily* mutually exclusive is another matter, though for Tuska it seems that they are.

Richard Slotkin also adopts a historical approach in his book *Gunfighter Nation*,[31] although this takes a more innovative form than Tuska's, since it is applied to a contemporary context. Slotkin achieves this by interweaving ideology and American history, spheres that can be, in any case, difficult to distinguish. This approach is used in relation to the western and in a general sense during the course of an investigation into American societal values. The analysis revolves primarily around the concept of frontier, its significance for Americans and the ways in which ideology and history are inextricably linked both to national identity and history. For example, 'Hollywood

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[27] Tuska, op. cit., p. xv.
[28] The dispute in question was over an essay on *The Searchers* by Pilkington in *Western Movies* edited by Pilkington, W.T. & Graham, D. 1979, University of New Mexico Press. p.3. Tuska outlined his objections to the views expressed in the article via a letter to Pilkington who, according to Tuska, dismissed these charges as irrelevant.
[29] *The Searchers*, 1956. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros. Interestingly, despite the film's overt ambiguities, Tuska describes it as 'one of the most viciously anti-Indian films ever made'. Tuska, op. cit., p. xix.
[30] Ibid., p. xix.
[31] Slotkin, R. 1990. *Gunfighter Nation*. New York: Harvard University Press.

preferred, as always, to assimilate competing ideologies to a common language of myth and genre. The new wave of Western features drew on both Beardian progressivism and Popular Front populism to produce three different ways of resolving the problem of making movies out of American mythology'.[32] This culturally specific historical concept of frontier, Slotkin argues, has attained the status of myth, and so he analyses the western as an exemplar both of frontier ideology and its mythological resonances. With this in mind, he partly attributes the genre's narrative impact to the mythological significance of the frontier and its related connotations such as the interlinked imagery of freedom and geographical space. In actuality, however, whilst these connotations derive from a specifically American historical moment, that of the winning and closing of the frontier, and are thereby apparently localised, the western has maintained its global appeal nonetheless. This in turn suggests that such connotations have a more universal character than the American orientated nature advocated by Slotkin might suggest.[33]

The form taken by cultural studies/film studies approaches to the western have been indicated briefly in the preceding overview of the anthology. Broadly speaking, they attempt to relate text to context in order to foreground previously overlooked cultural facets and contexts of the genre in question. The most widely used technique adopted by cultural theorists involves intricate filmic textual analysis, which is then mapped onto the cultural and social developments operating during the period surrounding the film's production. Alternatively, this process is reversed and a detailed investigation of cultural context itself is undertaken. The attempt is then made to discern such contextual elements in the texts of the period. As such, cultural theory's principle objective is to contextualise cultural issues, such as ideology, which are argued to underpin filmic narratives.

It should not be inferred that this represents a crudely deterministic approach, namely that films directly mirror the context of their production. Instead, cultural theorists seek to reveal the cultural dimensions by relating text to context in a fluid manner, which takes into account processes of mediation and contestation in cultural

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[32] Ibid., p. 286.
[33] I discuss both Slotkin's ideas and the nature of the genre's appeal in Chapter Four.

representations, and to this end, they draw on a number of different critical approaches. For example, in terms of film, cultural theorists frequently employ psychoanalytical concepts in order to identify those elements submerged within film narrative and ideological subtexts, frequently conveyed via imagery. Mirrors, for example, are standard devices for such interpretations.[34] Such techniques have been particularly enduring in feminist film criticism, particularly in relation to the Hitchcock oeuvre and *film noir*,[35] although responses from members of the film journal *Screen*'s editorial board to submissions in the field indicate that the approach met with some initial resistance:

> we accept that psychoanalysis is an intellectual discipline that may provide fruitful insights for film theory. However, we feel that it has to be approached with a degree of critical caution since certain of its concepts and methods are undeveloped while others are matters of substantial debate both within psychoanalysis and outside it.[36]

In this form of criticism, then, concepts such as the Lacanian model of the mirror stage in psychic development, or the return of the unconscious as manifested through the imagery of the horror film, are adapted directly from psychoanalysis. In relation to the mirror stage, for example:

> Laura Mulvey makes a direct analogy between the cinema and the mirror phase, describing identification in terms of the spectator identifying with stars. Metz refuses such a direct analogy between the cinema and the mirror phase and produces a much more indirect analogy which leads him to describe identification in terms of the spectator's identifying with himself as 'pure act of perception.[37]

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[34] A mirror's reflection, for instance, can be interpreted in a variety of ways as well as being a dramatic device in *noir* or horror films such as *Lady from Shanghai*, [1948. Directed by Orson Welles. USA: Columbia]—which makes use of a hall of mirrors in its closing sequences—and *Dead of Night*, [1945. Directed by Charles Cavalcanti. GB: Ealing], in which the mirror's reflection depicts scenes no longer existent. Importantly, however, such phenomena as cracked mirrors can be analysed in psychoanalytical terms, invoking fragmentation of the self/identity, and thus signalling psychological import, which transcends dramatic effects.

[35] For a classic example of feminist film criticism using a psychoanalytical model, see Laura Mulvey's article from the 1975 issue of *Screen*, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', included in the useful collection of essays edited by Joanne Hollows, Peter Hutchings & Mark Jancovich, [2000. *The Film Studies Reader*. London: Arnold]. I will discuss this piece in relation to masculinity in Chapter Three.

[36] Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell & Christopher Williams, 'Psychoanalysis and Film', in Caughie, J. & Kuhn, A. eds. 1992. *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. London: Routledge. p. 35.

[37] Ibid., p. 42.

At the same time, a number of objections can be levelled at this approach:

> Ever since Freud first developed his ideas, psychoanalysis has been raided by other disciplines and some of its concepts appropriated. In the course of this appropriation, the concepts have usually become imprecise and devalued. We're concerned that the differing uses of psychoanalytical concepts in *Screen* may be a mark of this process occurring in film theory.[38]

Such criticisms are echoed by the carefully stated methodologies of recent writers. For example, while Tony Williams's piece, 'Phantom Lady, Cornwell Woolrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic', shows that the psychoanalytical approach is ongoing in *film noir* analysis, Williams is careful to distinguish his usage of the concept of masochism from a purely Freudian one, which suggests that psychoanalytical concepts are treated with more caution than was once the case: 'It is important to understand the masochistic phenomenon historically and not regard it in the same universal a-historic manner as Freud's original formulation of the Oedipus complex'.[39] Likewise, Peter Lehman's comments in relation to a psychoanalytic reappraisal of *The Searchers* reflect the concerns of the *Screen* editors: 'If we are going to apply psychoanalysis as a cultural tool to the study of films, we have to be very careful in discriminating between levels of application... Much as the clinical institution of psychoanalysis turns largely on the sensitivity of the analysts, the same will be true for psychoanalytical film criticism'.[40]

In contrast, *West of Everything*[41] demonstrates yet another form of cultural studies approach, thereby evidencing the diversity of the field. Here, Jane Tompkins proposes that the previously discussed historical approach fails to address the meta-narrative elements of the western genre, which she argues to necessitate a more sophisticated critique. Regarding the significance of the genre's geographical and historical location, for instance, she writes:

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[38] Ibid., p. 42.

[39] Tony Williams, '*Phantom Lady*, Cornwell Woolrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic', in Silver, Alain & Ursini, James eds. 1996. *Film Noir Reader*. New York: Limelight. p. 130.

[40] Peter Lehman, 'Looking at Look's Missing Reverse Shot: Psychoanalysis and Style in John Ford's *The Searchers*', in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., pp. 266-267. I draw on Lehman's ideas in relation to masculinity in Chapter Three.

[41] Tompkins, J., 1992. *West of Everything*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

> Most historians explain the fact that Western takes place in the West as the result of the culture's desire to escape the problems of civilisation. They see it as a return to the concept of America as a frontier wilderness and as a re-enactment of the American dialectic between civilisation and nature... The Western doesn't have anything to do with the West as such. It isn't about the encounter between civilisation and the frontier. It is about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the western tirelessly reinvents.[42]

Such arguments interrogate historical interpretations by operating on a higher level of abstraction, seeking to extract deeper meanings than the more empirically orientated explanations offered by historical critics such as Tuska. In this way, Tompkins minimises any historical dimensions, thereby echoing Pilkington's analysis of *The Searchers*, which Tuska so vehemently opposed.[43] Instead, she foregrounds the mythological elements that transcend the actual subject matter of the films, interpreting film as a medium through which myths can be processed and transmitted. This exemplifies a strand of cultural studies that draws on a semiotic framework to determine meaning and structure in texts, as employed both by Roland Barthes and Christian Metz.

For instance, in a *Cahiers* interview with Michel Delahaye and Jacques Rivettes, Barthes suggests ways in which a semiotic analysis of cinema might be undertaken. He sees the main problem as that of translating a theory of language into a visual medium:

> A critic wanting to treat the cinema as a language...would therefore need to begin by working out whether in the filmic continuum there are elements which are not analogical...elements which are structured in such a way that they can be treated as fragments of language... It would be a case of applying structuralist methods and isolating filmic elements, of seeing how they are understood, which signifieds they correspond to...and, by varying them, of seeing at what point a variation in the signifier entails a variation of the signified. Linguistic units...would then have been isolated, and from

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[42] Ibid., p. 44- 45.
[43] Ford, 1956, op. cit., 1956.

these you could then construct the 'classes', systems or declensions.[44]

Metz, meanwhile, views cinematic language—and thus signification—in terms of sense perception, the role that visual elements play in determining meaning, and the process by which these are conveyed by the cinematic text:

> The cinema's signifier is perceptual (visual and auditory)... The unique position of the cinema lies in the dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but unusually stamped with unreality, from its very beginning...the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it over immediately into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present.[45]

Furthermore, in a broader sense, Barthes attempts to determine how ideological messages come to be propagated, circulated and naturalised via any cultural artefact, this time by drawing on the concept of myth:

> the very end of myths is to immobilize the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions... Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time. For the Nature, in which they are locked up under the pretext of being eternalised, is nothing but a Usage.[46]

Such forms of analysis can be seen as emblematic of the confluences that exist between the ostensibly distinct disciplines of cultural studies, critical theory and philosophy. Moreover, such structuralist interpretations are directly relevant to the western film genre, as demonstrated by Will Wright in *Sixguns and Society*.[47]

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[44] Roland Barthes, '"Towards a Semiotics of Cinema": Barthes in interview with Michel Delahaye, Jacques Rivettes', in Hillier, J. ed. 1986. *Cahiers du Cinema Vol 2: 1960-1968*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. pp. 277-278.

[45] Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', in Hollows et al, op. cit., pp. 214-215. See also, 'Methodological Propositions for the Analysis of Film', in Eaton, M. & Neale, S. eds. 1981. *Screen Reader 2: Cinema and Semiotics*. London: SEFT. pp. 86-98. I discuss Metz specifically on the western and myth later in the chapter.

[46] Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today', in Durham, M.G. & Kellner, D. M. eds. 2001. *Media and Cultural Studies Keyworks*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 126.

[47] Wright, W. 1975. *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Here, Wright critiques the western in terms of its plot structures. He maps the variations within—and development of—these onto cultural, social and ideological shifts within the relevant periods, thereby demonstrating the operation of myth within the western, a notion which he defines as, 'a communication from a society to its members: the social concepts and attitudes determined by the history and institutions of a society'.[48] This conceptualisation is also expanded to include cultural-ideological narratives because, 'it is through the movies that the myth has become part of the cultural language by which America understands itself... The central significance of the land is most truly expressed in cinematic imagery...[and] establish[es] absolutely the vital relation of the western setting of the stories to the stories and actions of the myth'.[49]

In addition, he excavates the deep structures embedded within its generic narrative/plot formations, and the myths that these reinforce.[50] He identifies these as demonstrating 'a clear pattern of change...within each period the structure of the myth corresponds to the conceptual needs of social and self understanding required by the dominant social understandings of that period; the historical changes in the structure of the myth correspond to the changes in the structure of these dominant institutions'.[51] In the light of this, he identifies four categories of plot, each of which he argues to correspond with the appropriate historical period:

> the classical plot—extends from 1930 to about 1955, when the Western revolves around a lone gunfighter who saves the town...the vengeance variation—overlaps the end of the classical period and continues till about 1960, with later recurrences. This plot concerns an ill-used hero who can find no justice in society and therefore becomes a gunfighter seeking vengeance...the transition theme—

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[48] Ibid., p. 16.

[49] Ibid., p. 12. I discuss Wright's ideas concerning the ideology of the western in Chapter Four.

[50] See my discussion of Barthes' theories of myth discussed earlier. A comparison can also be made with Vladmir Propp's functionalist analysis of the fairy tale in Propp, V. 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale*. London: University of Texas Press. Propp identifies a series of plot devices which he argues to have universal functions within adventure narratives. The methodology is undermined, however, by its attempts to universalise a range of diverse devices, since he is forced to include so many variations/exceptions to his initial categorisations that the validity of his generalised categories is thrown into question. That said, this represents a significant intervention in terms of the functions of narrative structures.

[51] Wright, op. cit., p. 14.

which is more logical than temporal, includes three films in the early fifties; the story centers on a hero and heroine who, while defending justice, are rejected by society...the professional plot—extends from 1958 to 1970 and involves a group of heroes who are professional fighters taking jobs for money.[52]

To take just one of these categories as an exemplar, the professional plot is used to account for the emergence of the mercenary heroes such as *The Wild Bunch*.[53] Wright sees the plot formation in deeply ideological terms, arguing that the professional mercenary developed in response to the increasing degree of permissiveness emergent in the sixties, evidenced by the escalating levels of violence and amorality deemed to be acceptable in film portrayals, resultant in blurred ethical boundaries in filmic representations. Such a view would appear to be borne out by the cowboy figure's evolution from embodiment of honour in its earlier incarnations, to the virtual anti-hero of the 1960s. As such, the professional gun-fighter invokes changing societal values and thereby embodies a filmic manifestation of capitalist values.[54]

While undoubtedly innovative, the approach is inevitably problematised by the difficulties involved in the categorisation of an entire film genre. Significantly, Wright has to make a number of adjustments and exceptions in order to make his "typical" films fit. As a result, justifications are deemed to be necessary: 'the transition theme— which is more logical than temporal, [and] includes three films in the early fifties'.[55] As such, his work highlights the problems inherent in the attempt to compartmentalise films according to temporal as well as structural co-ordinates. Nonetheless, Wright's critical intervention has generated much debate, proving to be both iconoclastic and influential.

In addition to the approaches cited above, there have been further ventures into western film research that do not readily lend themselves to classification. *Cowboy Metaphysics*[56] is one such work. It can be characterised as a philosophical analysis of

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[52] Ibid., p. 15.
[53] Peckinpah, op. cit.
[54] This is only a brief summary of Wright's form of analysis, intended to illustrate rather than comprehensively assess structuralism's contribution. Another example is provided by Jim Kitses's binary analysis later in the chapter.
[55] Wright, op. cit., p. 15.
[56] French, P. 1997. *Cowboy Metaphysics: Ethics and Death in Westerns*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

the ethics of the western, although French signals his refusal to engage in film criticism other than that generated by his philosophical themes. In this way, he sets himself apart from the approach typically adopted by film theorists. As he observes:

> This book is definitely not intended as film criticism. I have little or no interest in contrasting the films with each other or with attacking or defending this or that director's use of characters, images, and basic plotlines. The films, for me, are a place of departure... I do not pretend for a minute that the way I will be "reading" the films captures the intent of their creators. In fact, I could not care less.[57]

French identifies prominent themes/philosophical issues common to a range of western texts and explores their impact upon, and implications for, the genre's ethical framework as a whole. For instance, he examines the possible significance of death-related imagery in the genre. This does not primarily involve an investigation into mortality as an intrinsic aspect of the narrative structure, namely the abundance of gun related fatalities. Nor does it confine itself to being an assessment of death's status as the genre's narrative organising principle.[58] Instead, French's boundaries have greater flexibility, for they concern the frequent occurrence of death related references within westerns, examples of which include the prominent position occupied by the image of the graveyard, which can be seen as an essential component of the genre's iconography, for example Boot Hill Cemetery in *The Searchers*.[59] French's main aim at this point is to uncover the ways in which such emphases impact upon the ethics of the western once death is isolated from its ethical implications, which the western sometimes appears to do.[60] He also considers such topics as the world-view embedded within narratives, and the impact of such constructions. For example, he explores the extent to which characterisation of the western hero is informed by courage and the related virtues, drawing on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*[61] as its frame of reference.[62] This brief summary then, indicates that although French's work may

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[57] Ibid., p. ix.

[58] It can, after all, be taken as read that at least some of these characteristics form a feature of the majority of the films.

[59] Ford, 1956, op. cit.

[60] I consider the role of death in the western in Chapter Five's discussion of violence.

[61] Aristotle, 1976. *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*. Middlesex: Penguin.

[62] This topic is mainly covered in French, op. cit., pp. 3-11, and is termed a 'clash of cares' illustrated by, for example, the western's main narrative concerns and characters. See ibid., pp. 107-132 for an in-depth discussion.

initially present problems of categorisation, it can nonetheless be situated within the remit of film-philosophy, a field that will be reviewed shortly.[63]

Scholarship and the Western

Although this overview has included a range of critical perspectives on the western, the genre has not in itself been treated *comprehensively*. In light of this, it seems reasonable to suggest that the western, in common with other popular genres, has been assigned an inferior status.[64] Further, such omissions can be seen to derive partly from issues relating to academic legitimation; the western's status as a film genre worthy of serious academic inquiry, and even the academic eligibility of film studies. Indeed, whether film should be classed as an art form at all has provoked debate in the past, owing to negative perceptions of popular mass entertainment formats,[65] hence film criticism's former bias in favour of "art cinema", which laid claim to superiority over its populist counterpart.

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[63] Joseph Kupfer, whose work I discuss later in the chapter, cites Richard Gilmore's analysis of *The Searchers* in support of his employment of a philosophical methodology, one which is analogous to French's approach in that it treats ethical themes in films: 'He [Gilmore] takes the search of the protagonist, Ethan Edwards, to be a quest to discover something he does not quite understand he is seeking. Finding in Ethan an illustration of Nietzsche's (or Wittgenstein's) conception of the philosopher, Gilmore sees him as "one who necessarily stands outside of society". p. 6. In interpreting *The Searchers* as a story about the philosophical attempt to overcome self-deception and also provide society with a perspective on itself, Gilmore posits a relationship between the philosophical search and the good of society. The philosophical angle taken on Ethan Edward's quest provides a provocative new mode of appreciating a much-analysed movie classic'. Kupfer, J. 1999. *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film*. Boulder, Colarado: Westview. p. 6.

[64] Neale's previously cited books on genre and comedy go some way towards redressing the balance while *film noir* is one popular (sub) genre that has certainly been elevated. However, this is partly resultant from its categorisation and subsequent promotion by French cinema theorists, namely the *Cahiers du Cinema* group, whose overall attitude towards Hollywood is typified by Eric Rohmer, 'Rediscovering America', in Hillier, J. ed. 1985. *Cahiers du Cinema Vol 1: The 1950's*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. He writes, 'The finest American films which it has been my lot to see have more than anything else made me fiercely envious and sorry that France should have abandoned the pursuit of a claim to universality that it once—not long ago—affirmed so strongly, and that we should have let the flame of a certain idea of man be extinguished in order to be re-lit across the ocean, in short that we must admit defeat on ground to which we have a rightful claim', pp. 88-89. I briefly discuss the Group's work in the next chapter.

[65] It can be argued that the conceptualisation of film as a popular medium is in part responsible for its formerly problematic status in terms of academic research. While Film Studies has largely won such battles for academic recognition, television and other contemporary media forms/communication technologies are presently undergoing similar confrontations, within both the academic and public realms. The validity of Media Studies as a scholarly discipline, for example, is frequently under attack by media organisations.

It can be argued that this particular area of debate has largely been resolved, principally owing to the increasing prominence of cultural studies as a discipline, which seeks to redress the balance traditionally in favour of "elite" culture through the promotion of theoretical and empirical inquiry into popular cultural forms. For Simon Frith, however, the pendulum has now swung to the other extreme, resulting in the attitude that 'if it's popular it must be good!'[66] Consequently, 'cultural studies will remain rooted in accounts of the consumer, every act of 'popular' consumption an excuse for celebration...it is based on inadequate empirical studies of consumption (and, indeed, production)'.[67] He concludes that 'the more celebratory the populist study, the more patronizing its tone, an effect...of the more explicit populist determination to deny (or reverse) the usual high/low cultural hierarchy...what needs challenging is not the notion of the superior, but the claim that it is the exclusive property of the "high"'.[68]

While Frith's piece is certainly polemical in tone and content, he raises some important issues in relation to "artistic" and "popular" cultural forms, assumptions that are reflected in the ongoing debate regarding the boundaries of "high", "middle-brow" and "low" culture.[69] It has been argued, for instance, that such distinctions ought to be maintained if a meaningful "culture" is to be retained, and in this sense, the western is consigned to an inferior status due to its popular culture status. Likewise, in a previous age the novel had to win recognition amidst widespread prejudice regarding the value or otherwise of popular cultural forms as a focus for scholarly endeavour.[70] Conversely, it can be argued such distinctions are no longer contested, that the boundaries have, in fact, been dissolved. Rudolf Arnheim, for example, writes in his preliminary remarks to *Film As Art* whilst contemplating the fluctuating nature of—and attitudes towards—film theory during the time span of his writing career:

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[66] Simon Frith, 'The Good, The Bad, and the Indifferent: Defending Popular Culture from the Populists', in Munns, J & Rajan, G. eds. 1995. *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice.* London: Longman. p. 354. Frith cites the Popular Culture Association and John Fiske's work as belonging to the populist camp.

[67] Ibid., p. 354.

[68] Ibid., p. 355. I will offer a more detailed account of the discipline of cultural studies in relation to film-philosophy shortly.

[69] Concerns that culture is being "dumbed down" capture such concerns admirably, a debate currently being played out in relation to the BBC's attempts to define the precise nature of its "cultural" remit. Such concerns, however, lie largely outside the remit of this thesis.

[70] The novel's gender bias, both practitioners and core readership, are also arguably relevant here. Literary Studies has now, of course, attained a lofty status within The Academy.

The distinction between film as art and as entertainment seems no longer to be on the minds of those who make and use them. Are there still film critics, or even theorists, who talk of art when they evaluate particular works? There is much good content analysis in writings on film today...even philosophy; but the authors tend to lavish the same care on commercial light-weight films as on the rare masterwork. The difference between high aesthetic quality and box office success has become blurred.[71]

These comments indicate that Arnheim discerns considerable shifts in attitudes, both within and towards the arena of film writing during the duration of time under examination. Moreover, the slightly incredulous tone of the phrase 'even philosophy' in connection with film writing indicates that he views the philosophical approach as a new departure for film theory, a point to which I will return shortly. Additionally, he argues that these shifts impact on film by qualitatively debasing it in terms both of industrial and theoretical output. In so doing, Arnheim unwittingly makes a value judgement. This attitude is revealed through the distinction he draws between the categories 'light-weight films' and 'rare masterworks', a delineation which itself perpetuates the basic premises of the high/low-culture debate that he paradoxically claims to be moribund.

Of greater significance is the fact that it is fairly certain that the western film genre on such an analysis would be consigned to the apparently negative category of "lightweight" unless, that is, it can be recuperated by the strategic deployment of a sample of "rare masterworks", in other words, a canon. Supporters of the high/low art distinction could argue that these canonical westerns—far from discrediting their assignment of popular (low) rank to the western genre—gain a privileged positioning by transcending the inherent limitations of the genre via directorial artistry.[72] Such views in turn reinforce the auteur mode of interpretation, the critical position that privileges certain directors, arguing that they merit superior status due to pre-determined attributes. The work of such authors is argued to bear a distinctive hallmark, thus rendering them instantly recognisable and, at least to some degree,

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[71] Arnheim, R. 1957. *Film as Art.* London: University of California Press. From the work's preliminary forward, 'After Fifty Years,', devoid of page number.
[72] I am aware that the auteur can be another member of the film-making team besides the director, but for the purposes of this discussion, I am taking the director as exemplar, as this is usually the case.

representative of a particular approach to filmmaking. As a result, auteurs are deemed to have "a body of work", which means that the analytical focus is 'on thematic analysis, the challenge of deciphering an author's so-called "world view"'.[73] John Ford's oeuvre offers a case in point, particularly in relation to the western film genre. Ford's work and reputation have undoubtedly benefited from the practical application of the auteur theory. Moreover, his films have consistently been critiqued in auteurist terms as illustrated by Deleuze's assertion that, 'it would be dangerous to reserve an epic genius for Ince and Ford, attributing to other more recent directors the invention of a tragic or even a romantic Western'.[74] Such categorisations have, in turn, led to the valorisation of Ford's work, resultant in the strong likelihood of these films' inclusion in any canon of westerns.[75]

In addition, there are numerous examples of the auteur theory underpinning highly theoretical inquiries into the nature of cinema itself, as evidenced by the output of the *Cahiers* group. For instance, Jean Cocteau declared that: 'Such is the power of cinema that, under the word of a great director, the most insignificant thriller turns into a work of art'.[76] In light of the limitations posed by auteurism, however, which undervalues the value of work directed by those considered to be non-auteurs[77] who, after all, constitute a large proportion of the western film genre, the necessity for a less limited treatment than that offered by auteurism is apparent, while sometimes remaining difficult to realise in practice.[78]

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[73] Paul Willeman, 1981. 'Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male', in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., p. 209.

[74] Deleuze, G. 1986. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: Athlone. p. 147.

[75] John Ford's *The Searchers*, op. cit., is a likely candidate for a western canon, a film I will refer to at various stages throughout the thesis.

[76] Jean Cocteau cited by Ferydoun Hoveyda in 'Sunspots', in Hillier, 1986, op. cit., p. 139.

[77] Although the *Cahiers* group did much to promote popular cinema in Hollywood via the auteur classification of directors like Ford and Howard Hawks, evidenced by, for example, Jacques Rivette, 'The Genius of Howard Hawks', in Hillier, 1985, op. cit., wherein he states that, 'The evidence on the screen is the proof of Hawks's genius', [p. 126], such categorisations are inevitably partial. In this sense, they risk the exclusion of otherwise talented directors who fail to meet the pre-determined conditions due to diverse work, as well as those who have a numerically limited, though creditable, body of work. The position could therefore be seen to privilege quantity over quality, in addition to potentially valorising inferior films included in a director's body of work.

[78] By this I mean the widely acknowledged tendency to privilege familiar texts over unfamiliar ones, the pre-categorised "great" work over the lesser known, evidenced by almost any study of the western one might wish to select. This is only partly due to practical considerations such as access to material. Indeed, I am keenly aware of this phenomenon in my own work, since this thesis itself tends to treat such canonical films. However, whilst these constitute the bulk of my analysis, the tendency is mitigated somewhat by the comprehensive nature of my preparatory research, resultant not only in the wide range of westerns detailed in the filmography but also in the form taken by some of my more general findings,

The Turn to Philosophy

With this in mind, a turn to philosophy and an increasing reliance on philosophical tenets has emerged within the discipline of film studies. While I have already suggested likely reasons for this re-positioning of traditional disciplinary boundaries, such as the need to validate the academic study of a popular cultural form, the turn to philosophy can also be said to reflect the high esteem that 'Grand Theory'[79]continues to enjoy within The Academy. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll have this to say on the subject:

> [Grand Theory is] an abstract body of thought which came into prominence in Anglo-American film studies during the 1970s. The most famous Avatar of Theory was that aggregate of doctrines delivered by Lacanian psychoanalysis, Structuralist semiotics, Post-Structuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism. The Theory was put forth as the indispensable frame of reference for understanding all filmic phenomena: the activities of the film spectator, the construction of the film text, the social and political functions of cinema, and the development of film technology and the industry.[80]

They go on to dismissively remark the 'ethereal speculations'[81] inherent in such an approach, but it seems reasonable to suggest that Theory offers the possibility for forms of interpretation that can enhance humanities based disciplines, rather than conflicting with the more empirical approaches employed by the social sciences. Bordwell and Carroll too advocate a third way between theory and pure empiricism, a consensus that, they propose, has been reached in recent years: 'one robust rival to Theory is a middle-range inquiry that moves easily from bodies of evidence to more

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particularly in the conclusions drawn concerning the nature of the western hero. It would not be overstating the case to say that these were made possible by the breadth of the overview that such "minor" works provided.

[79] This term is initially used in the introduction to Bordwell & Carroll, op. cit., p. xiii. This work provides a good introduction not only to the critical approach of the editors but also that of others working both within and in the light of the film/philosophy tradition.

[80] Ibid., p. xiii.

[81] Ibid., p. xiii.

general arguments and implications...piecemeal, problem-driven reflection and research'.[82]

This turn to philosophy is not as recent a phenomenon as Bordwell and Carroll's account implies, however. On the contrary, it can feasibly be placed within an ongoing process, ranging from the days of the silent film and the work of Eisenstein,[83] through the works of the highly influential *Cahiers du Cinéma* theorists who aimed to push the boundaries of film writing,[84] through critical/linguistic semiotic analysis previously discussed in relation to Barthes and Metz, and culminating in, for example, the work of Giles Deleuze discussed shortly.[85] That said the diversity of this very limited selection is indicative of the difficulties attendant on bold attempts to categorise diverse fields in an all-encompassing manner, as previously illustrated by Wright's structuralist categorisations of the western. And so, in the light of such inconclusive findings, perhaps the turn to philosophy should be seen not as a radical intervention in film scholarship, but instead, as a merging of earlier film theory traditions with more recent philosophical innovations such as structuralism.

"New" Theoretical Directions: The Case of The Spectator

Film theory has further diversified since Bordwell and Carroll presented their analysis of Grand Theory. For instance, Deleuze offers an innovative critique of cinema, which clearly crosses the borderlines between film and philosophy:

> The theory of cinema does not bear on the cinema, but on the concepts of the cinema, which are no less practical, effective or existent than cinema itself... Cinema's concepts are not given in cinema. And yet they are cinema's concepts, not theories about cinema... Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice. For no

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[82] Ibid., p. xiii.
[83] See, for example, Sergei Eisenstein's influential work first published in 1946, translated and edited by Jay Leyda in 1977. *Film Form*. London: Harcourt Brace.
[84] For a useful sample of the writings of the Cahiers group see Hillier, 1985, op. cit., and Hillier, J. ed. 1986. *Cahiers du Cinema Vol 2: 1960-1968*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, respectively. I also draw on the work of Michel Mourlet, 'In Defence of Violence', Hillier, 1985, op. cit., pp. 132-135 in Chapter Five's discussion of violence.
[85] Deleuze's challenging approach to filmic writing is evidenced by two works: Deleuze, 1986, op. cit., and Deleuze, G. 1989. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. London: Athlone.

technical determination, whether applied (psychoanalysis, linguistics) or reflexive, is sufficient to constitute the concepts of cinema itself.[86]

Further, he argues that cinema can transform the nature of philosophy itself. In a move mirrored by post-modern critics discussed later, he concludes that "reality" is an extension of cinematic perception, as explained by Claire Colebrook:

> He did not see cinema as just another way of presenting stories and information; the very mode of cinematic form altered the possibilities of thinking and imagining…he uses cinema to theorise time, movement and life as a whole. But there is a clear reason why Deleuze combines an analysis of cinema with his more general philosophical claims. Deleuze argues that philosophy must remain open to life. Cinema is perhaps…one of the most important events of modern life. Only with cinema can we think of a mode of 'seeing" that is not attached to the human eye… Confronting cinema will open us up to a new philosophy, and it will do so not because we *apply* philosophy to films, but because we allow the creation of films to transform philosophy.[87]

Colebrook goes on to detail Deleuze's conceptualisation of cinema in relation to the movement-image and the time-image:

> The movement-image is the first shock of cinema, where the play of camera angles moving across a visual field gives us the direct expression of movement, and thereby opens thought up to the very mobility of life. In the time-image we are no longer presented with time indirectly—where time is what connects one movement to another—for in the time-image we are presented with *time itself*.[88]

Deleuze's analysis of the film *Winchester 73*[89] in terms of the movement-image illustrates this distinctive approach: 'The Western presents not only action-images, but also an almost pure perception-image: it is a drama of the visible and of the invisible as much as an epic of action; the hero only acts because he is the first to see, and only triumphs because he imposes on action the interval or the second's delay which allows

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[86] Ibid., 1989, p. 280.
[87] Colebrook, C. 2002. *Giles Deleuze*. London: Routledge. p. 29.
[88] Ibid., p. 30.
[89] *Winchester '73*, 1950. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: U.I.

him to see everything'.[90] Here, the film analysis operates at a higher level of abstraction than that usually presented by the standard film critique, which would typically examine a combination of filmic codes, themes and narratives, and/or explore visual elements such as cinematography and iconography. Instead Deleuze employs phenomenological terminology, thus operating at a distance from the narrative concerns of the text. It does so in order to demonstrate the application of a phenomenological methodology to film. This, then, represents a purely philosophical approach to film criticism, one which therefore bears more resemblance to the substantive discipline of philosophy than to film theory. It exemplifies a philosophy or theory *of* film in the way that historiography is the philosophy *of* history, concerned with the discipline as a methodology rather than its material data. As Colebrook notes, for Deleuze, 'cinema demands a whole new style of thinking, such that its ramifications can be gauged well beyond cinema'.[91]

With this in mind, Deleuze examines film as a medium in terms of, in this case, the philosophical theory of phenomenology. He does not concern himself with film texts as such, but instead analyses the ways in which film as a material object, as a sense datum, is perceived by the perceptive equipment of the viewer. In this way, he does not attempt to draw out philosophical themes or issues *from* particular film texts in the sense that Peter French does in relation to the ethical terrain of the western film narrative. Whilst the study of ethics is certainly the material of philosophical discourse, French's account originates in concepts raised by the film narratives themselves, which are then in turn interpreted using a philosophical methodology.[92] Conversely, Deleuze's approach demonstrates how philosophy and film can be interwoven in a very particular sense and, further, identifies one possible direction to be taken whilst navigating this relatively unexplored terrain, Paul Virilio and Guy Debord, meanwhile, take another.[93]

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[90] Deleuze, 1986, op. cit., pp. 69-70.
[91] Colebrook, op. cit., p. 30.
[92] See my previous discussion of French's work for a more detailed précis of his approach.
[93] See Debord, G. 1987. *Society of the Spectacle* London: Rebel Press/Aim Publications, for an illustration of the ways in which postmodernist theory can be used for media analysis as well as more sociologically based critiques.

Virilio, for instance, is one of the leading postmodernists, much of his work concerning the nature of reality and its relationship to visual media, both cinematic and more recent media forms. As a result, the blurring of boundaries between cinematic/visual media representations and the ways in which "reality" is perceived are recurring themes, which have in addition been noted by a number of post-modernist commentators on contemporary society.[94] Connected to this form of critique is the notion that "reality" can actually be constructed by visual media representations in a very real sense, that it is mediated rather than directly perceived, in a way that can be related back to Deleuze's phenomenological findings.[95] In fact, the ostensibly distinct spheres of real and representational are frequently presented as indistinguishable in the "post-modern" era. This perspective clearly conflicts with commonsense understandings of the relationship between media imagery and "the real world"; that the two are wholly distinct, and cannot conceivably merge in this manner. For postmodernist theorists, though, 'Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies'.[96] Moreover, Virilio cites the words of one of Wim Wender's actors, Hans Zischler, in support of his hypothesis: 'it is *reality* that we have to analyse in a cinematic way',[97] before making the point even more explicit in his own words:

> the streets themselves have become a permanent film for army cameras or the tourist-reporters of global civil war. The West, after adjusting from the political illusions of the theatre-city (Athens, Rome, Venice) to those of the cinema city (Hollywood, Cinecittà, Nuremberg), has now plunged into the transpolitical pan-cinema of the nuclear age, into an entirely cinematic vision of the world...videos and walkmans are reality and appearance in kit form: we use them

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[94] Featherstone, M. 1995. *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*. London: Sage, undertakes an extensive examination of the relationship between, for example, individual identity and ever-proliferating media representations, arguing that identity is increasingly influenced by such representations in the post-modern era. It is outside the remit of this chapter to analyse the nature of "reality" or the validity of postmodernist theory, however, and as a result, this discussion is merely indicative of new directions in film theory.

[95] Further, Deleuze's ideas overlap with those of post-modernism in his usage of the concept of the simulacrum, although Deleuze differs in that he argues the simulacrum to have a real presence in a way that, for Baudrillard, it does not. As Colebrook puts it, 'The simulacrum for Deleuze...is neither a recent nor a merely cultural event. The simulacrum is not the loss or abandonment of the real; it *is* the real'. Colebrook op. cit., p. 101.

[96] Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, 1979. 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in Hollows, et al, op. cit., p. 9. I am not, of course, given the timeframe, claiming that Adorno and Horkheimer were postmodernists. I include a brief discussion of their work shortly. Rather, their views are, interestingly, very much echoed by the postmodernists, as I go on to note in relation to Arnheim.

[97] Virilio, P. 1984. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. London: Verso. p. 65.

not to watch films or listen to music, but to add vision and soundtracks, to make us directors of our own reality.[98]

This type of postmodernist approach, which explores the alienating and desensitising effects of hyper-reality upon the contemporary (cinematic) spectator, might appear to be entirely original. However, this is not necessarily the case. Many years previously in 1935, for example, Arnheim used analogous arguments within the domain of film theory, predicting the fragmentational impact that new forms of media—in this case television—were likely to have on audiences. He argued that such technological innovations would result in the socially dislocated spectator. In a style strikingly reminiscent of "post-modern" attitudes he writes of,

> The pathetic hermit, squatting in his room, hundreds of miles away from the scene that he experiences as his present life, the "viewer" who cannot laugh or applaud without feeling ridiculous, is the final product of a century-long development, which has led from the campfire, the market place, and the arena to the lonesome consumer of spectacles today.[99]

As such, both postmodernists and film-philosophers, as previously suggested, can all be seen as emblematic not of a radical new departure for film theory, but rather as building on the foundations of earlier traditions. However, the proliferation of media forms has indubitably resulted in an increasing focus on the visual. In this sense a shift in emphasis has occurred since the work of Arnheim. This also holds true for other precursors of the postmodernist perspective such as Max Adorno and Theodor Horkheimer, who so famously critiqued the mass entertainment industry's impact on "authentic" culture in a style of analysis that harks back to the high/low culture debate due to presuppositions regarding the inferiority of popular cultural forms.[100]

So far, then, I have reviewed some of the directions that the turn to philosophy has taken. These include exploration of philosophical issues arising from the text using a philosophical methodology, as exemplified by French's analysis of such themes in westerns; a philosophy of film in terms of philosophical theory, namely

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[98] Ibid., p. 66.
[99] Arnheim, op. cit., p. 198.
[100] Adorno & Horkheimer, op. cit. I return to such arguments towards the end of this chapter.

phenomenology; and the application of a philosophical theory to an inquiry into cinematic spectatorship and its societal implications; post-modernism. That said, this overview of the film-philosophy field is intended to be indicative rather than exhaustive. Further, since the thesis operates within the methodological remit of film-philosophy, I now wish to situate it in relation to the mapping of western film criticism undertaken so far, as well as detail its critical framework.

Existentialism and the Western: Methodologies, Texts, Cultural Contexts

In an important sense, French's previously cited words are particularly relevant here. This thesis 'is definitely not intended as film criticism'.[101] As a result, I do not necessarily offer in-depth analysis of films in the sense previously outlined in relation to film studies—filmic codes, themes and narratives, cinematography, iconography and the like. Such characteristics will only be examined where relevant to my analysis, such as the ways in which the western film hero has been influenced by existentialist theories circulating in the cultural discourse of America at the time of their production, and/or related issues such as the ideology presented by filmic narratives. Likewise, I 'do not pretend for a minute that the way I will be "reading" the films captures the intent of their creators'.[102] I do not wish to suggest that film-makers intentionally portrayed existentialist outsider heroes, a point to which I will return shortly. Instead, I argue that particular types of western hero can be analysed in existentialist terms, and can further be seen as in some way signalling the impact of existentialism on the culture of America during the post World War Two era. The concept of cultural exchange, a phenomenon that occurred between France and America at this time, will further evidence this filmic/cultural manifestation.

In order to draw out other related issues, such as ideologies of the period, I will also draw on relevant material within film and cultural theory, which will therefore constitute a form of meta-criticism. This will enable me to paint a broader picture than would occur if I were to draw solely on primary texts for, as Dominic LaCapra points out, the process can be 'dialogical only insofar as it actively recognises the difficulties

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[101] French, op. cit., p. ix.
[102] Ibid., p. ix.

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of communication across time and the importance of understanding as fully as possible what the other is trying to say'.[103] In this way, the thesis can be seen as a conversation between fictional forms, primarily film and philosophical literature and the cultural context from which they derive, as 'an enactment of the humanistic understanding of research as a conversation with the past through the medium of its significant texts',[104] resulting in ontological readings of the western hero and narrative enabled by the application of existentialist ideas and concepts. It therefore adopts a trans-disciplinary methodology encompassing film, philosophy, literature and cultural history/theory, therefore constituting 'an informed dialogue with the past, which investigates significant texts and their relations to pertinent contexts'.[105]

It is important to note, however, that I am aware of the problems presented by the translation of concepts between media and written textual forms. LaCapra describes this as 'the attempt to relate texts to other "symbolic" media...the problem of translating from medium to medium in a process that entails both losses and gains in "meaning"',[106] an issue which Barthes also addresses in relation to the semiotic analysis of cinema discussed earlier: 'It always seems very difficult and rather pointless to transport a technique (and meaning comes under this heading) from one art to another, not because the genres have to be kept separate, but because structure depends on the materials used'.[107] I do not consider such issues to be insuperable, however, since the primary forms under consideration, namely films and existentialist fiction, are both narrative and fictional texts and therefore need not be incompatible. Though their purpose may differ in some ways—the philosophical novel, after all, seeks to inform as well as entertain—both are essentially formats intended to engage an audience. In this way, they can be seen as interconnected. Furthermore, I draw upon a range of sources, such as the philosophical and political writings of Camus and Sartre, in addition to theoretical works of the kind detailed in the literature review. Such material does not generate conflict with the texts themselves, but rather deepens our understanding of cultural context and/or the ideas inherent within the

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[103] LaCapra, D. 1983. *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language.* London: Cornell University Press, p. 50.
[104] Ibid., p. 21.
[105] Ibid., p. 69.
[106] Ibid., p. 26.
[107] Barthes, 1986, op. cit., p. 282.

filmic/written texts, by drawing out themes and issues or, alternatively, providing factual data. Therefore, the study entails a dialogue between differing textual forms and sources which contribute to the essential aim of the thesis: an existential critique of the western outsider figure, which takes individualist readings as a starting point for ontological inquiry into the nature of being he encapsulates.

The primary way in which the thesis relates text (the western and its heroes) to context (existentialist ideas generated by cultural exchange) is through the medium of the outsider figure, which I argue to be emblematic of its cultural moment. In other words, it represents the point of confluence between American and French cultural forms, a connection resultant from the dynamic of cultural exchange between the two countries in the light of the Second World War. Further, the form of existentialism instantiated by Camus and Sartre is crucially of its moment, be it in its literary, philosophical or political variants. For instance, the necessity for politically engaged philosophy of commitment that both philosophers advocated was generated by their involvement in the Second World War. The contextual provenance of the philosophy is further evidenced by the fact that both shifted emphasis from freedom as self-determination to privileging social relations and interaction.[108] As a result, while the roots of this particular brand of existentialism lie to some extent in a pre-existing philosophical tradition, it also diverges from this tradition in crucial ways as outlined in the introductory chapter.

It is important to note at this point, however, that I do not wish to claim that existentialism's popularity at the time of the western's peak *necessarily* results in such ideas being mirrored by the films or their heroes. As Ian Jarvie observes:

> In considering which philosophies reach the screen, fashion is an important factor. At any time there are philosophies that get wide public airing and can be said to be fashionable among the best reading public, and they tend to filter down in a certain way to students of other subjects and hence to have influence... Obviously it says nothing about the value of a philosophy that it is fashionable and it would be altogether too glib to seek the philosophy of a film

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[108] Camus, A. 1970. *Selected Essays and Notebooks*. Middlesex: Penguin. p. 221. I consider these developments in Chapter Four.

by checking to see which philosophies were fashionable at the time.[109]

Likewise, it would be overly simplistic to propose that intellectual influences absorbed by film-makers, such as existentialism, are overtly displayed in, for example, filmic ideologies. However, such a possibility cannot, perhaps, be wholly dismissed. In fact, according to Jim Hillier, both Bazin and Jim Kitses share this view:[110] 'Rather than an empty vessel breathed into by the film-maker, the genre is a vital structure through which flow a myriad of themes and concepts. As such the form can provide a director with a range of possible connections in which to experiment, to shape and refine the kinds of effects and meanings he is working towards'.[111]

What I do wish to maintain, however, is that lone heroes became particularly prominent during the period in question, and that it seem reasonable to partially attribute this to the historical/cultural moment. Accordingly, the western hero, a key variant, can be productively compared to the existentialist outsider figure also pervasive at this time, culminating in the ontological readings of the western hero undertaken by the thesis. As my review of the turn to philosophy suggests, though, it is difficult to determine the precise nature of the connection between fictional texts of any kind and the presentation of philosophical ideas such as, in this case, existentialism. Ian Jarvie offers one possible explanation of the interrelationship:

> Interpreting films in a philosophical manner is not to claim all films are philosophical, except in a trivial sense; neither is it to claim that these films are philosophical and nothing else. They may be many other things besides philosophical... Films, like most cultural products, subsist in many interpretative dimensions at once and our concentration on one is a selection for purposes of analysis; other purposes, other analyses, could make different selections.[112]

With this in mind, it is certainly the case that some films, particularly those that are produced away from the Hollywood mainstream, can and do intentionally interrogate

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[109] Jarvie, I. 1987. *Philosophy of the Film: Epistemology, Ontology, Aesthetics*. London: Routledge. p. 258.
[110] Hillier therefore cites the words of Kitses as supporting evidence.
[111] Jim Kitses, quoted by Hillier, 1985, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
[112] Jarvie, op. cit., p. 257.

philosophical ideas. Alain Resnais' *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*,[113] for instance, exemplifies this tendency, for it sets out to challenge the related conventions of linearity and realism in narrative structure. Such philosophical interventions certainly depart from the norms of generic filmmaking, however. As Joseph Kupfer notes, 'In some respects, it is harder for films to be philosophically rewarding while entertaining than to address philosophical questions in the studied manner of the art film…the popular films that have become classics…endure because their underlying philosophical views inform audiences' experience and enjoyment of the story.'[114] In this way, while philosophical notions *can* constitute a potential set of narrative themes, it is reasonable to suppose that most westerns do not *intentionally* present philosophical themes, although they certainly raise them incidentally, not least through their ideological subtexts. For instance, it is generally accepted that the western hero embodies the ideology of individualism, and that this is worked out through narrative themes such as the alleged opposition between the individual and society, treated as a clash of interests. This clash is presented as a "natural" and therefore "inevitable", which in turn has implications for philosophical concerns such as ethics and justice, thereby foregrounding issues which form the backbone of philosophical inquiry. Further, this thesis aims to highlight the ontological implications of this ideological arena generated by the proposed individualistic hero, taking us into the specifically existentialist realm of philosophical enquiry. Understood in this way, the western transcends its apparent boundaries as an escapist film product.

Moreover, 'Philosophical interpretation of film may even uncover perspectives on philosophy itself'.[115] In fact, some element of the philosophical can be seen as intrinsic to the fiction form itself, reflected by philosophical criticism of literature as well as film. Kupfer states, for instance, that,

> My appropriation of film is much like that well-worn approach taken
> by philosophers to literature… Morris Weitz claims that literary
> works contain philosophical themes or ideas dealing with "morality,

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[113] *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*, 1961. Alain Resnais. FR/IT: Terra/Tamara.
[114] Kupfer, op. cit., p. 6.
[115] Ibid., p. 6.

knowledge, human purpose, and reality." Therefore, an important task for literary criticism is to "state and clarify these themes, show how they are presented, and relate them to the other aspects of the work". Philosophical ideas may be presented explicitly through dialogue or commentary, but the more interesting ideas are usually implicit in the art work.[116]

Kitses maintains that the western narrative has a philosophical structure, though this is not to say that the genre sets out to treat philosophical notions in the sense that an existentialist novel, for example, does. He observes that, 'central to the form we have a philosophical dialectic, an ambiguous cluster of meanings and attitudes that provide the traditional thematic structure of the genre. This shifting ideological play can be described through a series of antinomies'.[117] He outlines a series of binary oppositions, forming the core structure around which representational and ideological components pivot, and assigns them three taxonomical categories which are then further subdivided:

THE WILDERNESS	CIVILIZATION
The individual	The community
freedom	restriction
honour	institutions
self-knowledge	illusion
integrity	compromise
self-interest	social responsibility
solipsism	democracy

NATURE	CULTURE
purity	corruption
experience	knowledge
empiricism	legalism
pragmatism	idealism
brutalisation	refinement
savagery	humanity

THE WEST	THE EAST
America	Europe
the frontier	America
equality	class
agrarianism	individualism
tradition	change

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[116] Ibid., p. 4.
[117] Jim Kitses, 'Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western', in Hollows et al, op. cit., p. 90.

This analysis, while innovative and thought-provoking, also exposes itself to charges of over-simplification similar to those previously levelled at Wright's structural analysis, namely that it is overly rigid in its attempts to categorise the philosophical structure of the western's narrative format. And so the defence is similar, namely that Kitses' taxonomies have generated much discussion and, further, formed the structural basis for many subsequent enquiries into the western.

Arguably, the apparent ease with which the western can be deconstructed in this manner has implications for the nature of the genre itself: that its philosophical basis can be conceived to be inherently formulaic and simplistic. Bazin, for example, observes that, 'The Corneille-like simplicity of western scripts has often been a subject for parody,'[119] though he goes on to maintain that, 'this comparison is double-edged: to make fun of the western by comparing it to Corneille is also to draw attention to its greatness, a greatness near perhaps to the child-like, just as childhood is to poetry'.[120] The simplicity of the generic formula can be viewed from an alternative perspective too, of course:

> I am not mad about Westerns. The genre has its requirements and conventions, just like any other, but in this case they are less liberal. The plains, the herds, the awful wooden towns, the mandolins, the chase, the perennial good guys and their homespun gallantry, the stale Scots and Irish jokes, are cause enough for boredom with any of those in the Old World who can hark back to a more distant and noteworthy past.[121]

Whether or not the western does have an underlying philosophical structure as Kitses proposes, a question which itself presupposes a particular definition of the term "philosophical", the western can certainly be seen to be in dialogue with other cultural artefacts and contemporary ideas, and with this in mind, it is important to account for

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[118] Ibid., p. 91.
[119] André Bazin, 'The Western: Or The American Film Par Excellence', in Bazin, 1972, op. cit., p. 147.
[120] Ibid., p. 147.
[121] Eric Rohmer, 'Les Maîtres de l'Aventure [Review of *The Big* Sky], cited by Jim Hillier, in Hillier, 1985, op. cit., p. 80. I will offer a more detailed account of the genre than there is room for here later in the chapter.

the increasing influence that existentialism, both as a concept and a philosophical theory, had on both Europe and America.

In part, this can be seen to originate in the philosophy's rejection of objective frameworks and universal "truths", those meta-narratives formerly employed to explain phenomena in a way that no longer seemed convincing, presupposing as they did an inevitable progress in human affairs that the events of the war clearly negated.[122] In this way, previous certainties had been seriously undermined, if not entirely destroyed, by the events of the war and as a result, existentialism had resonance for contemporary cultural concerns, commonly expressed as being, 'fundamentally pessimistic—even nihilistic'.[123] However, such responses ignore the philosophy's potentially liberating aspects which, although generated by war, can be said to constitute a positive method, one which simultaneously acknowledges the validity of pessimism and attempts to counter such reactions, primarily via the individual existential project.[124] Sartre highlights this in his definition of existentialism as 'a doctrine that…render[s] human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity'.[125]

Similarities between existentialism and popular culture's responses to post-war anxieties are additionally revealed by the ways in which filmic moral frameworks were increasingly undermined in the cultural artefacts of the post-war era resultant in, for instance, alienated and frequently masochistic, anti-heroes, providing a particularly strong connection with existentialist heroes. The traditional simplistic Hollywood conflict between good and evil, ethical black and white, became a battle between different shades of grey. This shift is evidenced by films like *Farewell My Lovely*,[126] wherein Philip Marlowe—while clearly on the side of the better (as well as himself)—displays ambiguous values, though he still retains his function as a focus for moral

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[122] C19th Whig historiography exemplifies this tradition of the linear progression of history. Both Sartre and Camus reject such assumptions: 'I do not have enough faith in reason to subscribe to a belief in progress or to any philosophy of history'. Camus, A. Thody, P. ed. 1970. Tr. Ellen Conroy Kennedy. *Lyrical and Critical Essays*. New York: Vintage. p. 135.

[123] Wilson, C., 1966. *The New Existentialism*. Wildwood House. p. 9. I also discuss the contemporary nature of existentialism in the Introduction and Chapter Two.

[124] I undertake a more detailed examination of Sartre's ideas in relation to his conception of freedom in Chapter Four.

[125] Sartre, J- P., 1948. *Existentialism and Humanism*. London: Methuen. p. 24.

[126] *Farewell My Lovely*, 1944. Directed by Edward Dmytryk. USA: RKO.

identification. Consequently, there is no longer a strict demarcation line to be drawn between the methods of heroes and opponents. It is now a question of the triumph of the relatively good over the relatively evil, this lack of strongly articulated boundaries later taken to extremes in films like *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*.[127] Here, moral distinctions remain largely undefined, emblematic perhaps of the status of ethical values when it becomes "necessary" to assign labels to characters.

Equally important for heroic representations is the war's impact on issues of gender, specifically masculinity, arising from the return of soldiers and workers to a post-war economy and increased female economic autonomy, which led to the reappraisal of traditional gender boundaries frequently discerned in *film noir*:

> Much has been made of the crisis of masculinity in *film noir*. Much could be made of the crisis in Judeo-Christian patriarchal structures since the mid-point of the 20th century. The dramatic crisis of *film noir* is the same as that which drives any convergent group of characterisations. The unprecedented social upheaval of two world wars compounded by economic turmoil and genocides on every continent were globally promulgated by broadcasts and newsreels and all condensed into a thirty-year span from 1915 to 1945. Just as the technique and technology of filmmaking has progressed in its hundred year history, the ideological outlook of its artists cannot have been unaffected by the other events in the world during that span of time.[128]

Westerns were no exception, although the impact was most obvious in particular types, such as the psychological westerns of the 1950s and the lone gunman protagonists under examination in this thesis. Here, the cowboy hero was increasingly presented as being an anti-heroic figure with hysterical, violently pathological tendencies, operating within what would have been deemed as non-moral frameworks in previous decades. James Stewart's character in *The Naked Spur*,[129] for instance, is scarcely recognisable from the standpoint of the thirties concept of a cowboy hero, the morally blameless

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[127] *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, 1966. Directed by Sergio Leone. Spain/Denmark/Italy: PC/CFP/PEA. This film is discussed at various points in the thesis.

[128] Silver & Ursini, op. cit., p. 5. I consider the impact of the war in relation to masculinity in Chapter Three. This view is widely accepted amongst film/cultural theorists, and can be said to amount to an academic truism in *film noir* analysis.

[129] *The Naked Spur*, 1953. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: MGM.

hero having been largely supplanted by an ethically ambiguous variant, which subsequent existentialist readings aim to highlight and explain.

However, this equation of textual pessimism with the post-war era is not simply a matter of mapping text directly onto context, partly because texts are not all equally representative of, or influenced by, their cultural moment. As Buscombe observes: 'Just because the 40's were, in the conventional account, gloomy years...there is no particular reason why the western should follow suit. Nor did other genres always reflect the prevailing angst'.[130] This view appears to be sustained by the ostensible lack of development in genres such as the musical, which remained more or less untouched by any suggestion of existential angst. That said, it is equally possible that the high production values of these genres resulted from the increased demand for escapism as a result of post-war austerity, although further consideration of such genres lies outside the boundaries of the thesis.[131]

Genre Forms

Bazin offers an additional perspective on the ways in which post-war cultural discourses influenced the western by proposing that the reason for the western's representational shifts principally derives from generic processes rather than cultural and social factors. At the same time, he emphasises the historical provenance of the genre, which he regards as unique: 'The Western is the only genre whose origins are almost identical with those of the cinema itself and which is as alive as ever after almost half a century of uninterrupted success'.[132] Moreover, he argues the genre form to have reached the classic stage of its evolution in the 1930's, peaking with films like *Stagecoach*,[133] and at risk of decline thereafter. As a result, it became necessary to revitalise the genre by introducing new elements into its form and content so that credibility and audience interest could be maintained. Such objectives were achieved using a number of methods, such as increasingly sophisticated plots and

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[130] Buscombe, E. eds. 1993. *The BFI Companion To The Western*. 2nd ed. London: Andre Deutsch. p. 45.
[131] This argument equally applies to the prominence of escapist genres in the era of The Depression in America.
[132] Bazin, 1972, op. cit., p. 140.
[133] *Stagecoach*, 1939. Directed by John Ford USA: U.A.

characterisation in common with other post-war genres in similar need of regeneration. These in turn required the formulation of a new category of western:

> Let us call the ensemble of forms adopted by the post-war western the 'superwestern'...a western that would be ashamed to be just itself, and looks for some additional interest to justify its existence—an aesthetic, sociological, moral, psychological, political or erotic interest, in short some quality extrinsic to the genre and which is supposed to enrich it... But first we should indicate the influence of the war on the evolution of the western after 1944. The phenomenon of the superwestern would probably have emerged anyway, but its content would have been different. The major films inspired by it come, naturally, after 1945. But the world conflict not only provided Hollywood with spectacular scenes, it also provided and, indeed, forced upon it, some subjects to reflect upon, at least for a few years. History, which was formally only the material for the western, will often become its subject: the profounder influence of the war is undoubtedly more indirect and one must look for it wherever the film substitutes a social or moral theme for the traditional one.[134]

As such, Bazin contrasts the self-reflexive superwesterns with the more conventional and less high-profile productions that exist alongside the mutant superwesterns. He argues that the first category, under whose auspices are included *High Noon*[135] and *Shane*,[136] present stories which only contingently have a western context, and could therefore be transferred to another genre. In this way they treat 'the western as a form in need of a content'.[137] Conversely, formulaic westerns do not make any such pretence of intellectual complexity. Instead, they rely on generic conventions for their effects. These films possess a quality which Bazin terms '"sincerity"...the directors play fair with the genre even when they are conscious of "making a western"'.[138] Bazin uses *Johnny Guitar*[139] to illustrate his point, a film that he argues to novelistically enrich its story through the employment of in-depth characterisations, while not attempting to conceal its roots in the western formula. In this way, the film does not attempt to justify its existence as a western in the way that superwesterns do.

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[134] André Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Western', in Bazin, 1972, op. cit., pp. 150-151.
[135] *High Noon*, 1952. Directed by Fred Zinnemann. USA: U. A. I offer an ontological analysis of the film in Chapter Two.
[136] *Shane*, 1953.Directed by George Stevens. USA: Paramount.
[137] Bazin, 1972, op. cit., p. 152. I have already alluded to the film in relation to its historical context earlier in the chapter, and explore it further as regards justice in Chapter Five.
[138] Ibid., p. 155.
[139] Ray, op. cit.

While Bazin's categories are innovative and to some extent productive in analysis of post-war westerns, his systematising approach suffers from the same flaws as Wright and Kitses' previously discussed attempts. Bazin himself acknowledges that the categories are 'inevitably arbitrary',[140] as many westerns fall between the two extremes. In addition the system's validity depends on the reliability of what are, inevitably, subjective distinctions. Likewise, the boundaries that Bazin draws between "A" and "B" productions when classifying the films is open to debate, becoming increasingly indistinct in light of industrial developments. He also tends to define and analyse westerns via features that are purportedly aspects of the western genre itself, thereby calling into question the critical status of his genre theories, though this flaw is intrinsic to genre critique as previously noted in relation to Neale's work. The evolution of the audience is also overlooked. The increased sophistication of post-war film is perhaps indicative of the cinema industry's recognition of increasingly levels of education in audiences, which in turn required more challenging material such as the usage of Freudian psychoanalysis, evidenced by the devices such as dream sequences and psychological themes in *film noir*[141] as well as the previously identified cycle of 1950s psychological westerns, chiefly in the films of Anthony Mann.[142] Metz, on the other hand, does not relate the genre to its context at all but sees it in terms of discourse and the concept of myth previously discussed in relation to Barthes. He writes that, 'It [the western] belonged to the category of the great controlled genres, those genres that, plausible or not in the details of their peripatetics, in any case never seem true, for they never pretend to be anything other than discourses—the fairy tale, the epic, the myth, the oriental theatre etc as well as large portions of classicism'.[143]

In this way, Bazin and Metz's views can be said to exemplify the two extremes of western genre analysis; one culturally contextualises it while the other sees it in purely formalist, structuralist terms. Both have validity on their own terms, though, since, as

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[140] Bazin., 1972, op. cit., p. 156.
[141] I discussed such psychological themes in *film noir* in relation to the psychoanalytical approach to film criticism earlier in the chapter.
[142] The cycle of Mann films starring James Stewart are the main example, additionally signalling a development in the Stewart star persona towards complex portrayals, also evident in Hitchcock roles such as *Vertigo*, [1958. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: Paramount]. Such changes are generally attributed in part to Stewart's experiences as a pilot in World War Two.
[143] Metz, op. cit., p. 248.

previously observed, 'concentration on one [area of study] is a selection for purposes of analysis. Other purposes, other analyses, could make different selections'.[144]

All studies are subject to Jarvie's proviso, of course, and this thesis is no exception. It is undoubtedly selective in its film selections, for example, the rationale for which is outlined in the introductory chapter. Likewise, the analogy drawn between the western genre and existentialist philosophy is an innovative one, and therefore likely to challenge pre-existing modes of critique. The thesis seeks to overcome such obstacles by demonstrating the ways in which existentialist ideas and concepts, applied to the western hero through ontological analysis, succeed in transcending pre-existent ideologically informed interpretations of the western hero. Furthermore, there are a number of assumptions underpinning my methodology, which I wish to outline at this point. For example, I do not wish to draw a direct parallel between the western and existentialism in terms of their political connotations. I am not claiming a point of contact between existentialism's potentially radical viewpoint and the western film genre. After all, as LaCapra notes in relation to Sartre's work it has a 'markedly critical or contestatory relation to the dominant sociocultural context and, in however divided or inadequate a way, [his] demand [for] a significantly different society and culture',[145] whereas the western generic form can be formulated as being essentially conservative, its primary purpose to reinforce dominant sociocultural norms as an outlet of the entertainment industry. On this view, genre narratives negotiate between opposing values, a process which is typically resolved via a "magical"—ideologically motivated— resolution between the two extremes, which takes the form of narrative closure.[146]

For Gramsci, this consensus between oppositional views signifies the reinforcement of the hegemonic norm, the ideological battleground on which the consent of the masses

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[144] Jarvie, op. cit., p. 257.
[145] LaCapra, 1978, op. cit., p. 19. LaCapra refers to 'the writings of important figures such as Sartre', but I am assuming the meaning to be unchanged by its application solely to Sartre.
[146]The marriage of the hero and heroine is probably the most widely used of these, a narrative device which reinforces the ideology of heterosexual romance. Conversely, in the case of the western, the hero rides off into the sunset to an unknown future, thus reinforcing the ideology of freedom which, in the western's context, presupposes freedom from the romantic commitment signified by marriage. I discuss freedom and its ideological significance in Chapter Four.

to be governed is won, thus securing the interests of the dominant ideological group.[147] This complex conceptualisation of leadership and socio-political dynamics has significance for industrial processes such as the cinema industry to the extent that, on Gramsci's account, such consent has to be won via the circulation of hegemonic ideas within the cultural arena, resultant in the naturalisation of such ideas, which in turn become societal norms. In this sense, the cinema industry's influence, exerted via such ideologically conventional structures as genre formulas, renders it an important component in what Gramsci terms 'a formidable complex of trenches and fortification of the dominant class'.[148] He goes on to make such processes even more explicit: 'The press is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything which is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it'.[149]

The Frankfurt School offers a different perspective on the political function of genre, however, for it conceptualises industrial formats as vehicles for oppression, rather than the tools by which complicity in the hegemonic system is won. On this interpretation, genre forms work to suppress critical thought, encouraging passivity and conformity to the dominant political formations. This is facilitated by the essential escapism of the genre formula, which thereby functions as an antidote to opposition. Moreover,

> there is no position from which good cinema could exist: cinema is part of the culture industry and therefore its aesthetics have one ideological purpose: to reproduce the spectator as consumer...cinema was a product of technologies of mass reproduction and distribution and was therefore already implicated in the maintenance of ideological and economic domination'.[150]

As such, the western can be viewed as being one of the most effective film genres in the entertainment industry's ideological weaponry. Jaded workers energise themselves by partaking in formulaic narratives, thus enabling them to reassume their place in the

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[147] See Antonio Gramsci, 'History of the Subaltern Classes', in Durham, & Kellner, op cit., in which he states that 'the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership"... A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise "leadership" before winning governmental power...it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to "lead" as well' p. 44.

[148] Gramsci, 'Cultural Themes: Ideological Material', in ibid., p. 46.

[149] Ibid., p. 46.

[150] Introduction to Hollows et al., op. cit., p. 2.

highly exploitative capitalist system with renewed vigour, thereby simultaneously reinforcing political apathy:

> Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanised work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again. But at the same time, mechanisation has such power over a man's leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself. The ostensible content is merely a faded foreground; what sinks in is the automatic succession of standardised operations. What happens at work, in the factory or in the office can only escaped from by approximation to it in one's leisure time. All amusement suffers from this incurable malady.[151]

This view of mass entertainment is undoubtedly an extremely pessimistic one, since it interlinks genre with the capitalist industrial system. That said, audience response can introduce radical elements into a genre presentation.[152] This can occur through the individual intent of either filmmakers or audience via the ideological messages encoded in and/or transmitted by, the film text. In this sense, the audience can actively construct meaning. Stephen Bourne, for example, explores the underlying gay subtexts of British cinema, illustrating how this process can occur via anecdotal evidence:

> I looked at some of the ways lesbians and gays had been portrayed in early British films, and one of the extracts I used to illustrate my talk was... Dead of Night. After the presentation I had a revealing brief encounter of my own with an elderly gentleman. He informed me that, as a young man in 1945, on seeing Dead of Night for the first time, he felt there was a gay subtext to the story.[153]

Such contestation can occur in connection with any genre, and is perhaps inevitably generated by them. It also holds true for any media form, as Stuart Hall highlighted in relation to the television text.[154] Hall accounts for the ways in which media messages can be encoded by producers and/or decoded by audiences, identifying three

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[151] Adorno & Horkheimer, op. cit., p. 11.

[152] This applies mainly to genre during the mid-twentieth century under examination. Hybrid generic forms are much more commonplace in the C21st, though even so, some generic boundaries still persist.

[153] Bourne, S. 1996. *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971*. London: Cassell. p. xvii. This is very difficult to establish in the case of genre films, however, as such messages are by their very nature concealed, hence open to interpretation.

[154] Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Durham & Kellner, op. cit.

hypothetical positions: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional. As such, audiences actively construct meaning, rather than passively consuming it as argued by mass theory critics such as the previously mentioned Frankfurt School. David Morley, meanwhile, demonstrates the practical application of these decoding positions in his ethnographic study of television audiences, 'Interpreting Television: the Nationwide Audience',[155] which employed a sample drawn from a range of socio-cultural groups, whose responses to the television current affairs programme, *Nationwide* were recorded to determine their decoding strategies. These findings were then related back to the reading positions outlined above, suggesting that, for example, bank managers adopted dominant decoding strategies.[156] Morley was careful to avoid an overly deterministic approach that suggested a simple correlation between socio-economic grouping and decoding position, however. Instead, he notes that 'there are always internal differences and divisions within each group, and different groups will operate different decoding strategies in relation to different kinds of material, and in different contexts',[157] a position which he qualifies even further in later work.[158] Such challenges to the rigidity of the genre formula are not intended to interrogate the western's basic ideological structure, but, rather, to shed light on possible methods for the deconstruction of the generic form.

An existentialist critique of the western hero, meanwhile, problematises ideological readings further, because the western's treatment of the individual can be seen to have more radical implications than it's frequently cited individualistic co-ordinates might suggest. After all, it valorises a pre-societal self which results in the promotion of the autonomous self also promoted by existentialist philosophy, a mode of being-in-the-world at odds with existing societal formations, as existentialist literature demonstrates through its alienated heroes. And so, whilst the western is not *politically* radical, as certain forms of existentialist philosophy were intended to be, it nonetheless has the potential to interrogate accepted societal norms; the appropriate interrelationship

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[155] David Morley, 'Interpreting Television: the Nationwide Audience', in Morley, D. 1992. *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

[156] Ibid., p. 117. Such results, while unsurprising, are nonetheless important in terms of the methodology used to gain them.

[157] Ibid., p. 118.

[158] David Morley, '*The Nationwide Audience*: A Critical Postscript' in ibid., pp. 119-130.

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between the individual and society for instance, as well as ethical issues such as the role of justice, broached in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

So far, then, the thesis has been situated within its methodological and philosophical context, and in relation to other work in the field of western film criticism and analysis. Related topics such as the development of film studies as a substantive discipline, the relationship between film and philosophy, the nature of existentialism and the implications this might hold for a study of outsider heroes has also been raised.

In addition, it has been established that the thesis employs an interdisciplinary approach by relating the western film text, ranging principally from 1945-1965, to its cultural context, that of the twenty years following the Second World War, via the dynamic of cultural exchange between France and America explored further in the next chapter. It therefore encompasses filmic, literary and philosophical texts whilst employing a dialogic approach through its readings of the western outsider hero in light of existentialist ideas and concepts. This is achieved through the medium of the existentialist outsider archetype, resultant in an ontological style of analysis.

Moreover, one of my main objectives is to offer a fresh perspective on a well-established hero type, the lone hero commonly analysed in ideological terms. Through ontological analysis and comparisons with his existentialist counterpart, I establish that this hero figure has implications far beyond the merely ideological. In fact, he embodies existentialist concepts such as autonomy much more clearly than the existentialist hero is able to, due to their differing social derivation. The mythical, non-societal context of the western is generally attributed to its individualistic co-ordinates, but at the same time, this renders it the purest exploration of the non-societal self available, uncomplicated by the societal constraints imposed by the existentialist hero's context. And so, the autonomous, non-societal self and its implications—existentialism's central concerns—are thrown into sharp relief by the western hero figure. Moreover, the ontological and ethical issues generated by such representations of unlimited autonomy are raised in Chapters Three, Four and Five, which concern the

limits and boundaries of autonomous expression within the western's non/societal context.

Firstly, though, I undertake a comparison of the western and existentialist outsider figures and their respective contexts, in order to identify the mode of being-in-the-world displayed by the western hero. This also provides the necessary theoretical groundwork for the succeeding chapters' considerations of the consequences of this mode of existential being when exercised within the confines of the western's mythical universe.

Chapter Two:
The Western Hero and the Existential Hero

Introduction

The derivation of the western hero figure is open to a number of possible interpretations, since it can be said to embody a long tradition of individualism in US culture, as well as incorporating elements of the warrior, adventurer, romantic hero and leader. What such interpretations share, however, is an emphasis on the hero as a lone figure, whose power and skill originates from, and is conferred by, his outsider status. Furthermore, heroes are generally understood to act on behalf of others. That said, the western hero figure under consideration in this thesis, namely the lone gunman protagonist emergent in the period following the Second World War, while unmistakeably heroic in form and an outsider in nature, exhibits markedly self-interested characteristics, since he is, generally speaking, reluctant to intervene on behalf of others until circumstances force him to do so. Whilst self-interest also marks out other lone heroes during the period, such as the *film noir* hero discussed in the next chapter, the western hero is unique in contextual terms, since he operates in a mytho-historical sphere representative of a pre or embryonic societal formation. This has implications for the type of heroism he embodies, as frequently employed individualistic interpretations testify.

However, alternative interpretations of the western hero's self-interested brand of heroism are possible, as suggested by the existentialist concepts which form the backbone of this thesis. This perspective posits the western hero in ontological terms, thereby adding a crucial dimension to the merely individualistic co-ordinates so frequently identified. Such an existential critique has wide-ranging implications for an understanding of the western hero's conduct, for example in relation to personal ethics, as well as the key issues foregrounded by the western's narrative, those of gender, freedom, justice and violence covered later in the thesis, which purely ideological interpretations of the significance of outsider-ness overlook.

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With this in mind, an ontological perspective on heroism would suggest that the individual hero figure can be sub-divided into two broad categories: the Saviour, acting primarily in the interests of others, thus willingly sacrificing the self, designated as the existential mode of being-for-others; and the type crucial to our purposes, the in-itself, whose main motivation consists in the protection of the self, and who serves others mainly for self-interested purposes. This hero type's principle ontological constituent, then, is autonomy, the defence of which is necessarily non-ethical in nature, since the in-itself is inherently non-societal in nature. In this way, wherever autonomous freedom is threatened by the wishes or, indeed, autonomy, of others, authentic action, the expression of the autonomous self, becomes necessary, even where that impinges on the freedoms of others.[1] This hero figure possesses special skills and the capability to aid others well in excess of the norm, as does the Saviour hero, but his motivations for exercising these are widely divergent and tend to be morally questionable, since ethical conduct entails a concern for the 'freedom' of others which the in-itself does not recognise, due to its concentration on the autonomy of the self. As a result, an ontological reading of the western hero's existential mode of being can be used to account for that ethically ambiguous conduct more usually explained in terms of the ideology of individualism.

Such ontological conceptualisations, then, expand our understanding of the western hero beyond gendered and ideological formations into the existential realm, recasting the hero as the embodiment of a mode of being-in-the-world denied to the societally situated self. On this account, he represents a mode of existence and, at the same time, the power to negate the existence of others through violent death, a recurrent trope which can be seen to hold much greater significance than that of merely dramatic device.[2]

In addition to ontological analysis of the western hero and the western film narrative of this kind, existentialist texts and ideas can also be employed to situate the western culturally. For example, I argue that the dynamic of cultural exchange between France and the US in the period immediately succeeding the Second World War is

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[1] Such issues are discussed in detail in Chapter Four's discussion of existential freedom.
[2] I return to these ideas in Chapter Five.

one that can enhance our understanding of the western via a type of hero common to both, previously described as representing the mode of the in-itself, namely the outsider figure who, viewed in ontological terms, is much more significant than if he were merely a product of individualism. These representations are particularly evident in genres such as the western and *film noir* as well as, of course, existentialist works, when this cultural process was at its peak. This in turn holds significance for one of my central arguments, namely the value of employing existentialist concepts and texts for analysing representations of heroism and associated narrative themes, since an exchange of cultural influences can be seen to complement pre-existent similarities between the western and the existentialist hero, commonly interpreted solely in the light of lone heroism and its individualistic attributes.

In addition, the nature of existential heroism as a substantive concept is also explored in order to establish its precise relevance for the critique of the lone gunman hero. For instance, Colin Wilson defines the existential outsider as 'a man-on-his-own in a world that did not understand him',[3] a description that highlights a key aspect of the existential hero. However, to what extent can this conception be plausibly applied to the westerner, a man who so often appears devoid of intellectual depth? While the definition seems to concur with the western hero's situation in the sense that he is indeed solitary, there is little evidence to suggest self-awareness or reflexivity in this character type, either through behaviour or dialogue. Indeed, such qualities of sensitivity to others are notably absent in this figure as befits the in-itself, the self-orientated subject which, as we will see in Chapter Three, is frequently gendered as well. Similarly, the sense of personal evolution that can sometimes be found in alternative forms of heroism is markedly absent.[4] If it can be argued that the western hero's world-view is not designed to be understood by others, which his self-imposed isolation would imply, then his behaviour simultaneously suggests indifference to this lack of social contact. Furthermore, he does not display self-awareness of his isolated state as does the existentialist hero, whose sense of alienation tends to be foregrounded by the text. Yet his situation is undoubtedly one of alienation, a form of

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[3] Wilson, C., 1956. *The Outsider*. London: Pan. p. 236.
[4] I return to this argument in Chapter Three.

exile in the personal, social and geographic sense, irrespective of this lack of self-reflexivity.

With this in mind, I wish to argue that the western hero represents the ontological mode of the in-itself in extreme form, an autonomous state of being rendered positive by the non-societal western context. In this way, the exile status of the western hero does not incur alienation in the negative sense experienced by the existentialist hero, (in other words social exclusion), since the western hero is isolated from sociality and, to all intents and purposes, has always been so, hence the narrative convention denying him a concrete genealogy. Instead, he exists in and for the moment, an existential state which can be seen as the authentic mode of being, but one that remains equally unachievable in a societal context. As such, the western's mythical, non-societal context means that its hero can enjoy the benefits of autonomy without paying the price exacted by societal configurations, namely, the state of alienation which, for existentialists, prevents its members from seeking a truly autonomous self.[5] As the western so powerfully demonstrates, the attainment of autonomous self-realisation entails the denial of the freedoms of others when it is threatened, as illustrated by the recurring trope of death in the western. Further, the western hero is accorded the right, by virtue of context, to defend his autonomy, even if that entails the curtailment of others' freedoms, ultimately death,[6] a mode of being denied to societal members and further, highlighting a crucial element in the western's undoubted escapist appeal; wish fulfilment for societal selves denied the right to act as autonomous individuals. In this way, the western hero has far greater significance than that conferred by the ideological doctrines of individualism, namely the pursuit of self-interest.

A further divergence between the western hero and his existentialist counterpart is his action-based mode of existence, one which contrasts markedly with accepted understandings of the existentialist hero as largely contemplative and cerebral, one whose life, 'pivots around his intellect and his emotions'.[7] To what extent does this

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[5] I discuss these ideas in more detail in Chapter Four's discussion of Sartrean freedom.

[6] I go on to present the connections between the exercise of autonomy and the negation of others in Chapter Five.

[7] Wilson, op. cit., p. 218.

type have a point of contact with a hero who apparently revels in his own physicality and can be defined in terms of it, as action hero? I will suggest that the latter definition takes far too narrow a view of the existential outsider. Wilson argues, for instance, that this is only one version of the outsider, though certainly the most widely accepted, a claim that will provide the starting point for an investigation into the type of outsider most pertinent to the western hero, involving consideration of various configurations and interpretations of the existential hero, both philosophical and literary. Once the relevant archetype has been identified, I go on to apply it to the western hero in order to establish the validity of comparisons between the two, and more importantly, my interpretations of the western hero and narrative themes in light of existentialist concepts and texts.

This chapter also explores the ways in which outsider-ness and Camus' work can be employed to analyse western and existentialist representations in relation to their ethical, practical and contextual realms. The societal formations in which the outsider figure is generally to be found can best be defined as embryonic in the western, with its frontier settlements and primitive law, and fully evolved but with a non-socialised/integrated hero in the case of existentialist literature. As previously noted, context has great significance for the hero's ontological status, since it renders the western hero the purest representation of the authentic self available in fictional form. Camus, who offers the most comprehensive fictional representations of the outsider and therefore constitutes the main focus of much of my discussion of outsider-ness, recognises the significance of societal context, for he describes Meursault, the hero of his novel *The Outsider*,[8] explicitly in these terms: 'he is foreign to the society in which he lives; he wanders, on the fringe.[9] Likewise, the drifter exile is a key figure in many westerns, a characteristic made explicit in both *The Searchers*[10] and *High Plains Drifter*,[11] in which this sense of exile from the community is highlighted. As I go on to argue, in existentialist terms, exile symbolises the state of alienation generated by autonomous existence, a state which can only be achieved through the

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[8] Camus, A., 1963. *The Outsider*. London: Penguin.
[9] From the 1956 preface to *The Stranger* in Camus, A. ed. Thody, P. 1967. *Lyrical and Critical Essays*. New York: Vintage. p. 336.
[10] *The Searchers*, 1956. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros.
[11] *High Plains Drifter*, 1972. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Universal.

authentic actions which non-societal contexts, such as those presented in the western, make possible.

This chapter begins by investigating the notion of cultural-historical exchange, before investigating the existentialist outsider, and, in turn, the western hero in light of such existentialist concepts and issues. However, it is important to note that I do not wish to claim the existence of direct connections between existentialism and the western in the sense of mapping one directly onto the other. Rather, I examine western film texts in light of existentialist ideas in order to offer a critical perspective on the western hero figure and the issues it raises, in a way that suggests an alternative critical approach to the possibilities outlined in Chapter One.

American Existentialism and Cultural Exchange

The notion of cultural exchange is one that underpins my examination of the western hero in light of existentialist concepts, since it reveals possible interconnections between the two forms in the post-war years. This is particularly evident in the work of the *Cahiers du Cinema* group in the 1950s and 1960s,[12] though views differ as to the precise extent of their contribution. Jim Hillier claims, for instance, that the group's contribution to—and influence upon—film theory has been over-estimated:[13] 'Legend has it that the feat was accomplished almost single-handed by motivated and volatile intellectuals from Paris sticking their heads together and pulling off a brilliant public relations stunt that came to be known as *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *nouvelle vague*'.[14] Be that as it may, the journal's work is significant for our purposes, because it took the western to be typical of American film production as a whole. Further, its intellectually engaged, philosophical approach can be likened to that of the French existentialists towards American cultural forms during the period. This can be

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[12] I introduce the journal in Chapter One.

[13] This is particularly so in relation to auteur theory, discussed in Chapter One. For a preliminary discussion, see André Bazin's polemical piece, 'On the Politique des Auteurs', in Hillier, J. ed. 1985. *Cahiers du Cinema Vol 1: The 1950's*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. pp. 248-259. And for the seminal work on this topic, François Truffaut, 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema' in Nichols, B. ed. 1976. *Movies and Methods: Vol.1*. London: University of California Press. p. 224. The journal *Screen* also appropriated the theory. See Eaton & Neale, op. cit.,; Ed Buscombe, 'Ideas of Authorship', pp. 170-180, and, finally, Stephen Heath, 'Comment on "The Idea of Authorship', pp. 181-186.

[14] Thomas Elsaesser, cited in Hillier, 1985, op. cit., p.1

formulated as largely antithetical to the industrial motivations of Hollywood and its action orientated, non-intellectual output, as Godard's words reveal: 'The Americans, who are much more stupid when it comes to analysis, instinctively bring off very complex scripts. They also have a gift for the kind of simplicity that brings depth—in a little Western like "Ride the High Country,' for instance. If one tries to do something like that in France, one looks like an intellectual'.[15] Such admiration fluctuated, however, for in the same decade and publication, he also stated that, 'The reason we used to like American cinema was that of every hundred films 80 per cent, say, were good. Nowadays of every hundred American films 80 per cent are bad'.[16]

Claims of this kind have significance beyond the confines of film criticism, however, since they bear testament to a process of cultural exchange between French and American cultural formations, which in turn serves to situate and analyse the western's outsider hero figure in more complex terms than those which appear elsewhere.[17] That said, it is difficult to provide a convincing explanation for the emergence of the morally ambivalent hero in a wide range of genres. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that this phenomenon was, at least in part, due to the impact of existentialism on American cultural formations during the process of cultural exchange between France and the US previously discussed in relation to the *Cahiers* Group, peaking during the period following the Second World War, when leading American literary figures such as Hemingway and Richard Wright spent time in Paris communing with existentialists like Camus, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.[18] Conversely, Camus visited New York in 1946, a trip that would generate much material,[19] during which his novel *The Stranger* was published in America for the first time.[20]

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[15] Hillier, J. ed. 1986. *Cahiers du Cinema Vol 2: 1960-1968*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. p. 64.

[16] Claude Chabrol, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Kast, Luc Moullet, Jacques Rivette, François Truffaut, 'Questions about American Cinema: A Discussion', in ibid., p. 174.

[17] I discuss alternative critical approaches to the western in Chapter One.

[18] For example, Sartre declared that 'after the war I met declared that after the war I met Hemingway and Don Passos', in Sartre, J.-P. Tr. Paul Auster, & Lydia Davis, 1978. *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*. London: Andre Deutsch. p. 41.

[19] See, for example, the essay 'The Rains of New York', in Camus, A. Thody, P. ed. 1970. Tr. Ellen Conroy Kennedy. *Lyrical and Critical Essays*. New York: Vintage.

[20] Indeed, the American connection is emphasised by Camus' appearance being likened to that of Humphrey Bogart. Camus enjoyed such comparisons according to Lottman, H. R. 1997. *Albert Camus in New York*. California: Gingko Press. p. 6.

Existentialism in itself arguably gained such a firm foothold at the time due to its stance against grand narratives. For instance, John Cruikshank argues that Camus spoke on behalf of contemporary concerns: 'he brought much benefit to his contemporaries by locating and exploring the major problems of his age. The kind of exploration which he carried out, with its emphasis on the needs of individual men and its exposure of murderous ideologies, is an essential step towards any ultimate solution to these problems'.[21] In addition, existentialism was consistent with the twentieth century's rejection of historical linear progression and the central tenets of humanism,[22] principally resulting from the First and Second World Wars, and captured by Camus' assertion that, 'I do not have enough faith in reason to subscribe to a belief in progress or to any philosophy of history'.[23] Likewise, Jean Domarchi of the *Cahiers* Group attributed the proliferating cult of self to cultural shifts generated by the Second World War: 'each person is expressing his own individuality for himself, alone... doubt is the expression of our individual isolation as Europeans of the 1960's, living within that individuality and nourishing ourselves from it without even connecting up with the universal, with society'.[24]

Moreover, Norman Mailer *explicitly* grounds the American appropriation of existentialism in its cultural and historical context in 'The White Negro',[25] a treatise on American culture, existentialism and their embodiment in the "hipster" figure so prominent in the road novel and movie of the fifties. This phenomenon can be characterised as the co-option of perceived "black" American qualities by white youth in an attempt to resist the restrictions of mainstream value systems, manifesting itself in a form of existential outsider-ness:[26]

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[21] From the introduction to Camus, A. 1965. *Caligula and Cross Purpose*. Middlesex: Penguin. p. 19.

[22] Such notions reached their apotheosis in the age of Victorian Imperialism and its methodological counterpart, Whig historiography.

[23] From 'The Almond Trees', one of a series of essays entitled 'Summer', in Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 135.

[24] Hillier, 1986, op. cit., p. 76.

[25] In Mailer, N. 1968. *Advertisements for Myself*. London: Panther. pp. 269-289.

[26] See, for instance, Jack Kerouac's highly influential novel, *On the Road*, [Middlesex: Penguin], a work whose continuously reprinted status is testament to its enduring appeal. For a later filmic reinvention of the hipster/beat figure, *Easy Rider* [Dennis Hopper, 1969. USA: Columbia].

the American existentialist—the hipster, the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the State...or with a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled...the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self.[27]

Further, in 'The Existential Hero: Superman Comes to the Supermarket', Mailer characterises America as a land peculiarly devoted to heroes and adventure, these being intrinsic to the national frontier myth and manifested by the western hero: 'America was the land where people still believe in heroes: George Washington; Billy the Kid; Lincoln, Jefferson; Mark Twain, Jack London, Hemingway; Joe Louis, Dempsey, Gentleman Jim... It was a country which had grown by the leap of one hero past another—is there a county in all of our ground which does not have its legendary figure?'[28]

Mailer conflates this myth with The American Dream which he argues to lie at the core of American twentieth century political life, rooted in, 'the dynamic myth of the Renaissance—that every man was potentially extraordinary'.[29] He also offers a distinctively existential political interpretation of major cultural moments, whilst analysing American presidents according to their existential heroic status, an approach further validated by Robert Kennedy's interest in Camus as a result of his brother's death: 'The most concrete expression of Kennedy's existential quality was his involvement with the writings of Albert Camus...he more than just read Camus. He memorized him, meditated about him, quoted him and was changed by him'.[30]

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[27] Mailer, 1968, op. cit., p. 270. I go on to discuss the intrinsic significance of death in relation to violence and the outsider figure in Chapter Five.

[28] Mailer, N., 1964. *The Presidential Papers*. London: Andre Deutsch. p. 38.

[29] Ibid., p.38. I am not suggesting that this quotation reflects a solely American ideology given the fact that Mailer's understanding of the spirit of the Renaissance illustrated here equally holds true for the myth of the Romantic hero so powerful in Anglo-European culture. I am merely making the much more modest claim that this particular inflection of the spirit of the Renaissance is generally understood to be peculiarly American, at its crudest the notion that anyone can become the President of the United States if they are sufficiently hard working and opportunistic.

[30] This is from a memorial article written by Kennedy's friend Jack Newfield, cited in Brée, G. 1974. *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment*. London: Calder & Boyars. p. 44.

Meanwhile, in the *Presidential Papers*,[31] Mailer describes the specifically existential element of American heroism as, 'a consecutive set of brave and witty self-creations'.[32] This certainly holds true for the central precepts of existentialism, which propose the individual to be the result of free choices, self-determined rather than bound by the chains of the past, consequently embodying present choices together with a projection of future possibilities. The appeal of this potentially liberating viewpoint to those wishing to create a new future—rather than harking back to a recent past that included the events of the Second World War—thus becomes clear. As a country without a substantial history,[33] existentialism was also remarkably in tune with America's own historical perceptions. Not only did it demand that the significance of the past and its influence upon the individual be dismissed, it also appeared to endorse and celebrate its lack. As Mailer puts it, America is, 'the most rootless of countries, since almost no American could lay claim to the line of a family which had not once at least severed its roots by migrating here'.[34] Such interpretations partly account for the resonance of a philosophy that centred on a hero figure without a past or connections, existing in a permanent present.

As such, Mailer regards the mythical hero to be central to the American world-view and attempts to capture the essence of the American myth at the heart of the western in this way:

> each of us is born free, to wander, to have adventure and to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed, and the unexpected…a force which could not be tamed no matter how the nation's regulators…would brick-in the modern life with hygiene upon sanity, and middle-brow homily over platitude; the myth would not die. Indeed a quarter of the nation's business must have depended upon its existence…[35]

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[31] Mailer, 1964, op. cit.

[32] Ibid., p. 6.

[33] This formulation of American history is a reflection of Mailer's own exclusion of the native inhabitants.

[34] Ibid., p. 38.

[35] Ibid., p. 38. I discuss the centrality of freedom to the western hero in Chapter Four.

In an argument which links in with those psychoanalytical ideas that posit the hero as the embodiment of the wishes of the mass or collective unconscious,[36] he argues that the leader-hero represents the essential spirit of the American nation, and as such, is essential to its well-being and growth. *The Presidential Papers* were primarily written for Jack Kennedy, and so it is he who constitutes Mailer's blueprint here:

> It was a hero America needed, a hero central to his time, a man whose personality might suggest contradictions and mysteries which could reach into the alienated circuits of the underground, because only a hero can capture the secret imagination of a people, and so be good for the vitality of his nation; a hero embodies the fantasy and so allows each private mind the liberty to consider its fantasy and find a way to grow.[37]

Mailer argues America's authentic identity to originate in the myth of the nation as a collection of autonomous individuals; "neo-renaissance man". He sees the American film industry as intrinsic to this process of frontier mythologisation: 'The film studios threw up their searchlights as the frontier was finally sealed, and the romantic possibilities of the old conquest of land turned into a vertical myth, trapped within the skull, of a new kind of heroic life'.[38] He further argues that films channelled this myth by using a variety of highly effective methods including the usage of actors said to hold certain essential "American" qualities:[39] 'it was almost as if there were no peace unless one could fight well, kill well (if always with honour), love well and love many, be cool, be daring, be dashing, be wild, be wily, be resourceful, be a brave gun'.[40] Not coincidentally, these are all traits held by the western hero, arguably the ultimate incarnation of American values and certainly one frequently cited as a quintessentially nationalistic figure. Such "neo-renaissance" authentic American types were, in Mailer's view, at risk from being swamped by the undifferentiated group known as

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[36] The collective unconscious is a concept particularly associated with Carl Jung. Its association with the hero myth is explained by Anthony Storr as an expression of 'fundamental psychological experiences common to all men. We all start life as helpless children. We all have to emancipate ourselves from parents and other adults and face life and its challenges independently. If we do not succeed in doing so, we will neither attain a position in the world (a throne), nor reach sufficient heterosexual maturity to win a mate (the beautiful princess). Instead, we shall be destroyed by the dragon... Hero myths originating from different cultures are similar, because our psychological process through life is similar'. Storr, A. 1973. *Jung*. London: Fontana. pp. 36-37.

[37] Mailer, 1964, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

[38] Ibid., p. 38.

[39] Humphrey Bogart and Frank Sinatra are cited as examples.

[40] Ibid., p. 38.

"mass man", namely collective conformism. This group arguably emerged from the increasingly consumerised society of post Second World War America, a phenomenon arising from mass communications and emblematic of the rigid straitjacket of security generated by the upheavals of the two World Wars and the subsequent Cold War atomic threat.[41]

The hipster figure, in contrast, is resolutely anti-mass man and, as previously suggested, is characterised as arising from this process of cultural homogenisation, the result of both the cultural impact of existentialism and specific twentieth century conditions like post-war angst. He is a resolutely non-heroic cultural phenomenon cast in a similar mould to that of the later hippie figure. However, this specifically *existential* hero is, according to Mailer, only the latest incarnation of a type pre-dating existentialism's introduction to American society,[42] to be found in the nihilistic and frequently disturbing fictional worlds created by Edgar Allen Poe[43] and Herman Melville in the nineteenth century.[44]

Furthermore, the parallels between Melville and the existentialist tradition's emergence in America, transmitted by writers like Camus and Sartre, are strong enough to lead to claims that, 'The opening of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is merely a variant of the opening of *Moby-Dick*'.[45] And so the possible linkages between an American

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[41] This is a necessarily brief summary of Mailer's ideas, which are woven throughout the previously cited third Presidential Paper.

[42] Søren Kierkegaard is generally cited as the first existentialist philosopher. See for example, Chapter 3 of Walter Kaufmann's invaluable compendium of existentialist writings, 'Kierkegaard: The First Existentialist', [1975, *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*. London: Meridian. pp. 83-121]. However, it is unlikely that these ideas circulated very widely during the 19th Century. As such, Mailer is referring to the *spirit* of existential heroism, rather than an actual emergence at this time.

[43] See the 1994 edition of *Edgar Allen Poe: Selected Tales* London: Penguin.

[44] Melville, H. 1972. *Moby Dick*. Middlesex: Penguin. Indeed, a hero doomed to wander and a singular obsession with death in a seemingly nihilistic universe is evident right from Moby Dick's opening passage with its references to winter, coffins and funerals: 'Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet...then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. p. 93.

[45] Extract from the introduction by Harold Beaver, ibid., p. 38. Likewise, the French film director Jean-Pierre Melville (formerly Grumbach) owes his name to the novelist, the adoption of which Philip French argues to be in homage to one of his three favourite American authors, Melville, Edgar Allen Poe and Jack London, all of whom can be placed within the American tradition of literary existentialism. These literary variants pre-date the existential philosophy's emergence in America, of course, but nonetheless shares central thematic concerns with it relating to the nature of individual existence and outsider-ness. These include alienation, anomie, nihilism and rebellion. Furthermore, French avers that, 'Melville borrowed from American cinema and his refined style was filtered back to Hollywood where followers

author and a French philosopher ostensibly writing in entirely different traditions becomes apparent, particularly when Camus' own account is taken into consideration: 'If a painter of the absurd has played a role in my idea of literary art, it is the author of the admirable *Moby Dick*, the American, Melville'.[46]

In contrast, a more externalised, "wholesome" American version can be traced to the heroes of Ernest Hemingway, himself an overtly masculine figure concerned with proving his manhood by the expression of physicality and the spirit of adventure. These are certainly the standard reference points for Hemingway's style of heroism, although existential heroes share a similar fascination with death and rituals of death, analogous to that of the western's protagonist.[47] As formerly indicated, Wilson employs Hemingway's heroes as illustrative of a specific existential type, arguing that they strive to 'achieve a vividness of sense perception',[48] in contrast with the cerebral type, a view shared by Camus when comparing European and American variants: 'In Kafka, the reality that he describes is created by the symbol, the fact stems from the image, whereas in Melville the symbol emerges from reality, the image is born of what is seen. This is why Melville never cuts himself off from the flesh or nature, which are barely perceptible in Kafka's work'.[49] Certainly, Hemingway's characters, be they soldiers or bullfighters, revel in a life of the senses and their own physicality in contrast to that psychological and physical retreat from the outside world enacted by a 'typical' existential hero like Raskolnikoff: 'The life of the Outsider pivots around his intellect and his emotions, and as often as not, he retreats into a cork-lined room as did Proust and forgets he has a body. It was Hemingway's main achievement to restore the sense of the body into literature…there is a sense of physical freshness, a direct, intense experience of natural things that makes the "troubles and perplexities of

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included Walter Hill and Michael Mann…he claimed there were nineteen variations in cops-and-robbers films—all of them used in his films'. [Philip French writing in the Review section of the *Observer* newspaper. 13/07/03. See, for instance, the film *noir*esque *Le Samouraï*, [1967. Directed by Jean-Pierre Melville. France: TC.]], with its bleak sense of nihilism and futility, and its lone existentialist hero whose downfall is brought about when authentic emotion finally breaks through his habitually alienated relationship with the external world and its inhabitants. This is a pessimistic take on existentialism, which emphasises the code of the warrior and the price exacted by authenticity, and further illustrates the French interest in American culture and film genres.

[46] From 1951, 'Three Interviews', in Camus, 1970. op. cit., p. 355. Furthermore, Camus also writes of Melville in admiring terms in his essay 'Herman Melville', included in Camus, 1970, op. cit.

[47] I return to the significance of death in Chapter Five.

[48] Wilson, op. cit., p. 220.

[49] From 'Herman Melville', in Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 293.

intellect" seem nonsense'.[50] Wilson views such heroic action as a necessary outlet from the emotions aroused by "human stupidity", the herd instincts which cause the un-heroic masses to act collectively and conventionally, and are duly rejected by lone heroes: 'Hemingway's heroes escaped the stupidity by going in for high excitement: big game hunting and bullfighting and war'.[51]

Unsurprisingly, conventional ethical norms remain absent from both the Hemingway adventurer and Camus' Outsider. Instead, both determine themselves through action based on underlying pragmatic codes, distinguishing themselves not through a sense of ethical superiority but through a will to self-determination: 'there is no love nor mercy nor charity nor justice unless a man can keep his courage, and this indeed fitted the facts. What fitted the need of an adventurer even more precisely was Hemingway's individualistic categorical imperative that, "what made him feel good therefore became The Good"'.[52] Conversely, Kant's definition of the Categorical Imperative as a measure for the morality of an action is founded on the degree to which it is universalisable and formed by duty and reason, the precept, 'Act only according to a maxim by which you can at the same time will that it shall become a general law'.[53] Although this perspective is equally applicable to other versions of existential heroism, it is certainly at odds with Kant's requirement that the good ought to address the universal interests of mankind. Hemingway's version grounds the good in individual need rather than ethical absolutes, for the formulation of an objective ethics is wholly alien to a philosophy based on the individual who is, by definition, unique. For this reason, a fundamental commitment to subjectivity lies at the heart of the existentialist universe. Indeed, this is one of the key connections between existential and western modes of heroism, one which transcends the pure individualism projected by the foregoing American conceptualisations of existential heroism, since both highlight the impact of such individualism upon the self, through representations of alienation, anomie, and the absurdist visions on offer in a number of westerns and existentialist works.

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[50] Wilson, op. cit., p. 218.
[51] Ibid., p. 155.
[52] Mailer, 1968, op. cit., p.272.
[53] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, cited in Russell, B. 1991. *History of Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge. p. 683.

Camus' *Outsider*,[54] for instance, does not appear to present a moral universe in the Kantian sense.[55] Meursault murders an Arab, an event which is presented as meaningless, and prior to this shows little interest in his mother's death. Significantly, neither of these warrants moral condemnation within the context of the novel, for an ethical response would be out of place, granted the work's singularly neutral treatment of these issues. With this in mind, Connelly comments that: 'the neo-paganism which is common to both civilizations [Algerian and Deep American South], together with Camus' rapid and somewhat colloquial style, have caused some critics to consider *The Outsider* merely as a French exercise in the American 'tough guy' manner',[56] though he maintains that 'the atmosphere is not really similar'.[57] George Cotkin, meanwhile, is less equivocal: 'popular American film and fictional noir spread its magic towards Europe. The style of James M. Cain's classic *noir* novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), for example, influenced Camus to write his own novel, *The Stranger*, in a similar style'.[58] This seems reasonable in light of the deadpan delivery and hedonistic, adolescent lifestyle characterised by a focus on sex, food, movies, living for and in the moment, and random outbursts of violence, all conventions of American "pulp fiction". Elsewhere, Cotkin likens Camus' writing to Ernest Hemingway's style of delivery,[59] a view with which Wilson, interestingly, concurs in terms of novelistic themes and concerns: 'Camus' *L'Etranger* reminds us of another modern writer…comparison of the two makes it apparent that all of Hemingway's work has its relevance to the problem of the Existentialist Outsider'.[60] Wilson notes further equivalences between the novelist's characters: 'Kreb's similarity to Camus' Meursault is immediately striking. With the difference that Kreb's state of mind is the result of specific experiences, while Meursault's is natural to him, Krebs and Meursault would be almost interchangeable in their two stories'.[61]

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[54] Camus, 1963, op. cit.
[55] I offer a detailed account of ethics in relation to the outsider figure in Chapter Four.
[56] Introduction to the first English edition of 1946 of *The Outsider*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
[57] Ibid., p. 6.
[58] Cotkin, G. 2003. *Existential America*. London: John Hopkins University Press. pp. 28-29.
[59] Ibid., p. 120.
[60] Wilson, op. cit., p. 31.
[61] Ibid., p. 33.

That said, it is debatable whether Camus' work can be said to lie closer to Hammett or Hemingway, though the author's own views on the American literary style are revealing. While conceding the influence of American writing on his work, Camus simultaneously conveys a negative attitude towards the American literary style, which, echoing Connelly's dismissive attitude towards *The Outsider* as "merely" a French exercise:

> the technique of the American novel seems to lead to a dead end. I used it in *The Stranger*, it is true. But this was because it suited my purpose, which was to describe a man with no apparent awareness of his existence. By generalizing this particular technique, we would end up with a universe of automatons and instincts. It would be a considerable impoverishment. That is why, although I appreciate the real value of the American novel, I would give a hundred Hemingways for one Stendhal or one Benjamin Constant. And I regret the influence of this literature on many young writers'.[62]

Conversely, Camus admired Faulkner, having adapted one of the latter's plays, 'Requiem for a Nun', and writes of the influence in positive terms:

> the great problem of modern tragedy is language. Characters in business suits cannot talk like Oedipus and Titus. Their language must at the same time be simple enough to be our own and lofty enough to reach the tragic. In my view, Faulkner has found such a language. I have tried to recreate it in French, and to betray neither a work nor an author I admire'.[63]

Further concretising this connection, Doubrovsky argues that, 'Camus is the great writer American literature has waited for and who never came...what they [Americans] like most is...the concern he shares with Hemingway or Melville for man's struggle within the universe and against it'.[64] So, while Camus vacillates between admiration and criticism of the connections between the French and American literary styles, both traditions can be seen to converge in a distinctively existentialist perspective on humanity, which concerns itself with the absurdity of a universe in which ethical codes have been virtually destroyed, thereby enabling the authentic

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[62] From 'Three Interviews', in Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 348.
[63] From 'Critical Essays', in ibid., p.317.
[64] Doubrovsky, 'Camus in America', in Brée, G. ed. 1962. *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall. p. 17.

individual to be given full rein, as in the western, or punished, as in the societally bound existentialist novel.

A further point of reference between American commentators of the period and French writers, in this case specifically the existentialists, is evidenced by Camus and Sartre's interest in—and analysis of—American culture and history, in work which echoes that of Mailer, who also grounded American culture in its history as already established. For example, Sartre makes much of the recurrent imagery connected with freedom[65] in America's cultural and ideological formations. He suggests that American towns and cities contain strong clues as to the nature of the American psyche and the significance that Americans ascribe to freedom, locating such concerns in the freedom to roam conferred by the myth of frontier, as does Mailer. In this way, Sartre draws parallels between the modern city and its origins in the frontier town of Western expansion familiar to the western generic formula:

> I came to understand that the American city was, originally, a camp in the desert. People from far away, attracted by a mine, a petroleum field or fertile land, arrived one fine day and settled as quickly as possible in a clearing, near a river. They built the vital parts of the town, the bank, the town hall, the church, and then hundreds of one-storey frame houses. The road, if there was one, served as a kind of spinal column to the town, and then streets were marked out like vertebrae, perpendicular to the road. It would be hard to count the American cities that have that kind of parting in the middle.[66]

He then draws wider conclusions from such formations, for instance the potential for liberation from the constraints of tradition that they invoke:

> In America these long, straight, unobstructed streets carry one's glance, like canals, outside the city. You always see mountains or fields of the sea at the end of them, no matter where you may be. Frail and temporary, formless and unfinished, they are haunted by the presence of the immense geographical space surrounding them. And precisely because their boulevards are highways, they always seem to be stopping places on the roads. They are not oppressive,

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[65] I offer a detailed discussion of freedom in relation to ethics and existentialist concepts in Chapter Four.
[66] 'American Cities', in Sartre, J.-P. 1955. Tr. Annette Michelson. *Literary and Philosophical Essays*. London: Rider. p.107.

they do not close you in; nothing is definitive, nothing is arrested. You feel, from your first glance, that your contact with these places is a temporary one; either you will leave them or they will change around you...But these slight cities, still so similar to...the outposts of the Far West, reveal the other side of the United States: their freedom. Here everyone is free—not to criticise or to reform their customs—but to flee them, to leave for the desert or another city. The cities are open, open to the world, and to the future. This is what gives them their adventurous look and, even in their ugliness and disorder, a touching beauty.[67]

Moreover, Sartre proposes that the American sense of individualism, which, as previously observed, provides the starting point for conceptualisations of the outsider figure, is central to the American mentality. The importance of freedom can be discerned in urban formations but, likewise, the impact of individualism is also perceptible in architectural design: 'New York is the triumph of individualism. The tops of the building defy all the rules of town planning'.[68] He later goes on to liken the symbolism of skyscrapers to, 'an almost Nietzschean individualism',[69] thus emphasising the connections between the ideology of individualism and the will to power that it promotes, one common to both American and European conceptualisations. With this in mind, Sartre highlights the extremes of autonomy to which, in his view, American citizens are ultimately conditioned to aspire, thereby providing a further reference point between American and existential outsider-ness, as I go on to discuss later.

In addition, Sartre perceives American individualism to be closely allied to the role model heroism mentioned in Chapter Two, and as such forming the bedrock of the American value system: 'in the struggle of life, American individuality is, above all, each person's passionate aspiration toward the state of the individual. There are individuals in America just as there are skyscrapers. There are Ford and Rockefeller, and Hemingway and Roosevelt. They are models and examples'.[70] He further observes that Americans are, paradoxically, constrained by their conception of freedom which appears to consist of the necessity to conform to certain "freedoms"

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[67] Ibid., pp. 116-117.
[68] 'Individualism and Conformism', in ibid., p. 103.
[69] Ibid., p. 106.
[70] Ibid., p. 104.

for the greater good of society: 'It was this complete freedom in conformism that struck one... It is public opinion that plays the role of the policeman. The few Americans I met seemed to me to conform through freedom, to be depersonalised through rationalism'.[71] This analysis seems, however, to contradict accepted definitions of the concept. The freedom to exercise conformity hardly appears to constitute freedom at all. However, Sartre sheds more light on this by arguing that the American brand of individualism combines elements of both self-determination and conformism through personal achievement measured, in this context, by financial gain won by conformity to societal norms. Thus, the American wins his individuality as a reward for effective maintenance of the status quo, for playing by the corporate rules. He is rewarded financially, which proves his worthiness as an individual, through which he gains status, self-worth and external validation for his achievements. Even more importantly, though, he thereby earns the right to a societally constrained form of individuality.

This tension between corporate and individual is a standard narrative device in American films,[72] and is emblematic of a widespread concern with the individual and the system evident in, for example, generic action/adventure narratives, and paralleled by existentialist texts such as *The Outsider*[73] discussed at length throughout the thesis. One need look no further than *Dirty Harry*[74] to see this device played out in a particularly overt fashion; the maverick cop and his vendetta versus the bureaucratic ineptitudes of the systemic police force. It is surely significant for the narrative's ideological implications that Harry proves to be correct in his assessment that the victim will die if the rules which, in his view, privilege the rights of the accused over the victim, are observed. Sartre sees the French conception of individualism, on the other hand, as much less complex, viewing it in purely political terms as denoting the

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[71] Ibid., p. 102.
[72] *Wall Street*, [1987. Directed by Oliver Stone, USA: TCF], is a case in point, in which the interests of the individual and the corporation are presented as being necessarily in opposition within the market economy framework. Thus, Gordon Gekko's aggressively individualist approach, which is entirely self-interested and power-based, collides with the corporation for which he works and also with the populist notion of the "little man" represented by the shareholders. The film ultimately affirms benevolent capitalism, represented by small businesses and trade union formations, as being the answer to such conflicts rather than the ethic free model represented by Gekko's egotistical capitalist. This is arguably, however, a magical narrative resolution to an insoluble problem.
[73] Camus, 1963, op. cit.
[74] *Dirty Harry.* 1971. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Warner Bros.

opposition that naturally exists between the interests of the individual and those of the State apparatus, rather than constituting the type of national ideology he claims to be particular to the United States. He observes that, 'This combination of social conformism and individualism is, perhaps, what a Frenchman will have most difficulty in understanding',[75] for in his view, the European conception of individualism is unified and unproblematic, in contrast with the complexity of the American variant.

Camus also noted the vastness of America and its architecture during a visit in 1946, and was similarly engaged by its culture, noting on arrival that New York was, 'a hideous, inhuman city. But I know that one changes one's mind. A few details strike me: that the garbage men wear gloves, that the traffic moves in an orderly fashion…that no-one ever has change in this country, and that everyone looks like they've stepped out of a B-film'.[76] Furthermore, 'he was moved not by skyscrapers but by the Bowery',[77] significantly, for our purposes, equating America with the western, recalling, 'a strange bar, apparently straight out of a Western, [where] fat old actresses sing about ruined lives and a mother's love'.[78] On the ideological front, however, Camus regarded America's individualistic, materialistic ideology as an inevitable outcome of the post-war era, not as a national characteristic in line with Sartre's view. In response to a question on the topic, for instance, he observed that, 'Everywhere today man suffers from materialistic civilization. In poverty and hunger, European man is materialistic. Can it be otherwise?'[79]

Camus' conclusions concerning the consequences of individualism also differ from Sartre's, though they both equate architectural design with economic factors: 'We enter New York harbor. A terrific sight despite or because of the mist. The order, the strength, the economic power are there. The heart trembles in front of so much admirable inhumanity'.[80] He was more negative when writing in retrospect, though: 'The whitened skyscrapers loom in the gray mist like gigantic tombstones for a city

[75] Sartre, 1955, op. cit., p. 102.
[76] Camus, A. 1989. Tr. Hugh Levick. *American Journals*. London: Hamish Hamilton. p.32.
[77] Lottman, op. cit., p. 52. The Bowery denotes New York's Lower East Side.
[78] From 'The Rains of New York', in Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 186.
[79] Lottman, op. cit., p. 15.
[80] Camus, 1989, op. cit., p. 31.

of the dead, and seem to sway slightly on their foundations. At this hour they are deserted. Eight million men, the smell of steel and cement, the madness of builders, and yet the very height of solitude'.[81] Here, the emphasis is very much on the alienation of city life, which can be seen as an inevitable consequence of individualistic, autonomous modes of existence, as existentialist texts suggest. The western, in contrast, represents the possibility of individualistic non-alienation, though this can only be achieved by means of a mythical, non-societal context and so, for practical purposes, remains unattainable.

New York's constructed-ness also reveals Camus' preference for the natural over the urban in his documentary writings.[82] As a result, his attitudes to identical features of the American city are diametrically opposed to those of Sartre, signalling entrapment rather than liberation:

> seeking shelter in a cab that stops at a red light and starts again on a green, you suddenly feel caught in a trap, behind monotonous, fast-moving windshield wipers sweeping aside water that is constantly renewed. You are convinced you could drive like this for hours without escaping these square prisons or the cisterns through which you wade with no hope of a hill or a real tree.[83]

Again, very different from Sartre's view that, 'They are not oppressive, they do not close you in; nothing is definitive, nothing is arrested'.[84] Camus' perspective on America and individualism is much more contradictory than indicated by this selection of extracts, though. While he sometimes juxtaposes the natural with the urban in his descriptions in a positive sense, 'New York is nothing without its sky. Naked and immense…it gives the city its glorious mornings and the grandeur of its evenings',[85] he then counteracts this by later returning to his previous tone: 'when the sky grows dull, or the daylight fades, then once again New York becomes the big

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[81] Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 182.
[82] This is not consistent in his fictional work, though, as outlined in relation to existentialist conceptions of space in Chapter Four.
[83] Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 182.
[84] Sartre, 1955. op. cit., p. 117.
[85] Camus, op. cit., p. 182.

city, prison by day and funeral pyre by night'.[86] So, the overall effect of the piece is somewhat ambiguous, reflecting Camus' own position on America:

> After so many months I still know nothing about New York, whether one moves about among madmen here or among the most reasonable people in the world; whether life is as easy as all America says, or whether it is as empty here as it sometimes seems...whether New Yorkers are liberals or conformists, modest souls or dead ones...whether, finally, we should believe those who say that it is eccentric to want to be alone, or naïvely those who are surprised that no one ever asks for your identity card. In short, I am out of my depth when I think of New York.[87]

Overall, though, Camus emphasises the loneliness of the city through the recurring trope of exile, one which becomes overt in his formulation of the outsider figure. Even so, the apparently negative emotion of loneliness evokes a sense of ambivalence also reminiscent of the outsider mentality: 'sometimes one needs exile. And then the very smell of New York rain tracks you down...to remind you that there is at least one place of deliverance in the world, where you, together with a whole people and for as long as you want, can finally lose yourself forever',[88] the emphasis on "deliverance" suggestive of both the freedom and autonomy enabled by anonymity, as well as the sense of isolation which arises from one's individual identity being subsumed within the faceless crowd and city space, the ontological mode of *das man*, which both the western and existentialism so strongly challenge and ultimately reject.

As the foregoing account of cultural exchange suggests, however, there is no single, unified explanation for such common ground between the two forms, and it is not my intention to make claims that French-American cultural exchange directly informed cultural representations in either country, although as the previously marshalled evidence indicates, there was clearly a form of dialogue between the two. Rather, it seems reasonable to suggest that post-war culture had a similar impact on the cultural forms of both in terms of, for example, increased questioning of previously accepted cultural norms evidenced by the proliferating examples of ethical ambiguity in

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[86] Ibid., p. 183.
[87] Ibid., p. 184.
[88] Ibid., p. 186.

fictional representations and, perhaps, prejudice against the ontological mode of the masses in light of cultural trends such as the rise of consumerism and its thrust towards homogenisation. Be that as it may, projections of ethical and/or ontological certainties were certainly in decline in the post-war era.

The Outsider and Existential Heroism

Having accounted for the ways in which American and French cultural analysis and ideas intersect, I now wish to consider the outsider figure of existential literature, since it constitutes an essential component of my critique of the western hero in relation to existentialist ideas and texts. As a result, this subsection consists of a preliminary analysis of the archetype in order to lay the groundwork for the more concrete exploration of the western heroic outsider figure undertaken later in the chapter. I will therefore discuss salient aspects of the archetype drawn from existentialist texts, prior to a more detailed analysis of the type in relation to the western hero. The outsider type undoubtedly appears in a variety of literature. Some of these texts are explicitly existentialist, designed to be bearers of their author's existentialist ideas. The heroes of Camus and the previously discussed Mailer fall into this category, while others are rather more equivocal, merely suggestive of—rather than designed to be—existentialist in nature, such as the work of writers like Kafka and Dostoyevsky. Despite this diversity, it is possible to identify some leading characteristics of the literary outsider, ones that will then be compared and contrasted with the westerner.

One of the primary characteristics of both the literary outsider and the lone/action hero is a verbally uncommunicative approach, a feature intrinsic to the enigmatic persona displayed by a number of different heroic types. It can partly be attributed to a certain masculine forbearance,[89] a conscious or unconscious refusal to acknowledge any sense of subjective inner feeling that could potentially detract from object status, the in-itself. This cryptic quality is manifested in the absurdist speech patterns and disposition of the existential heroes created by writers like Camus, and is also

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[89] An underlying assumption both here and throughout the thesis is that the outsider and his ontological mode, the in-itself, is essentially male, an issue which will be explored in more depth in Chapter Three.

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frequently associated with a stereotyped view of masculinity typically connected with action heroes. The western hero is no exception. For Robert Connell, this amounts to a 'self-conscious cult of inarticulate masculine heroism',[90] and its consistent presence in the outsider figure can therefore be seen as intrinsic to the lone male hero, who displays the benefits conferred by autonomy over the highly developed communication skills privileged by the societal self.

The existential hero figure is not generally associated with overt machismo as is the lone action hero of the western, not least because the cerebral nature with which he is most commonly associated is antithetical to the action hero stereotype. This suggests that non-verbalisation is a feature of the ontological mode shared by both, rather than primarily a masculine trait. Be that as it may, the cerebral variant of existential hero, though widespread, is not the only possible configuration of the type. For example, the conqueror figure in *The Myth of Sisyphus*[91] appears to be the polar opposite of the contemplative type,[92] for he is an active, macho figure, as befits a warrior, in accordance with Wilson's physical outsider discussed shortly.[93] This position is made explicit when the character declares that, 'A man is more a man through the things he keeps to himself than through those he says. There are many I shall keep to myself'.[94] This reveals a conscious decision by the man of action not to articulate, generally equated with qualities like strength and power familiar to descriptions of the warrior-type. Significantly, this particular warrior goes on explicitly to align action with masculinity and pride and honour, another key constituent of the hyper masculine persona, explicitly situating it in the present moment, the eternal present. This contrasts with the eternalised conception of time found in, for example, religious understandings of the temporal:

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[90] R. W. Connell, 'The History of Masculinity', in Adams, R. & Savran, D. eds. 2002. *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 250. I go on to discuss the significance of gender in Chapter Four.
[91] Camus, A. 1975. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Middlesex: Penguin.
[92] I am assuming *The Myth of Sisyphus* to be primarily existentialist in nature here, even though Camus himself described it as 'the only book of ideas that I have published...directed against the so-called existentialist philosophers' [Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 345], because it presents a detailed account of the philosophy of the absurd, and as such includes explorations of some key existentialist ideas.
[93] I refer here to Colin Wilson's study of outsider figures in *The Outsider*, op. cit., to be discussed shortly.
[94] Camus, 1975, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

> There always comes a time when one must choose between contemplation and action. This is called becoming a man. Such wrenches are dreadful. But for a proud heart there can be no compromise. There is God or time, that cross or this sword... If I choose action, don't think that contemplation is like an unknown country to me. But it cannot give me everything and, deprived of the eternal, I want to ally myself with time.[95]

Moreover, Doubrovsky argues that the notion of the present is crucial to Camus' philosophy which is: 'directed at shutting this door so dangerously left open on the sacrifice of the living to the men of the future and at reinstating the inalienable value of the present in opposition to the future'.[96] As a result Camus' conceptualisation of heroism can be seen as a natural outcome of his divergence from writers such as Sartre and de Beauvoir, who, in contrast, idealise future projects over the present moment.[97] With this in mind, Camus attributes the existentialist constituents of his work, such as absurdity, nihilism and the situation of the individual in society, to contemporary concerns—as previously proposed in relation to the role of cultural exchange—rather than philosophical common ground: 'We want to think and live in our history... If the epoch has suffered from nihilism, we cannot remain ignorant of nihilism and still achieve the moral code we need'.[98]

In addition to existence in a permanent present, which deviates from Sartre's version of existentialism, non-verbalisation is also a characteristic crucial to the hero of *The Outsider*,[99] Meursault, though he is certainly not an action hero in the manner of his Sisyphian counterpart the Conqueror. Indeed, his failure to verbalise is largely responsible for his conviction and execution. This tendency is at its most overt at two key points in the novel. The first is in response to his mother's death: 'Mother died

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[95] Ibid., p. 81.

[96] Serge Doubrovsky in Brée, 1962, op. cit., p. 78.

[97] I will discuss such differences in relation to existentialist definitions of freedom in Chapter Four. They are made most explicit, perhaps, by Camus' rejection of the term "existentialist", either as a philosophy or as a categorisation of his work: 'I do not have much liking for the too famous existential philosophy, and, to tell the truth, I think its conclusions false'. [Albert Camus, 1988. 'Pessimism and Tyranny: Pessimism and Courage', in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*. New York: Vintage. p. 58.

[98] Ibid., p. 59. Despite such assertions, I am categorising Camus as an existentialist in accordance with standard philosophical practice, and because 'the putative intention of the writer [does not] unproblematically govern what the text does, especially when the reading is a retrospective one provided by a self-reading or self-commentary'. [LaCapra, D. 1978. *A Preface to Sartre: A Critical Introduction to Sartre's Literary and Philosophical Writings*. New York: Cornell University Press. pp. 20-21]. In this way, the existentialist form and constitution of his work affirms the validity of such a categorisation.

[99] Camus, 1963. op. cit.

today or maybe yesterday; I can't be sure'.[100] This is typical of the emotionally detached speech patterns throughout the novel, unsurprisingly interpreted by others as signalling a failure of filial emotion. The second key moment occurs during the trial in which several of Meursault's accusers deduce that he has a criminal nature from his taciturn and unemotive approach towards his crime, the slaughter of an unnamed Arab.[101] This is taken to signal a lack of remorse and an almost implausible degree of detachment, one that can be seen to be echoed by the writer's personality and approach to writing: 'The Tarrou side of Camus, in truth the temptation of heroism, is apparent in Camus' tendency to refuse emotion'.[102] As one of Meursault's witnesses and friends responds on being asked whether the former could be described as a secretive person: "No... I shouldn't call him that. But he isn't one to waste his breath, like a lot of folks",[103] a phrase that in turn succinctly captures the western protagonist's approach towards social discourse and interaction.

In the context of the novel, though, Meursault's failure to verbalise is presented as honest and authentic,[104] qualities typifying the mode of the in-itself. The others, meanwhile, represent the mode of the-one, the herd mentality of a group thinking and acting as one rather than as a collection of autonomous individuals. Marie, Meursault's girlfriend, can be seen to embody the being-for-others, evident in her concern to defend Meursault against what she perceives to be defamations of his character. She proves to be ineffective, though, as the-one appears to triumph. This is in sharp contrast with the western, in which the in-itself possesses the superior power.

Camus himself summed up Meursault's behaviour as being emblematic of authenticity: 'He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings, and immediately

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[100] Ibid., p. 13.

[101] The novel's representation of this character has been taken to be an example of Camus' *pied noir* colonialist attitudes towards Muslim Algerians by many commentators, a term which denotes French colonials living in Algeria, as opposed to the "native" Muslim population. As such, it has derogatory implications. However, it is outside the remit of this chapter to discuss Camus' political views on Algerian independence, or his attitudes towards violence.

[102] Doubrovsky, in Brée, 1962, op. cit., p. 76.

[103] Camus, 1963. op. cit., p. 93.

[104] His fate also provides a meta-narrative on the absurdity of existence and the futility of speech when faced with such a situation.

society feels threatened...a man who, without any heroics, agrees to die for truth',[105] Be that as it may, the concept of individual authenticity and the benefits it confers, to be attained through authentic expression, is indubitably inherent to the existentialist outsider figure, as it is to the western hero, and signals more than mere individualism, which can be defined as a concern for self to the exclusion of others.

Camus can be said to view heroism as essentially a demonstration of a unified self, inextricably bound up with action. In this sense, Meursault is arguably the ultimate embodiment of heroism. Indeed, Pollman argues that he represents, 'a perfect though unintentional illustration of what Sartre regards as existentiality—immediacy of action created anew from moment to moment'.[106] And again, '[he] cannot enter into an explicit, willed relationship with anything. He is not—or not yet—capable of becoming divided in himself, of being one thing and wanting the other. He is immediate internal unity which feels unbearably threatened by the mere idea of possibly stepping out of itself'.[107] This parallels the self-contained western hero. Both of these heroic types have only minimal relationships with others because they are ontologically self-sufficient and therefore at risk from societal incursions. Thus, they cannot emotionally interact with others because self cannot be separated from self. Existentialist and western lone heroes alike can be seen to embody a total unity of self, thus posing the ultimate threat to societal beings by definition unable to unify the self in this manner.

As a result, Meursault's autonomy is highlighted by the conformity inherent to the ontological mode of the crowd,[108] who wish to condemn him not only because he has committed a crime, but also on the grounds of his deviation from social norms: 'any man who does not weep at his mother's funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to

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[105] From Camus' 1956 Preface to *The Stranger*, in Camus, 1970, op. cit., pp. 336-337. Interestingly, O' Brien holds this to be a mis-representation of the character, emblematic of a widespread sanctification of the hero. O'Brien, C. C. 1970. *Camus*. London: Fontana. p. 21.
[106] Pollman, L 1970. *Sartre and Camus: Literature of Existence*. New York: Frederick Ungar. p.133.
[107] Ibid., p. 134.
[108] This concept, namely that of *das man*, which can be defined as the mode of the individual as object rather than subject—"one", rather than "I"—is discussed at some length in Martin Heidegger's book *Being and Time*, [1962. Oxford: Blackwell], but it is outside the scope of the thesis to attempt a detailed analysis of the concept here.

death'.[109] It is no accident, then, that this state of authenticity, presented as the ideal by the author, ultimately destroys the hero. It is, rather, crucial to the novel's depiction of the absurd nature of the societal self, but also indicates the fundamental incompatibility between individual authenticity and sociality. In stark contrast, authenticity is the fulcrum of the western hero's power as an individual hero, one who is thereby enabled to protect and save others. Significantly, however, this treatment of the relationship between authentic individual and society is only made possible by the mythical, non-societal context of the western's narrative, an issue I will discuss in more detail later. This suggests that existentialism and the western ultimately concur as to the fundamental incompatibility of autonomous, authentic individual and the societal self, since both fail to represent the autonomous individual succeeding in a fully formed society, a phenomenon which can hardly be viewed as coincidental or, indeed, accidental.

In marked contrast to *existentialist* formulations of heroism, the western hero's verbal reticence is presented positively, as a key source of heroic virility and control. In this way, the refusal of the societal hypocrisy, in ontological terms, inauthenticity, associated with the sophisticated language skills of the Easterner in the western, represents the hero's ultimate defence against death, which can be characterised as the force of self negation. Furthermore, action functions as an expression of the drive to authenticity in the western hero, namely, the will to power encapsulated by his particular mode of being: the in-itself, which in turn confers the special qualities required for the hero figure to act on behalf of others (whilst never acting contrary to his own interests, as a purely ideological interpretation would also have it). Authentic action, then, represents the only viable form of communication in the western, and this applies equally to autonomous individuals and those who embody the societal self, in other words, The Other, in its various representational permutations.[110]

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[109] Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 336.

[110] The Other can take various forms in the western, "civilised" men, women, children, ethnic minorities and so on. These all share a crucial feature in common, however, their lack of autonomy, the inauthentic nature of their ontological being, which is located as the source of all weakness in the western. This in turn renders the hero's power and success not only inevitable but also "natural" within the confines of the generic format. The existentialist hero, meanwhile, is constrained by societal circumstances, and so is unable to achieve full autonomy and thus susceptible to the state of alienation, the price exacted upon individuals who attempt to attain a state of authenticity in a societal context.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance[111] emphasises such contrasts. Ransom Stoddard, with his law books and 'feminine' communication skills, his apron and performance of "women's work" in the kitchen, all indicative of his inferior ontological mode of being, the being-for-others, is presented as being a just object of ridicule within a genre which works to advocate individual autonomy. Meanwhile, the representatives of authenticity, the verbally unsophisticated Liberty Vallance (the villain) and Tom Doniphon (the hero) express their autonomy through action, the source of their power. It is irrelevant as to whether this is a force for good or evil in ethical terms, as autonomy is non-societal and thus not amenable to societal values. Rather, it is their autonomous state of being that is crucial, irrespective of the consequences its expression has for The Other(s), in this very typical case, the townspeople. This group represent the-one, the mode of the crowd, a state very far indeed from autonomy, owing to their co-dependent nature and inability to act, inevitably resultant in weakness and, in turn, autonomous heroes.

What distinguishes the film is the demise of its authentic figures, both hero and villain. While Doniphon is recognisably an authentic western hero, he ultimately sacrifices both himself and his girl to Stoddard by killing the authentic villain. Moreover, once society is fully established, as is the case on Stoddard's return to the town, Doniphon's position has become that of the alienated autonomous hero, exhibited by his status as the town drunk, since autonomy and society are incompatible as the existentialist novel so clearly demonstrates by means of its marginalized heroes.[112] Thus, contrary to generic convention, the authentic hero is supplanted by an inauthentic one, Stoddard, whose inability to express or embody an autonomous mode of being is made clear through his ineptitude in the western context. He is unable to fight effectively, his only weapon the verbalisation indicative of the weak, invalidated societal self. Moreover, he appears content to co-exist with others in a state of being-for-others, be it through his work in the kitchen, his job as lawyer, his relationships with the other townspeople, including women, or his eventual marriage in The East, the emblem of inauthenticity. He is clearly displaced in The West owing to his ontological condition, whereas the authentic hero

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[111] *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, 1962. Directed by John Ford. USA: Paramount.
[112] I consider the relationship between autonomy, alienation and societal configurations in Chapter Four.

and villain belong there, the rightful locus for the autonomous individual. In this way, the film breaks greatly with generic convention, the inauthenticity of its ostensible hero, saved by the authentic one, revealing the direction inevitable to the onset of civilisation as existentialist texts indicate. In this sense, the ontological modes of being-for-others and the-one appear to be finally validated by a genre which works to reject them, despite the fact that such modes are in context based upon, 'ambiguity and hypocrisy. The hero of *Liberty Valance* is bent on cleansing himself of the crime in order to become a respectable senator, whilst the journalists are bent on leaving him his legend, without which he would be nothing'.[113]

Thus the film presents the inevitable demise of the Old West and its authentic modes of being, expressed through action, but simultaneously problematises the nature of "progress", which is shown to require the loss of authentic individuals in favour of inauthenticity, expressed through, on these terms, excessive verbalisation and thus loss of individual power and will. Societal formations, then, require 'that the community...develop certain illusions about itself',[114] in other words, the creation of the societal self which denies the value of autonomy and, by association, certain kinds of freedom.[115] In this sense, the western's narrative acknowledges that the authenticity of the hero is threatened and ultimately destroyed by societal evolution, as the end-of-the-west cycle discussed in Chapter Four also demonstrate so clearly. As previously observed, the autonomous self cannot survive in the societal context without risk of punishment, if only by the alienation produced by the social outcast status manifested by the existentialist outsider, and so the western is reliant on its non-societal context for its presentation of autonomy.

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[113] Deleuze, G. 1986. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: Athlone. p. 147.

[114] Ibid., p. 147. This conclusion is reached regarding John Ford's westerns. In connection to the relationship between situation and action, Deleuze writes that, 'Ford constantly grasps the evolution of a situation, which introduces a perfectly real time... In Ford, the hero is not content to re-establish the episodically threatened order. The organisation of the film, the organic representation, is not a circle, but a spiral where the situation of arrival differs from the situation of departure... It is an ethical rather than an epic form'. p. 147.

[115] There are differing forms of freedom, of course, as I go on to discuss in Chapter Four, and there is no doubt that the type conferred by autonomy on this formulation can seen as ideologically informed, as is the case with individualism. After all, life with others may well bring differing, and no less potent, freedoms than those particular to the non-societal self.

It seems, then, that an existentialist critique, of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*[116] highlights the narrative conflict between East and West via contrasting ontological modes, and their expression through action and verbalisation respectively. In turn, this has implications for potential forms of existence in the world, and their relationship to societal evolution. Thus, the role of narrative and character in the film becomes much more significant than a non-existentialist reading would tend to suggest, since it concerns the nature of being-in-the world in relation to society, one which transcends the purely ideological focus of, for example, individualism.

Another way in which the western privileges authenticity through action (the expression of the in-itself) over the verbal mode of response (the expression of the-one/being-for others) is illustrated by the contrasting ways in which the western hero and the community react to external threat. The community responds by ineffectual passivity, even apathy, by its inability to translate words into action, thereby demonstrating the inferiority of the inauthentic societal self in a non-societal context, while the hero acts and thus offers effective resolution by means of autonomous self-expression. In this sense, talking and action represent mutually exclusive, context specific, modes of being-in-the-world.

High Noon[117] marks this ontological distinction clearly. The hero stalks the town with a worried expression and few words, finally resorting to the action demanded by the autonomous self. In order to express the authentic self, he has to act to defend himself and the townspeople. Meanwhile, the villains gather on the edge of town and the townspeople resort to meetings in churches and saloons. These two groups represent the mode of the-one, since the villains act as one mind, rather than as autonomous individuals, dependent on another for their strength in a cowardly manner, without thinking through the consequences of their actions. As such, action itself does not guarantee authenticity, but rather the way in which it is exercised and the intentions behind it. At the same time, the co-dependent townspeople's failure to act renders them equally inauthentic, and no less a threat to the autonomy of the authentic individuals, since their abandonment of the sheriff, again acting as a one

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[116] Ford, 1962, op. cit.
[117] *High Noon*, 1952. Directed by Frank Zinnemann. USA: U.A.

mind rather than a group of autonomous individuals, is contrary to self-interest as well as the greater good. This sequence of events is juxtaposed through editing, with little space for doubt as to which mode of being is most appropriate to the situation, with wider implications for non-societal being-in-the-world in general. The Mexican bandit Tuco sums up the western's approach to existence thus: *If you want to shoot a man, don't talk about it, shoot.*[118] In this way, the authentic expression of the in-itself is privileged over the mode of the-one, and the being-for-others within the western's mythical, non-societal context. Thus, the authentic expression of the autonomous being becomes an appropriate response to external threat, while the political and social skills associated with the other two modes of being are rendered inferior.

In addition to the non-verbalisation of both existentialist and western heroes, concepts such as individual authenticity and subjective autonomy are also crucial in comparisons between the two hero types.[119] Doubrovsky provides an extensive account of Camus' version of heroism, for instance, its saint-like elements:

> "What interests me," says Tarrou with simplicity, "is to know how one becomes a saint." Evidently, Camus, too, is interested. But in his moments of weakness, when the demands he makes upon himself grow weak, Rieux, who, after all, is the narrator of the book, and who survives whereas Tarrou dies, answers his friend, his alter ego: "I have no taste, I believe, for heroism and sainthood. What interests me is to be a man." "Yes, we are seeking the same thing, but I am *less ambitious*".[120]

This argument explicitly situates the hero in the transcendental realm since it equates heroism with sainthood, both of which are distinguished from the concrete notion of "being a man", which I go on to explore in Chapter Three. This distinction is one that I will later equate with the western hero Shane, a figure who apparently operates in a transcendental realm, in stark contrast to the prosaic farmer, Joe Starrett.[121] Furthermore, the journalist, Rambert, suggests that it is easier to transcend everyday concerns than to exercise compassion: "I've seen enough of people who die for an

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[118] *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, 1966. Directed by Sergio Leone, 1966.
[119] The outsider hero figure is a key vehicle for Camus' ethical and political ideas, and therefore his version of existential heroism is the one that I will draw upon most extensively here.
[120] These quotes from *The Plague*, are cited by Doubrovsky, in Brée, 1962, op. cit., p. 76.
[121] *Shane*, 1953. Directed by George Stevens. USA: Paramount.

idea. I don't believe in heroism. I know it's easy and I've learnt it can be murderous. What interests me is living and dying for what one loves".[122]

Meanwhile, Doubrovsky argues that Camus ultimately takes a negative view of heroism by viewing it as, 'a turning in on oneself by a confrontation with death'.[123] Further, Camus can be viewed as ultimately rejecting the autonomous premises of heroism at the end of *The Rebel*:[124] 'when he breaks away from the ultimate ambition of heroism, it is because he is not thinking in terms of a closed, circular ethic; it is because all his thought tends to define an ethic of "openness" to the world and to others, an ethic of participation'.[125] In this way, heroism becomes futile because it privileges action as an end in itself and is thus ultimately solipsistic. In this way, the 'ethic of participation' suggests a validation of the mode of being-for-others. Elsewhere, however, the autonomous individual, the hero, is privileged over societal forms of being, however unfeasible this might prove to be in practice, as we have seen in relation to *The Outsider*.[126] It is therefore difficult to identify a unified sense of heroism or its ontological co-ordinates in Camus' work.

Sartre also has an essentially negative attitude towards heroism, deriving primarily from ideas about action, authentic behaviour and the in-itself. For Sartre, the basic condition for authentic behaviour is the future project contained in the present moment. Because autonomous heroism appears to promote, and to some extent idealise, action in the moment for its own sake, as instrumental but also as a value, it is oppositional to this conception of authenticity. On this analysis, then, it would appear that Sartre and Camus concur on the basic nature of heroism, if this is defined as action for its own sake, yet both regard it as ultimately futile and yet another sign of man demonstrating his basic nature as 'a useless passion'.[127] This is because, in their view, heroism has at its core the drive to possess and dominate, either through action, power over others or, ultimately, the self. On the other hand, the ontological

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[122] Camus, 1966. *The Plague.* Middlesex: Penguin. pp. 135-136.
[123] Doubrovsky, in Brée, 1962, op. cit., p. 76.
[124] Camus, A. 1962. *The Rebel.* London: Penguin.
[125] Doubrovsky, in Brée, 1962, op. cit., p. 76.
[126] Camus, 1963, op. cit.
[127] Sartre, cited in Brée, op. cit., p. 77.

mode displayed by the western hero and the existentialist hero can be conceptualised as authentic, since it is an expression of an autonomous self.[128]

The instinct for control over others and/or the self is also apparent in Colin Wilson's analysis of the Outsider figure, which he sub-divides into three categories: the intellectual, who questions the nature of being; the emotional type who poses questions about, "'love or eternal indifference?'" and, finally, the physical Outsider, for whom the ultimate problem is, "a question of life or death, the body's final defeat or triumph"'.[129] It is clear that the western hero is closest to the physical Outsider, while all three by their very nature share a marginalized status in relation to society, due to the essential incompatibility between the autonomous and the social self, as previously established. Wilson himself privileges the overtly masculine action hero of writers like Ernest Hemingway—perhaps the American "type"—over the cerebral and emotional types prevalent in existentialist literature—the European variant, for, 'Man is not merely intellect and emotions; he is body too'.[130]

While Meursault, the hero of *The Outsider*,[131] might not initially appear to fit the category of physical Outsider due to the novel's philosophical concerns, such traits are conveyed by the narrative as much as the character. The book does not contain scenes that explore Meursault's ontological contemplations, any more than the western does. On the contrary, Meursault is represented in intensely physical terms, as a highly sensual being, preferring indulgence of the self over concern for others. Thus, he visits the beach and embarks on relationships, activities that benefit him, rather than grieving over his mother's death as befits the social self governed by societal norms and conventions. Furthermore, Meursault is easily bored when inactive. As Philip Thody puts it when comparing him with another of Camus' heroes, Patrice Meursault, 'both enjoy living in Algeria, are fond of swimming, have a mistress, find nothing to do of interest on a Sunday, and tend to fall asleep as soon

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[128] A state of autonomy is impossible to achieve within the heavily politicised context of Sartre's post-war work, however, which shifts radically from a focus on the man alone—the power of the autonomous individual—to the benefits conferred by social solidarity as established in Chapter Four.
[129] Wilson, op. cit., p. 218.
[130] Ibid., p. 218.
[131] Camus, 1963, op. cit.

as work or physical pleasure leave a gap in their lives'.[132] In this way, although solitary, Meursault displays the characteristics of an autonomous mode of being through his authentic activity, as opposed to the inwardness of the cerebral. Therefore, his ontological mode can be closely allied with that of the action orientated outsider, and thus the western hero.

At first encounter, the action Outsider appears to be markedly different from the intellectual variant, although similarities emerge on closer reflection. Raskolnikoff, the hero of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*,[133] is a notable example of this Outsider type. Although he commits murder, the ethical fulcrum of the work, and is therefore involved in action of the most physical kind, this hero is cerebral rather than sensual, a student who engages in philosophising, living as a virtual recluse due to the depression he suffers for most of the novel. Significantly, he discourses on the topic of heroism when accused of murder, proposing that the hero leader has the right to transcend ethical norms in a way that is closely allied to Nietzsche's proposition that power is non-ethical in nature, and that the noble master race therefore has a right to transcend the ethics incumbent on the slave race, in pursuit of power:[134]

> "all legislators and rulers of men...have one and all been criminals, for, whilst giving new laws, they have naturally broken through older ones which had been faithfully observed by society and transmitted by its progenitors. These men have not hesitated to shed blood, as soon as they saw the advantage of doing so'. Consequently, not only all great men, but all those who...have raised themselves above the common herd, men who are capable of evolving something new, must, in virtue of their innate power, be undoubtedly criminals more or less".[135]

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[132] From the Preface to Camus, A. Tr. Philip Thody 1963. *Notebooks 1935-1942*. London: Harvest/HBJ. p. x.
[133] Dostoyevsky, F. 1997. *Crime and Punishment*. London: Penguin.
[134] These ideas are discussed at length in Nietzsche, F. 1989. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Vintage. An explicitly existential reading would recast the two groups, master and slave, into ontological categories, namely the master as the in-itself (autonomous, authentic self) and the slaves as the-one/being-for-others (inauthentic, societal versions of self), as I go on to do in relation to hero, villains, townspeople and The Other in the western.
[135] Dostoyevsky, op. cit., pp 193-194. Ethical issues are also crucial to the narrative. The key ethical dilemma is this: had Raskolnikoff been successful in his aims to rob and kill the unscrupulous moneylender without punishment, could his actions conceivably be morally justified? Moreover, the consequences of the death in this case would have been greatly beneficial to his family, so does the end ever justify the means in such situations? Although ethical questions such as these can be deduced from the text, Dostoyevsky did not formally systematise his ideas. Thus, it is no possible to determine whether the authorial voice is present in Raskolinkoff's words, "Liberty and power! But above all—power! To

Raskolnikoff's accusers assume such ideas to be a rationalisation for his own behaviour, which he denies: "An extraordinary man has a right—not officially, be it understood, but from and by his very individuality—to permit his conscience to overstep certain bounds, only so far as the realisation of one of his ideas may require it. (Such an idea may from time to time be of advantage to humanity)".[136] However, the fact that such ideas recur throughout the novel suggests that this disclaimer is purely situational, owing more to the necessity for defence against criminal accusations than a sincerely expressed viewpoint. For instance, Raskolnikoff later recapitulates his arguments thus:

> "Supposing Napoleon to have been in my place...on the point of committing a murder with a view to secure his future, would he have recoiled at the idea of killing an old woman, and of robbing her of three thousand roubles? Would he have agreed that such a deed was too much wanting in prestige and much too criminal a one? ...he not only would not have hesitated...he would not have understood the possibility of such a thing. Every other expedient being out of his reach, he would not have flinched, he would have done so without the smallest scruple. Hence, I ought not to hesitate—being justified on the authority of Napoleon!"[137]

In light of this comparative discussion, then, certain cerebral elements of the intellectual outsider and his philosophical deliberations have been found to be largely irrelevant to a critique of the western hero. Instead, it is the autonomous state of being particular to all existential outsider figures that provides the primary point of reference to the western hero under examination in this thesis. While the ideology of individualism can be employed to explain outsider qualities shared by the existentialist and western outsider to some extent, existentialist readings of the type reveal additional, and more significant, specifically ontological dimensions than those covered by a purely individualistic interpretation, giving rise to issues concerning the

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rule over all trembling creatures, over the whole ant-hill. That is the goal!" [ibid. p. 294], or, indeed, whether the dialogue in defence of his actions captures the message of the entire novel: "Is it a crime to have killed some vile and noisome vermin, an old usurer that was obnoxious to all, a vampire living on the life of the poor? Why, murders of that kind ought to make up for many a crime!" [ibid., p. 410]. However, the fact that questions of power and heroism are central to the work's narrative framework is at least suggestive of authorial interest in such topics.

[136] Ibid., p. 193
[137] Ibid., p. 330. From an exchange between Raskolnikoff and Sonia.

individual subject and its relationship to society. These consist of, for example, autonomy, authenticity, alienation, anomie and their implications for the expression of being-in-the world: issues like freedom, ethics, justice and death discussed in later chapters. In addition, they suggest ways in which such autonomous expression might be received in a societal context, as presented by the specific contexts of the western and the existentialist texts under examination. As a result, both invoke the essential incompatibility of the autonomous self and society.

With this in mind, certain literal and ontological commonalities between the Meursault outsider type and the western protagonist can be discerned. Both live in a personal present representative of the mode of the autonomous in-itself. Significantly, Sartre situates this technique as explicitly American and emblematic of the historical moment while analysing the distinctive terse phraseology of *The Outsider* previously broached in relation to Meursault's taciturn nature: 'The presence of death at the end of our path had made our futures go up in smoke; our life has "no future"; it is a series of present moments… What our author [Camus] borrows from Hemingway is thus the discontinuity between the clipped phrases that emphasise the discontinuity of time… Each sentence is a present instant'.[138] This separation of the present from both past and future contexts is therefore additionally responsible for the sense of alienation and absurdity crucial to the existentialist universe.

Denial of the future is represented by the autonomous hero's attitude towards paid employment. Neither figure derives personal fulfilment or validation from work. Meursault has a job from which he appears entirely detached, yet another indication of his alienated status and the social exclusion conferred upon the outsider. The cowboy hero, meanwhile, despite his name, is rarely presented in established employment, best described as an opportunist rather than a worker, even when given a specific role such as mercenary, bounty hunter or ranch hand. In his case, though, this is not presented as a consequence of alienation, as it is in the socially formed existentialist context. Rather, the lack of societally validated occupation is the natural state of being-in-the-world for the fully autonomous mode of being in a non-societal context, a state which the western hero embodies so effectively. This becomes the

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[138] 'Jean-Paul Sartre, 'An Explication of The Stranger', in Brée, 1962, op. cit., pp. 118-119.

authentic expression of the in-itself, one who is defined by his own being rather than dependent on the external validation of others, or financial gain.

Additional outsider qualities shared by the existentialist and western outsider include marginalisation in relation to societal norms, disengagement from both others and emotional or spatial connections, and autonomous activity as the preferred mode of expression, all qualities typical of the in-itself. Crucially, then, these are all characteristics typical of the autonomous, non-societal self, thereby representative of existential authenticity, a state of existence which is fully attained by the western hero due to his non-societal context, and only partially so in the case of the existentialist outsider due to societal constrictions. These are most clearly demonstrated by the punishment exacted upon the existentialist type, be it types of social exclusion, such as alienation, anomie, marginalisation, exile or, at its most extreme, death.

The Outsider and the Western Hero

So far, I have established a number of ways in which the western hero can be analysed in existentialist terms, most clearly seen in the ontological mode of analysis undertaken in relation to qualities shared by the existentialist and western outsider figures and their differing contexts. Further, the outlaw/reluctant lawman/mercenary heroes have the most relevance to discussions of existential heroism in the western, because these represent the non-societal self, namely, the in-itself in its purest form, thus providing a point of contact with the focus on individual autonomy and authenticity apparent in existentialist work. The western protagonist can certainly be placed within a longstanding tradition of lone male action heroism, manifesting qualities such as leadership, martial skill and the capability for outstanding deeds, on his own behalf or that of others. However, an existentialist critique suggests that while heroism and, indeed, individualism can go some way towards explaining the outsider-ness of the lone hero, and its prominence within the Hollywood heroic tradition, the western hero can also be seen in ontological terms, as representative of a non-societal mode of being in its purest form, one which in turn has philosophical implications for the societal self and the nature of human existence, of being-in-the-world. In this sense, the individual hero is much more than merely an ideological

vehicle for a longstanding tradition of individualism in American culture. Instead, he expresses the non-societal self essentially lost to all but escapist fictional forms. As existentialist works demonstrate, this entirely autonomous mode of being-in-the-world is largely incompatible with contemporary societal configurations, yet exists alongside it within the representational realm.

The one-dimensional and emotionless nature of *High Plains Drifter*'s[139] hero typifies this figure, one which invokes both the outsider-ness of the individualistic tradition of lone heroism and, more significantly for our purposes, yielding those elements which enable an ontological analysis of modes of being-in-the-world. Such heroes certainly suggest an extreme form of autonomy, evidenced by The Drifter's complete exclusion from both community and its (debased) values within the film. In a specifically existentialist context, this would give rise to the alienated state and consequent punishment previously discussed in relation to existentialist heroes. However, The Drifter exhibits no overt sense of social exclusion in the way that the existentialist in-itself does. Instead, he represents the extreme self-reliance, to the point of subject merging into object, engendered by complete autonomy, the in-itself which by its very nature excludes the possibility of a societal self. Thus, there exists an insurmountable barrier between the in-itself he represents and the deficiencies of the societal self within the film's representational framework, which splits ontological identity into two. Firstly, the-one (defined as crowd mentality) is exhibited by the majority of the townspeople, who are therefore fatally weakened by their inability to act as a group of autonomous individuals. Secondly, the mode of being-for-others represents the positive possibilities of the societal self (Sarah Belding), and she is thus favoured by the in-itself, (The Drifter). It should be noted, however, that in the context of the film the being-for-others, while useful to the hero, is necessarily equally ineffective of terms of the autonomous activity exercised by the in-itself against the villains (also the-one) threatening to negate their existence. Thus the capabilities conferred by the autonomous self (the hero) are privileged over either form of societal self in accordance with the ontological universe presented by certain types of western.

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[139] Eastwood. 1972, op. cit.

In addition to its representation of differing modes of existence-in-the-world, *High Plains Drifter* also lends itself to existentialist analysis through its evocation of an absurd and ethically nihilistic universe reminiscent of the literature of Camus and Sartre. Nihilism is invoked by the veniality of the townspeople and their corrupted ethical sense, as well as the hero figure's projection of almost total objectification, the extreme possibility of the in-itself manifested by his total identification with environment in the film's opening and closing sequences.

I offer a detailed discussion regarding the significance of the wilderness setting in relation to freedom in Chapter Four, but wish to broach the topic briefly here in more general terms. For instance, the context which Camus describes as: 'a place with no soul where the sky alone is king,[140] is strikingly reminiscent of the role played by the desert in films such as, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*,[141] as is his observation that, 'Man is an outlaw. So much heavy beauty seems to come from another world'.[142] The parallel this suggests to exist between the existentialist outlaw figure and the overwhelming nature of the environment by which he is engulfed also invokes the western hero's symbiotic relationship with the desert terrain. Buscombe attributes the increasing prevalence of wilderness imagery in the western to its cultural moment, observing that, 'As the American Dream darkened, the landscape increasingly became reduced to binary codes of plains-mountains, claustrophobic interior-open range, pastoral-savage, Main Street-hostile territory, with the emphasis on the second of the pairs. [143] However, in ontological terms, the wilderness becomes a testing ground for the nature of human existence-in-the-world and the price exacted by autonomy within a universe rendered absurd and sometimes even nihilistic by the erosion of ethical certainties so prominent in *High Plains Drifter*.[144]

Existentialist conceptualisations of this kind are not confined to desert terrain, although in the case of Camus' work, they invariably are owing to the Algerian

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[140] 'The Minotaur, or Stopping in Oran' in Camus, 1970. op. cit. p. 117.
[141] Leone, 1966, op. cit.
[142] Camus, 1970, op. cit.
[143] Buscombe, E. ed. 1998. 2nd edition. *BFI Companion to the Western*. London: BFI. p.1 68. This binary structure links back to Kitses' approach as outlined in Chapter One. I discuss the aesthetic composition of the western in more depth in relation to violence in Chapter Five.
[144] Eastwood, 1972, op. cit.

context. The wilderness can also be snow-bound in the case of the western, exemplified by the mountain ranges and wintry plains appearing in such films as *The Far Country* and *Day of the Outlaw*.[145] While such backdrops undoubtedly serve a dramatic purpose, and are crucial to many gold-rush/pioneer plots—of which *The Far Country* is a leading example[146]—they also tend to lend a bleak and nihilistic element to the narrative, the characters diminished by mountain ranges, in what has been referred to as a way of 'denying connection to the world and to others who might transgress the boundary between self and world'.[147] In specifically existentialist terms, the in-itself becomes distinct not only from other societal selves, as previously illustrated, but from the landscape as well, in a way indicative of the alienation more usually associated with existentialist treatments of the status of the in-itself in a societal context. In these extreme examples of wilderness representation, then, the alienation of the in-itself becomes complete even in the non or semi societal context, the formerly equivalent mode of the in-itself and natural environment also problematised, perhaps signifying the intrinsic absurdity of the man/subject—landscape/object equivalences upon which the western greatly relies.[148]

Significantly, Buscombe particularly characterises westerns such as *The Far Country*[149] in terms of their icy landscapes, thus emphasising the importance of such imagery. The conclusions he draws from such imagery differ from those suggested by an existentialist analysis, though, which invoke a nihilistic space devoid of ethical boundaries. Instead, Buscombe maintains that, 'Mann's heroes occupy the above-snow-line world of lonely brutal rocks in the 'name of the furrowed earth'. The elemental structures of Greek tragedy and Christian morality play seem reinforced by the stark doubleness of the landscape'.[150]

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[145] *The Day Of The Outlaw*, 1958. Directed by Andre de Toth. USA: U. A.

[146] *The Far Country*, 1954. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: U. I.

[147] Ryan, M & Kellner, D. 1990. *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Indianopolis: Indiana University Press. p. 204. While the writers refer to *The Deer Hunter* here, [1978. Directed by Michael Cimino. USA: Universal], the context is equally applicable to the role played by mountain terrain in the western.

[148] I discuss such equivalences between the in-itself and landscape in relation to masculinity in Chapter Three.

[149] Mann, 1954, op. cit.

[150] Buscombe, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

An existential analysis of the wilderness in the western also brings the relationship between nature and the individual to the fore. In the non-societal context of the western, nature can, and does, assume much greater significance than in societally orientated existentialist representations, as illustrated by the western's conventional setting. Nonetheless, both treat nature as much more powerful than the individual in terms of its potential to negate existence-in-the-world through death, although in contrast to societal formations, at the same time, non-threatening to individual autonomy, as I go on to argue in Chapter Four's analysis of existential space and context.[151]

Likewise, *Day of the Outlaw*[152] also invokes the omnipotence of nature, this time in its depiction of wilderness as location for existential entrapment. The film offers a tale of ethical ambiguity in which differing modes of being-in-the-world, the in-itself (as ever, the autonomous hero figure), the-one (the townspeople, who once again act according to crowd mentality rather than as autonomous individuals and are thus rendered weak) and the being-for-others (key female figures and, surprisingly, one of the villains, Captain Bruhn, who acts in the best interests of the townspeople when he himself is dying). This ontological scenario is played out against an entirely bleak, lifeless snow-scape, reflective of the absurdity of an existence without moral certainty, which almost amounts to a form of nihilism within the context of the film, the eerie photography and frequent fog compounding the sense of ambivalence. In

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[151] Such representations of the power of nature are echoed in the historical sphere, since it had a huge impact on the process of settlement of the American West, resultant in a huge number of deaths. The Bret Harte short story, The Outcasts of Poker Flat, for example, is a particularly evocative example of such a wilderness, in which a group of pioneers are trapped and eventually die. [Lewis, J. ed. 1995. *The Giant Book of the Western*. London: Magpie]: 'a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snow-flakes were sifted over the land. Day by day closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white, that towered twenty feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half hidden in the drifts... In the morning, looking into each other's faces, they read their fate'. Ibid., pp. 10-11. Furthermore, an 1893 article from a Wisconsin State newspaper documents a similar incident, its prosaic tone indicative of the commonplace nature of such occurrences: 'Within 5 miles of Milton Junction and in a thickly settled part of Rock County, Mrs. Ira Ames starved and froze to death. The case was reported to the authorities at Janesville and it was found that the father had spent most of his time fishing while his wife and 7 children were in a rickety shanty without fuel or food. The youngest child died a week ago and was buried under the snow by the father in a soap box'. [Lesy, M. 1973. *Wisconsin Death Trip*. London: Allen Lane]. This article is contained in this rather disturbing collection of contemporary news articles and photographs chronicling life in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, in the last twenty years of the 19th century.
[152] De Toth, op. cit.

line with more conventional western thematics, however, the villains are punished via the negation of their mode of existence, though in this case, this fate owes as much to the environment as the capabilities of the autonomous hero.

Interestingly, the landscape also operates as a metaphor for the potential lifelessness of existence, in a way that is alien to the usual vitality of the genre as a whole. This monochrome aesthetic appears to suggest a polarised moral terrain. However, the narrative works in opposition to this stark visual binary. The heroes and villains, outlaws led by an ex-army captain pursued by the army, whilst representing differing modes of being, are less distinguishable than usual. The hero himself admits this to his ex-lover, Helen when offering a rather un-heroic explanation for leading the villains away from the town: *I'm not doing anything special. Just taking some bad men out of a good town.* Here, the mode of the autonomous in-itself appears to be acting in his own best interests in ejecting the villains, in accordance with the purely individualistic motives so frequently attributed to the western hero. However, his words do not reflect his true motives as expressed through his actions, since he also acts in the interests of the townspeople in a way that the strength enabled by his autonomy makes possible. In risking the negation of his own existence[153] by leading the outlaws through the non-traversable mountain range, the hero demonstrates the authentic actions of the in-itself.

While the hero's actions are in this way typical of the strength generated by the autonomous in-itself, the film also emphasises the potential for absurdity produced by ethical ambivalence in a similar way to *High Plains Drifter*.[154] As one of the outlaws comments as the weather worsens: *None of us are going to make it...*thereby conveying a sense of futility. There is little sense here of the authentic hero triumphing over evil as incarnation of inauthenticity, the catharsis that belongs to the formula western. Rather, true to the spirit of existentialism, the film works to suggest that death, the negation of existence, determines the present, as all the villains apart from the redeemable youngster are killed either by freezing to death or bullet shots

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[153] Narrative convention, of course, dictates that this will not be allowed to happen, though within the bleak context of the film, the outcome is not entirely predictable.
[154] Eastwood, 1972, op. cit.

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from the others, their store of gold worse than worthless in the situation, thus symbolising the absurdity of all human endeavour. At the same time, the hero's authentic expression of the in-itself through the action which saves the townspeople, is represented as being worthwhile. Within the non/semi societal context, the freedom to act authentically is in both the hero and the community's best interests and, moreover, works to distinguish the hero from the villains in a conventional as well as ontological sense: *I'm doing it for myself. I took a good look at myself in the mirror. Didn't like what I saw. Doesn't make me any different from the men who rode in and took over this town.*

Meanwhile, the alienation of the societal self within a non-societal context is also thrown into sharp relief by the film, in contradistinction to the alienation visited upon the autonomous self within the societal context as presented by existentialist texts. This sense of exclusion and detachment, in this instance the barriers existing between the inauthentic social self and the freedom enjoyed by the autonomous individual, is manifested via a number of devices. For example, shots of partially visible beings through misted up windows, the barriers between the individuals and their world enhanced by the barrier between the viewer and the characters within, fog, gloom despite the glare of the snow, and the physical barrier of the mountain range, providing a symbolic and literal barrier, all invoke the sense of the alienation so crucial to existentialist works. Furthermore, while the outlaws are undoubtedly villainous and take over the town, the inhabitants are less than heroic in their behaviour, typifying representations of the societal self within the western which, as previously noted, privileges the authentic in-itself of the hero over the societal modes of being-in-the-world embodied by the others. In this way, the autonomous hero is always imbued with a sense of superiority, even when, as in this case, he is presented in rather ambiguous terms,[155] which lessen the customary divide between hero and villain in a way reminiscent of the moral ambiguity of the existentialist novel. As such, the film can be said to present the hero's struggle to attain, and then maintain, an autonomous state within a semi-societal setting.

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[155] That said, he still retains some heroic attributes, such as leader qualities and warrior capabilities.

In fact, the hero himself dismisses conventional ethical distinctions in favour of the personal authenticity which he equates with "truth", as does the existentialist hero: *I can see what's true. I don't care what's wrong or right.* Furthermore, the essentially inscrutability of the outsider figure, the mode of the in-itself, is also highlighted. In response to his woman, Helen's, observation, *I don't know you at all*, a tangible barrier is maintained: *No reason to.* In this way, the barriers between the autonomous self and the societal self, the essential detachment of the in-itself from the being-for-others embodied by the woman, is made manifest. Moreover, the hero's acceptance and defence of such boundaries demonstrate his awareness of the power conferred by autonomy, coupled with a willingness to accept it at the expense of connections with other modes of being, which necessarily presuppose a weakening of the autonomous self within the context. As such, the societal self, here represented by the woman, threatens to taint the hero's authenticity, and thus the ontological boundaries which detach autonomous from non-autonomous modes of being must be constantly maintained, and incursions challenged, as demonstrated by Starrett's detached response. Likewise, further testifying to the rigidity of the in-itself, contrasting with the essentially fluid societal self.[156] Helen asserts: *you want everything on Blaise Starrett's terms... You don't have much mercy do you?* to which Starrett replies briefly: *"You won't find much mercy anywhere in Wyoming.* In this way, mercy, which presupposes a connection with others, is presented as yet another sign of the emotionality, and thus weakness, of the societal self within the frontier context not, as is conventionally the case, an ethical value to be aspired to. As such, the film once again privileges the values of the autonomous self over the socially orientated ethics practiced by the societal self.

The issue of individualism, together with the ways in which existentialism offers us a new insight into this apparently well documented aspect of the western hero, is one that will be discussed in some depth in relation to existentialist conceptualisations of freedom in Chapter Four. However, as the western hero shares non-moral qualities with the existentialist, it makes sense to offer a preliminary comparison between the two at this point. In accordance with their apparent embodiment of individualistic

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[156] As demonstrated by Ransom Stoddard's approach in the previously discussed *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* [Ford, 1962, op. cit.]

values, both occupy a marginalized position in relation to societal configurations. This dichotomy is particularly marked for the western hero, who, as previously established, is presented as being external to any sense of community or sociality, this status is presented in positive terms since it is essential to the authenticity of the in-itself. Such detachment is no less significant for the existentialist type, though, since existentialist works revolve around the alienated autonomous individual, whose quest for authenticity results in alienation, both from others and, accordingly, associated ethical norms. So far, then, the commonalities between the two are clear, revolving as they do around the detachment of individual from society. However, the ways in which their moral codes and marginality are presented differ greatly, usually the attitudes of societal beings towards the hero's values. The western hero's ethical code and behaviour is valorised, not punished, and although his marginal status is highlighted by his detachment from others, as illustrated in relation to *Day of the Outlaw*,[157] this too is distinguished as being the source of strength conferred by autonomy and expressed through authentic activity undertaken on behalf of self and, where necessary, others. In contrast, a societal context might well deem such an approach to be indicative of selfishness, inherently threatening to the interests of others. The ethics of the autonomous individual, then, are very much context specific as previously observed.

With this in mind, it is impossible to cite a western that unequivocally punishes the hero for acts which, in a differing context, would indubitably be identified as ethical contraventions, such as the killing of others. Indeed, such deaths, which are in actuality treated as criminal acts by established justice systems, are not presented as crimes, but rather as the execution of rightful justice in the absence of more conventional law-giving bodies. This treatment can be associated with the notion of heroic power without responsibility on a Nietzschean reading of the nature of heroism, which confers upon the "special" leader the right to contravene social norms if required to do so. A utilitarian perspective would maintain that the hero has a right to act in this manner so long as it is demonstrably in the interests of the greater good while a Kantian approach would undoubtedly reject such acts on the grounds that one cannot will such behaviour to become Universal Law. An existentialist analysis,

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[157] De Toth, op. cit.

meanwhile, recasts such acts in an ontological light, by viewing them as the authentic expression of the autonomous self, thereby not subject to societal norms but, rather, privileged on the grounds that autonomy is the ideal state of being. At the same time, autonomy is rare and constantly threatened by the societal self, as both the western and existentialist works clearly demonstrate. In this way, the autonomous self embodied by the hero, coupled with the special capabilities it confers, means that he acts both in his own interests and, where possible, also on behalf of the others, the societal beings. And so, the conduct of the heroic in-itself is the natural expression of a particular mode of being-in-the-world which cannot therefore be deemed as unethical, since ethical norms derive from the social dimension from which, by its very nature, the in-itself is detached.

The ethical immunity accorded to the autonomous western hero due to his ontological state of being is clearly illustrated by *High Plains Drifter*,[158] in which the town prostitute, Callie, expresses outrage at the hero's behaviour: *Just what do you consider going too far? Isn't forcible rape in broad daylight a misdemeanour in this town*? This act, which the narrative works to present as a just punishment for Callie's former mistreatment of the hero, is undoubtedly a moral transgression in terms of societal ethical norms, for which rape is always wrong. Furthermore, there is a further, underlying dimension to this conduct, besides the actual act itself, the presupposition that the hero has a right to judge and punish others by whatever means he deems appropriate.[159] This too, contravenes societal ethics, which would define such acts as constituting vengeance, and therefore immoral. As such, the western hero can be seen to usurp the role reserved for the justice system. It is here that the importance of context is thrown into sharp relief, since heroic status confers upon the hero the right to act as he thinks best, a key constituent of his special power and capabilities, and captured, as previously established, by the non-societal, autonomous self, one which therefore inevitably clashes with those established by societal selves. Thus, the hero's apparent right to act "immorally" derives not merely from his

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[158] Eastwood, 1972. op. cit.
[159] The western hero's assumed right to act as judge, jury and executioner is a frequently observed one, but an existentialist analysis of the kind undertaken here can reveal significance to such acts beyond power-based/ideological heroic interpretations. I explore such issues in more depth during Chapter Five's discussions relating to justice and violence.

heroism, nor from individualistic values, but instead from the ontological state of being he so effectively represents.

Such presentations of the western hero as the effective replacement of an established justice system are, of course, made possible due to the western's quasi-historical setting in the American West. As such, the western can dispense with the ethical norms associated with established societal states and subjects, and re-present a vision of society prior to its full establishment. As such, critical approaches to the western's setting tend to invest it with ideological dimensions, representative of America's foundation myth, so equating the hero's conduct with the vigilantism of the frontier mentality, and, in turn, accounting for America's gun culture tradition and individualistic values.[160] However, existentialist readings can add another dimension by focusing on the ontological dimensions of the type of subjectivity that the western hero conveys. In this way, the western provides a fertile terrain for an exploration of the differing forms of subjectivity and its connection to society at various stages in its evolution from the non to semi societal states on offer. In this way, the western is far more effective in its depiction of the non-societal, autonomous state of being than the ontology's natural arena— existentialist works—can ever be. Instead, existentialist works are constrained by pre-existent social configurations and their need to confront ontological issues in terms of contemporary political concerns, in the case of Sartre and Camus' factual works, and/or the demands of realism in the case of existentialist fiction, which the mytho-historical setting of the western does not require.[161]

Although the mode of the in-itself displayed by the western hero allows—perhaps even privileges—his non-ethical behaviour, such licence is not always unproblematic, as evidenced by the increasingly ambivalent narratives of the period in question. For instance, The Drifter reveals a negative approach towards his own conduct, at the same time highlighting the decline of the western hero as romanticised figure with corresponding code of honour.[162] In response to a question concerning the

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[160] Chapter Four offers a detailed analysis of these issues.

[161] By this, I do not intend to dismiss alternative interpretations, but instead seek to analyse the western hero in philosophical terms rather than purely ideological ones.

[162] In his account of the code of the historical West, Walter Webb describes such characteristics thus: 'There is something romantic about him. He lives on horseback, as did the knights of chivalry, he goes

psychological consequences of killing the villains: *What do we do when it's over?* he replies fatalistically: *Then you live with it.*[163] In a similar manner to *Day of the Outlaw,*[164] this takes a pessimistic view of the non-societal self, throwing the alleged benefits of the in-itself into question by recasting that which might previously have been deemed as the authentic expression of autonomy, namely heroic action, into an absurd light as do existentialist novels' depictions of the hero's attempts to act authentically. Significantly, then, the freedom of action conferred by authenticity becomes problematic in such nihilistic portrayals, which convey an increasing sense of the essential alienation of the in-itself, again redolent of existentialist texts. Both films clearly show the weakness and veniality of the mode of the-one represented by the community. However, they do not present the non-societal alternative as ideal either. Rather, it can reasonably be claimed that both treat the being-for-others in a fairly positive light. After all, The Drifter, although the heroic point of identification, is not even corporeal, thus representing the extreme of the in-itself, while Sarah Belding is the one who rejects the herd mentality and defends him against the others, finally rejecting them at the close of the film. So it could be argued that the greater strength lies with her than with a transcendental Stranger.

Day of the Outlaw[165] presents another prevalent form of heroic "unethical" behaviour,[166] namely, town taming. The film presents such behaviour as justifiable in the context of land settlement, once again reinforcing the autonomous individual's purported right to express his authenticity through non-ethical acts (in societal terms), even when this is detrimental to others' being-in-the-world. Further, it highlights the inevitable tensions which occur between autonomous and societal selves, even in an embryonic societal configuration such as this, thereby demonstrating the limited viability of the autonomous hero role within a societal context:

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armed with a strange new weapon which he uses ambidextrously and precisely, he swears like a trooper, drinks like a fish, wears clothes like an actor and fights like a devil. He is gracious to ladies, reserved towards strangers, generous to his friends and brutal to his enemies'. Webb, W. P. 1959. *The Great Plains.* Belgrade: Graficki Zavod. p. 496.

[163] Eastwood, op. cit.

[164] De Toth, op. cit.

[165] Ibid.

[166] I offer a detailed account of heroic violence in Chapter Five.

Starrett: *When Dan and I came here, [it] was a resting spot for every thief and killer in the territory. A man's life wasn't worth the price of a bullet. No woman was safe in the streets, let alone in a lonely farmhouse. It took more than a big mouth to get rid of the lice who infected every bend of the road you ride so safely on. I'm not saying Dan and I did it alone. But we did more than our share. We hunted them down in the freezing cold while you sat back hugging your knees in front of your pot-bellied stoves. Nobody thanked us, nobody paid us. We did it because we felt we belonged. We've earned the right to belong. And all you've done is ride in here and put down your stinking roots. And now you tell us that you belong and we don't...no pig-bellied farmer's going to stop me!*

Likewise, the existentialist novel makes the non-viability of the non-societal self within a societal context even more overt, as the authentic expression of autonomy is subject to punishment as previously established in relation to, for example, Meursault and Raskolnikoff. That said, whilst Starrett expects, and eventually commands, respect for his autonomous acts, the existentialist hero is punished and ostracised in return for his deviance from accepted social and moral norms, resultant in alienation, exile and, ultimately, death.

The differing societal contexts of the western and the existentialist novel can be used to account for these contrasting treatments of the consequences of authentic, autonomous acts. Interpretations of the western hero's non-ethical acts in terms of individualism would present such activity as appropriate to the frontier context. Such a reading could suggest that individualistic practices predominated on the historical frontier, resulting in lawlessness and violence in frontier towns, despite attempts to challenge such assumptions by historians such as Webb, who claims that myth and actuality have become hopelessly entangled: 'If the character of the West was spectacular, romantic and lawless, its reputation for being so outran the facts. No other part of the frontier enjoyed the publicity that was given to the West'.[167] Indeed, westerns themselves often demonstrate an awareness of this fundamental tension between history and myth. *Unforgiven*[168] depicts a western pulp novelist's elevation of a western adventurer's exploits, a figure who proves to be somewhat less daring in actuality, while the editor in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*[169] captures the spirit

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[167] Webb, op. cit., p. 501.
[168] *Unforgiven*, 1992. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Bros. Buffalo Bill's legendary Wild West show is another example of the exploitation of the western frontier legend.
[169] Ford. 1962, op. cit.

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of the West admirably: *This is the west, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.* Due to such mytho-historical treatments, westerns are free to challenge orthodoxy. As a result, hegemonic norms of justice, which work to privilege the interests of the masses, are dismissed in favour of thoroughgoing individualistic practices via themes that demand such responses. Vengeance is thus a key theme which gives rise to the thin dividing line between "rough justice" and pure vigilantism frequently observed in the western, the feature that has given rise to the notion of frontier ethics in contemporary America.[170]

An ontological reading, meanwhile, would also argue for the importance of context specificity in the western hero's apparent licence to act non-ethically. However, the focus here shifts away from ideologically informed interpretations towards a consideration of the mode of being-in-the-world embodied by the hero and the others, and the way this works to justify his behaviour in terms of authentic expression within a non-societal context, which the western is able to do due to its mytho-historical context. Thus, rather than interpreting the western hero as bearer of individualistic values which, in turn, reflect the cultural-historical concerns of their production, an ontological reading based on existentialist ideas and concepts can show how the western sets up differing forms of subjectivity based upon differing forms of being-in-the-world, and is enabled to do this by its non-realistic context. With this in mind, it no longer makes sense to judge the western hero in terms of ethical norms derived from societal configurations, since he originates in a pre-societal mode of subjectivity, namely the in-itself, a mode of existence which is rendered moribund by interactions with societal selves and frameworks, as the end-of-the-west cycle, such as *Lonely Are the Brave*,[171] highlight.

The existentialist novel acknowledges this fundamental incompatibility by offering the autonomous individual as the ideal state of existence, whilst simultaneously affirming its impossibility by showing the failure of all attempts to exercise

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[170] See, for example, the ways in which Michael Moore draws on such ideas in his documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, [2002, USA: MGM/UA]. The notion of frontier justice is analysed in greater depth in Chapter Four, while violence and justice are key issues in Chapter Five.
[171] *Lonely Are The Brave*, 1962. David Miller. USA: Universal. I offer an ontological analysis of the film in Chapter Four.

authenticity within a societal context. As a result, Meursault—the hero of *The Outsider*[172]—is condemned, an event which the author himself argues to be unjust, but which nonetheless reflects the likely sequence of events within the fully formed society presented. Likewise, Raskolnikoff serves a sentence of hard labour for the crime of killing someone portrayed as being social vermin in order to protect his sister from effectively prostituting herself in marriage, but again, while our sympathies are intended to lie with the hero, he is not allowed to profit from his crime. Even though he acts authentically, he is not rewarded as the western hero is.[173] Likewise, the trajectory of existentialist non-fictional work ranges from an initial promotion of the non-societal autonomous individual as ideal, to an increasing emphasis on the societal self, as I go on to discuss in Chapter Four. As Sartre wrote, 'The war really divided my life into two… It was then…that I abandoned my prewar individualism and the idea of the pure individual and adopted the social individual and socialism.[174]

Such comparisons demonstrate that existentialist ideas recast ideological interpretations of the western hero's non-ethical actions in ontological terms, in this way highlighting the non-societal mode of the in-itself which he embodies, thus rendering the application of societally derived ethics meaningless. In this way, his behaviour is an enactment of his authentic mode of being, an expression of a particular kind of freedom which is corrupted by societal contact, as suggested by the alienation and anomie of the hero within an absurd, sometimes even nihilistic, universe, in films such as *High Plains Drifter* and the earlier portion of *Day of the Outlaw* previously discussed.[175] Both the western and the existentialist ideas, then, demonstrate the fundamental incompatibility of the autonomous self and its authentic expression by means of their differing societal contexts.

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[172] Camus, 1963, op. cit.

[173] Dostoyevsky, op. cit.

[174] Sartre, 1978, op. cit., pp. 44-45 & 48.

[175] Eastwood, op. cit, & De Toth, op. cit. I go on to discuss alienation through the recurrent trope of exile in *The Searchers* [Ford, 1956, op. cit.], later in the thesis.

Conclusion

It appears that similarities and differences exist between the western and existentialist hero in relation to their narrative function and representational configurations. Both can be and, in the case of the western, frequently are, analysed in terms of individualism, since they share a focus on the relationship between individual and society while implying an inherent incompatibility between the two, which can reasonably be seen as ideologically informed. Further, the cultural and political climate shared by both shows a sharp division between individualistic and more communitarian approaches to sociological issues, both of which are present in, for example, Sartre's political work.

However, I wish to go further than making purely ideological claims for the points of contact between the western and existentialism's focus on the lone individual. As previously suggested, while the western, via its hero figure, can be seen to take the implications of individualism to its logical extreme, an existentialist reading suggests that this has implications far beyond the merely ideological. Instead, the western hero can be seen to embody a mode of being-in-the-world, the ontological mode of the in-itself, the autonomous individual in its most fully worked out form, enabled by the western's non societal setting. In this way, the western hero's mode of conduct, the authentic expression of the mode of the in-itself, has further implications for the possibilities of human subjectivity, being-in-the-world in differing societal configurations, together with the alternatives, that is the societal being which itself can be sub-divided into two components: the mode of the-one, frequently taken by the community in the western, and redolent of the hypocrisy and corruption generated by crowd mentality, and the being-for-others, those who are able to act on behalf of the interests of others, as well as the self. This mode tends to be represented by The Other, typically the hero's woman, in the western, those individuals who interact with the hero as far as this is possible without threatening his autonomy. The being-for-others is accordingly associated with the impact of society's evolution upon the subject, which ultimately renders the in-itself moribund. Here, the societal framework

of the existentialist novel continues the ontological trajectory begun by the western in pre-society, by translating the autonomous subject into a societal setting. Hence, the failure of autonomy is revealed, the subject's attempts to exercise his authenticity, resulting in social exclusion: alienation and anomie, and, ultimately, punishment: exile and/or death. In the western, the hero brings death to non-autonomous beings, while non-autonomous beings bring death to the existential hero. As such, the ontological process of the autonomous subject is completed, and the inherently oppositional nature of personal autonomy and society fully concretised.

This chapter began by culturally situating the western hero in relation to forms of existentialism emergent in a range of mid twentieth century cultural artefacts, encompassing novels and political writings, as well as filmic forms of representation. Thus, existentialism can be identified as an important element in the cultural conversation between France and America during the twentieth century, as evidenced by, for example, the work of the *Cahiers* school of film critics.[176] Bearing such issues in mind, it is important to note that in the context of this chapter, I have not taken "existentialism" to invoke the specific tenets of the philosophy. Instead, I draw on the philosophy's wider implications for the relationship between individual and society, the potentially absurd nature of a universe devoid of ethical certainty and, most significantly, its focus on the individual subject which bears most relevance to the western hero. This chapter thus presents an interpretation and application of existentialism's key co-ordinates. Certainly, my focus on the ontological and ethical implications of existentialism in relation to individual heroism can be viewed as a partial appropriation of existentialist ideas, but this is nonetheless the strand which

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[176] This process also impacted on African American writers. Richard Wright, for instance, forged close links with French existentialism, particularly after his relocation to Paris, possibly finding an affinity with those elements of the philosophy relating to outsider-ness and rebellion, the conflict between the marginalized individual and society so reminiscent of the situation of the black American in the mid twentieth century. While some 'have dismissed his embrace of existentialism as ephemeral, or have claimed that his interest in such ideas predated his move to France, with the result that he was largely unaffected by his new surroundings', [Greg Robinson, 'Choosing Exile: Richard Wright, the Existentialists, and Cultural Exchange', in Epitropoulos, M.G. & Roudometof, V. eds. 1998. *American Culture in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* London: Praeger pp. 164-16], Greg Robinson maintains that 'It is obvious that Wright was not "seduced" out of his own modes of thought by an Existentialist siren song.' Ibid., p. 165. However, while existentialism's political implications for violent resistance partly account for its adoption by figures such as Wright, my discussions of existentialist attitudes towards violence are necessarily confined to their connection with masculine heroism for the purposes of this thesis. I discuss Camus' ideas on politically engaged violence in Chapter Five.

has most relevance for an existentialist critique of the western hero of the type undertaken by the thesis.

So far, an existentialist analysis has suggested that the western hero represents a particular ontological type: the autonomous subject, the in-itself. In the next three chapters, I turn to three aspects of the western hero which can productively yield further to an existentialist critique of this kind. Firstly, I examine the arguably gendered nature of the western hero and autonomy, before going on to analyse two key elements of the western narrative, freedom and violence, which can be viewed as crucial to the autonomous, authentic mode of being and its active expression.

Chapter Three
Masculinity and the Outsider

Introduction

This chapter focuses principally upon the type of masculinity presented by the western hero, a form which has been remarkably consistent owing in part to generic constraints. At the same time, 'masculinities come into existence at particular times and places, and are always subject to change. Masculinities are, in a word, historical'.[1] With this in mind, I argue that the western hero embodies a fixed, unified and essentialist version of masculinity which, as proposed in the previous chapter, can be reconfigured in ontological terms as encapsulating the in-itself, the non societal mode of being, as does the existentialist hero. This ontological commonality between the differing heroic types derives from their outsider status in relation to societal formations. The western hero is presented as external to an elementary form of society, whilst the existentialist outsider is peripheral to, and marginalised by, a sophisticated societal configuration.

Further, the western hero is a static figure, one that rarely evolves during the narrative trajectory. This phenomenon can be understood in relation to ideology, and so be attributed to the genre's reinforcement of dominant male stereotypes, a view which I go on to explore shortly. It can also be seen in nationalistic terms, as demonstrated by my comparisons of American and Algerian masculinities towards the end of the chapter. I do not wish to argue against such conceptualisations but instead propose to investigate the type from an alternative, ontological angle, which builds upon and then transcends ideological and nationalistic formulations. This involves analysis of the gendered co-ordinates of the western outsider in order to identify its ideological elements, before assessing the extent to which the in-itself can be seen as an essentially gendered mode of being-in-the-world, as suggested by the western's recurrent presentation of females as societal beings, representative of the mode of the-one or, alternatively, the being-for-others, thereby distinguished from

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[1] Adams, R. & Savran, D. eds. 2002. *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 245.

the non-societal mode of being projected by the male heroic in-itself, which can be identified as the locus of his distinctive autonomous power.

It has been argued in relation to Hollywood heroic narratives that, 'The transformative power of women's pure love has been one of America's most resilient cultural tropes'.[2] In contrast, the western hero can be seen as an idealised projection of masculinity, one who is unaffected by, and largely impervious to, human contact or personal experience. Ontologically, characteristics such as these are particular to the mode of the in-itself, as I go on to establish later. Be that as it may, they certainly distinguish the western hero. This idealisation helps to account for female marginalisation in the western; the hero's contact with women is necessarily contained lest she exert this type of influence, though in any case, the hero is not seen as 'bad' and in need of romantic transformation or change in the sense particular to characters such as Rhett Butler or Rick Blaine.[3] Again, viewed from an ontological perspective, the female as societal self threatens the heroic autonomous, non-societal self, and thus boundaries between the two modes of being have to be defended.

In view of such idealised and, arguably, ideologically inflected treatments, attempts by the psychological western[4] to problematise masculinity are not taken to their ultimate conclusion. To call into question this idealised masculinity would be to undermine one of the fundamental underpinnings of a genre that depends on the projection of a unified gender identity. As such, the western represents the white adult male as intrinsically superior to any being that diverges from this ideal, whether on grounds of gender or ethnicity, both of which are represented as The Other[5] or, in

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[2] For a fuller discussion on this topic than there is room for here, see Amy Aronson and Michael Kimmel, 'The Saviors and the Saved: Masculine Redemption in Contemporary Films', in Lehman, P. ed. 2001. *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*. London: Routledge. pp. 43-50. Aronson and Kimmel, op cit., p.44], argue that actors like 'Humphrey Bogart made a virtual career out of this transformation'.
[3] Characters from *Gone with the Wind*, [1939. Directed by Victor Fleming, USA: MGM], and *Casablanca*, [1942. Directed by Michael Curtiz, USA: Warner Bros.], respectively.
[4] I define this sub-genre in Chapter One.
[5] This holds true even for revisionist westerns such as *Dances with Wolves*, [1990. Kevin Costner. USA: MGM]. Although the film seeks to offer a fair representation of Native Americans, this is undermined by the retention of a white American hero. While Lt. Dunbar undoubtedly "goes native", he is certainly an inauthentic figure. I would suggest that it is impossible for the western's generic conventions to permit a fair or objective account of Native inhabitants, as such an attempt would contradict the western's primary rationale: the representation of dominant white American males.

ontological terms, societal modes of being-in-the-world as maintained in the previous chapter. Tompkins goes so far as to liken this objectification of the masculine to his identification with the western terrain, asserting that, 'To be a man is not only to be monolithic, silent, mysterious, impenetrable as a desert butte, it is to be the desert butte'.[6]

Furthermore, the western hero embodies a hyper masculinity that privileges the physical, rational self, ontologically, another characteristic particular to the in-itself. Moreover, it is orientated around power and control, signifying the expression of the autonomous self, which is non-ethical since it is inherently non-social. This provides the basis for Chapter Five's account of autonomous ethics, which explores the need for the autonomous self to achieve a state of freedom, expressed through non-social activities such as a propensity for violence. This approach distinguishes the in-itself from societal modes of existence. Understood in relation to individualism, meanwhile, it reinforces the ideology of masculine superiority, which accordingly condones the treatment of others as inferior. Either way, the western can be seen to transmit a polarised view of gender: ultra masculinity in (necessary) opposition to femininity.

In ontological terms, however, this becomes a clash between differing modes of being-in-the-world which can also be viewed as essentially gendered in accordance with the western's idealisation of masculine heroism: the authentic in-itself (the male hero) against the inauthentic societal modes: the-one (the mode of the crowd, generally represented by the community and/or any other being who is necessarily inferior to the hyper autonomy of the in-itself, within the non-societal context of the western), and the being-for-others (again, members of the community, though this tends to be individuals, particularly women with connections to the hero). The being-for-others is superior to that of the-one, and therefore presents a greater threat to the autonomy of the in-itself. Within the non-societal context of the western's narrative, it is recognised that the being-for-others cannot triumph over the autonomous hero. Thus, the hero always wins. Nonetheless, it is the societal self, not the in-itself, which is ultimately appropriate to societal contexts. As a result, the threat presented

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[6] Tompkins, J. 1989. *West of Everything*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 56

by societal modes of being underlies the western's narrative, as demonstrated by its dependence upon embryonic social formations. Accordingly, the being-for-others would necessarily displace the in-itself in the event of full settlement, a tension which becomes overt in the end-of-the-frontier westerns, which signal the eventual demise of the heroic in-itself within societal formations. Therefore, the mythical non social context of the western is essential to representations which elevate the in-itself over societal modes of being in this manner.

This reliance on a specific social context for presentations of the authentic non-societal self, the heroic in-itself, partly accounts for the relative rigidity of the western formula, evidenced by westerns made in the wake of the genre's decline. The revisionist western, *Unforgiven*,[7] for example, appears to interrogate the simplistic masculinities of earlier westerns, but simultaneously affirms such representations through its elegiac tone. Therefore, it can be seen to perform the same work as previous westerns which reinforce the superiority of the autonomous male hero. Whether this characteristic is viewed in ideological or, as in the case of this thesis, ontological terms, the essentially gendered nature of the autonomous hero, the in-itself, is clear, as Thumin maintains: '*Unforgiven* is not only a classic western, it is also *about* the western and thus, necessarily, it is also *about* masculinity in both its personal and its public, or social, manifestations'.[8]

The pertinence of gender does not only apply to the hero figure, however. Both the western and existential literature can be conceived as male-orientated in subject matter and thematic concerns. It can be argued that they project particular, gender imbued value systems which work to privilege the masculinised, autonomous self against feminised—which tend to be mapped onto societal—[9] modes of being. For instance, male writers have consistently dominated philosophical and literary existentialism, the main exception to this general rule, Simone de Beauvoir. This bias is revealed in the masculinist slant of the vast majority of the body of work. That said

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[7] *Unforgiven*, 1992. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Bros.
[8] Janet Thumin, 'Maybe He's Tough But He Sure Ain't No Carpenter: Masculinity and In/Competence in Unforgiven', in Kitses, J. & Rickman, G. eds. 1999. *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight. p. 342.
[9] This is not exclusively the case. See Chapter Five's discussion of *Johnny Guitar*, [1953. Directed by Nicholas Ray. USA: Republic], which features a female example of the in-itself.

such tendencies are at their most overt in representations of the outsider figure. It follows from this that discussions relating to femininity occur only where directly relevant to masculine heroism, since this thesis concerns a type of heroism that is intrinsically masculine. Therefore, only brief analyses of female characters are pursued in this chapter, most especially in their traditional role, namely, 'marking the boundaries of the masculine',[10] and in relation to the modes of societal being they occupy.[11]

The western film genre has conventionally been seen as male dominated in all key aspects; thematic and narrative concerns, actors, and filmmakers as well as audience composition. Consequently, this chapter begins by examining the nature of—and rationale behind—these assumptions in order to evaluate how far thematic and ideological concerns inform the mode of existential being projected by the autonomous western hero. I then go on to consider the western hero as male spectacle and the ways in which this can be related to notions of individual autonomy, before embarking on a discussion of American and Algerian masculinities in order to identify possible nationalistic elements existing in the western's presentation of the autonomous outsider hero. Finally, I draw these strands together by assessing the extent to which the ontological mode of the western hero is informed by ideology and nationalism, and whether the autonomous non-societal self is essentially masculine, as western and existentialist presentations of heroism appear to indicate.

The Western as Masculine Genre

The western is generally conceived as a masculine genre in line with other action/adventure-orientated narrative forms such as the war film, science fiction and the colonial epic. Such definitions in turn raise a number of questions, concerning the nature of gender and genre,[12] for instance, but also highlight some key features of

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[10] Ibid., p. 353.

[11] This does not preclude the usage of feminist critiques, where relevant to considerations of gender.

[12] The wide diversity of methods used in genre analysis, for example, can raise further questions as to the validity of this particular mode of film criticism. Steve Neale, [ed. 2002. *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*. London: BFI], outlines these as follows: 'Genres can be approached from the point of view

the gendered nature of the western. It seems reasonable to suggest, for example, that westerns are generally intended for male audiences and derive from largely masculine traditions,[13] a characteristic shared with existentialist forms which can be seen to privilege "masculine", autonomous modes of non-societal being over societally informed "feminised" forms.

A number of themes revolving around traditionally "male" concerns combine to constitute the backbone of the western's narrative form, and provide the basis for the outsider status of its hero figure which existentialist analysis reveals to be characteristic of the in-itself and its expression through autonomous activity. This typically takes the form of violence (justice and vengeance), undertaken to achieve a state of freedom from societal others who threaten that autonomy. As a result, the western represents domesticity as intrinsically threatening to individual autonomy, a sphere incarnated by the female being-for-others. Likewise, the emotionalism of the societal self becomes a sign of weakness in contrast to the self-control conferred by an autonomous state of being. This results in the privileging of homo social bonds— which do not threaten autonomy—over romantic ones which do. It is further manifested by the western's emphasis on violence and combat skills as a way of solving all worthwhile, that is, masculine-orientated, problems, with a requisite focus on victory (the triumph of the of autonomous will) over restitution (the method favoured by the societal self). Such interpretations would appear to indicate that the western offers a masculine world-view with little room for the "feminine", deeply dependent as it is on conventions of masculine heroism and modes of being.[14]

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of the industry and its infrastructure, from the point of view of their aesthetic traditions, from the point of view of the broader socio-cultural environment upon which they draw and into which they feed, and from the point of view audience understanding and response'. p. 2. I discuss genre in more depth in Chapter One.

[13] By "masculine", I mean those elements frequently assigned to the male gender in the twentieth century, whether such categorisations are taken to be arbitrary, on the model of cultural relativism or, alternatively, biologically determined. I do not wish, however, to dismiss the female constituents of the western's narrative or its audience identified by, for example, Stanfield: 'The A-feature Western's focus on romantic engagement meant that the women in these films were given a prominent role. Indeed, it is arguable that their concerns were dominant'. [Stanfield, P. 2001. *Hollywood, Westerns and the 1930s: The Lost Trail.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press p.166]. However, I am unable to examine such claims in detail due to my focus specifically on masculine forms of heroism.

[14] Interestingly, the cowboy has played a prominent role in women's romantic fiction, although the fantasy elements of the western hero, in other words the stereotypical masculine characteristics involving male dominance over the submissive female, operate to the detriment of the formulaic, action orientated narrative elements, a phenomenon which Peter Stoneley explores at some length. [Peter Stoneley, 'Never

The western conveys masculinity even at the most basic visual level, that of costume; a feature particularly significant in the western's signifying system, deeply embedded as it is in notions of the type of masculinity[15] conveyed by items like trousers, spurs, gun belt and Stetson. While these garments are frequently assumed by certain kinds of tomboy or dominant women in a range of westerns, they have distinctly masculine overtones, nonetheless. The gun belt, for instance, can be said to foreground firearms and so, warfare. Spurs, meanwhile, appear to privilege speed over animal welfare.

Unsurprisingly, these thematic characteristics are reflected in the western's average audience composition, particularly marked in the case of the spaghetti western sub-genre. For example, Christopher Frayling cites an extract from a 1993 interview with the actor Franco Nero suggesting that the average audience demographic for this type reflects a not only a gender, but also an age and class divide: 'Spaghetti Westerns were for a certain kind of audience- the workers, I think. Mainly workers, boys',[16] a feature which Frayling argues to, 'hark back to the era of silent movies in America, or 'B' movies of the 1930s, when films made direct contact with similar audiences (in the city and the country), and when the horses did as much thinking as the itinerant cowboy'.[17] While this does not necessarily discount female audiences, Frayling's female students described their viewing experience of *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*,[18] as analogous to, "'being at a football match where all the men stare at

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Love A Cowboy: Romance, Fiction and Fantasy Families', in Sullivan, C. & White, B., eds. 1999. *Writing and Fantasy*. London: Longman. pp. 223-255]. In addition, although the western film has been male dominated, western literature has had some key female figures in writers such as Willa Cather and Dorothy M. Johnson, whose work has been adapted into film form. See, for example, two short stories, 'On the Divide' and 'A Man Called Horse' by Willa Cather and Dorothy M. Johnson respectively in Lewis, J. ed. 1995. *The Giant Book of the Western*. London: Magpie. Such features may cast a little doubt on the contention that the western is entirely masculine. However, there is no space here to offer a detailed discussion of the western's feminine appeal, other than in relation to female audiences and psychoanalytical frameworks to be discussed shortly.

[15] The phrase "white hats, black hats" is sufficiently widespread as to be a catchphrase for hero/villain and thus the ethical polarities of earlier versions of the western. Such usages are indicative of the inherent significance of the western costume within the cultural arena.

[16] This brief extract appears in the preface to Christopher Frayling's seminal and eminently readable book on the topic: *Spaghetti Western: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. London: I.B. Tauris. p. xi.

[17] Ibid., p. xi.

[18] *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*, 1966. Directed by Sergio Leone. Spain/Denmark/Italy: PC/CFP/PEA.

each other'",[19] a phenomenon which Laura Mulvey describes in more abstract terms as being, 'so out of key with the pleasure on offer, with its 'masculinisation', that the spell of fascination is broken'.[20] In the light of this, Frayling observes that, 'Spaghetti Westerns were, with one or two exceptions, a celebration of a masculine world where men were men and women—on the rare occasions they appeared—seemed to like it that way'.[21] This focus on hyper masculinity, then, represents the world of the American western taken to its extreme:[22]

> the understated masculinity of the classic Hollywood Western…had turned into in-your-face close-ups of rugged faces, twitching hands and fetishised weaponry, maleness as spectacle and style… The audience stared at the protagonists staring at each other. The women were usually…madonnas or whores and sometimes both at once. The politics of the Spaghetti Western, which could be quite radical, did not extend very far into sexual politics'.[23]

How, then, are we to account for those female spectators who consume the western format on its own terms?

Mulvey attempts to explain this phenomenon by adopting a complex, psychoanalytical approach towards for the pleasures/displeasures of the western and its gendered co-ordinates.[24] She dismisses simplistic gender binaries in favour of an unstable female sexual identity, which is able to resist the pre-allotted passive female role via the appropriation of an escapist fantasy of male agency. This can be

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[19] Ibid., p .xiv.

[20] Mulvey, L. 1981. 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun'* in Easthope, A. ed. 1993. *Contemporary Film Theory*. London: Longman. p. 125.

[21] Frayling, op. cit., p. xiv.

[22] This less than reverential attitude has, incidentally, generated a deal of resentment on behalf of the "official" western.

[23] Frayling, op. cit., p. xiv.

[24] It is important to note here that, prior to her attempts to retract some of the more extreme arguments concerning the purported correlation between gendered spectator and character identification, Mulvey proposed the existence of a strictly delineated gender divide, a view also informing subsequent critiques. As a result, she denounced mainstream cinema's representation of women as passive objects of desire and in turn, presented a radical political polemic in favour of the abandonment of mainstream cinema by feminist spectators. Such ideas were outlined in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' [Easthope, op. cit.], in which she sought to, 'discuss the interweaving of…erotic pleasure in film, its meaning and, in particular, the central place of the image of woman'. [Ibid., p. 113]. The iconoclastic implications of this approach were also emphasised: 'It is said that that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article', [Ibid., p. 113], further opining that, 'Women, whose image has continually been stolen and used for this end, cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with anything more than sentimental regret'. Ibid., pp. 123-124. She partially retracts such views in 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Ibid., p. 125.

achieved, she argues, through identification with the male hero, the ultimate bearer of active subjectivity and, in turn, power. Such cross-gendered subject positioning is, then, at odds with the purportedly unproblematic, unmediated identification which "naturally" occurs in relation to "women's" pictures designed with female spectatorship in mind.[25] Further, she defines it as a form of female transvestism: 'trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second nature. However, this Nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes.[26]

Mulvey offers an in-depth analysis of *Duel in the Sun*[27] in order to support such views, a film that is deeply ambivalent in its representations of race as well as gender. She argues that the "half breed" lead character, Pearl Chavez represents both sides of the potential female identities, the regressive, masculinised pre-Oedipal female, the active tomboy; and the passive female princess figure which the process of feminisation is intended to foster.[28] In Pearl's case, the process of feminisation is largely unsuccessful. The narrative accounts for this failure by suggesting that she is victim to the uncontrollable animalistic sexuality deriving from her Native American/Mexican genetic inheritance.[29] This excessive libido drive persists despite attempts at containment by her adopted family and Joseph Cotten's repressed "good" brother Jesse, a lawyer symbolising Eastern values. Significantly, he eventually surrenders Pearl to the carnal advances of his reprehensible, though charming,

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[25] I have melodramas and musicals in mind here.

[26] Mulvey, in Easthope, op. cit., p. 129. Such trans-gender positioning could, of course, be further defined as a neurosis in psychological terms.

[27] *Duel in the Sun*, 1946. Directed by King Vidor. USA: Selznick.

[28] Numerous studies have suggested that the tomboy, while deviating from gender norms is nevertheless more societally acceptable the male equivalent—the feminine boy who dresses in female clothes. *Ma Vie en Rose*, [1997. Directed by Alain Berliner. France/Belgium/Switzerland/GB: Buena Vista], for example, attempts to reconcile familial and community anxieties and condemnation of the boy's sexual ambiguity, firstly via psychotherapy, during which he 'performs' masculinity by dressing in cowboy clothes and brandishing a gun in front of a mirror, before eventually resolving the problem by transplanting him into a much more liberal context, one accepting of difference. The film's surrealist framework, however, signals that this is actually a fairy-tale solution to a situation that would undoubtedly be highly problematic in reality. The high levels of anxiety generated by this gender type signal that feminine display raises the spectre of male homosexuality, a "condition" perceived to be infinitely more threatening than its female counterpart in Western society. Richard Dyer argues that this ideologically informed: 'It clearly is acceptable for a girl to be a tomboy (whereas it is not acceptable for a boy to be a sissy), presumably because it is admirable for a person to wish to take on the attributes of the superior sex but not vice versa'. Dyer, R., 1979. *Stars*. London: BFI. p. 95.

[29] Such recurring attempts by westerns to equate non Anglo-Saxon races with excessive sexuality, while fascinating on ideological grounds, lie outside the remit of this chapter.

brother Lewt, in favour of marriage to an Eastern lady. Indeed, Lewt is objectified as the quintessential westerner, evidenced by his father's admiring words: *What a boy*, and is therefore consistently favoured by their father over the "civilised" values of his lawyer son.

The incompatible elements of Pearl's nature can only be resolved in death, thus placing the film within the tradition of melodrama. With this in mind, the gender conflict is presented in symbolic terms, between Pearl's unresolved femininity and the opposing elements of the masculinities exemplified by the two brothers. The film's ideological blueprint demands that these elements cannot co-exist. It also confirms the contemporary hegemonic standpoint on femininity, that the masculine phase in Freud's account must be suppressed or rejected in favour of the norm of passivity evoked by the princess/rescue/marriage trajectory identified by Vladmir Propp in *The Morphology of the Folktale*.[30] In response, Mary Ann Doane observes that, 'While it is certainly true that spectatorship is a complex and multi-faceted process, why should it be the case that processes of identification and spectatorial engagement are more complicated (if not convoluted) for the female spectator than the male? And why does it seem essential that a masculine position appear somewhere in the delineation of female spectatorship?'[31] De Beauvoir, meanwhile, posits such conflicts in practical terms: 'should women totally reject this masculine universe, or should they make a place for themselves within it? Should they steal the instrument, or change it?'[32] Further, it seems reasonable to analyse femininity in terms of masculinity so long as the film industry and its products are assumed to be patriarchal structures. That said, feminist views, however divergent, tend to agree that, 'the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences'.[33] It is here that existentialist ideas can be appropriated in order to view gender from a perspective distinct from such ideologically inflected modes of

[30] Propp, V., 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale*. London: University of Texas Press.

[31] Doane, M. A., 1987. 'Subjectivity and Desire: An (other) Way of Looking', in ibid. pp. 168-169.

[32] Sartre, J.-P. Tr. Paul Auster & Lydia Davis, 1978. *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*. London: Andre Deutsch. p. 107.

[33] Theresa de Lauretis, quoted in Easthope, op. cit., p. 167.

analysis, using gender as a starting point for analysis into differing modes of being-in-the-world.

An existentialist reading of *Duel in the Sun*,[34] then, highlights the conflict between the "masculine" mode of being embodied by the bad brother Lewt, representative of the hyper-autonomy of the in-itself in its most extreme form, thereby rendering him non-heroic, and the other ontological modes presented by the film. These are: the being-for others represented by the "feminised" male, (the lawyer, the good brother, Jesse)[35] the-one (the maid, who is apparently unable to exercise independent thought,) and, most importantly, the film's "hero" figure, Pearl, who vacillates between a state of autonomy when pursuing her own interests, (thus, on Mulvey's terms, when in tomboy mode) and the being-for-others when she acts in the service of others (the feminised mode which others attempt to thrust upon her). Significantly, she can only achieve a unified authentic state through death. This conclusion has both ideological (the power of the masculine cannot be invested in a female) and ontological (the impossibility of authenticity within a social context) implications.

Further, Lewt embodies a state of extreme authenticity, one which Pearl attempts to assume. She is unable to do so, though, because ontologically, her subjectivity combines the being-for-others with the in-itself, states which cannot co-exist without considerable tension.[36] The film therefore represents a struggle between two irreconcilable modes of being, inevitably resultant Pearl's death. Jesse, meanwhile, is both attracted and repelled by Pearl's conflictual ontological modes, but ultimately rejects her "masculine" self in favour of the unified mode of being-for-others offered by his Eastern bride. This also signals his rejection of the authenticity embodied by his brother and Pearl's "masculine" self in favour of the mode of the-one conferred by the hyper-social convention of marriage. He is therefore a combination of the-one, as signalled by his compliance to social norms: marriage and employment as lawyer

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[34] Op. cit.

[35] Lawyers generally occupy the role of "feminised" modes of being in the western as argued in relation to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* [1962. Directed by John Ford. USA: Paramount], in Chapter Two. This is because they represent the values of The East, representative of the societal self in its most extreme form, distinguished by such qualities as sophisticated communication and political skills which threaten the autonomy of the in-itself.

[36] This is also the case in relation to the female character Vienna in *Johnny Guitar*, op. cit., analysed in Chapter Five.

and all that entails, and a being-for-others, evidenced by his initial attempts to act in Pearl's best interests, which involves denying those authentic sexual instincts explicitly enacted by his brother. At the same time, Lewt accepts Pearl's autonomy, but is unable to satisfy her being-for-others by marriage, which she desires from the being-for-others, Jesse. So their relationship too is doomed to failure, owing to Pearl's divided self.

The consequences of authenticity are also made explicit, not only through Pearl's death, but also through Lewt's. While Lewt's death can be attributed to his anti-heroic status, it also has ontological significance, since the alienated status generated by hyper-autonomy is made explicit on the isolated rocky outcrop, where he is unable to claim Pearl, and so dies unheroically. This is suggestive of the price exacted by authenticity and its ultimate unattainability. In this way the film affirms the authenticity conferred by the in-itself while at the same time acknowledging that it cannot be fully achieved. The future, then, belongs to the being-for-others exemplified by Jesse and his wife, not lone outsiders, and so the consequences of such divisions between The West and East and the ontological modes they represent, is made apparent.

As such, an ontological reading of the film revolves around differing modes of being-in-the-world which tend to be rooted in particular genders, although this particular film is unusual in its fusion of two forms of being within a female outsider figure, in turn highlighting the essentially gendered mode occupied by the in-itself, one that cannot, it seems, be wholly assumed by a female. In this sense, gender, while important, is only one aspect of existentialist analysis of this kind, and thus can have broader implications than feminist critiques for which gender, combined with ideology, is central. With such issues in mind, I now turn to the visual elements of western heroic representations, and the ways these might impact upon existentialist readings.

The Western Hero as Male Spectacle and Aesthetic Form

The potential links between homoeroticism and the adventure spectacle have frequently been observed, particularly in relation to male bonding and companionship evident in, for example, the war film and the western. For example, Robert Eberwein formulates the connection in explicitly sexual terms in the case of war: 'combat films and other discourses produced during World War II can be seen to have provided some indication of an as yet unarticulated conception of sexuality and masculinity developing in the American consciousness',[37] despite his dismissal of what he terms 'totalizing reading of displays of the feminine and affection in the war film [which] see representations of behavior readable as feminine and/or homosexual as validated by suffering and death'.[38] I therefore wish to explore issues arising from the aestheticisation of the western hero in relation to gender,[39] and more importantly for the central concerns of the thesis, consider existentialist ideas in relation to purely gendered approaches.

Paul Willeman draws parallels between masculinity, (homo) sexuality and spectacle similar to those expressed by Eberwein:

> Mann's stories are mere excuses to replace one image by another, pretexts for the renewal of visual pleasure…this structure is pivoted on the look at the male figure: the male "in context," as it were. The viewer's experience is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male "exist" (that is, walk, move, ride, fight)… And on the unquiet pleasures of seeing the male mutilated…and restored through violent brutality. This fundamentally homosexual voyeurism (almost always repressed) is not without its problems: the look at the male produces just as much anxiety as the look at the female… The images always draw attention to themselves, never as fodder for the eye, but always "eye-catching," arresting the look. Spectacular in the true sense of the word.[40]

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[37] Robert Eberwein, 'As a Mother Cuddles a Child: Sexuality and Masculinity in World War II Combat Films', in Lehman, op. cit., p. 162.

[38] Ibid., p. 150. Here, Eberwein is criticising the arguments of both Anthony Easthope and Mark Simpson. I touch on some of these ideas in relation to violence in Chapter Five.

[39] For detailed discussion of issues relating to masculine sexuality and western costume, for example, see Jane Marie Gaines & Charlotte Cornelia Herzog, 'The Fantasy of Authenticity in Western Costume', in the 1998 collection, Buscombe, E. &. Pearson. R. E. eds. *Back in the Saddle Again*. London: BFI. I discuss some of these ideas later in this chapter.

[40] Paul Willemen, 'Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male', in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., p. 211.

Similarly, for Eberwein the desires aroused by the male spectacle generate anxieties that only martial representations in a range of cultural forms manage to successfully negotiate. They do so by presenting images that affirm male companionship and demonstrative affection elsewhere confined solely to the realm of femininity or overt homosexual display: 'One of the most complex signifying practices that occurs during World War II involves showing males in ways that connect them to the feminine or that present scenes of non-aggressive physical contact'.[41] They employ a number of strategies: 'toughness and masculinity are in no way compromised by being linked to the feminine... Displays of overtly and stereotypical feminine behaviour or images of apparent confusion about gender identity are instantly qualified...by the valorization of masculinity...hence reassuring readers about the males' heterosexuality'.[42]

Likewise, comparisons are frequently made between the aggressive affirmation of masculinity offered by cowboy attire and potential homosexual connotations, again revealing assumptions concerning the homosexual subtext of overt masculine display:

> It is difficult to imagine a male costume that lends itself more to eroticisation than that of the gunfighter, and it is not surprising that the iconography of the low-slung, skin-tight trousers and cocked hat, the texturing of raw and smooth cowhide, is one of the favourite costume repertoires of gay male pornography, lending itself to fantasies of soft flesh concealed and protected by leather.[43]

It is this polysexual element of the westerner's attire, its status as visual spectacle, that the film *Midnight Cowboy*[44] seeks to foreground, by exploring the hero's costuming in terms of both the predatory, aggressive heterosexuality of the hero as gigolo, and masculine/homosexual reactions to the perceived sexual ambivalence of his appearance, which is shown to arouse suspicion and anxiety as well as the desired

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[41] Eberwein, in Lehman, op. cit., p. 150.
[42] Ibid., p. 160.
[43] Gaines & Herzog, in Buscombe & Pearson, op. cit., p. 179.
[44] *Midnight Cowboy*, 1969. Directed by John Schlesinger. USA: U.A.

sexual response.[45] In the light of this cultural coding, then, it is unsurprising that the hero Joe Buck[46] is mistakenly perceived as homosexual on various occasions owing to his western costume, feminine features[47] and performative posturing, a stance reinforced by his swaggering walk and attention to the details of his appearance, a mirror-gazing vanity suggestive of narcissism rather than the aggressive masculinity perpetuated by generic cowboy heroes.[48] Indeed, he is forced to exploit such linkages by working as a prostitute for both male and female clients, although the film overtly proclaims such activities to be provoked by poverty rather than subconscious homosexual urges and Buck is at pains to distance himself from the taboo-laden homosexual identity despite, or perhaps because of, these practices. At the same time, the precise nature of his relationship with his friend Rizzo, one that is undoubtedly intimate,[49] is never fully explored, again perhaps indicative of anxieties around homosexuality. Further, the semiological significance of *Midnight Cowboy*'s title operates by uprooting the codes of the cowboy costume and associated persona demonstrated by Buck's chivalry and sexual naivety from their rightful context, the western, and transplanting them to an alien one, namely the urban jungle.[50] In this sense, the fetishistic significance of the costume is maximised by its de-contextualisation. This process is made possible because such costume connotations are assumed to be universal, an assumption which seems reasonable given the

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[45] More recently, such linkages have been further concretised in other contexts, such as *The Village People* song *YMCA*, [1998. *The Very Best of the Village People*. Audio CD album. USA: Polygram, track 1.]The band's homosexual orientation was not, however, widely acknowledged at the time. The song was originally released as a single in 1978, which ensured that the significance of traditional cowboy attire for the gay community became absorbed into popular consciousness. Indeed, heterosexual pop culture has also played its part in the eroticisation of the cowboy costume, its latest incarnation in the form of Christina Aguilera. [See Aguilera, C. 2002. *Dirrty*, CD single in *Stripped*. Audio CD album. USA: RCA, track 16.]As a result, the erotic and performative elements of the cowboy costume foreground a range of masculine identities in what virtually amounts to a gender masquerade.

[46] The surname evokes the aggressive masculinity associated with the "young buck," a term associated with young cowboys/ "Red Indians" in numerous westerns.

[47] By this, I mean the boyish softness of Jon Voight's countenance.

[48] This "new" form of narcissistic heterosexuality previously associated with homosexuality is also on display in the star personas of Richard Gere in *American Gigolo*, [1980. Directed by Paul Schrader. USA: Paramount], and Warren Beatty in *Shampoo*, [1975. Directed by Hal Ashby. USA: Columbia], respectively.

[49] The pair co-habit and display an emotional interaction, particularly in the poignant closing scenes when Joe attempts to alleviate the pain of Rizzo's terminal illness by taking him on a final trip to Hawaii, his dream location.

[50] This process of de-contextualisation is also evident in *Coogan's Bluff*. [1968. Donald Siegel. USA: Universal], discussed in relation to urban/desert space in Chapter Four, although here, the costume's homosexual undertones are entirely elided via Clint Eastwood's overtly masculine star persona.

prominence of the cowboy costume in twentieth and twenty-first century cultural forms.

Dyer agrees that representations of the male form, particularly partially or entirely unclothed, are fraught with anxieties surrounding homosexuality:

> Until the 1980s, it was rare to see a white man semi-naked in popular fictions. The art gallery, sports and pornography offered socially sanctioned or cordoned-off images, but the cinema, the major visual narrative form of the twentieth century, only did so in particular cases. This was not so with non-white male bodies. In the Western, the plantation drama and the jungle adventure film, the non-white body is routinely on display.[51]

More significantly for the concerns of the thesis though, the western hero's costume is suggestive of that self-control which in ontological terms indicates a specific mode of being, namely the in-itself. In this way, power, control and autonomy are interlinked, evidenced by the focus on weaponry, thereby signifying heroic power over others, the weak societal selves. With this in mind, the retention of firearms at all times, even in the bathroom, is not especially unusual in a range of action genres, a measure demonstrating both defensiveness and aggression.[52] Similarly, the cowboy cannot be presented as vulnerable, even in bed, as illustrated by *A Fistful of Dollars*,[53] in which Manco's only preparations are the removal of hat and gun-belt. Meanwhile, boots and spurs remain firmly in place. In response to the query: *Tell me, is that the way you go to bed every night?* on observing his emergence from bed re-assuming only gun-belt, hat and cigar, Manco signals a rejection of societal norms in

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[51] Richard Dyer, 1997. 'The White Man's Muscles', in Adams, & Savran, op. cit., p. 262.

[52] See, for example, the bath scenes in *High Plains Drifter*, [1972. Clint Eastwood. USA: Universal], and *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, [1966. Sergio Leone. Spain/Denmark/Italy: PC/CFP/PEA], featuring Clint Eastwood and Eli Wallach respectively. That said, instances of white male heroic nudity and refusal to comply with clothing norms do appear prior to the 1980s, for example, *Get Carter*, [1971, directed by Mike Hodges. GB: MGM], in which the anti-hero, Jack Carter, is presented as entirely invulnerable, though naked, in the face of imminent violence, his nakedness perhaps suggestive of a high degree of inhumanity when he emerges onto a populace street brandishing a shotgun and totally impervious to the reactions of others. Nonetheless, in this case at least, the male is fully in control of the situation and fully operational in terms of violent potential, though again, the possession of a strategically placed firearm, this time under the bed, is undoubtedly a contributory factor to this preternatural level of mastery.

[53] *A Fistful of Dollars*, 1964. Directed by Sergio Leone. Italy/Spain: Jolly Films/Ocean Films.

keeping with his autonomous power, contrasted sharply with the anxiety of the symbol of the societal self, here, the innkeeper: *Don't worry, I didn't dirty the sheets.*

It is possible to challenge ontological readings such as these, however, which point to a unified and static mode of being particular to the in-itself. Martin Pumphrey, for example, avers that, 'the ideal of masculinity offered by Westerns in their heroes is fundamentally contradictory. Heroes must be both dominant and deferential, gentle and violent, self-contained and sensitive, practical and idealist, individualist and conformist, rational and intuitive, peace-loving and ready to fight without quitting at a moment's notice'.[54] And, most significantly, 'the hero's masculine toughness must be partially feminised'.[55] However, I would suggest that this description cannot be convincingly applied to the specifically outsider hero under examination in this thesis. It is much more indicative of westerns aimed at mixed audiences, as exemplified by the melodramatically orientated *Duel In The Sun*[56] for example, or *Shane*,[57] with its inclusion of the slightly feminised star, Alan Ladd, rather than the overt expressions of hyper-autonomy through violence displayed by the gunman heroes discussed throughout the thesis. In addition, Pumphrey's argument falters due to his underlying assumptions relating to gender characteristics, which are based on contemporary hegemonic gender norms that equate rationality with masculinity and intuitiveness/emotionality with femininity, for example. This is perhaps unavoidable, though, in that these norms are constantly reproduced in mainstream cinematic representations, and even Mulvey is reliant on such assumptions, despite her political investment in problematising gender norms. In this way, Pumphrey can be said to critique the films on their own terms, his main aim to situate the western and its masculinities in a specific cultural context:

> to link it with the growth of the consumer economies…in the first half of the twentieth century… This development set in motion a redefinition of gender that urged women to conceive of themselves as active consumers while at the same time situating the dominant

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[54] Martin Pumphrey, 'Why do Cowboys Wear Hats in the Bath? Style Politics for the Older Man', in Cameron, I. & Pye, D. eds. 1996. *The Movie Book of the Western*. London: Studio Vista.
[55] Ibid., p. 52.
[56] Op. cit.
[57] *Shane*, 1953. Directed by George Stephens. USA: Paramount.

models of masculine identity, activity and relationships distinctly apart from the consumer version of modernity.[58]

Significantly, Pumphrey's assumptions signal an additional area in which ontological analysis can make a distinctive contribution to such ideologically inflected understandings of gender, since the modes of being presented by the western can be mapped directly onto such categorisations. In this way, the gender norm that equates rationality with masculinity becomes, in ontological terms, the in-itself, the autonomous self signifying power, whilst intuitiveness and emotionality, typically, but not universally, associated with femininity, are reconfigured as the societal mode of being which, in the western, confers weakness. As a result, while these categories *can* be mapped onto gender, they do not necessarily have to be, as established by *Duel In The Sun*,[59] in which a heroine is partially representative of the in-itself, while another male is entirely representative of the two sides of the societal self: the-one and the being-for-others.

Pumphrey also proposes that the western is responsible for promoting a certain traditional mode of masculinity while unwittingly foregrounding the anxieties attendant on any form of gender identity; in this case the latent fear of male display evidenced by the western's attempt to efface the erotic potential of the aestheticised male form. He concludes that this concern about the male spectacle has been vastly eroded in the wake of "new" forms of masculinity which work to legitimate active consumerism, male style and forms of behaviour which would previously have been deemed feminine, for example, those displays of masculine emotion so familiar in, for example, contemporary reality television programmes.[60] Again, such distinctions can be reconfigured in ontological terms in relation to differing modes of being-in-the-world. While the "traditional" mode of masculinity can be read as signifying the rigidly autonomous in-itself, the "new" forms of masculinity can be seen in terms of

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[58] Pumphrey, in Cameron & Pye, op. cit., pp. 58-59.
[59] Op.cit.
[60] I am thinking here of the *Big Brother* TV series, [Endemol UK Productions, 2000-], a format that appears to make a virtue out of emotionality, the psycho-therapist commentators preferring openly emotive males to those who are more self-restrained, (formerly a positive masculine quality), the latter frequently judged to be overly repressed and thus, within the terms of the programme, deemed untrustworthy. Similarly, the football player David Beckham has been hailed as the harbinger of "new" forms of masculinity, ones that work to blur pre-existent gender boundaries. "New" masculinities lie beyond the boundaries of this study of "old" masculinities, however.

societal modes of being, previously equated with the challenge presented by civilising forces in the western. On this interpretation, then, the in-itself, or "traditional" forms of masculinity, represent a threat to sociality, as the existentialist novel so graphically illustrates, resulting in the alienation of the non-societal self when translated into a societal context. In this way, "new" forms of masculinity observed by Pumphrey can be equated with the societal self, which favours compliance with social norms and a willingness to engage in human interaction, characteristics which the western works to equate with the surrender of the autonomous self with its attendant weakness and loss of freedom. In this way, the societal self, as expressed through "feminised" "new" forms of masculinity is ultimately successful, as both the western, with its reliance on non-societal formations, and existentialism, with its punishment of the in-itself, indicate.

It is outside the scope of this thesis to stray too far onto the territory of the eighties heroic aesthetic, but it seems appropriate at this point to indicate at least some of the ways in these issues might have a bearing on masculine display, especially in relation to the notion of American masculinities to be examined shortly. It has frequently been suggested, for instance, that the numerous examples of heroic semi/naked torsos in the eighties action film borders on homoerotic display. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone are most usually cited as being at the forefront of this trend. However, this claim is difficult to substantiate. For example, the preponderance of partially clad male images on offer in bodybuilding magazines specifically aimed at heterosexual males would appear to contradict such linkages between muscular male torsos and homosexuality. On the other hand, this is not necessarily proof of the heterosexuality of such images given our previous discussions concerning the taboos which govern homosexuality amongst heterosexual men, and it certainly seems feasible that such exaggerated musculature constructed through weight training or other athletic practices may indicate attempts to transform the male body into an object, a machine, in order to avert anxieties around masculine display for heterosexual spectators. Dyer discusses this type of display in considerable detail, arguing that the exhibition of the "hard" body is one of the few instances in which white naked male bodily display can take place in mainstream cinema. He then goes

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on to consider the connotations of the unclothed body and the socio-political implications of clothing in relation to existing power structures:

> The white man has been the centre of attention for many centuries in Western culture… A naked body is a vulnerable body. This is so in the most fundamental sense—the bare body has no protection from the elements—but also in a social sense. Clothes are bearers of prestige, notably of wealth, status and class: to be without them is to lose prestige. Nakedness may also reveal the inadequacies of the body by comparison with social ideals… The exposed white male body is liable to pose the legitimacy of white male power: why should people who look like that—so unimpressive, so like others—have so much power? [61]

In addition to examinations of male sexuality and its various permutations, there is also the more conventional function that has enduringly been assigned to the male westerner's body and the costuming thereof, namely the ways in which it has served as a symbolic and literal vehicle for a normative masculine ideal. This formula is inherently power based as Dyer suggests, thereby working to reinforce patriarchal structures and, in the case of the western at least, individualism, as I argue throughout the thesis. Peter Lehman makes such linkages even more explicit when he writes that, 'the silence surrounding the sexual representation of the male body is itself totally in the service of traditional patriarchy'.[62] Since, 'only after thus centering on the male body will it be possible truly to decenter it',[63] he argues that extensive analysis of male bodies is justified even 'If this…risks replicating patriarchal viewpoints'.[64] He argues this task to be necessitated by feminist criticism's insistence on analysis of the female body at the expense of the male, a view echoed by Neale:

> Heterosexual masculinity has been identified as a structuring norm in relation to images both of women and of gay men. It has to that extent been profoundly problematized, rendered visible. But it has rarely been discussed and analysed as such… It is thus very rare to find analyses that seek to specify in detail…how heterosexual

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[61] Dyer, in Adams & Savran, op. cit., pp. 262-263.
[62] Lehman, P. 1993. *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p. 4.
[63] Ibid., p. 5.
[64] Ibid., p. 5.

masculinity is inscribed and the mechanisms, pressures and contradictions that inscription may involve.[65]

Meanwhile, Tompkins focuses on the ideological functions of the western through the genre's heroic representations rather than its visual conventions, arguing that masculine dominance is thereby normalised:

> The ethical system the Western proposes, which vindicates controlled violence, and vengeance, and the social and political hierarchy it creates, putting adult white males on top with everyone else in descending order beneath this code and this hierarchy never appear to reflect the interests or beliefs of any particular group, or of human beings at all, but seems to have been dictated primordially by nature itself.[66]

Rather more controversially, though, she goes on to propose that this power is transmitted through a fusion of the environment with the hero figure: 'The blankness of the plain implies—without ever stating—that this is a field where a certain kind of mastery is possible, where a person (of a certain kind) can remain alone and complete and in control of himself, while controlling the external world through physical strength and force of will.[67] Such ideologically based discussions will be related to the twin concepts of individualism and freedom in the next chapter, however, so I will now turn to specifically American notions of masculinity and the masculine ideal, particularly those predominating during the mid twentieth century, the time span most relevant to the autonomous western hero under examination. These largely ideological characteristics will then be contrasted with Algerian masculinities in order to identify points of reference with existentialist configurations of masculinity, and assess how far such ideological and nationalistic elements imbue the ontological mode of the in-itself, as projected by the western heroic outsider figure.

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[65] Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', in Caughie, J. & Kuhn, A. eds. 1992. *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. London: Routledge. p. 277.
[66] Tompkins, op. cit., p. 73.
[67] Ibid., p. 75.

American Masculinities

That the western's standard narrative formula is premised on the masculine desire to find an escapist space outside the confines of domesticity, in which tough active values are privileged over the "civilised" passivity required of societal man, has become a truism in western film scholarship. On this account, technological developments have seen physical strength—formerly masculinity's primary claim to superiority—become largely obsolete[68] in favour of traditionally feminine strengths such as social skills and emotional literacy. Allied to this is the increasing fear of emasculation engendered by the perceived encroachment of the feminine onto formerly masculine territory in the twentieth century; increasing female economic empowerment in the public sphere partly resulting from the Second World War's employment opportunities, an area which had formerly been male dominated. This type of analysis is extremely prevalent in discussions of American masculinity. However, critical analysis of this type, which root changes in gender largely to cultural context, can be viewed from the perspective of existentialism, which can recast such oppositions into conflicts between differing and, perhaps, oppositional modes of ontological being-in-the-world, between non-social forms of being: the in-itself (authentic/autonomous masculinity, which can be mapped onto definitions of "traditional" masculinity, the dominant and self-sufficient male informed by the ideological system of patriarchy, further analysed by Susan Faludi later in this chapter); and societal forms of being, which rely on external validation and therefore the presence of, and emotional connections with, others. As previously stated, these can be defined as the being-for-others, which can be mapped onto the "feminised" male, and the-one, which becomes the mode of "mass man", as I go on to discuss in relation to Mark Jancovich and David Reisman's ideas shortly. This is the collection of individuals who are conditioned by employment to think as one, a development arguably generated by, for instance, consumerism and the trend towards employment within the service industries, giving rise again to an ontological mode more usually associated with femininity and therefore generating anxiety regarding the state of the appropriate boundaries between the genders. Elsewhere, I indicate how the western articulates these differing ontological modes within its representational universe. At

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[68] Apart, that is, from low-status occupations, labouring work for example.

this point, though, I wish to focus on American masculinities, as they appear in various cultural forms, principally in the 1950s as one of the key decades for the concerns of the thesis, in order to shed further light on the significance of individualism for representations of masculinity. More, importantly, though, I will view these from an existentialist perspective in order to, once again, add a further dimension to those largely ideological understandings of masculinity which so frequently underpin critiques of the western outsider hero.

Both Jancovich[69] and Faludi[70] examine the topic of masculinity in its cultural and historical context, and adopt a feminist mode of critique. However, they do so in pursuit of entirely different goals. Faludi provides a polemical analysis of masculinity, partly with the aim of shedding light on the purported "crisis of masculinity", a project involving both ethnographic and theoretical investigation. Jancovich, on the other hand, discusses it specifically in relation to the 1950s horror film. They do share some source material, however, such as the fiction of Richard Matheson,[71] a subject producing a chapter significantly entitled 'The Dilemmas of Masculinity' in Jancovich's case. This title is in itself suggestive of the multiple tensions evident in a gender that has arguably struggled to present a united front, a unity which, while always somewhat illusory, has arguably become increasingly fragmented. Further, Matheson himself signals the implications of the work undertaken during the 1950s including stories such as 'The Shrinking Man'[72] in this way: 'my stories were deeply imbued with a sense of anxiety, of fear of the unknown, of a world too complicated which expected too much of individual males'.[73]

Jancovich concurs with the author's view that the fiction reflects the general sense of dislocation and lack of purpose which many have argued to exist during the decade, and furthermore indicates that this sense of alienation gave rise to a proliferation of

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[69] Jancovich, M. 1996. *Rational Fears: American horror in the 1950s*. Manchester: MUP.

[70] Faludi, S., 1999. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man*. London: Chatto & Windus.

[71] Perhaps significantly, Matheson was a partially disabled war veteran.

[72] The title was changed to *The Incredible Shrinking Man* for the film version in order to signal its genre as science-fiction.

[73] This extract is drawn from Matheson's 1989 introduction to a collection of short stories, cited in ibid., p.78.

stories relating to fears concerning loss of gender identity, partly in response to "new" forms of masculinity that privileged surface over substance.[74] A direct parallel can be drawn here between such notions of alienation and existentialist texts, in which alienation becomes an inevitable corollary of the authentic autonomous being within a societal context, which works to force him to conform, to privilege the mode of the-one, in a way that denies the autonomy of the individual, giving rise to an inauthentic state of being.[75] Jancovich, meanwhile, concentrates on the concept of external validation, which can be mapped directly onto the societal mode of the being-for-others:

> This concern is also directly linked to concerns about the 1950s corporation man, the major image of conformity within the period... For many in the 1950s, it was this figure [the advertising executive] which not only epitomised the corporation man, but also the 'other directed' man who managed people rather than things, and was bound up with the society of the image, rather than the world of reality and substance. He dealt with the manipulation of appearances and style.[76]

The hero of *North by Northwest*[77] typifies this figure, that of the light-hearted, suave Madison Avenue advertising executive Roger O. Thornhill, whose middle initial, emblazoned on his business card, is not an actual referent. Significantly, it denotes the O of an empty space, an absence, as the character himself observes. Hitchcock thus mocks Thornhill's lack of identity and the superficiality of his manners, elegant suit and good looks, factors which, while rendering him sexually irresistible, and thus wholly masculine,[78] to women on one hand—*It's a nice face* in the heroine's words—also represent a lack of success in practice as evidenced by two failed marriages. He is therefore forced to rely on the company of his mother and alcohol, thus highlighting a fragmentation of the hero's hyper masculine image. Thornhill can only become authentic—in existentialist terms, the autonomous self—when put to the test in an active, and therefore traditionally masculine, arena in which his

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[74] A claim now omnipresent in post-modern theory.

[75] I discuss the concept of alienation specifically in relation to the western in, for example, Chapter Four's discussion of *The Searchers* [1956. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros].

[76] Jancovich, op. cit., p. 139.

[77] *North by Northwest*, 1950. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: MGM.

[78] This convention of sexual irresistibility is one that reached its parodic apotheosis in the iconic figure of James Bond.

manhood can be tested. He is thus transplanted into a shadowy world replete with deadly blondes and spies, wherein nothing is as it seems and where he is forced to prove himself "a man" by means of a series of near-death encounters. The new world to which Thornhill is forcibly introduced is presented in sharp contrast to the existence which he has previously enjoyed in the film's opening scenes, an opulent world of ostentatious display which privileges surface over substance, wealth over altruism. While the key figures in this underworld are also wealthy and privileged, they are part of a vast network of shadowy dealings underlying the superficial world of appearances inhabited by the hero. Thus, privilege is exposed as a surface cover for intrigue.

Moreover, prior to Thornhill's initiation into the active realm, he is, in effect, emasculated in the sense crucial to discussions of 50s masculinity, enslaved by an image-obsessed job, the pursuit of superficial women and mind-numbing substances. As he protests when asserting the "real" identity which the film seeks to undermine: *I'm an advertising man, not a red herring. I've got a job, a secretary, a mother, two ex-wives and several bartenders dependent upon me.* However, the film seems to suggest that the power dynamic in fact flows in the opposite direction, that Thornhill is dependent on the economic need of others in order to reinforce his frail identity. At the same time, he can only be deemed a man through his function as economic enabler. This is the only sense in which he is active until, that is, he is initiated into the world of "real" men, which in turn forces him to defend his superior status, namely the birthright conventionally conferred upon white, middle-class males. In return, Thornhill wins the love, and subsequent submission, of a beautiful woman, the standard reward for such endeavours, coupled with the reinstatement of his dominance. This status has had to be earned, though, and as such represents the conventional route into the traditional structures of power for the masculine hero. That said, the heroic trajectory is somewhat convoluted and belated in Thornhill's case, leading some commentators such as Neale to ascribe a Freudian element to the narrative.[79]

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[79] For example: 'the Oedipal trajectory...the movement of its protagonist...from a position of infantile dependence on the mother to a position of 'adult', 'male', heterosexuality, sealed by his marriage to Eve Kendall...and by his acceptance of the role and authority of the father'. Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', in Caughie & Kuhn, op. cit., p. 278.

An existentialist interpretation, meanwhile, would render the film a quest for identity of a different kind, one not reliant on ideological structures of patriarchy but, rather, as an individual's quest for his lost authentic self, eroded by the pressures of societal conformity. Understood in these terms, Thornhill's journey of self discovery traces a trajectory from both the societal mode of the-one, signified by the empty "O", and as a being-for-others, as manifested by his relationships with his ex-wives and mother, which entails the loss of his own authentic identity through servicing the interests of others, in this case "natural" societal beings: females, who by their very existence threaten male autonomy. Thornhill loses his non-authentic self to an imaginary entity, Kaplan, a shift which can only occur outside of the boundaries of society as Thornhill understands it. This is evidenced by his exile into a realm in which all societal and identifying signifiers have been lost, in other words, a symbolic space analogous to the western's wilderness. Exile from his previous modes of being-in-the-world enables Thornhill to search for, and ultimately achieve, an autonomous state of being: the in-itself. It is only then, when the mystery of Kaplan's identity is resolved, that Thornhill can be safely transplanted back into society, crucially in possession of an authentic state of being-in-the-world, one which is autonomous from the interests of other societal beings. In an ideological reading, then, by the end of the film, Thornhill assumes his rightful place as dominant male. Ontologically, though, this re-positioning does not owe itself to pre-existent patriarchal structures but, rather, to an ontological re-aligment, in other words, the successful resolution of an existential project.[80] This autonomous state cannot be maintained within a societal context, however, as both the western and existentialist works demonstrate, for Thornhill is married by the end of the film. And so, whilst his exile results in his discovery of autonomy, on return to society he becomes once more a being-for-others. Moreover, through his reconciliation with the societal norms of marriage, he also risks returning to the state of the-one as well, and so the ontological circle, the displacement from, and return to, society, is completed.

Jancovich, on the other hand, adopts a cultural approach to issues of masculinity by link purported loss of traditional gender identity to the increased significance

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[80] I define the precise nature of the existential project in Chapter Four.

attached to commodities so intrinsic to, in this case, 1950s America, both for women in terms of the domestic pressures to attain the appropriate accoutrements of the housewife, and for men in providing the economic basis for these "new" requirements. In turn, this process is held responsible for mens' drive to acquire rather than produce which, in turn, compromises traditional male roles. As a result, socio-psychological crises ensue, while consumer items attaining an importance far beyond the reasonable: 'in the modern world, image is everything and people's identities are produced by the commodities which they consume, commodities which seem to have more life than the humans who possess them'.[81] That this signals a new age of superficiality, involving a mediated and therefore intrinsically inferior experience of the world is one held by mass culture theorists and postmodernists alike.[82]

Furthermore, the type of employment that enables this relentless acquisition of products requires men to become subsumed within a corporate identity, the threat posed by that phenomenon of industrialised societies which has been identified as "mass man" or, in existentialist terms, the mode of the-one: 'The corporate workplace threatens to absorb the male into a characterless mass, while the male finds it harder and harder to meet the expectations of himself and others within the suburban home'.[83] Indeed, one of the primary psychological discourses circulating in the 1950s went so far as to claim that this shift to a consumption orientated culture in which individuals no longer produced or witnessed the products of their labour had a significant psychological impact, in addition to privileging different skills. David Reisman, for instance, proposed 'that modern American society was increasingly organised as 'a lonely crowd' in which the individual was psychologically dependent on the judgment of others and incapable of opposing such judgements.'[84] As a cure for this malaise, Reisman proposes a return to individual autonomy to be achieved by practices that encourage self-determination, such as

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[81] Jancovich, op. cit., p. 139.
[82] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' is the most famous of these, included in the collection, Durham, M.G. & Kellner, D. M. eds. 2001. *Media and Cultural Studies Keyworks*. Oxford: Blackwell. I briefly discuss their work in Chapter One.
[83] Jancovich, op. cit., pp. 140-141. This phenomenon is explored in a range of films including *The Truman Show*, [1998. Peter Weir. USA: Paramount], which portrays and parodies an America consumed by consumerism and the death of authentic "reality".
[84] Ibid., p. 21.

resisting the pressure to be guided by the opinions of other people, groups and organisations. This goes some way towards explaining the popularity of the western hero and similar individualistic heroes at this time, representing as he does the ultimate fantasy of individual power and control in a world that seems on this interpretation to be devoted to subsuming the individual in the mass. At the same time, a focus on the individual as distinct from society is also pivotal to existentialist ideas and texts as previously established, which largely accounts for my focus upon existentialist critiques of the western's individualistic hero although, as argued throughout the thesis, existentialist concerns go beyond the realm of ideology projected by the western, instead reflective of ontological concerns, in other words, the analysis of the nature of being-in-the-world, that which constitutes human existence.

This emphasis on the superiority of the self-determining individual in America is one of the dominant masculine ideals of the twentieth century, the spirit of which is perhaps best captured by the phrase "The Self-Made Man", a concept inextricably linked with the American dream, which, as Deleuze points out, is no less potent for being illusory: 'One cannot…criticise the American Dream for being only a dream: this is what it wants to be, drawing all its power from the fact that it is a dream',[85]which, he argues, functions to provide Americans 'with a healthy illusion as continuity of the nation',[86] its most poignant evocation to be found in *Death of a Salesman*: 'Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it',[87] which Kimmel defines as, 'a model of manhood that derives entirely from a man's activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility'.[88]

Further, in a point relating back to the alienated aspects of a certain kind of American masculinity, it 'is uncomfortably linked to the volatile workplace, and…depends upon continued mobility.'[89] Consequently: 'Mobile, competitive, aggressive in

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[85] Deleuze, G. 1986. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image.* Minneapolis: Athlone. p. 148.

[86] Ibid., p. 148.

[87] Miller, A. 1958. *Arthur Miller: Collected Plays.* London: Cresset Press. p. 133.

[88] Michael Kimmel, 'The Birth of the Self-Made Man', in Adams, & Savran, op. cit., p. 137.

[89] Ibid., p. 137.

business, the self made man was also temperamentally restless, chronically insecure, and desperate to achieve a solid grounding for a masculine identity'.[90] As Kimmel points out, though, the self made man is not uniquely American but, rather, a phenomenon that appeared across Europe once market-driven economies were in place. However, the peculiarly American element of the type, in Kimmel's view, derives from the fact that 'in America, the land of immigrants and democratic ideals, the land without hereditary titles, they were present from the start, and they came to dominate much sooner than in Europe'.[91]

This image of the classless, independent, aggressive individual disconnected from its economic and societal context is one which the western hero exemplifies and privileges as the essence of American masculinity, in turn exerting a global influence, via America's media dominance according to Susan Faludi:

> A man is expected to prove himself not by being part of society but by being untouched by it, soaring above it. He is to travel unfettered, beyond society's clutches, alone—making or breaking whatever or whoever crosses his path... He's a man who won't be stopped. He'll fight attempts to tamp him down; if he has to, he'll use his gun. It seems to us as if it has always been thus, ever since the first white frontiersman strode into the New World wilderness, his rifle at the ready.[92]

However, she emphasises that this type of masculinity, while representing the contemporary masculine hegemonic norm, has long been in competition with a communitarian opponent, a battle which persisted throughout the twentieth century, only to emerge triumphant after the Vietnam War:

> a look at our history, long since buried under a visual avalanche of Marlboro Men and Dirty Harrys and Rambos, suggests a more complicated dynamic, one in which from the nation's earliest frontier days the man in the community was valued as much as the loner in control, homely society as much as heroic detachment. Even in the most archetypal versions of the original American male myth, a tension prevailed between the vision of a man who stood apart from

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[90] Ibid., p. 137.
[91] Ibid., p. 137.
[92] Faludi, op. cit., p. 10.

society and the man who was a part of society; the loner was not the ideal. The "Indian fighter" was ultimately a homesteader.[93]

This tension between the settler and the lone individual has particular import in view of the ultimate project at hand, and Faludi cites the example of Daniel Boone in support of her argument that the solitary hero was in fact less individualistic and significant in the historical West than the western's heroic representations would suggest: 'Essential to the myth of his [Boone's] journey into the wilderness was his return from it to retrieve his family and establish a new community'.[94] However, she argues that this masculine type has been largely supplanted by the paradigm familiar to contemporary notions of American masculinity, 'that it is all about being the master of your universe'.[95] Faludi interprets this shift to be a direct outcome of industrialisation, the spirit of which is exemplified by another historical frontier figure, Davy Crockett, who gained a quasi-mythical status as a result. She provides historical accounts of masculine prototypes in order to trace this development spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, once again categorising masculinity in terms of those social and non-social binaries underpinning her overall treatment of masculinity:

> A study of heroic male figures…found that the perceived key to masculinity was "publick usefulness". The hunter in the saddle, untethered from public life, was regarded as only half a man. He was the outrider whose blood-letting served no social purpose, the lone killer who kept on killing because there was nothing else to do. He was the frontier "wastrel"… In industrializing nineteenth-century America, however, the wastrel would gain a certain renown as an emblem of virility, his rapaciousness evidence of his ambitious, rags-to-riches drive, his heaps of dead pelts the equivalent of the tycoon's consolidated fortunes, his killer instinct compensating for the loss of service to a community. To be a man increasingly meant being ever on the rise, and the only way to know for sure you were rising was to claim, control and crush everyone and everything in your way.[96]

This, then, encapsulates the indomitable, goal-focused, entrepreneurial spirit of America, and certainly privileges the aggressive, controlling, dominating aspects

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[93] Ibid., p. 10.
[94] Ibid., p. 10.
[95] Ibid., p. 14.
[96] Ibid., p. 11.

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over the previously discussed sensitive qualities paradoxically found in Pumphrey's version of the westerner. However, these aspects of the westerner could potentially reflect the initially family orientated nature of the genre, a need to minimise the socially unacceptable aspects of American masculinity, thereby resulting in a degree of ambivalence in such representations. The cowboy code of honour, for example, may have less to do with the actuality of the frontier than a need to avoid representations of gratuitous and unmotivated acts of aggression, and to impose a moral framework on a narrative type which might otherwise appear to be extolling the virtues of violence. However, Webb argues the code to have historical provenance one which, significantly he couches in terms of masculinity:

> In the absence of law and in the social conditions that obtained, men worked out an extra-legal code or custom by which they guided their actions. This custom is often called the code of the West...it demanded fair play...one must not shoot his adversary in the back, and he must not shoot an unarmed man. In actual practice he must give notice of his intention, albeit the action followed the notice as a lightning stroke... This was justice carried out in a crude but effective manner, and warning given that in general the code must prevail... Men were all equal. Each was his own defender. His survival imposed upon him certain obligations which, if he were a man, he would accept.[97]

He also situates this masculine prototype firmly in its environmental context; (the wilderness), a move familiar to western representations of the cowboy hero, and previously discussed in relation to Tompkins's account of masculinity.

Observations concerning the western hero's preference for action over words are a frequent feature of criticism on the cowboy hero. The title track from *The Man from Laramie*[98] provides a useful summary of the bearer of this masculine type, the outsider archetype as formulated by the western, the self-possessed, enigmatic and alienated figure, emblematic of the mode of the in-itself:

> *Though he was friendly to everyone he met*
> *No- one seemed to know a thing about him*

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[97] Webb, W. P., 1959. *The Great Plains*. Belgrade: Graficki Zavod. p. 497.
[98] *The Man from Laramie*, 1955. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: Columbia.

He had an air of mystery
He was not inclined to speak his mind
The Man from Laramie.

This does not necessarily, however, derive from the dominating American male of industrialised America's fantasies. Instead, it could stem from the controlling elements of the dominant male, a desire to conceal thoughts and deny the significance of human contact in order to control and subordinate others in the drive for power. It also brings to the fore another notable aspect of the self-determining male, the unconscious desire for self-objectification, and thus invulnerability, the in-itself discussed previously, rather than the being-for-others which analysts like Reisman argue to be at the root of male passivity and its by-products, anxiety and depression:

> The interdiction masculinity imposes on speech arises from the desire for complete objectification. And this means being conscious of nothing, not knowing that one has a self. By becoming a solid object, not only is a man relieved of the burden of relatedness and responsiveness to others, he is relieved of consciousness itself which is to say, primarily, consciousness of self... At this point, we come upon the intersection between the Western's rejection of language and its emphasis on landscape. Not fissured by self-consciousness, nature is what the hero aspires to emulate: perfect being-in-itself.[99]

This particular form of self-containment is intrinsic to the hegemonic norm of masculinity, one which, for Faludi, is the source of the purported crisis in masculinity, proposing as it does ever more individualistic solutions to a socially generated identity issue which women, in contrast, have sought to solve by means of solidarity. In existentialist terms, the mode of being-for-others is rendered inferior by the western's ontological representational framework, rather than the individualism which, as I have argued, is ontologically recast into the non-societal in-itself, promoted through the elevation of the western outsider figure:

> Whatever troubles the American man...can be cured by removing himself from society, by prevailing over imaginary enemies on an imaginary landscape... Instead of collectively confronting brutalizing forces, each man is expected to dramatize his own struggle by himself, to confront arbitrarily designated enemies in a

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[99] Tompkins, op. cit., p. 57.

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staged fight—a fight separated from society the way a boxing ring is roped off from the crowd.[100]

Another potential consequence of masculine self-determination is the existential alienation here attributed to depictions of the detective in *film noir*: 'For them [existentialists], man stands alone, alienated from any social or intellectual order, and is therefore totally self-dependent... By keeping emotional involvement to a minimum, the detective gains a degree of power over others but pays the price in terms of loneliness'.[101] This type of alienation is also present in the western hero as previously discussed, although this "loneliness" becomes instead, alone-ness, which in ideological terms can be seen as idealised and naturalised, as constituting pride and masculine honour in a similar sense to that of the war film. Alternatively, in existentialist terms, such alone-ness encapsulates the price exacted by autonomy, the authentic state of being, of freedom from the threat of societal others, previously illustrated by *Duel In The Sun*,[102] in contrast to the *film noir* hero's frequently pathetic, because societally informed, characterisation.[103]

Tompkins's analysis of the western hero also isolates masculinity as if it is a hermetically sealed entity rather than a culturally contingent construction, a concept again familiar to conceptualisations of dominant American masculine forms; in Kimmel's words, 'American manhood became less and less about an inner sense of self, and more and more about a possession that needed to be acquired'.[104] Her description is also reminiscent of the dominant masculine paradigm identified by Faludi. It is formulated in universalising terms and thus implies that the cowboy hero incontrovertibly stands for a certain masculine type. In fact, Faludi proposes her own version of the elements intrinsic to traditionally conceived forms of masculinity during the course of a discussion about "new" masculinities. Here, she suggests that such conventional forms are, in effect, repackaged and sold back to the "new"

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[100] Ibid., p. 15.
[101] Robert Porfirio, 1976. 'No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the *Film Noir*', in Silver & Ursini, James eds. 1996. *Film Noir Reader*. New York: Limelight. p. 85.
[102] Op.cit.
[103] One needs look no further than the shabby bachelor apartment and empty fridge of the stereotypical *noir* hero for evidence of this contrast. This is also the source of the hero type's vulnerability: his loneliness makes him susceptible to the *femme fatale* in a way that would be inconceivable for the western hero.
[104] Cited in Faludi, op. cit., p. 11.

consumerist (and thus anxious) male: 'the culture reshapes his most basic sense of manhood by telling him…that masculinity is…personal, not societal; that manhood is displayed, not demonstrated. The internal qualities once said to embody manhood—surefootedness, inner strength, confidence of purpose—are merchandised to men to enhance their manliness'.[105] Interestingly for a feminist writer, she also deplores this shift in masculinity, preferring the inner qualities to the superficiality of what she terms "ornamental culture",[106] the mass media and its emphasis on surface over substance, thus privileging the in-itself over the being-for-others exemplified by "new" masculinities.

In light of this, the individualistic hero's appeal can be said to lie in his fusion of these outer and inner qualities. After all, he simultaneously embodies both the visual elements as male spectacle explored earlier in the chapter, thereby reminiscent of "new masculinities", and the inner-directed forms, by refuting external validation and sociality, in existentialist terms, the maintenance of the in-itself. The western hero can certainly be characterised as the ideal fantasy of dominating active manhood for a nation of men who, at least on previous accounts, were feeling the need to turn to such physically demanding and skilled practices as DIY in the 1950s in the domestic sphere in order to prove themselves virile in an increasingly feminised public arena which no longer unquestioningly privileged the physicality of the traditional male. In fact, the cowboy hero is arguably the archetypal American self made man translated from a social to a mythical non-societal context, representing the essence of the competitive drive to succeed by means of aggression, control and domination, yet without the need to temper this with the concern for others necessitated by a societal context. The western thus offers a magical solution to a conflict which is, in actuality, irresolvable. As a result, the cowboy is emblematic of a particular American masculine type, one that has been more universally sustained than any competing version. This remains the case despite the ostensibly prophetic words of President F. W. Roosevelt uttered in a speech during

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[105] Ibid., p. 35. Such issues are illustrated by *Fight Club*, [1999. Directed by David Fincher. USA: TCF], in which a paucity of father figures/role models is blamed for men's fear of emasculation and excessive consumerism. Further, it explores the contemporary notion that this alleged gender deviance can be cured by a return to the exercise of masculine aggressive instincts in a move that parodies American masculine self-empowerment groups.
[106] Ibid., p. 35.

the era of the New Deal in 1932. Here, the frontier hero is firmly located in a past era, seen to be a pre-condition for a nation emerging from the Depression and, consequently in need of progressiveness: 'The man of ruthless force had his place in developing a pioneer country [but now he is] as likely to be a danger as a help [because] the lone wolf...whose hand is against every man's, declines to join in achieving an end recognised as being for the public welfare'.[107] This individualistic conception of "old" masculinities as embodied by the western hero, then, is a pre-existent and widely acknowledged one.

An existentialist critique, meanwhile, is able to go beyond such notions of individualism as manifested by the outsider hero of the western, rooted as he is in a longstanding ideological tradition in American culture and history. Recast in ontological terms, Roosevelt's "lone wolf" becomes emblematic of a specific ontological mode of being and accordingly, holds significance for the analysis of ontological issues such as the purpose of ethics in relation to individual being.[108] In this way, the western hero is the embodiment of possibilities for individual authenticity, not the negative, alienated outsider suggested by the status of "lone wolf", but instead, the positive aspects of outsider-ness in a way that the existentialist text is unable to achieve due to its societal underpinnings. This conception of the western hero accounts for the western outsider's lack of alienation in the negative, existentialist sense which tends to signify social exclusion and threats to society. Co-ordinates such as these are, as Roosevelt's speech makes clear, the ever-present corollary of the "lone wolf" image.

In contrast, the western equates outsider-ness with freedom, even when ostensibly depicting exile in the wilderness, as does *The Searchers*.[109] I return to the topic of freedom in Chapter Four, but here it should be noted that the western hero projects the positive aspects of individual autonomy, the possibility of authentic individual

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[107] Ibid., pp. 20-21. Such sentiments would undoubtedly have been deplored by Roosevelt's uncle, Theodore, a man who fervently proclaimed the value of frontier heroics at the turn of the century in a way that Slotkin describes as 'the tradition...in which the past was romanticised as a prelude to an attempt to reproduce under industrial conditions the mythical order of the idealised frontier' [Slotkin, R., 1992. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*. New York: Harvard University Press. p. 286].

[108] I expand on issues such as these in, for example, Chapter Five's exploration of violence.

[109] Op. cit.

freedom in an escapist, mythical context, rather than the negative connotations invoked by the individualism of the "lone wolf". Understood in these terms, the western hero becomes much more than merely a vehicle for a combination of individualistic values and the culture/heroic traditions from which he derives, though he does, of course, encapsulate all of these.

Existentialism and Algerian Masculinities

Having investigated ideological conceptualisations of masculinity, which work to polarise it into individual and societal forms, and, more importantly, demonstrated the contribution that existentialist concepts can make to ideological understandings of gender, I now wish to turn my attention to the ways in which the overtly masculine and universes of the western and existentialist fiction can be said to mesh. The purpose of this approach is to illustrate a further point of convergence between the two forms, which is at its most pronounced within their individualistically imbued presentations of the outsider figure. It should therefore serve to reinforce the existentialist mode of critique. With this in mind, existentialism can shed further light on the western hero by highlighting the extent to which nationalistic masculinities can be said to influence Camus' presentation of existential heroism.

I initially discuss the gendered nature of the existential universe before focusing on a specific type of existentialist masculinity: the Algerian-ness of Camus' masculine heroes in order to provide a point of comparison with the American-ness of the western hero, and the ways in which the two partially merge in the qualities captured by the phrase "to be a man". In this way, it is possible to isolate points of reference between Algerian masculinities and existentialist representations, so we can establish the extent to which nationalistic elements inform existentialism's version of outsider-ness, the mode of the autonomous in-itself which provides a leading point of contact with the western outsider hero.

The theory of existentialism has frequently been categorised as masculinist in nature, and as a result the fact that de Beauvoir is the only existentialist female writer discussed in this entire thesis is significant, due not only to the gendered focus

required by an analysis of masculine heroism, but also to the fact that she is the only substantive female existentialist in either the philosophical or literary realms. This is not to say that there are no female writers with strong connections to existentialism, for example, Germaine Brée, a writer on French culture and philosophy, who was also a close friend of Camus.[110] Likewise, Mary Warnock has written extensively on existentialism.[111] Neither of these, however, represents a substantial intervention in existentialism as a substantive philosophy, but rather a body of insightful criticism.

De Beauvoir, on the other hand, certainly stands alone in terms of her writing, her intimate relationship with Sartre notwithstanding. Moreover, during an interview with Sartre, she presents an illuminating insight into the underlying ethos of his work and, by association, that of Camus. Sartre had previously portrayed women in the personal realm very positively:[112] 'My relations with women have always been the best... With a woman, the whole of what one is can be present',[113] an interesting statement in view of the bias which de Beauvoir detects in his work: '*one finds traces of macho, even of phallocracy*'.[114] Importantly, Sartre agrees with this assessment: 'You're exaggerating slightly. However, I admit that it's true'.[115] That said, while de Beauvoir discerns machismo in Sartre's attitudes, such as a need to control conversations with women and, at the same time, determine the nature of his relationships with them, in respect of their own relationship, she observes that, '*we have never had an inferiority-superiority relationship, as women so often do*'.[116] In fact, Sartre accounts for this apparent contradiction by arguing that it was his relationship with de Beauvoir which helped to correct his defective attitude towards women, one which he argued to derive from an all-encompassing superiority

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[110] Olivier Todd comments that, '[Camus] would spend time with university professors like Germaine Brée, whom he had met years before in Oran'. Todd, O. 1998. *Albert Camus: A Life*. London: Vintage. p. 222. Her work is frequently cited throughout the thesis, in particular, the collection of essays, Brée, G. ed. 1962. *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall; and, 1974. *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment*. London: Marion Boyars.

[111] For example, Warnock, M. 1965. *The Philosophy of Sartre*. London: Hutchinson, and the substantial analysis of existentialism in Warnock, M. 1978. 3rd ed. *Ethics since 1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[112] Sartre, op. cit. This time with a man, Michel Contat. Whether the gender/nature of the relationship with the interviewer affected Sartre's responses is difficult to establish, however.

[113] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

[114] The italics are retained from the original text.

[115] Ibid., p. 95.

[116] Ibid., p. 97.

complex: 'My situation in relation to women was that of most men of our time. I took it to be individual superiority. But I must confess that I believed I was far superior to my age group in my own sex—in other words, superior to other men'.[117] This arrogance is reflected in his comments concerning Camus, whom he also presents as being macho: 'His language was very racy—so was mine, for that matter—we told filthy stories one after another, and his wife and Simone de Beauvoir pretended to be shocked... We could not go far on the intellectual level because he grew alarmed quickly. In fact, there was a side of him that smacked of the little Algerian guy, very much a hooligan, very funny'.[118] In this sense, Sartre depicts a very masculine universe, even more so in his refusal to admit emotion over the break-up of their friendship, despite admitting that, 'He was probably the last good friend I had'.[119]

Such points illustrate Sartre's somewhat contradictory attitudes, ones which sometimes appear to betray a degree of irony, although this in itself is difficult to determine. For instance, in an ostensibly serious appendix to *What is Literature?* Sartre writes: 'it is with words and not with his troubles that the writer makes his books. If he wants to keep his wife from being disagreeable, it is a mistake to write about her; he would do better to beat her'.[120] Camus, on the other hand, can be said to display less complexity, widely acknowledged to be, as Sartre suggests, macho in thought and action as well as his work. Olivier Todd, for instance, draws on combat imagery when describing Camus' numerous relationships, arguing them to be the equivalent of target practice: 'Often, Camus treated women the way a bombardier pilot treats a site: he would strike and, mission accomplished, he would get away quickly'.[121] For de Beauvoir, though, such convergences between masculine identity and creative output are, in any case, inevitable as, '*All values bear the stamp of masculinity*'.[122] And so, on this account, all creative work is inevitably constrained by pre-determinedly masculine values, irrespective of the gender of the actual producer.

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[117] Ibid., p. 96.
[118] Ibid., pp. 63-64.
[119] Ibid., p. 64.
[120] Sartre, J.-P. 1967. *What is Literature?* London: Methuen. p. 233.
[121] Todd, op. cit., p. 222.
[122] Sartre, 1978, op. cit., p. 107.

With this in mind, both the western and existentialist works cannot fail to be gender-biased in a way that can be paralleled with the previously discussed tendency of writers like Mulvey to analyse gender by employing the very terms that they simultaneously reject. However, much more than this, I wish to argue that both nonetheless promote particular masculine dominant identities, deliberately so in the case of the western's overt promulgation of masculine ideologies and values, less transparently in the case of existentialist works, whose phallocentric portrayals[123] reflect authorial concerns and socio-political context,[124] rather than a deliberate ideological agenda. As previously noted, both forms' reliance on representations of the individual masculine hero, the outsider figure rooted in a tradition of individualism, represents a major point of contact. As this thesis demonstrates, however, such shared concerns can also be analysed in terms which go beyond the purely ideological. This ontological approach, whilst deriving from the philosophy of existentialism, rooted as it is in ontology, is equally applicable to the western hero owing to this common ground, the shared focus on the individual distinct from society.

Moreover, existentialist concepts transcend gendered identities by means of phenomena like authenticity, autonomy and anomie, since they are intended to uncover the nature of being, an essence which is necessarily non-gendered. So whilst the work of male existentialist writers reflects the masculinity of their creators to some extent, such ideas are gender neutral and are, indeed, intended to be. I have asserted that the mode of the in-itself is ascribed to the masculine hero in both existentialist and western representations of the outsider, but this need not necessarily be the case, as the societal modes of the crowd in *The Outsider*[125] discussed in the previous chapter attest. In this way, there is an overlap between ideological presentations and ontological concerns, since in existentialist fiction, the hero is the bearer of the in-itself, but this feature perhaps owes as much to narrative traditions of male heroism, itself rooted in patriarchy, as a desire on the part of

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[123] I deliberately adopt de Beauvoir's terminology here.

[124] After all, it is impossible for any writer to operate in an ideological vacuum, or to separate historical/cultural context from ideas.

[125] Camus, A. 1963. *The Outsider*. Middlesex: Penguin.

writers to make claims for the essentially masculine nature of the in-itself. Suffice it to say at this point that the existentialist outsider and the autonomous lone outsider of America's ideological traditions are closely connected through their ontological roots in the non-societal self, a mode of being with which the male is, at least within Western societies, more easily reconciled.[126]

The masculine orientation of existentialist work does not entirely exclude the feminine, however, although, as for the western, they appear only to the extent that they are relevant to representations of males, in this way connoting gender boundaries and differing modes of societal being-in-the-world, in particular the being-for-others. For example, in Camus' work, both Mother and Marie in *The Outsider*[127] may initially be perceived as marginal to the narrative. Further, they appear to be narrative devices, intended to highlight aspects of the hero's character and ontological mode of being. On the other hand, Meursault's relationships and attitudes towards both can be seen as pivotal to the novel's dramatic structure, and the writer himself noted that, 'Three characters went into the composition of *The Stranger*: two men (one of them me) and a woman'.[128] Likewise, Sartre summarises the novel's plot explicitly in relation to its female characters: 'Meursault buries his mother, takes a mistress and commits a crime'.[129] Furthermore, the hero's overly detached relationships with women[130] are crucial to his later conviction.

Sartre describes this detachment as a facet of Meursault's ontological mode of being-in-the world, the in-itself: 'All that counts is the present and the concrete. He goes to see his mother when he feels like it, and that's that'.[131] With this in mind, Meursault's refusal to tell Marie that he loves her, coupled with the proximity of the relationship initialisation with the death of his mother, are taken to be further evidence of his callousness but, more crucially, have wider ontological implications, conveying as they do his lack of being-for-others which is ultimately responsible for

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[126] I have no doubt that this owes something to the domestication of the female, child bearing and so on, but it is beyond the scope of this present work to discuss such issues.

[127] Camus, 1963, op. cit.

[128] From Camus' *Carnets* [Notebooks], quoted in O'Brien, C. C. 1970. *Camus*. London: Fontana. p. 22.

[129] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'An Explication of The Stranger', in Brée, 1962, op. cit., p. 115.

[130] This view is taken by the majority of the characters in the novel, though whether readers are expected to share it is difficult to ascertain.

[131] Ibid., p. 113,

his alienation and death. Moreover, the prosecutor, representative of the mode of the-one, uses such manifestations of Meursault's alienated state as a basis for his accusations: "'Gentlemen of the jury, I would have you note that on the next day after his mother's funeral that man was visiting the swimming-pool, starting a liaison with a girl, and going to see a comic film. That is all that I wish to say'".[132] That said, the fallacious nature of the mode of the-one, which here condemns a man on the basis of his alienation from societal norms as much as murder, is thrown into sharp relief by the defence lawyer's subsequent enquiry: "Is my client on trial for having buried his mother, or for killing a man?"[133]

Marie's role in Meursault's life is also crucial in the sense that her testimony is partially responsible for his conviction, though this is not a deliberate act. As Meursault observes on her performance as a witness, 'all of a sudden, Marie burst into tears. He'd [the prosecutor] got it all wrong, she said; it wasn't a bit like that really, he'd bullied her into saying the opposite of what she meant'.[134] Here, the inauthenticity of societal modes of being becomes even more apparent, connoted here by Maria's lack of authenticity. She tries too hard to exist in a state of being-for-others by attempting to defend Meursault and simultaneously being over-responsive to the prosecutor at the expense of her own authenticity. This sensitivity to the reactions and ideas of others is diametrically opposed to the autonomous mode of being, which relies on a sense of self to the exclusion of others, as illustrated by the western's representation of the power conferred by authenticity as exemplified by the western hero. This power is contrasted with the weakness of the others, community members who therefore require the autonomous hero. These societal beings are reliant on the external validation attendant upon the mentality of the crowd, as I argue throughout the thesis, and are therefore rendered powerless.

While *The Outsider* portrays in Meursault a man who is apparently incapable of fully evolved relationships with women, it does not necessarily reflect authorial macho attitudes towards women, although it is certainly possible to read the novel in this

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[132] Camus, 1963. op. cit., p. 95.
[133] Ibid., p. 97.
[134] Ibid., p. 95.

manner. After all, detachment is essential to the absurdity of the hero and his situation as previously noted. As a result, he is indifferent to all human contact regardless of gender, a feature symptomatic of his alienation. Nor is this treatment necessarily male-orientated, though it does focus on themes which could be characterised as intrinsically masculine, such as justice and violence, themes which not coincidentally predominate in other overtly masculine genres such as the western and the war film. Moreover, Camus explores violence partly in feminine terms in *The Just*, in which female terrorists' attitudes towards violence, death and the slaughter of "innocents" are embedded within the play's philosophical framework.[135] Nonetheless, when taken as a whole, Camus' concerns do seem largely masculine and his characters correspondingly so.

However, such characters are perhaps less productively discussed in terms of masculinity than in relation to their function as vehicles for specifically existentialist ideas which transcend gender, for they are intended as philosophical concepts with widespread application. This undoubtedly holds true in the case of Meursault who is primarily an absurdist hero operating within a correspondingly absurd universe connoting a sense of nihilism, a further point of contact with some westerns such as *Day of the Outlaw*[136] discussed in the previous chapter. With this in mind, a brief discussion of the specifically nationalistic elements of Camus' portrayals of masculinity will shed some light on the gender portrayals on offer as well as providing a point of contact with the American masculinities previously discussed.

As Roger Quillot notes, 'Essays, short stories, novels: all of Camus's works are related to Algeria and are rooted there... There is one exception... Camus situated *The Fall*...in the grey mists of Amsterdam',[137] while Camus himself highlighted the Algerian context of his work. For instance, he described the characteristics of Meursault as those particular to Algerian men who, 'live like my hero, in complete

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[135] Camus, A. 1970. *The Just; The Possessed*. Middlesex: Penguin. I discuss the issues raised by the play in Chapter Five.

[136] *Day Of The Outlaw*, 1958. Directed by Andre de Toth. USA: United Artists.

[137] Roger Quillot, 'Albert Camus's Algeria', in Brée, 1962, op. cit., 1962. p. 38.

simplicity',[138] while describing his connection to Algeria as essentially an emotional one: 'Such is my long-standing link with Algeria, one that will doubtless never end, and that keeps me from being completely lucid'.[139] The nationalistic elements of Camus' writing have also been emphasised by other critics of his work, the Algerian context taken to be crucial despite his voluntary exile from the country, a linkage which for Brée is entirely logical: 'our physical and intellectual life is indeed shaped by the space around us...to say, like some commentators, that his own culture was entirely European and French is to omit all the aspects of culture anthropologists have obliged us to take into account'.[140] Moreover, for Tony Judt, '[Camus] was born in Algiers and grew up there, drawing on his experiences of that time and place for much of his best work',[141] and thus he analyses Camus' writing style in terms of national characteristics: 'in spite of the reiterated insistence on the antithesis between the rootless, cold Parisian world and his own sunny, terrestrial, non-judgemental Mediterranean sources, Camus was anything but a southerner in the conventional sense in which he himself occasionally used the term. His style was cool, distant and, (with the exception of some magnificent, lyrical passages in his last novel) studiedly unemotional'.[142] This, then, would seem to suggest that Algeria was crucial to Camus' work on a thematic and contextual level, rather than stylistically because, as previously established, Camus' style most closely resembles American traditions.

At the same time, the issue of colonialism is one that is impossible to entirely overlook when discussing the Algerian context. O'Brien, for one, contends that Camus' work is deeply colonial in its portrayal of Arabs, thereby betraying his *pied noir*[143] status. In support, he cites the fact that the Arab in *The Outsider*[144] is

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[138] From notes to the 1956 preface to *The Stranger* in Camus, 1970, op. cit. p. 335-336. Camus' words are taken from a 1946 interview with Gaëton Picon.

[139] From 'A Short Guide to Towns Without a Past', in the collection of essays entitled, 'Summer', in Camus, A., ed. Thody, P. 1970. *Lyrical and Critical Essays*. New York: Vintage. p. 144.

[140] Brée, 1974, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

[141] Judt, T. 1998. *The Burden of Responsibility*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. p. 116.

[142] Ibid., pp. 103-104.

[143] Camus was one of the most famous of these but was of mixed parentage and without fixed ideas on Algerian independence. Judt describes Camus' family origins in a way which emphasises the fluctuating nature of national identities and categories: 'Camus's own father was exiled thrice over: he came from a family of immigrants from German-occupied Alsace, had moved from France to Algeria, and would return again to France, to die there on the Western Front and be buried in a remote town in Brittany. Camus's mother was descended from Minorcan immigrants, a Spanish connection in which he took great pride. North Africa, too, was thus at best a contingent home'. Ibid., p. 104.

[144] Camus, 1963, op. cit.

unnamed, thus distancing the reader from the crime and, by association, the victim, who is thus rendered expendable: 'the reader does not quite feel that Meursault has killed a man. He has killed an Arab'.[145] While O'Brien acknowledges that Camus himself would undoubtedly reject this interpretation, he argues that 'the relative substantiality of Arabs and Europeans in the text carries its own message',[146] although again, authorial concerns do not necessarily reflect prejudice as previously discussed in relation to gender and authorship. However, even more crucially, O' Brien cites Meursault's execution for the crime in support of his case, seeing it as entirely unrealistic in colonial Algeria:

> French justice in Algeria would almost certainly not have condemned a European to death for shooting an Arab who had drawn a knife on him and who had shortly before stabbed another European. And most certainly Meursault's defence counsel would have made his central plea that of self-defence, turning on the frightening picture of an Arab with a knife... The court is presented as if it were a court in a European town dealing with an incident involving members of a homogenous population...the presentation in this way of a court in Algeria trying a crime of this kind involves the novelist in the presentation of a myth: the myth of French Algeria.[147]

For O'Brien, then, Camus' status as a French Algerian seriously affects his treatment of sensitive issues, which leads him into being, 'rigorous in his treatment of the psychology of Meursault...and lax in his presentation of the society'.[148] Brée, however, takes issue with this perspective on Camus' nationality, citing variously: 'the lack of serious documentation, the faulty quotations, erroneous statements, and arbitrary inferences that seriously mar an essay in which the author is anxious to bring his own interpretation of Camus into line with his own rather schematic view of Western guilt'.[149]

Additionally, Brée discerns Algerian-ness on the personal as well as the thematic level: 'Camus's *literary* culture was European; his sensibility and general approach

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[145] O'Brien, op. cit., p. 25.
[146] Ibid., p. 25.
[147] Ibid., pp. 22-23.
[148] Ibid., p. 22.
[149] Brée, 1974, op. cit., p. 151. That said, she is not entirely condemnatory of O'Brien's work, instead prefacing this passage with comments about, 'the questionable, though sympathetic and refreshing, interpretation of his [Camus'] attitudes. Ibid., p. 151. Both of these comments take the form of endnotes.

to human beings was specifically marked by his Algerian upbringing',[150] and again, 'Camus's sense of human needs and ways of life was shaped in part by the distinctive character of that population... Tempers were hot, violence quick to erupt, but feelings were spontaneous and direct; and there were simple codes'.[151] This is an approach taken by a number of commentators besides the previously mentioned views of Sartre. For instance, Jean Grenier notes during a personal encounter, 'the pride, so strong in Camus, that Grenier himself diagnosed as "castillanerie" (i.e. a deep-seated hostility to condescension in any form),[152] while Camus described himself as "a man of passion" an assessment with which Brée concurs: 'there was certainly in his instinctive way of life a streak of the Spanish "point of honour," of the independence subsumed in the Spanish "hombre," which echoes in the Algerian worker's "to be a man".[153] Further, she argues that this phrase, one also mentioned in relation to American masculinities, 'meant many things in the working-class milieu of Belcourt. At bottom, the words referred to the plain facts of life which Camus had learnt to confront as a child: one was born, one worked and died'.[154] This can be characterised primarily as a non-verbal, action-based attitude to life reflected in both his characters, and use of language:

> From the outset, then, Camus was aware of a realm of human experience that lay beyond the reach of words, outside all conscious elaboration... Camus' characters, with notable exceptions, are men and women of few words... And he himself preferred terse understatement and simple language to Sartre's runaway rhetoric and often abstruse vocabulary.[155]

Indeed, the sense of the absurdity of human existence so essential to Camus' work and typifying the essence of existentialism, can be found to originate in the poverty of his Algerian upbringing, echoed by the words of his character Caligula: 'Men die and they are not happy'.[156] Verbal and emotional reticence is also observed by Grenier, again reinforcing arguments about Camus' gender conditioning, the

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[150] Ibid., p. 81.
[151] Ibid., p. 199.
[152] Ibid., p. 130.
[153] Ibid., p. 128.
[154] Ibid., p. 126.
[155] Ibid., pp. 63-64.
[156] Camus, 1965. *Caligula; Cross Purpose*. Middlesex: Penguin. p. 34.

Algerian notion of "what it is to be a man": '[He] answered my questions concerning his health only in monosyllables… Silence fell between each remark',[157] though Brée attributes this once again to pride instead of Grenier's rather more expansive conclusion that Camus therefore had 'the makings of a revolutionary'.[158]

I have already demonstrated the non-verbal nature of the cowboy hero, as well as his pride and honour, features shared with the existentialist hero and further signifying their shared ontological characteristics, but I now wish to take this claim further by proposing that, in addition, these qualities are embedded in the concepts of both heroism and gender, encapsulated by the phrase "what it is to be a man". Further, this applies to both American and Algerian masculinities. Faludi sums up "traditional" American masculinity as inner-directed as previously stated: 'The internal qualities once said to embody manhood—surefootedness, inner strength, confidence of purpose'.[159] However, these equally apply to the type of masculinity practiced and portrayed by Camus, invoking qualities such as verbal and emotional reticence, the superiority of action and, if necessary, violence, over cerebral responses, chivalrous attitudes towards the weak and so on. In this way, while distinctive nationalistic characteristics can be discerned in both the masculinities of the western and existentialist literature, such features are not crucial in the sense that gender is.

It has been claimed that existentialist concepts can ultimately transcend considerations of gender. Additionally, the quest for authentic values central to existentialism can be equated with the inner-directed masculinity identified by Faludi, a preference for engagement and commitment over the superficiality evident in outer-directedness, that desire for external validation which she argues to be increasingly prevalent in the cultural representations of the latter half of the twentieth through to the twenty-first centuries which can be allied to differing modes of ontological being-in-the-world as previously argued. This form of gender critique is not confined to feminist critiques, though, as the ideas of Kimmel and Riesman illustrate towards the beginning of this chapter. Indeed, all such ideas about

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[157] Ibid., pp. 129-130.
[158] Ibid., p. 130.
[159] Faludi, op. cit., p. 35.

American masculinity draw heavily on Riesman's model that, 'Individuals were no longer 'inner-directed' as they had been in the period of nineteenth-century capitalist accumulation, but were increasingly 'other-directed',[160] a trend which both existentialist and western narratives resist, owing to their investment in the autonomous individual, the outsider figure.

Lastly, "what it is to be a man" can be seen as an essentially classless formulation. Certainly, the working-class nature of Camus' origins are always emphasised when discussing the type of masculinity he embodied, further demonstrated by his work's tendency to marginalise middle-class values in favour of political action.[161] However, the close connection between Algerian and American notions of "what it is to be a man" suggests that this need not necessarily be the case. Ideal American masculinities are, in their purest form, inherently classless, both according to the premises of the American Dream and as embodied by the ambitious individualistic man of market capitalism represented by the American cowboy hero. Indeed, for Wright, '[he] symbolized freedom and equality, the end of class privilege, the end of sacred duties',[162] a phenomenon whose prominence in American society has, accordingly, been attributed to its frontier history: 'Inherited titles seemed archaic and traditional class distinctions less meaningful in a land where a man's worth to society was judged by his own skills; a democratic social system with greater possibilities for upward mobility followed naturally'.[163] As such, while the essentially working-class nature of Camus' version of masculinity can plausibly be upheld, such representations could also be seen to have more in common with American masculinities than European, class-based formulations. Consequently, yet another point of overlap is evident between western and existentialist conceptualisations of masculinity.

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[160] Jancovich, op. cit,, p. 21.
[161] Although Camus' occupation as a writer might seem to contradict such alleged working-class masculinity, he was opposed to overly philosophical approaches, preferring the engaged forms of writing, in particular journalism, over the cerebral type philosophy of, for example, Sartre.
[162] Wright, W. 2001. *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory*. London: Sage. p. 3. I will undertake a detailed discussion of such issues in Chapter Five.
[163] Ray Allen Billington, 'America's Frontier Heritage', cited by Martin Ridge in, 'Frederick Jackson Turner and His Ghost: The Writing of Western History', Hench, J. B. et al. 1991. *Writing the History of the American West*: reprinted from the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 101 (April 1991/1), p. 67.

Finally, I am aware that Camus' affinity with the natural environment is one that has been overlooked in this discussion of the Algerian connection, despite its centrality as a metaphor for both alienation and absurdity, formulations which can, significantly, also be applied to the role played by the exile and wilderness in the western, in which freedom signifies the futility of societal norms and, at the same time, the threat they present to individual autonomy. Ontological interpretations such as these go beyond the ideologically orientated findings proposed, for example, Wright's structuralist binaries in relation to wilderness imagery.[164] However, since this is a topic which overlaps with nature as projected by the western, it will be discussed in the next chapter in connection with existential freedom.

Conclusion

During the course of this discussion of male gender representations and their relationship to existentialist concepts such as authenticity and its negation, I have established that while there is a case to be made for multiple forms of masculinity, the prototype most relevant to the project at hand, namely, the American and existentialist variants, is less complex than might be suggested by the vast cross-cultural array of possible masculinities. It amounts, perhaps, to a simple binary: social versus non social forms, which in existentialist terms become a clash between differing modes of being-in-the-world. The fact that America, a diverse set of nations, is far less rooted in a historical past than other countries may go some way towards explaining this phenomenon. Moreover, while the section devoted to this topic has tended to revolve around the polemical ideas of Faludi, she is only the latest in a long line of commentators who have taken the view that American masculinity is fairly polarised—while certainly influential—in nature. This has been argued to have deeply ideological, and in some ways disturbing, implications, both for the fictional representations which it promotes to the rest of the world through its multifarious communications outlets, and for the wider political and cultural spheres. It is undoubtedly the case that in the current climate, widely concerned with the twin issues of terrorism and globalisation, America as a nation is, rightly or wrongly, blamed for many and various problems throughout the world, not least because of its

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[164] I offer an exposition of these in Chapter One.

economic domination of global markets and its willingness to secure such interests by aggressive means if necessary. It is here that the spirit of American masculinity has most resonance, recurring images involving domination and aggression outweighing alternative, less belligerent versions of manhood. In this way, it can be argued that America's projects an aggressively expansionist face to the world, one familiar from those images of mythical frontier masculinity when men sought to subdue and destroy in a bid for land and power. This type is the 'American man who dominates his world. If anything, such images have been inflated as superstars prevail, again and again, on athletic courts, the battlefields and cityscapes of giants'.[165]

The lone hero embodying a particular set of American values has predominated in popular filmic representations throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Indeed, Wright goes so far as to claim that, 'Most American popular stories…are in some sense versions of Westerns, because they are always versions of individualism', arguing that, for example, 'action films…while they are not set in the Wild West…are still focused on the mythical image of the cowboy as someone who acts independently, defies authorities, and "shoots from the hip".[166] Versions of heroism such as these, which I have elsewhere associated with Roosevelt's designation of "lone wolf", are rooted in a long tradition of individualism. As such, they contain negative potentialities which threaten sociality. Ontological readings, on the other hand, suggest the western hero's individualism to project a positive mode of being-in-the-world enabled by its non-societal context, suggesting the possibility of an authentic self untainted by societal forms of being. In this way, the process is reversed because the societal self becomes detrimental, since it as an inauthentic mode of being. Ultimately, however, the western's resolutely unrealistic context signals an underlying affirmation of the societal modes of being-in-the-world.

The existentialist hero, too, is essentially a lone figure, but in contrast to the western hero, one whose social context renders him problematic to society and thus subject to alienation and punishment. In common with the western hero, however, his power

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[165] Faludi, op. cit., pp. 38-39.
[166] Wright, op. cit., p. 9.

resides in his struggle for authenticity, successful for the western outsider, unsuccessfully so for the existentialist outsider. The implication of these representations, again, is that the powerful man is autonomous, which in turn implies that masculine power is debased by human connections. Certainly it is difficult to imagine an existentialist hero having anything but the most superficial relationships with others, even friendship being apparently problematic. The entire thrust of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*,[167] after all, is that Raskolnikoff has to act alone in order to carry out his crimes. His relationships with others threaten to compromise the effective executive of his crimes although the overall message is less bleak: it is only through the love of the woman Sonia that his eventual redemption is made possible. For Camus' existentialist heroes, however, others do not make redemption possible. Indeed, it is Meursault's essentially disengaged reactions to others that ultimately condemn him. He is essentially alone at the beginning of the novel and equally so at the end, the only difference being that at the end he has made peace with himself, resigned to the absurdity of his fate. The final lines of the novel testify to his entirely alienated attitude towards others, as well as illustrating the solitariness on which his existence has hitherto depended: 'For all to be accomplished, for me to feel less lonely, all that remained was to hope that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration'.[168] Although Meursault claims to be happy at this point, it is safe to say that this is not happiness in the usual understanding of the term. This response could more readily, perhaps, be viewed as a sign of emotional disturbance. To take this view, however, would be to fail to judge the book on its own philosophical terms. In the light of this, an alternative interpretation would be to suggest that this emotion is instead a sign that true authenticity and a requisite rejection of conventional notions about appropriate behaviour has been fully attained, presumably the ultimate goal of an existentialist novel, unless its aim is to prove that such authenticity is, in actuality, impossible for a life lived amongst others. This is a task that the western, on the other hand, can accomplish with ease due to its non-societal context, as I go on to discuss shortly.

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[167] Dostoyevsky, op. cit.
[168] Camus, 1963. op. cit., p. 120.

Both western and existentialistic heroes, however, are rendered more powerful by their ontological mode of being, the non-societal mode which entails non-sociality, existence external to or, in the case of the existentialist hero, marginal to societal configurations. In this way both are ontologically empowered by their non-social status, and it is here that existentialist readings of the western hero render him much more than merely the bearer of ideological values. This is because the western hero's non-societal context renders him not merely an individualistic outsider but, much more importantly, the most distilled version of authenticity, the autonomous individual in its positive sense, available in fictional form.

Representations of the authentic existentialist outsider, meanwhile, have to negotiate societal frameworks which necessarily dilute their presentations of autonomy. Divorced from the societal concerns which problematise existentialist attempts to convey the autonomous individual, the western hero contains the essential in-itself for he exists in a context which does not require connection with the concerns or ontological states of others at all, other than in the polarised sense of non-societal versus societal states of being. The only requirement of the western hero is authenticity, the expression of his autonomy which accords him special capabilities, as exemplified by, for example, his frequent role as judge, jury and executioner, his autonomous status rendering ethical considerations irrelevant, as I go on to explore in Chapter Five. This focus on the needs of the autonomous hero to the exclusion of all others can be seen as absurd, as I go on to consider, and he is certainly alienated, if this is to be defined as a state of exile and exclusion from others. However, whereas the state of alienation is presented in negative terms by existentialist works, as a necessary corollary of authenticity within a societal context and therefore likely to be punished, in westerns, it becomes a state of total freedom, an ideal state in other words which is denied to— and necessarily unachievable for—all others. With this in mind, the significance of freedom and individualism, both for the western and in relation to existentialist interpretations, form the backbone of the next chapter.

Chapter Four
Existential Freedom and the Western Hero

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the concept of freedom in relation to existentialist conceptualisations, which suggest freedom and autonomy to be analogous within the western's narrative framework. Understood in this way, freedom is not only an ideologically informed concept as frequently asserted but, more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the type of freedom which underpins the western hero's activities can be seen as an expression of his autonomous state, as the exercise of an authentic state of being. As such, existentialist ideas add another layer of meaning to pre-existent, ideologically informed formulations of freedom. Underlying this approach, then, is the assumption that the concept of freedom is vital to both the western and existentialist narrative frameworks, as articulated through representations of outsider-ness, and that it is therefore crucial to a critique of both.

With this in mind, I examine those aspects of freedom which specifically relate to the two forms, together with their implications for ethics and ideology as they relate to the individual subject, whilst applying existentialist analysis in order to view such arguments from an alternative perspective. This approach draws on the complex interaction between European and American ideas established in Chapter Two, a dynamic which can reasonably be viewed as at least partially responsible for the affinity that I have argued to exist between existentialism and the western hero outsider archetype. Indeed, James Naremore assumes the intersecting nature of existentialism and American culture in the post Second World War era to be self-evident: 'The importance of existentialism to the period has long been recognized'.[1] This interchange is in turn inflected through their shared focus on the solitary individual as distinct from societal formations and others, whilst also in part highlighting the distinctive contribution made by existentialist concepts to a deeper

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[1] James Naremore, 'American Film Noir: The History of an Idea', in eds. Hollows, J., Hutchings, P. & Jancovich, M., 2000. *The Film Studies Reader*. London: Arnold. p.108.

understanding of the western's representations of heroism, as demonstrated throughout the thesis. As such, this interchange underpins many of the assumptions made in this chapter.

I consider the concept of existential freedom in relation to a range of pertinent issues, in particular its implications for the ideology of individualism and, accordingly, ethics, which in itself becomes problematic when placed alongside existentialist ideas. If free acts are to be seen as the expression of autonomy, of the authentic self and therefore constituents of the non-social self, then ethics, which is after all a set of social values and norms, becomes irrelevant. In this way, it makes no sense to ascribe moral values to the western hero's activities, a view which therefore recasts his violent activities as non-social and therefore non-ethical, as established in Chapter Five. This existentialist interpretation of the western hero's acts, then, counters ideological interpretations which formulate such acts in terms of individualism, which places them firmly within a social context and thus subjects them to ethical co-ordinates. Once again, the non-social context becomes crucial to the mode of autonomy projected by the western hero, informing his non social state of being, which I have defined elsewhere as the in-itself.

The rationale for this approach originates in the degree of relevance that existentialist thought has for analysis of the western and, accordingly, American culture, owing not only to the outsider archetype already established, but also the related conceptualisations of freedom which lie embedded in America's deepest ideological structures, most notably the strong individualistic strand articulated by the western's representations of individual heroism as contrasted with social beings, which existentialist analysis of the type undertaken in this thesis seeks to recast in ontological terms, as additionally exemplifying differing modes of being-in-the-world. Therefore, this mode of critique presupposes the western genre and the culture from which it derives to be in many ways inseparable, which accordingly underpins the discussions of American individualism which appear in the following pages.

One of the most notable features of the western in both visual and narrative terms is the privileged status accorded to a particular, individualistic version of freedom.

Further, the concept can plausibly be characterised as a cornerstone of American ideology and the basis on which the previously discussed myth of the American dream—so intrinsic to the American psyche—has been constructed. Moreover, it could be held at least partly responsible for the popularity that the western has consistently enjoyed in global terms, a phenomenon for which it is difficult to offer a convincing alternative rationale, other than the enduring popularity of the action/adventure format.[2] America can be seen to symbolise a power-based form of freedom, that of the market economy, 'an individualised society...in which people necessarily compete rather than co-operate',[3] and it is therefore no accident that its most characteristic film genre, the western, supports the significance of this identification. Since the cowboy hero arguably symbolises the individualistic mode of freedom in its purest form, it has become synonymous with the concept in both the political and cultural spheres, a linkage that Wright makes fully explicit in his observation that: 'President Clinton...once gave cowboy hats as gifts to all world leaders at a global economic summit. He argued for more free trade at that summit, greater market individualism, and the cowboy hats, as the leaders understood, were symbolic of that argument...the cowboy myth is a model for social action'.[4] In the light of this widely accepted conflation of individualism and freedom in both the western and American ideology, the highly influential frontier thesis put forward by Turner,[5] a work which has traditionally been regarded as, 'an American masterpiece because it influenced the way the American public sees, feels, and thinks about itself, it's past and its future',[6] comprises an important element in this chapter, since it provides the basis for my ontological analysis of the individual in the western.

In light of this, the concept of freedom also lies at the core of all forms of existentialist philosophy, both in ontological terms and as the basis for its ethical

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[2] It is not being claimed here that the western is the only American film genre that has transferred successfully into the global market, but the extent to which it, and its variants, have been successful in this indicates a wide-ranging thematic appeal.

[3] Ryan, M & Kellner, D. 1990. *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film.* Indianopolis: Indiana University Press. p. 227.

[4] Wright, W. 2001. *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory.* London: Sage. p. 8.

[5] Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', in Munns, J & Rajan, G. eds. 1995. *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice.* London: Longman. pp. 59-78.

[6] Martin Ridge, 'Frederick Jackson Turner and His Ghost: The Writing of Western History', in Hench, J. B. et al. 1991. *Writing the History of the American West:* reprinted from the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 101 (April 1991/1). p. 65.

system, due to its analogous focus on the individual subject. Further, the commonalities between French literary existentialist and the western's conceptualisation of the concept owe much to their respective secularity and rejection of grand narratives. In this way, both are situated very much in the twentieth century; their focus on individual concerns in a rational and Godless universe a reflection of this rejection, a development which Wright links directly to the emergence of individualism and the market economy: 'According to individualistic assumptions, "naturally" rational individuals are also "naturally" autonomous and they "naturally" pursue their private self-interests...they will "naturally" create a decent civil society with no need for sacred moral rules'.[7] Similarly, Sartre attributes the central tenets of existentialism to a focus on individual self-determination: 'If existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom'. And again, 'if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimise our conduct',[8] a statement that is equally applicable to the strand of westerns examined in this thesis.

Consequently, the manner in which this individualistic conceptualisation of freedom is conveyed by existentialist literature is central to my ontological analysis of the ideologically inflected form of freedom transmitted by the western, since both promote the individual as its ideal embodiment. This accordingly influences the ways in which they treat freedom, and partly informs my analysis of the western hero in view of such concepts. Approached in ideological terms, representations of this type reinforce the status quo by representing conflict between individual interests and those of society as "natural" and "inevitable". Other people are conceived as automatically problematic due to the threat they present to self-interest, thus "naturally" generating conflict. This notion appears at its most extreme in Sartre's phrase: 'Hell is other people',[9] but is no less pronounced in the emphasis that both existentialism and westerns place upon the narrative disjunction between the individual/hero and others, and the supposedly inevitable consequences arising from

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[7] Wright, op. cit., p. 28.
[8] Sartre, J.-P. 1990. *Essays in Existentialism*. New York: Citadel. p. 41.
[9] Sartre, J.- P. 1955. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. New York: Vintage. p. 47. This is Garcin's dialogue in the play *No Exit*.

this opposition. However, as already proposed, when viewed in existentialist terms, such oppositions can assume greater significance than the purely ideological, as they can be seen to reflect conflict generated by differing modes of non-societal and societal being, having further implications for lived existence in-the-world and alternative ontological possibilities, such as autonomy, in addition to issues such as ethics. I will return to such points later in the chapter, however.

As a result, I argue that both the western and existentialist literature represent freedom by means of themes and characters and, even more importantly for my purposes, their emphasis on, and employment of, space and environment. After all, visual signification is one of the primary ways in which westerns communicate a sense of freedom, the opposition of wilderness and civilisation crucial in both visual and narrative terms. At the same time, Camus' distinctive usage of the Algerian terrain is equally intrinsic to his depictions of existential absurdity, and the central place that freedom holds in his work. All of these can in part be attributed to his childhood in Algeria as suggested in the previous chapter: '[As] a young man he had known many forms of freedom: freedom felt in the well-being of a body at home in its world, which had brought him hours of happiness; freedom in human dealings of the give and take of everyday living in the poor sections of Algiers',[10] in addition to experiences gained elsewhere: 'the freedom of speculative thinking, the freedom of the artist, the freedom of friendship'.[11] Equally, the western and existentialist literature work to reinforce the thesis that it is impossible to realise individual freedom in a civilised context. They do so by presenting the "logical" conflict generated by the co-existence of nature, be it environmental or behavioural, and the civilised. These characteristics are generally attributed to the ideology of individualism in the case of westerns, but an existentialist critique provides an alternative perspective, by recasting such ideological conflicts into ontological terms, as signifying tensions between social and non social forms of being: the authenticity of autonomous forms of being-in-the-world, and the inauthenticity intrinsic to societal being, respectively. The depiction of these polarities is made possible by the non societal context of the western which the societal setting of existentialist texts, in contrast, renders problematic. In this way, representations of

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[10] Brée, G. 1974. *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment.* London: Calder & Boyars. p. 148.
[11] Ibid., p. 148.

space and context as symbols of freedom in both the western and existentialist works become much more than simply ideological signifiers.

Finally, it should be noted that analysis of the ways in which individualism is embedded in the outsider figure's alienation from societal formations are woven throughout, both in relation to existentialist literature and the western, together with ontological readings of the outsider as alienated autonomous being. In this way, then, the overlapping spheres of the ethical, ideological and political are pivotal to this chapter.

Existential Space and Context

Social context, often characterised by means of visual and environmental imagery, is crucial to western filmic and existentialist presentations of freedom, particularly as it relates to the individual. Moreover, critics of the western typically locate this as the source of the western hero's power, since it makes possible a thoroughgoing presentation of individualism. Correspondingly, existentialist presentations of freedom are constrained by their societal context, as previously observed. The western hero, meanwhile, tends to draw his being from an embryonic societal setting, in contradistinction to the more complex social structure characteristic of the detective or policeman's urbanised anti-hero persona, although parallels certainly exist in the sense of their evocative use of the physical space of the wilderness, urban or otherwise. Indeed, the sterile space on the edge of the city, which provides the setting for *Dirty Harry*'s[12] cathartic scene, reveals the character's full transformation into urban cowboy while simultaneously illuminating both the connotations and visual imagery of the urban wilderness. Here the potential for a symbiotic relationship between cop and cowboy reaches its full apotheosis.[13] This overlap between cowboy and cop is no accident. Both figures derive from the same archetype: the action hero who flourishes in an environment where individualistic skills are a prerequisite for survival. The competent execution of these tends to be antithetical to complex legal and ethical structures, hence the emphasis placed on the maverick figure operating on

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[12] *Dirty Harry*, 1971. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Warner Bros.
[13] It is no coincidence that the former Western star Clint Eastwood plays this hybrid character.

the borderlines of the societal formation.[14] Although society is necessarily much more advanced in the cop genre than the western, the emphasis on death within the sterile space—effectively the wilderness on the outer reaches of the city—provides a point of contact between the two apparently disparate filmic contexts.[15]

However, once existentialist concepts are applied to the western's treatment of the relationship between the hero and society, the full significance of both societal and environmental context becomes much more pronounced than it is on the former, ideologically informed reading. This is because an existentialist critique foregrounds the fundamental incompatibility between subject and society in ontological terms, as having significance for both subject identity and formation, as I go on to examine in relation to notions of autonomy and, correspondingly, the alienation generated by societal demands upon the autonomous individual. Ideological formulations, on the other hand, see such representations as serving a purely ideological function, reflective of the need to exercise restraints over individual freedoms, necessitating conformity to societal frameworks such as the justice system, to which I return in the next chapter.

Imagery connoting the sterility of nature also holds true for existential depictions, as illustrated by Kafka's novel, *The Trial* in which two "gentlemen" murder Joseph K in the book's final sequences. Once again, nature is deadened and debased by its contact with the urban, and so the borderlines of convergence are correspondingly negative:

> they came quickly out of the town, which at this point merged without transition, into the open fields. A small stone quarry, deserted and bleak, lay quite near to a still completely urban house... The two of them laid K. on the ground, propped him up against the boulder, and settled his head upon it... Then one of them opened his

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[14] The hero of the 2002-03 US TV series *24* (Fox Broadcasting Company), Jack Bauer is yet another variation in a long line of mavericks, in this latest incarnation a government agent who gets results by unconventional and sometimes plainly unlawful means while operating on the outer fringes of the system.
[15] There are numerous permutations in the usage of wilderness in the cop and crime genres, a sterile space which enables a reversion/regression to the law of the frontier that is so plainly evident in the environment of the western. It is invariably on the outskirts of town or more isolated locations such as forests or deserts where, for instance, bodies are disposed of and confrontations played out, frequently in a ritualistic manner analogous, again, to the western. See, for example, the symbolic and physical significance of the desert in *Casino*, [1995, Martin Scorsese, USA: Universal].

> frock-coat...drew a long, thin, double-edged butcher's knife, held it
> up, and tested the cutting edges in the moonlight.[16]

The more cerebral existential hero operates in a manner similar to that of the individualistic western hero, reflective of Camus' individualistic attitude towards the relationship between human beings and social structure, as evidenced by his assertion that, 'I do not think that man is by nature a social animal'.[17] The societal derivation of the existentialist hero differs greatly from that of the western hero, though. He exists on the margins or external to a highly sophisticated—and by implication corrupt—societal formation, hence the necessity for legalised punishment when the failure to conform arises, again reflecting Camus' belief that, 'he [man] cannot live henceforth outside of society, whose laws are necessary to his physical survival'.[18] Significantly, the western outsider makes such an existence not only possible, but also, ideal. In this way, human potential for individual autonomy and its implications for lived existence external to the boundaries of society can be invoked much more fully by the western's narrative than that achieved by existentialist texts. Of course, this is only made possible by the western's essentially mythical setting, but this does not render its treatment of ontological issues any less valid in philosophical terms. In fact, the western's unrealistic and isolated setting is ideal for abstract analysis of a philosophical kind, because it simplifies potentially complicated existential states.

Be that as it may, marginality is integral to the nature of the hero's existential authenticity, and thus the individual is presented in opposition to, and thus alienated by, the community in, for example, *The Outsider*.[19] Here, the community threatens and destroys Meursault's autonomy of thought and action and is threatened in turn by

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[16] Kafka, F. 1953. London: Penguin. p. 250.

[17] Albert Camus, 'Reflections on the Guillotine', in Camus, A. 1988. *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*. New York: Vintage. p. 178

[18] Ibid., p. 178. Interestingly, Camus' ideas on the intrinsic unsociability of man is reminiscent of the Hobbesian view, that political structures are essential in order to preserve social order without which individual needs would constantly conflict, leading in turn to his notion that life on this basis would be, 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short', Hobbes, T. 1981. *Leviathan*. London: Penguin p. 186. The western can be compared to this state of nature situation in which 'every man is Enemy to every man...wherein every man live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withal...no Society; and...continualle feare, and danger of violent death', ibid., p. 186. From this situation arises the need for a strong lawgiver, the hero prior to the establishment of a fully evolved justice system. I offer further analysis of Camus' views in relation to justice and violence in the next chapter.

[19] Camus, A. 1963. Tr. Stuart Gilbert. *The Outsider*. Middlesex: Penguin.

his assertion of the right to think, feel and act authentically. This attempt to realise autonomy ultimately results in the hero's death. Camus describes Meursault's attempts at self-assertion as symptomatic of a refusal, 'to play the game. In this respect, he is foreign to the society in which he lives'.[20] Furthermore, 'this is why some readers have been tempted to look upon him as a piece of social wreckage',[21] an attitude with which Camus, however, disagrees: 'He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings, and immediately society feels threatened'.[22] For O'Brien, however, this interpretation works to 'sanctify the hero',[23] in a way that is contrary to the complexities of the novel, which, he argues, shows Meursault to be 'indifferent to truth as he is to cruelty',[24] as opposed to the epitome of existential authenticity. Nevertheless, Meursault is presented as marginalized and authentically motivated, and is consequently punished.

In his later work, though, Camus' emphasis shifts from this treatment of individualism as ethically superior towards a more socially based and communitarian view in which the potential for authenticity is no longer confined to the individual but is, on the contrary, communitarian. In a letter to Roland Barthes, for instance, Camus makes the significance of the outsider's relationship to societal context explicit when discussing the shift of emphasis between The Outsider and his later work: 'Compared to *The Stranger*, *The Plague* does, beyond any possible discussion, represent the transition from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggles must be shared. If there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it is in the direction of solidarity and participation'.[25] That said, Alexandre de Gramont offers a more nuanced perspective by claiming that, 'Camus's concern shifted, but not so much to the community at large as to the problems of the individual committed to serving that community'.[26] This claim is borne out by Camus' continued refusal to commit himself to all-encompassing political causes in relation to, for example,

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[20] Albert Camus, 'Preface to The Stranger', in Camus, A. 1970. *Lyrical and Critical Essays*. New York: Vintage. p. 336.
[21] Ibid., p. 336.
[22] Ibid., p. 336.
[23] O'Brien, C. C. 1970. *Camus*. London: Fontana. p. 21.
[24] Ibid., p. 21.
[25] Extract from a letter by Albert Camus to Roland Barthes on 'The Plague', in Camus, 1970, op. cit., p. 339.
[26] Translator's introduction to Camus, A. 1991. *Between Hell and Reason: Essays from the Resistance Newspaper Combat, 1944-1947*. Hanover: University Press of New England. p. 7.

Algeria, in addition to such reflections that it is the individual who is the likely site for future progress: 'nourished by millions of solitary individuals whose deeds and works every day negate frontiers and the crudest implications of history...each and every man, on the foundations of his own sufferings and joys, builds for all'.[27] Elsewhere, though, Camus' writing indicates that the concept of individualism does not entirely capture the complexity of his views on social relations, since he conceptualises sociality in positive terms: 'man will begin again to have that feeling for man, without which the world can never be but a vast solitude'.[28]

Likewise, Sartre displayed complex attitudes towards the relationship between the individual and society and also changed direction on such issues, though in his case this resulted in an overtly political and specifically Marxist activist stance, which he perceived as being the only valid response to the impact of the Second World War.[29] Despite such diverse trajectories, however, the war marks the watershed for both writers, thus reinforcing this particular nihilistic and absurdist strand of existentialism as culturally situated, a characteristic which Herbert Read stresses in relation to Camus's series of essays, *The Rebel*, arguing that it is not a theoretical work but, on the contrary a politically motivated one, 'an examination of the actual situation of Europe today'.[30] Similarly, Camus situates the philosophy specifically in its historical moment, noting in relation to its nihilistic elements that engagement in current issues is the only way to present a viable philosophy of the era: 'the uneasiness that concerns us belongs to a whole epoch from which we do not want to disassociate ourselves. We want to think and live in our history. We believe that the truth of this age can be found only by living through the drama of it to the very end. If the epoch has suffered from nihilism, we cannot remain ignorant of nihilism and still achieve the moral code we need'.[31]

Sartre further concretises this connection:

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[27] Albert Camus, 'The Artist and his Time: Create Dangerously', in Camus, 1988. op. cit., p. 272.

[28] Albert Camus, 'Pessimism and Tyranny: Defense of Intelligence', in ibid., p. 65.

[29] This led him to take issue with Camus' lack of political motivation, particularly in relation to the question of Algerian independence, a disagreement which ultimately led to the end of their friendship.

[30] Sir Herbert Read, Foreward to Camus, A. 1962. *The Rebel*. London: Penguin. p. 7.

[31] Albert Camus, 'Pessimism and Tyranny: Pessimism and Courage', in Camus, 1988, op. cit., p. 59

one can only understand an individual, whoever he may be, by seeing him as a social being. Every man is political. But I did not discover that for myself until the war, and I did not truly understand it until 1945. Before the war I thought of myself simply as an individual. I was not aware of any ties between my individual existence and the society I was living in... I was a "man alone", an individual who opposes society through the independence of his thinking but who owes nothing to society and whom society cannot affect, because he is free. That was the evidence on which I based everything I believed, everything I wrote, and everything I did in my life before 1939. During the whole period before the war I had no political opinions, and of course I did not vote... In some sense *Nausea* is the literary culmination of the "man alone" theory. I did not manage to go beyond that position, even though I recognised its limitations...tried to justify my existence, at the same time attempting to define for the solitary individual the conditions for an existence without illusions... The war really divided my life into two... I knew that we were fighting to restore its value, hoping that it would be reborn after the war. It was then...that I abandoned my prewar individualism and the idea of the pure individual and adopted the social individual and socialism.[32]

Yet the western remains reliant upon individualistic values even in the post-war era as we have seen. As a result, it is the early, individualistic work of Camus and Sartre that yields most in terms of their treatment of the individual subject and its links with the western's formulations.

In contrast to this focus on the relation of the individual to societal formations, western heroes operate within an unsophisticated setting in which laws are at best rudimentary if they exist at all. A fundamental feature of the western genre is that once society is fully established, the hero's function becomes obsolete. Consequently his power is always linked to a pre-societal formation, and exceptions to this rule, such as the end-of-the-west cycle referred to later in this chapter, work to highlight this by depicting the hero's impotence in the face of such developments. As a result, the process of settlement and frontier closure are inextricably linked to the decline of heroism in the western. Indeed, according to Hegel this trajectory is even applicable to heroism in its broadest sense: 'Once the state has been founded, there can no longer be any heroes'.[33] More importantly for the concerns of the thesis, however,

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[32] Sartre, 1978, op. cit., pp. 44-45 & 48.
[33] Hegel, G.F.W. 1952. *Philosophy of Right*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 93.

the western's reliance on non societal context for its presentations of heroism has additional significance for its presentation of the individual, which ontological analysis conceives in terms of the individual autonomy of the non-social self. Since the onset of civilisation signals the end of the individualistic hero, it also implies that individual autonomy depends upon the pre or part-social. As such, the western supports existentialism's treatment of the autonomous self: as essentially non social and hence incompatible with the societal self. Hence, the concept of alienation becomes a crucial corollary of the autonomous self in existentialist texts, whilst the largely western's non societal context means that alienated outsider heroes only become an issue in those narratives depicting more sophisticated forms of community, such as Tom Doniphon in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*[34] or, as is the case in *The Searchers*[35] discussed later in the chapter. These dwell on the exiled nature of the western outsider hero in the wilderness, therefore entailing the depiction of a mild form of alienation generated by displacement. It should be noted, however, that alienation is never integral to—or as fully formed within—the western's outsider figure, as it is for his societally derived existential counterpart due to the western's positive presentation of autonomy and consequent suppression of the state's potentially negative connotations which, in any case, arise primarily out of a societal context as the existentialist novel makes clear.

A further divergence between the two forms is evidenced by the role played by urban and pastoral in existentialist fiction. In contrast to the western's overwhelmingly positive representation of the rural, and its portrayal of any form of urban construction as artificial and threatening to individual autonomy, the natural environment in the existentialist novel tends to be negative, and the urban "natural". For instance, the only non-urban spaces in the case of *The Outsider*[36] are, significantly, sites of death; the beach, here equated with the wilderness, and the care home located in the hills outside a rural village where the hero's mother dies. Moreover, the beach, the novel's most uncontrovertibly natural space is the site of Meursault's crime, because it is here that he encounters the Arabs, one of whom he is

[34] *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, 1962. Directed by John Ford. USA: Paramount. I discuss Doniphon's alienation in Chapter Two.
[35] *The Searchers*, 1956. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros.
[36] Camus, 1963, op. cit. A more detailed discussion of the novel appears later in the chapter.

later accused of murdering, an event which is compounded by his alienated attitude towards the mother who dies in the *rural* Home. Evidently, once Meursault is removed from his natural habitat he becomes vulnerable to primal forces which, while positive for the western hero, prove to be responsible for the existentialist hero's downfall, thereby performing a malevolent function. In this way, Meursault can convincingly be formulated as intrinsically urbanised in nature despite his essentially autonomous state of being. As a result, he is submerged within the city context and consistently described in terms of it, illustrated by a passage which also, significantly in view of this thesis's position on cultural exchange, bears unwitting testament to the ubiquity of the western in the European context: 'After some minutes the local cinemas disgorged their audiences. I noticed that the young fellows coming from them were taking longer strides and gesturing more vigorously than at ordinary times; doubtless the picture they'd been seeing was of the Wild West variety'.[37]

Furthermore, Meursault does not enjoy the natural in any form. Instead, he is consistently portrayed as being uncomfortable when displaced from the urban milieu. For instance, there are numerous references to the heat and the blazing sun, both of which play a major role in the eventual killings, and nature is replete with negative imagery, symbolised by weather in this case, throughout the novel. Nature is deemed to be, in effect, unnatural and contrary to civilised, in other words urban, behaviour: 'It was a blazing hot afternoon...what with the glare off the road and from the sky'.[38] Once translated into a context where this harmful type of nature predominates, therefore, Meursault is effectively doomed, since he cannot be assimilated into the eternal wilderness context, or survive external to the boundaries of the urban, here equated with "civilisation".

Thus Meursault is very much a contemporary hero, rather than a mythological Romantic blank canvas requiring a wilderness, as the western hero does. This distinction has been described in this way: 'For the classicists, the wilderness embodied and encouraged atavistic remnants of a more savage order. For the

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[37] Ibid., p. 31.
[38] Ibid., p. 13.

romantics, individual salvation lay in exposing the repressed elements of our mind because there lay the authentic, the positive features of our individuality which could balance out the artificiality of our public lives'.[39] It should be noted, though, that both conceptualisations place a similar emphasis on individual authenticity, though offering contrasting settings in which it can be exercised.

Existential accounts of environment, then, differ markedly from the cowboy's affinity with Nature, one who is equally at home in desert or mountain terrain. Heat undoubtedly infuses the western, indeed shimmers in many a desert, but never to the extent that it threatens the competency that has been argued to lie at the heart of all treatments of the masculine hero, as '*necessary* to a convincing demonstration of masculinity'.[40] Instead heat is taken for granted rather than remarked, and certainly the cowboy rarely complains of, or appears to suffer unduly from it, a feature for which heroic self-control cannot be held solely responsible. As such, the urban/nature binaries formulated by the existentialist novel are inverted by the western; urban development of any kind becomes the enemy and nature, the ally. Moreover, although desert/wilderness may be essential in invoking a barren and alienated atmosphere, the existentialist space to be found in numerous spaghetti westerns, rarely does it deter the hero. Initially, *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*[41] appears to be an exception, but even here, while Blondie is victimised by the desert, indeed nearly dies, it also operates as a tool of empowerment by providing the goal (gold) and the means to reach it. In this way, the desert is ultimately responsible for bringing about the defeat of his enemies. It is thus beneficial to the hero, rather than a destructive force in contrast to existentialist formulations, and, as a result, functions in effect as a plot device in addition to providing the film's visual impact and atmosphere. Likewise, the desert functions as the ideal setting for invocations of alienation, both from social selves and, as in this case, individuals in various states of autonomy, since it prevents satisfactory communication between the three protagonists, beyond, that is, the purely functional. Whilst masculine film genres

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[39] Short, J. R. 1991. *Imagined Country: Environment, Culture and Society*. London: Routledge. p. 21.
[40] Janet Thumin, 'Maybe He's Tough But He Sure Ain't No Carpenter: Masculinity and In/Competence in Unforgiven', in Kitses, J. & Rickman, G. eds. 1999. *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight. p. 345.
[41] *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*, 1966. Directed by Sergio Leone. Spain/Denmark/Italy: PC/CFP/PEA.

other than the western tend to depict a process of male bonding in situations of adversity such as these, even between highly contrasting masculine types,[42] here, the three protagonists are joined by venal motives only. Meanwhile, while both Blondie and Angel Eyes (The Ugly) embody extreme forms of autonomy in positive and negative form respectively, as befits the ontological states accorded the heroic and villainous in-itself respectively, as I go on to discuss later, Tuco, in contrast, exhibits aspects of a social self as evidenced by his reliance on the others and his need for external validation. Significantly, in view of this, he is consistently characterised as the weakest of the three, again in accordance with the western's promotion of the power conferred by the non-societal mode of being.

The desert can also become a space of alienation in the western owing to its connotations of anomie, in non-ontological terms, the disorientation invoked by the desert's formlessness. The status of cowboy hero as drifter, a man without clear purpose or direction analogous to the existentialist outsider, is simply established. However, this tendency is heightened because of the anomie invoked by, for example, Blondie's journey across the desert when abandoned by Tuco. Certainly, he is operating with a goal in mind, not only gold but also survival in this instance, but nonetheless, all three characters lack a sense of direction, becoming subsumed within this vast, physical space, as is the case in *Day Of The Outlaw's* depiction of a settlement marooned in a vast, snowy plain surrounded by mountain ranges, and the hero and outlaws' subsequent journey through this wilderness.[43] That said, alienation appears in its most positive form in the western, since it is most usually conjoined with the freedom conferred by autonomy, a state which has been achieved by the western hero. In this way, the desert can offer a potential space for authentic expression forbidden to societal selves, who may enjoy the benefits of sociality, but are accordingly denied freedom and its potential corollary, alienation, even though they may nonetheless desire it. Certainly, Camus would argue this to be the case, for

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[42] One need look no further than films such as *The Defiant Ones*, 1958. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: U.A., or innumerable war movies for evidence of this.
[43] *Day Of The Outlaw*, 1958. Directed by Andre de Toth. USA: U.A. I offer a detailed ontological analysis of the film in Chapter Two. Such ideas can also be related to the purported equivalence of masculinity and the western's environment proposed by feminist writers in the previous chapter.

he asserted that, 'I do not think man is a social animal'.[44] And so, it is largely left to existentialism to convey the negative aspects of both freedom and alienation, via its depictions of the treatment sustained by the existentialist outsider.

In a similar manner, the desert's symbolic incarnation, the beach, provides the setting for *The Outsider*'s[45] catharsis. At this point, however, the analogy becomes more problematic, though no less valid, since both the western and existentialism focus on the authentic, non-societal individual. In the novel, the eventual climax provoked by the fatal confrontation on the desert-like beach has entirely negative consequences for Meursault aside from the fact that he has a chance to gain a strange kind of redemption, even release, via his disavowal of hypocrisy through authenticity, again analogous to the cowboy. This means that Meursault does not fear self negation, in other words, death, which instead becomes preferable to an inauthentic existence. Such emotions are expressed, significantly, in terms of the natural environment: 'I, too, felt ready to start life over again... I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still'.[46] This is one of the work's few claims to a less than nihilistic outlook.

In stark contrast to this somewhat ambiguous combination of positive and negative elements, desert based western confrontations invariably have a triumphant outcome for the hero, a phenomenon which arguably has much to do with the symbolic role that the wilderness plays in generic iconography and ideology, a point which I will explore in more detail later in the chapter. Nonetheless, it is always the individual hero that both existentialism and the western seek to free from the constraints of the urban or social, since he is the bearer of individualistic values and also, more significantly for the concerns of this thesis, suggestive of the ontological consequences of this ideological position, for example, the potentiality for alienation attendant upon individual autonomy. Paradoxically, though, such freedoms invariably involve sacrifice, signifying that authenticity is not attainable in practice

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[44] Camus, 1988, op. cit., p. 178.
[45] Camus, 1963, op. cit.
[46] Ibid., p. 120.

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other than in the mythical arena of the western. In the case of existentialist formulations, death appears to offer the only viable escape, since nature is depicted as being as negative as the urban space. Meanwhile, the closing image of *The Searchers*[47] powerfully evokes freedom from civilisation in the western's sense, via its framing of Ethan Edwards in a doorway, silhouetted against the backdrop of the desert, an outsider to his family and condemned to roam which becomes, in ontological terms, redolent of such notions as the alienation of the outsider exile, one who, however, has no choice but to exercise his autonomous freedom in this way and, indeed, welcomes it, even where it results in that sense of anomie previously mentioned. Ironically, the words which Edwards utters over an Indian he has just killed appear to apply to his own role, at least on standard interpretations: *But, what that Comanche believes, ain't got no eyes...can't enter the spirit land...has to wander forever between the winds.* Existentialist readings of Ethan's position suggest a crucial difference, however: that existence is still a positive, the aloneness of the outsider exile not to be equated with loneliness, which presupposes emotional connections, but rather as emblematic of an extreme self autonomy, the ideal state although one that is, at the same time, unattainable by most. Alienation has to be the corollary of extreme autonomy, the in-itself, but one that the western hero clearly accepts in return for authentic freedom.

Such characterisations of a nomadic, "free" and, in this case, outlaw-type existence bound to the desert/wilderness are undoubtedly rooted in actuality, evidence for which one need look no further than T. E. Lawrence's account of the Arabs in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*:

> The Bedouin of the desert, born and grown up in it, had embraced with all his soul this nakedness too harsh for volunteers, for the reason, felt but inarticulate, that here he found himself indubitably free. He lost material ties, comforts, all superfluities and other complications to achieve a personal liberty which haunted starvation and death... In his life he had air and winds, sun and light, open spaces and a great emptiness.[48]

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[47] *The Searchers*, 1956. John Ford. USA: Warner Bros.
[48] Lawrence, T. E. 1997. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Herts: Wordsworth. p. 23.

The rather romanticised tone of this ostensibly factual account, however, is suggestive of the intersection existent between wilderness as actuality and its symbolic resonance within the fictional sphere as exemplified by the cowboy hero's symbiotic relationship with the wilderness. In this way, depictions of the wilderness require outlaw wanderers for the sake of realism, for domesticity and wilderness tend to be mutually exclusive after all, and ideological interpretations can readily be brought to bear on binaries such as these, as previously observed in relation to Wright's structuralist formulations in Chapter One. That said, fictional outsider figures also capture a number of symbolic meanings relating to the wilderness as a free and boundless space, simultaneously connoting the notion of freedom which, when liberated from its purely ideological co-ordinates by existentialist concepts, can contribute to ontological debates concerning, for example, ethics, as I go on to explore in the next chapter. In addition, the nature of existence-in-the-world and the differing modes of being raised by such conceptualisations thereby make philosophical discussion of ontological issues like autonomy within fictional non/ societal contexts possible, with wider implications for actual lived existence.

Existential Space and Freedom

It would appear, then, that the roles played by the urban and the natural are diametrically opposed in existentialist fiction and the western, whilst both share a focus on the individual subject and its relationship to societal formations. For the western, urban development spells the end of freedom and, indeed, the genre. This is most prominently illustrated by *Lonely are the Brave*,[49] a film which graphically demonstrates the destructive impact that the onset of civilisation has had on what, in ideological terms, are the "natural" values and practices of its ageing cowboy hero who is in flight from the forces who do not understand him, as represented by both the authorities and the townspeople. In this way, while the cowboy gives chase for a while, the possibility that he might achieve his freedom tantalisingly suggested, such aims cannot finally be realised for ideological reasons. The desires of the individual present too great a threat to the status quo, which cannot tolerate the challenge presented by difference. On the contrary, difference has to be assimilated or, as in this

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[49] *Lonely Are The Brave*, 1962. Directed by David Miller. USA: Universal.

case, destroyed, just as much as the authorities have to eliminate the threat presented by Meursault's alternative way of existence. Once again, the outsider cannot be tolerated in a societal context, his presence being detrimental to urban conformity.

Ontologically speaking, the film's hero represents individual authenticity, the in-itself, a mode of being inevitably threatened and ultimately to be destroyed by inauthentic societal modes of being-in-the-world: the authorities and the townspeople. Both of these groups exhibit the mode of the-one while masquerading in the form of being-for-others, because they act as one mind according to the social conformity and self-interest of the crowd, rather than in the interests of others, which requires individual thought. When the hero's horse, the incarnation of authentic values and therefore to be equated with freedom, teeters onto the rain-swept highway and collides with a lorry, the collision between differing ontological modes is at its most explicitly poignant, the visual imagery evoking the essential incompatibility of the-one and the in-itself. As such, autonomy is literally destroyed by the onset of the New World as exemplified by the forms of transport necessitated by life in society, which have supplanted and destroyed the freedom of autonomy: the horse. This highlights the film's message that the natural and urban cannot co-exist peaceably. Further, the triumph of the urban and its values is seen as inevitable, the possibilities for autonomy are therefore necessarily limited by context as previously noted. Significantly, the film also works within generic traditions despite its apparently contemporary setting, to the extent that it does not ultimately affirm societal modes of being but instead idealises autonomous freedom, a message which appears to inform both the end-of-the-western cycle and generic representations of civilisation on the whole. As Short comments, according to the western narrative, 'the coming of civilization has its problems. Progress is not an unambiguous process...in the defeat of the wilderness, we may be losing something important',[50] and on an existentialist reading, that "something" is the freedom of autonomy so potently captured by the western outsider hero.

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[50] Short, op. cit., p. 185.

Moreover, the connotations of urbanisation in *Lonely are the Brave*[51] provide a revealing point of comparison with Camus' implication that the urban is the only viable context in which freedom, and thus autonomy, could potentially be exercised, since the natural has become an irrelevant, if not destructive, force within the societal context. This type of representation predominates in Camus' recurring depictions of the Algerian wilderness, a feature that can be linked to its origins in a country dominated by the Sahara desert. Such natural phenomena reveal ambiguities in Camus' thought as evidenced by the abundance of, and variations in, descriptions of the desert and nature in his work. For instance, in the short story 'The Guest',[52] the desert appears to be a proving ground for its inhabitants, a place of that exile which is always potentially attendant upon autonomy, analogous to the role played by the mythological wilderness space of the western. Importantly, the historical wilderness of The West has also been described in a similar way by Webb, with the difference that he concentrates on its negative impact upon female pioneers, as opposed to its symbolic significance: 'the Plains—mysterious, desolate, barren, grief-stricken— oppressed the women, drove them to the verge of insanity in many cases, as the writers of realistic fiction have realised'.[53]

Likewise, 'The Guest' presents the desert as uninhabitable for all but the most extreme outsiders, the extreme mode of the in-itself so effectively displayed by the western hero as previously established: 'In the beginning, the solitude and the silence had been hard for him on these wastelands peopled only by stones… Towns sprang up, flourished, then disappeared; men came by, loved one another or fought bitterly, then died. No one in the desert, neither he nor his guest, mattered. And yet, outsider this desert neither of them…could have really lived'.[54] Meanwhile, in 'The Adulterous Woman', the desert environment is anthropomorphosised, virtually characterised as the woman's lover, therefore playing a key role within the narrative:

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[51] Op. cit.

[52] Camus, A. 1962. Tr. Justin O' Brien. *Exile and the Kingdom*. Middlesex: Penguin.

[53] Webb, W. P., 1959. *The Great Plains*. Belgrade: Graficki Zavod. p. 248. Moreover, the destructive psychological impact of wilderness solitude is most effectively captured by Lilian Gish's performance in *The Wind*, [1928.Victor Sjöström. USA: MGM], which also highlights the meteorological extremities of the desert in its central depiction of a sandstorm and the constant blowing of the wind in East Texas in a similarly melodramatic manner.

[54] Camus, 1962. op. cit., pp. 73-74.

> Not a breath not a sound… Before her the stars were falling one by
> one and being snuffed out among the stones of the desert, and each
> time Janine opened a little more to the night. Breathing deeply, she
> forgot the cold, the dead weight of others, the craziness or stuffiness
> of life, the long anguish or living or dying… Her whole belly pressed
> against the parapet as she strained towards the moving sky; she was
> merely waiting for her fluttering heart to calm down and establish
> silence within her. The last stars of the constellations dropped their
> clusters a little lower on the desert horizon and became still.[55]

In this way, the wilderness can be said to operate virtually as a substantive character, the existential wilderness becomes a symbolic ontological space wherein the nature of existence can be tested. Interestingly, in view of the points of contact which I have proposed to exist between existentialist and western representations of environment, this function has also been ascribed to John Ford's usage of Monument Valley as visual signifier in his films,[56] his status as *auteur* partially dependent upon it: 'Ford's westerns constitute a coherent body of work, part of the unity lying in his use of Monument Valley in Utah'.[57] More significantly for the topic at hand, however, these comparisons between the role played by the desert within existentialist and western texts add another layer of complexity to that assumed by deserts in the western, not only as a space of exile, in which authentic freedom can be enacted in the form of, for example, the violent acts examined in the next chapter, but also where the nature of existence itself can be tested for the lone subject, the outsider hero.

Be that as it may, although the desert plays this role for the woman, Janine, the Algerian context is entirely alien to her husband, thus signalling the exact nature of her betrayal, that of a demonstrable and explicit affinity with an alien territory and way of life. Marcel, the husband, clearly a French name, exclaims in exasperation, "What a country!" and there are frequent references to "Arabs" throughout, thus represented as Other to the French Algerian characters.[58] Elsewhere, though, the desert is depicted in less harsh terms, yet Algerian-ness remains equally significant,

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[55] Ibid., p. 28.

[56] For an in-depth discussion see an article wholly devoted to this topic entitled 'John Ford and Monument Valley', co-authored by Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, in Buscombe, E. & Pearson, R. E. eds. 1998. *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*. London: BFI.

[57] Short, op. cit., p. 186. Short goes on to claim that, 'His vivid composition, his use of landscapes as background and metaphor…raised the western to major significance'. p. 193.

[58] Camus, 1962, op. cit., p. 10. This type of depiction lends weight to claims that have been made as to Camus' status as a French Algerian and his corresponding dismissive attitude towards African Algerians.

its prominence emphasised by Camus' factual account of Oran in relation to the desert in his *Lyrical Essays*: 'Man is an outlaw… If one can define the desert as a place with no soul where the sky alone is king, then Oran awaits its prophets… There is something implacable about deserts… Emptiness, boredom, an indifferent sky: what enticements do these places offer? Solitude, doubt, and perhaps human beings'.[59] Again, Camus stresses the notion of outlaws and outsiders here, the symbolic as well as in this instance religious, significance[60] that accords with both the existentialist (negative) and western (positive) conceptions of the wilderness space, place of exile and authentic freedom denied to the inauthentic, societal mode of existence-in-the-world. Once again, it becomes clear that the negative perspective of wilderness projected by existentialist works indicates a greater degree of realism, an acknowledgement of autonomy's intrinsic unattainability, whereas the western's positive configuration of authentic freedom signals its escapist qualities, which render the impossible state of full autonomy apparently possible within, that is, the boundaries of the mythical West.

In this way, the wilderness and its connotations can be seen as intrinsic to both the existentialist outsider and outlaw/outsider figure so crucial to both the western and existentialist forms, in turn suggestive of the ways in which the wilderness can be interpreted as having much greater symbolic significance than merely as a space for the exercise of individualism, as proposed by ideological readings of freedom in the western. Lawrence's ideas concerning the desert prove relevant once again here, particularly in view of the fact that his work, *Pillars of Wisdom*[61] has been termed, 'one of the most important case-books of the Outsider that we possess'.[62] Lawrence describes the desert specifically in religious terms, as a space of exile in which individuals are enabled to prove themselves. Wilson summarises his hypothesis thus: 'the history of prophets of all time follow a pattern: born in a civilization, they reject

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[59] Albert Camus,'The Minotaur, or Stopping in Oran', in Camus, 1970, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

[60] I mean here Camus' reference to the notion of prophets as well as the biblical connotations: the forty days and forty nights spent by Jesus in the wilderness during the course of which his faith is tested by Satan.

[61] Lawrence, op. cit.

[62] Wilson, C. 1956. *The Outsider.* London: Pan. p. 79. Wilson's outsider categories are explored in Chapter Two. He claimed that Lawrence shared characteristics with all of these, however.

its standards of well-being and retreat into the desert',[63] further arguing that, 'The Outsider's miseries are the prophet's teething pains. He retreats into his room, like a spider in a dark corner; he lives alone, wishes to avoid people'.[64] While the latter mode of retreat certainly characterises outsiders like Meursault, Raskolnikoff and Joseph K, whose precise mode of outsider-ness are discussed in Chapter Two, it is less clear how this applies to the western hero, since his exile in the wilderness does not necessarily imply a deliberate disavowal of others but, rather, a lack of need for human contact or, as in the case of the outlaw, a site of refuge from the past and its consequences. It can also signal others' rejection of his outsider nature of course; *The Searchers*,[65] for instance, underscores the western hero's essential lack of sociability, presenting it not as a deliberate stance but, rather, in terms of a refusal to comply with societal norms, a position which can be understood as particular to, 'one who necessarily stands outside of society'.[66] This also renders such figures important for ontological concerns, since the western is highly significant for its exploration of the non-societal self. Indeed, it is difficult to find quite such a detailed treatment of the mode of the in-itself in other fictional forms, since societal contexts demanded by realism nearly always intrude. Rarely does the individual subject operate in the isolation that typically characterises the western.

There are also interesting parallels to be drawn between the settings of the literary existential works of Camus and those of the western's film narrative. These derive from their differing treatment of heroism. Camus' writing is inextricably linked to a symbolic and geographical version of Algeria, both in terms of its national identity and, more significantly for our present purposes, its environment. As previously noted, the wilderness has a significant symbolic role to play in both the short stories and novels. *The Outsider*,[67] for instance, clearly derives its ambience from a claustrophobic urban setting analogous to *The Trial*, which likens civilisation, here exemplified by the bureaucratic system, to a prison with no hope of reprieve. In this way, the urban context alienates and destroys the individual, as suggested by Joseph

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[63] Ibid., p. 90.
[64] Ibid., p. 90.
[65] Ford, 1956, op. cit.
[66] Quoted in Kupfer, J. 1999. *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film*. Boulder, Colarado: Westview. p. 6.
[67] Camus, 1963, op. cit.

K.'s final thoughts: 'Where was the Judge, whom he had never seen? Where was the High Court, to which he had never penetrated?'[68] However, nature is even more malevolent, as suggested by this passage concerning the site of Meursault's crime: 'the light hadn't changed; it was pounding fiercely as ever on the long stretch of sand that ended at the rock. For two hours the sun seemed to have made no progress; becalmed in a sea of molten steel'.[69] Many of the short stories are, moreover, specifically located in the desert, an environment whose symbolic meanings are woven throughout their narratives as we have seen.

Why precisely, then, does the desert have such an enduring and prominent place in the western and the existentialist novel? In addition to its role as symbolic of freedom and ontological authenticity for the individual self, it connotes death and decay, both central to the two narrative forms. As previously established, for existentialist fiction, death is the primary escape route for the authentic individual. In the case of the western, death is focal to the regenerative notion of frontier violence to be discussed shortly[70] but also, in French's view, has metaphysical significance for the hero: 'All westerners have something to do with death, and it is not just because they live and die by the gun. It is because the westerner cares about death, his own death... It focuses and frames his world view, and the ethics to which he is committed...is what his life is all about',[71] which for French, is substantiated by the centrality of death to the genre's world view.

Understood in existential terms, meanwhile, death is the ultimate extreme of ontological negation, the cancelling out of the individual self in its most explicit form. In this way, we can see the western as a pure form of ontological exploration, since it depicts oppositions between life and death in the starkest terms. That said, in an apparent paradox, the ostensibly dead space of the wilderness signifies life, whereas scenes of death, such as the generic device of the shoot-out in which villains/enemies

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[68] Kafka, op. cit., pp. 250-251. I discuss the function of the sterile space in the death of Joseph K towards the beginning of this chapter.

[69] Camus, 1963, op. cit., p. 63.

[70] In addition, I will undertake a substantive discussion concerning the relationship between death and violence in Chapter Five.

[71] French, P. 1997. *Cowboy Metaphysics: Ethics and Death in Westerns.* Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield. p. 47.

are "executed", invariably occurs in a community setting. This suggests that for the western, death and settlements are interlinked because communities threaten and, ultimately kill, autonomy, whereas the wilderness is the site where a mode of full autonomy is made possible.

With these points in mind, the desert represents a boundless and barren space, apparently devoid of life or the potential for growth of any kind. It is an environment of stark contrasts and visual extremes, both in terms of the obvious environmental dualities, for instance light and dark, heat and cold and, on a less concrete level, connoting the ultimate extremes: of life and the very real possibility of death, one of the major concerns of westerns and existentialism due to their shared focus on the nature of individual existence and non-existence. In addition, the desert and its attributes are also associated with freedom and ontological authenticity. Significantly, Slotkin explicitly designates the desert as an existential arena in a way that links the western and existentialism: 'It is altogether a nicely visualised existentialist dilemma; the external desert encroaches and makes itself a metaphor for the emptiness and absurdity which overcomes each man in turn'.[72] As we have seen, the desert has mainly positive connotations in the western, which works to privilege the natural, while existentialist works such as Camus' *The Outsider*[73] together with his short stories, as well as the imagery of Kafka and Dostoyevsky, demonstrate a much more ambivalent attitude towards nature and, in turn, desert symbolism. For both, however, the desert has significance in ontological terms, as the space for the exercise of autonomous freedom be it unlimited, as in the western or, alternatively, severely constrained, as tends to be the case in existentialist works. And for both, it can potentially suggest the alienation of the autonomous outsider exile.

The Existentialist Conception of Freedom

Such ambiguities in existentialist works partly relate to the co-existence of positive and negative connotations within the existentialist conceptualisation of freedom, as regards its ethics and core ontological precepts. While freedom indubitably holds an

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[72] Slotkin, R. 1990. *Gunfighter Nation*. New York: Harvard University Press. p. 321.
[73] Camus, 1963, op. cit.

elevated status in existentialist thought because it is a pre-requisite for the existential project designed to facilitate authenticity, the Sartrean concept of anguish, one of the theory's key concepts, offers a much more equivocal and pessimistic understanding of the term's implications. The drawback of full existential freedom, achieved via the attainment of authenticity, is anguish. This effectively prevents individuals from achieving their full existential potential. This concept denotes the feelings individuals experience when confronted by the freedom offered by an infinite number of possible futures since, in theory at least, there are as many choices as there are individuals. In this way, nothing can relieve the self from the burden of choice, as there is no necessary causal chain linking past and the future. The future is not, for existentialists, determined by the past as it might be for alternative theories of existence. Rather, individuals are invited to choose their own future once they accept the governing principle of the existential project, which enables authenticity and, thus, freedom. Significantly in view of my observations concerning the individualistic foundations shared by the western and existentialism, great emphasis is laid upon the individual achieving their own potential, without relation to others. That said, Sartre denies that he is in favour of 'an individualism in which the individual takes himself as an end',[74] in the way that the western illustrates so clearly. Notions such as these are, for Sartre, bound up with ethics because, 'Man makes himself. He isn't ready made at the start. In choosing his ethics, he makes himself, and force of circumstances is such that he can not abstain from choosing one'.[75] As a result, others remain a barrier to the attainment of authenticity.

The significance that this conception of freedom holds for existential ethics is that there can be no fixed reference point or overarching framework of moral values. Instead the self is confronted with the vertiginous prospect of endless choices. He/she does not have recourse to objectivity, to those certainties that had formerly been provided by value systems such as Christianity and enshrined within societal norms and frameworks, thereby constituting basic core values irrespective of religious conviction. Consequently, there can be no existential ethics as such, but rather a range

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[74] Sartre, J.-P. 1985. *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War*. London: Verso. p. 108. This is taken from Notebook 3.
[75] Sartre, 1990, op. cit., p. 56.

of ethical possibilities based on individual projects. As Sartre notes, 'everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to. He can't start making excuses for himself'.[76] Moreover, he refutes the notion that morality could ever be of a sacred nature: 'it would have no meaning for angels or for God', since, he argues, 'every morality is human, even theological morality...is for the purpose of human reality... Without a world, no value'.[77] However, this lack of context or point of reference explains the emotions generated by this conception of freedom, the fear and despair which Sartre terms existential anguish. The individual is, in this way, alone, expected to assume an impossible burden of responsibility by the existentialists: 'man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders: he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being'.[78] When confronted by this type of freedom, most individuals prefer to remain inauthentic, in 'bad faith',[79] accepting the comforting illusions offered by societal norms.[80] As such, individuals refuse existential freedom. In contrast, the individualistic freedom offered by the western is represented as desirable and attainable, although unrealisable within a societal context as previously observed. In this sense, the western's wilderness is ontological as well as mythical, since it enables the exercise of the non-societal self as previously noted.

Camus shares Sartre's negative conceptualisation of freedom, meanwhile, as being both onerous and rarely achieved, whilst at the same time essential to authenticity. For instance, in the novel, *The Fall*,[81] the narrator characterises freedom in terms

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[76] Sartre, 1990, op. cit., p. 41.
[77] Sartre, 1985, op. cit., p 108.
[78] Ibid., p. 63.
[79] Sartre, J.- P., 1989. *Being and Nothingness*. London: Routledge. p. 59. This term can be defined as lying to oneself, and is illustrated by Sartre's parable of the waiter: 'Let us consider the waiter in the cafe. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes towards the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer... All his behaviour seems to us a game... he is playing at *being* a waiter in a café'.
[80] There is only room for a very brief analysis here. For Sartre's main ideas concerning existential freedom, together with its implications for both individual conduct and the philosophy, see the essays 'The Humanism of Existentialism' and 'Freedom and Responsibility' in Sartre, 1990, op. cit. A more complex discussion appears in Part Four, Chapter One; 'Being and Doing: Freedom', in Sartre, 1989, op. cit.
[81] Camus, A. 1966. *The Fall*. Middlesex: Penguin.

similar to those experienced by Meursault in *The Outsider*,[82] as a state with potentially negative consequences, rather than a tool to liberate the individual from the constraints of inauthenticity. Authenticity in these terms is a burden, not an ideal as it is in the western. Camus writes:

> I didn't know that freedom is not a reward or a decoration that is celebrated with champagne... It's a chore, on the contrary, and a long-distance race, quite solitary and very exhausting... Alone in a forbidden room, alone in the prisoner's box before the judges, and alone to decide in face of oneself or in the face of other's judgement. At the end of all freedom is a court-sentence; that's why freedom is too heavy to bear, especially when you're down with a fever, or are distressed, or love nobody.[83]

Furthermore, Camus' *The Rebel*[84] assumes crime and freedom to be co-dependent: 'Freedom, particularly when it is a prisoner's dream, cannot endure limitations. It must embrace crime or it is no longer freedom',[85] thereby apparently concurring both with Raskolinkoff's views expressed in *Crime and Punishment*[86] analysed in Chapter Two, and the elevation of Meursault's "authentic" behaviour previously discussed in relation to O'Brien's views at the beginning of the present chapter. Furthermore, Camus equates such behaviour with the cult of romanticism, which he views as essentially individualistic and as such equally applicable to those elements of western heroism that are rooted in the romantic tradition. He extols the notion of the individual while simultaneously affirming the aesthetic qualities of death, ideas which I will discuss specifically in relation to violence in the next chapter: 'Much more than the cult of the individual, romanticism inaugurates the cult of the 'character'... The human being who is condemned to death is, at least, magnificent before he disappears, and his magnificence is his justification'.[87] Similarly, Camus also highlights the transcendental nature of the romantic heroic individual, which sets him apart from the norms governing others: 'romanticism...is chiefly concerned with

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[82] Camus, 1963, op. cit.
[83] Camus, 1966, op. cit., p. 97.
[84] Camus, A. 1971. *The Rebel*. Middlesex: Penguin.
[85] Ibid., p. 36.
[86] Dostoyevsky, F. 1997. *Crime and Punishment*. London: Penguin.
[87] Camus, 1971, op. cit., p. 47.

defying moral and divine law',[88] a notion further manifested through the function and behaviour of the western hero.

While such definitions differ from those of Sartre, both concur that freedom is a pre-requisite for individual authenticity, however difficult its practice may be, and also that only the individual can attain such freedom. However, they disagree on a crucial element, the limits and boundaries of personal freedom. For Sartre, the existential project invites boundless freedom and thus the individual is accorded the right to realise such freedom, whereas Camus argues that the freedoms of others determine the extent to which the individual freedom form can be realised: 'freedom is not the answer to everything, and it has frontiers. The freedom of each finds its limits in that of others; no one has the right to absolute freedom'.[89]

Despite this lack of a discernible consensus as to the nature of existential freedom[90] and, in turn, its physical incarnation, the wilderness, however, this metaphorical and physical space can be said to offer a dramatic setting in which the core self of the hero has the potential to be exposed and tested by the elemental forces of nature, thereby illustrating ontological issues such as the nature of individual existence and the constitution of authentic action, as well as presenting the negation of existence, death, which is a constant presence in the western, as French avers. In addition, freedom functions as a dramatic device. In the western, for example, the hero can emerge from, and disappear into, the wilderness, whilst also being identified with it, a phenomenon strikingly exemplified by *High Plains Drifter*.[91] But, crucially for our purposes, what significance does the symbolic wilderness hold for individualistic

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[88] Ibid., p. 46.

[89] Albert Camus, 'Defence of Freedom: Homage to an Exile', in Camus 1988, op. cit., p. 101. The two writers also convey their philosophical ideas by different means, reflecting their contrasting approach towards philosophical writing, described by Brée in this way: 'For Camus, the essential givens were the concrete givens of experience, for Sartre, the creations of the mind', [Brée, G. 1974. *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment.* London: Calder & Boyars. p. 70]. Axel Madson links this with their attitudes towards politics, again situating such increasing divergences in the post-war era: 'For Camus, politics was a waste of time; for Sartre literature was becoming a waste of time. Camus was anxious to free literature from its subordination to immediate political "relevancy" and himself from "issues". Sartre, on the other hand, was entering his most politicised period, culminating in The Words, which he said was his 'good-bye to literature'. Madsen, A. 1977. *Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre.* New York: William Morrow. pp. 172-173.

[90] This can, in any case, be seen to demonstrate the philosophy's refusal of overarching definitions.

[91] *High Plains Drifter.* 1972. Clint Eastwood. USA: Universal. I discuss this film at various points throughout the thesis.

ethics and what do the ontological concerns raised by existentialist analysis contribute to out understanding of individual morality?

American Ideology and Freedom

The notion of wilderness is central to Wright's hypothesis that the western represents individualistic values and accordingly, the values of the market economy in its purest form, and therefore he describes the western hero explicitly in terms of it:

> The cowboy is the symbol of individual autonomy, the 'natural' autonomy of the State of Nature. He emerges from the wilderness with no social connections—alone, independent, self-reliant... He represents individualist freedom in its pure, 'natural' form. He has wilderness knowledge and skills...and part of his wilderness identity is his special mastery of violence. Violence is necessary in the wilderness State of Nature, an inherent aspect of freedom, and it is also necessary to end the State of Nature and build a civil society... Individualist freedom depends on violence because individualist freedom derives from the wilderness.[92]

In this way, individualism and freedom are crystallised within the imagery of the wilderness although, as previously maintained, existential concepts add another layer of complexity to purely ideological understandings of its function. I will discuss violence as an expression of the mode of the in-itself displayed by the western outsider in the next chapter, but suffice it to say at this point that violence is played out via the concept of the frontier in the western, thus presupposing an essentially individualistic fictional terrain.

Certainly, the equation of freedom with individualism is widely acknowledged to underpin the American political and economic system as previously observed, with its corresponding emphasis on personal wealth symbolising personal achievement and initiative. Moreover, Wright claims that, 'America is the most successful and dominant market nation at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is also the market nation most committed to individualism. More than any other market nation, America was constructed on individualist ideas. America had no traditional past, and

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[92] Wright, op. cit., p. 45.

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most of the people who built America were escaping from a traditional past.[93] Importantly, such ideas are echoed by Sartre's words written decades before: 'the New Yorker has not forgotten the period when a man could win a fortune by personal initiative',[94] a view which again situates American ideology in its historical-mythical origins by conflating the myth of the frontier with the historical actuality. As such, many have attributed this valorisation of the individual to a cluster of additional meanings relating to the concept of frontier origins, such as the right of the citizen to bear firearms in defence of person, family or property. Indeed, it is highly revealing that the right of the citizen to bear arms detailed in the Second Amendment of the American Constitution is second only to freedom of speech,[95] testament to the historical embedded-ness of the frontier mentality in the American national consciousness. This can also be seen as symptomatic of a war-like nation as suggested in relation to its projection of dominating masculinity in the conclusion to the last chapter, although further analysis of such contemporary political implications lie outside the scope of this thesis.[96]

Instead, I wish to focus on the origins of the frontier thesis in Turner's historical-mythological conceptualisation, and the ways in which these relate to the western's treatment of freedom and, accordingly, individualism, which entails reference to Chapter Two's discussion of Sartre and Camus' attitudes towards American culture. Having examined the frontier thesis in relation to individualism, I go on to indicate

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[93] Ibid., p. 187.

[94] Jean-Paul Sartre, 1962. 'Individualism and Conformism', in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*. New York: Collier. p. 104. These essays were written as a result of Sartre's visit to New York in 1946. I offer a detailed discussion of Sartre's views on America in Chapter Two.

[95] See http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.overview.html [accessed on 29/07/03], for the full text of the American Constitution, which was instituted in 1791.

[96] Michael Moore presents a highly polemical, but nonetheless informative, perspective on the significance of firearms for American society in the controversial 2002 documentary *Bowling For Columbine*, [USA: MGM/U.A]. Although leaving the debate open-ended, he holds the media-generated culture of fear largely responsible for the high rate of violent, gun-related incidents in the US by drawing comparisons with the gun-saturated but nevertheless tolerant Canada, which can lay claim to an analogous frontier history. Moore's interview with Charlton Heston, leader of the NRA, highlights prevalent arguments that draw on frontier history to justify and explain the dominance of gun culture. As Ed Buscombe succinctly points out, 'Although statistical studies have proved time and again that (after 1850) only a small minority of Americans ever went to the frontier—and that the West, as a region, was far less violent than the cities of the Northeast or certain counties in the South—popular myth continues to assert that the frontier was pre-eminent in the realm of violence. Similarly, both journalistic and official surveys of the causes of American violence persist in asserting that the present rate of violent crime and domestic bloodshed derives in significant measure from America's frontier origins'. Buscombe, E. ed. 1998. *BFI Companion to the Western*. London: BFI, p. 233.

some of the ways in which existentialist concepts can shed ontological light upon ideological conceptualisations of the individual self in the final sub-section of the chapter. I do so by arguing that the western's non social context enables it to contain clearer presentations of the non-societal self than the socially bound existentialist text is able to do, in a way previously proposed in relation to wilderness space and context in the western. With this in mind, western heroic representations have implications for existential notions such as authenticity and its societal counterpart, alienation. Indeed, the threat which social agents present to the autonomous in-itself of the hero results in a preference for exile status in the wilderness, where the liberation of the autonomous self becomes possible.

As previously suggested in Chapter Two's discussion of American masculinities, the country tends to generate contradictory feelings in both American and French commentators, a phenomenon which Camus likens to a passion: 'there are cities, like certain women, who annoy you, overwhelm you, and lay bare your soul'.[97] However, though such responses tend to vary, there is one feature on which all seem to agree, namely that individualism is intrinsic to American consciousness. Whether individualism is advantageous or detrimental to American society is, however, more difficult to determine, the extent to which this focus on individual interest ever is, or can be, tempered by social concerns and communitarian values. Wright, for instance, argues that the ideology of individualism dominates and informs the nature of American society and is, moreover, in no doubt as to its consequences: 'America tends to be more callous, divided, violent. America is far less supportive than other market nations of unions, health care, and welfare, and far more characterized by crime, distrust, and indifference'.[98] This could be seen as an extreme view. That said, a general consensus of opinion can be discerned as to the origins of the ideological notion that frontier mythology is largely responsible for the American conflation of individualism and freedom. As such, Turner's piece, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', which in Martin Ridge's words, 'rooted American free institutions in individualism [and] praised capitalist democracy',[99] and whose

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[97] Camus, 1970, op. cit.,, p. 185.
[98] Wright, op. cit., p. 187.
[99] Ridge, op. cit., p. 72.

influence is felt even by 'anti-Turnerians [who] are strangely haunted by his silent scholarly ghost, for they deny the usefulness of his scholarly vision but often unwittingly work within it',[100] provides the starting point for discussion of both the mythological and historical import of the concept.

Turner's frontier thesis can be summarised as, 'the westward expansion of the USA in the nineteenth century was cause for celebration. It was a move away from contact with an effete Europe. The extension of the frontier involved a battle with the elements from which emerged democracy and self-reliance. It was in contact with the wilderness that a genuinely democratic American society was formed'.[101] This, then, presents the account in historical terms, drawing ideological conclusions from empirical premises. Wright disagrees, however. He formulates the thesis in purely ideological terms, emphasising the mythological over the historical elements to explain its longstanding impact on both America and the western, arguing Turner's thesis to have been, 'used to justify colonial expansion'.[102] Further, he implies that Turner's intentions were not wholly historically motivated:

> Turner's frontier vision was never very good history, but it was always very good theory, the legitimating theory of market individualism, the legitimating theory of America... The image of the frontier had always validated freedom and equality even if the reality of the frontier did not. The end of the frontier, then, ended that validating image, and that image had been crucial to America. Turner became influential by capturing that historical moment... The image of a frontier is inherent in market theory, an image of equal opportunity, so some implicit frontier permeates all market issues - private property, limited government, democracy, freedom and equality. Turner was right to think that the western frontier legitimated the American market... The frontier provided the *image* at least, of real equal opportunity... But once the frontier was gone all this hope would be gone, and this is what Turner feared...and what the cowboy myth condemns... This is the image of the urban East, a place of corruption and oppression, a place of class monopolies.[103]

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[100] Ibid., p. 76.
[101] Short, op. cit., p. 19.
[102] Ibid., p. 134.
[103] Wright, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

This interpretation of Turner's thesis assumes the ideological component to be paramount and moreover holds it responsible for the flaws in the market economics practised in America. More typical are criticisms levelled at Turner's elevation of the white male at the expense of all others, which, unsurprisingly, equally applies to the western, representing, '[a] male orientated...and triumphalist view of the frontier which...praises the economic and political success of white males in the establishment of an individualistic, capitalist democracy at the expense of the frontier's failures, the oppression and exploitation of minorities and women, and a degraded environment'.[104] In view of Turner's account, this can be seen as valid on the basis of contemporary norms. That said it is important to note that the piece was written in 1893. With this in mind, such criticisms could be argued to lack an appropriate cultural contextualisation. Turner was not, after all, likely to have shared the ideological concerns and assumptions of those writing in the latter half of the twentieth century. Similarly, while Wright cites a number of historians who characterise the western frontier as, 'characterized by blatant sexism, brutal racism, corrupt speculation, and cynical greed',[105] again, while Turner's account certainly does fail to address such issues, the historian's concerns are reflected in such interpretations of what is, after all, a quintessentially nineteenth century account.[106]

Turner also made a number of claims concerning the impact of the "freedom" of the western frontier on its inhabitants, all of which are formulated in terms of individualism:

> That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and
> inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find

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[104] Ridge, op. cit., p. 65.

[105] Wright, op. cit., p. 56

[106] Certainly Camus' observations concerning the American treatment of Negroes as late as 1946 would also suggest that such criticisms of a nineteenth century text are somewhat naïve and ill informed. Herbert Lottman, for instance, noted that, 'the American attitude to Negroes disturbed him [Camus]. He had expressed his own feelings...by seeing to it that the works of Richard Wright were translated and published in Paris', [Lottman, op. cit., p. 52], although even in this case, Camus displays a more complex interpretation of cultural context than Turner's critics. He notes whilst in New York: '[We] sent a diplomat from Martinique to the consulate here. He was lodged in Harlem. With regard to his French colleagues, he perceived for the first time that he was not of the same race. Contrary observation...in the bus a middle-class American sitting opposite me gets up to give his seat to an old Negro lady'. Camus, 1989, op. cit., p. 35. While such debates are certainly engaging, however, I will confine myself to the specifically individualist elements of the frontier thesis, rather than attempting an analogous wholesale mode of critique.

expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and evil; and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.[107]

Such ideas echo those of frontier historians such as Webb, who also uses the frontier theory to account for and justify the types of law as well as those character traits particular to the American West:

> Under the social conditions the taking of human life did not entail the stigma that more thickly settled regions associated with it... Men were all equal. Each was his own defender. His survival imposed upon him certain obligations which, if he were a man, he would accept. It he acted according to the code he not only attested his courage but implied that he was skilled in the act of living. Murder was too harsh a word to apply to his performance, a mere incident, as it were. But how could the Easterner, surrounded and protected by the conventions, understand such distinctions?[108]

In this way, Webb presents Western and Eastern values as mutually exclusive, thereby lending support to Wright's theory that the frontier has consistently been regarded as an arena of freedom and equality since the actual closure of the frontier in 1890, be it historically or mythologically. As Turner himself writes, 'each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons'.[109] Slotkin agrees with Turner that the frontier represents a borderline between old and new Americas in *Gunfighter Nation*,[110] though he formulates this in purely symbolic terms as finding its most explicit articulation in the western:

> It is nearly always understood as a border between an "old world" which is seen as known, oppressive, and limiting, and a "new world" which is rich in potential and mystery, liberating and full of opportunity... Though this transgression of the borders, through

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[107] Turner, in Munns & Rajan, op. cit., p. 75.
[108] Webb, op. cit., p. 497.
[109] Ibid., p. 75.
[110] Slotkin, op. cit.

combat with the dark elements on the other side, the heroes reveal the meaning of the frontier line (that is, the distinctions of value it symbolises) even as they break it down. In the process they evoke the elements in themselves (or in their society) that correspond to the "dark"; and by destroying the dark elements and colonising the border, they purge darkness from themselves and from the world'.[111]

He further situates the frontier thesis in the context of American ideology by arguing that the western works by representing the frontier as America's foundation myth, in turn condoning American colonial expansion and the use of violence in achieving these ends. In this way, the western mythologises historical processes, as Wright also maintains:

> when we are told that a certain film is a western, we confidently expect that it will find its moral and emotional resolution in a singular act of violence. Moreover, since the western offers itself as a myth of American origins, it implies that its violence is an essential and necessary. Part of the process through which American society was established and through which its democratic values are defended and enforced.[112]

Whether the frontier is taken as primarily a historical or ideological construct, though, the western certainly portrays the frontier as a liberating space, a meritocracy where individual interests are privileged.

Likewise, existentialist accounts of American society discussed in Chapter Two support this view, and place a similar emphasis on individualistic freedom, thereby demonstrating its significance for considerations of the relationship between the individual and society. With this in mind, I will now consider the concept of freedom in relation to the western, once again applying existentialist readings to western film texts in order to shed light on the way that freedom in the western can be seen in ontological terms.

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[111] Ibid., p. 351.
[112] Ibid., p. 351.

Freedom and the Western

A specifically individualistic formulation of freedom, then, underpins both existentialism and the western. Understood from an existentialist standpoint, however, the purely ideological significance accorded the western's focus on the individual has significance beyond political and/or cultural boundaries. Existentialist conceptions of the individual go to the heart of the nature of existence itself, through key concepts such as the authenticity, autonomy, freedom and alienation of the societal subject, and the necessity for societal exclusion if full authenticity is to be achieved. As previously noted, both the western and existentialist texts focus on the individual, and therefore raise questions concerning the appropriate relationship between individual and society. In this way, purely ideological readings inevitably fail to identify the ontological co-ordinates of such presentations, which demonstrate the unattainable nature of authenticity in different ways due to their contrasting societal contexts and, further, raise crucial issues involving the nature of being-in-the-world in the process.

Be that as it may, freedom is certainly one of the central concerns of existentialism, and therefore underpinning the existential project essential for individual autonomy. It is also a major constituent of the western's ideological framework as we have seen in relation to frontier ideology and individualism. Equally, both existentialist literature and the western appear to conclude that such freedom is difficult if not possible to attain within a societal context via their narrative forms and imagery. Existentialism depicts the punishment of the outsider figure, and the western displaces him to a mythical, non-societal context.

Specifically in terms of the western, freedom is central to its core visual imagery, and the cowboy can be said to wholly embrace such freedom as represented by images of the huge skies and endless panoramas of the "big country": deserts, mountains, plains, canyons, the landscapes. This is the iconography of the western and can be said to define it. Further, the cowboy regards the freedom to roam as an ideal intrinsic to his identity as autonomous being, the in-itself, formerly identified by Sartre in relation to America's cities in Chapter Two. Hence, he is prepared to fight to protect it and, by this method, individualistic freedom and, in existentialist terms,

autonomous authenticity, are both concretised by the western. Likewise, the vastness of the wilderness appears to render humanity's endeavours to enclose and tame it as futile, although the western's narrative form covertly acknowledges the inevitability of land enclosure and settlement, due to its historical underpinnings. The following exchange illustrates the taming of the wilderness through its invocation of the image of the trajectory from wilderness to garden, although the romanticisation of the cactus rose invokes the loss of authenticity attendant upon civilisation, for Tom's autonomy renders him a failure once society is fully established:

Hallie: *Look at it, it was once a wilderness, now it's a garden. Aren't you proud?*
Stoddard: *Hallie, who put the cactus roses on Tom's coffin?*
Hallie: *I did.*[113]

This movement towards 'civilisation' in the films is conveyed by devices like the depiction of paved streets and gardens and the social benefits that derive from these developments. As Starrett, *Day of the Outlaw*'s hero asserts, before the arrival of these, *No woman was safe in the streets, let alone in a lonely farmhouse...*[114] Buscombe, meanwhile, argues such devices to trigger ethical significations: 'The treatment of women (and children) is the moral litmus test of the Western'.[115] However, the drawbacks of such "progress" are equally clear. The western's ideological framework proposes that the freedom for the individual to work towards solitary self-realisation cannot be maintained in a societal context, any more than the existential outsider is free to behave freely without punishment. Inauthenticity is the only possible outcome of civilising processes, resulting inevitably in the loss of individual values.

With this in mind, the precise nature of the cowboy hero's role in such land settlement is a paradoxical one, since his role as town tamer also presupposes that his role will eventually become moribund. As the agent who makes the pioneer's taming of the wilderness possible, he is effectively the orchestrator of his own demise. The end of the wilderness, the closure of the frontier, signals the end of the free wilderness space, the arena in which the autonomous freedom's authenticity is

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[113] Ford, 1962, op. cit.
[114] De Toth, op. cit. I offer an ontological analysis of the film in Chapter Two.
[115] Buscombe, op. cit., p. 234.

enabled. This in turn connotes an eternal present, a rejection of the future project which for Sartre, but not Camus, is essential to autonomy. Consequently, as the concluding scenes of *The Magnificent Seven*[116] wherein the young Mexican Chico sacrifices his autonomy in favour of the societal self through marriage makes clear: *The farmers won. We lost. We always lose.* Likewise, while Shane the gunfighter fights and wins on behalf of the farmers, and thus appears to have superior skills to them, the dominant sense when he rides off is that he cannot carry on riding forever. Such inherent contradictions become particularly marked in *Day of the Outlaw*:

Starrett: *Ever known me break the peace, Vic?*
Vic: *No, but I've seen you put away some who tried to. I don't hold for killing*
Starrett: *You don't have to, long as you've got somebody to do it for you*
Vic: *I'm beholden to you for what you've done in the past, but things has changed, and we've gotta change with 'em*
Starrett: *I don't object to change. Just fences.*[117]

Despite assertions to the contrary, Starrett necessarily objects to change, here symbolised by "fences", since land enclosure signals the end of his role as autonomous individual protecting the community from external threats.

At the same time, settlement presupposes domesticity, as made overt by the western's frequent presentations of hearth and home. Such forms of existence are wholly incompatible with autonomy, however, as they require at least a modified form of the societal self. Therefore they counter authenticity and the exercise of freedom, and therefore have to be rejected. Such consequences of the mode of the in-itself are signalled by the outsider hero's self-identification with the wilderness as equivalent to home. As Will Lockhard puts it, *I always feel I belong where I am.*[118] That said, the in-itself and its reliance on the authentic freedom enabled by the wilderness is also apparent, hence the introduction of a limited form of alienation into a number of westerns. Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*,[119] for instance, is doomed to wander in the wilderness thereby connoting the exile of the autonomous self. That said, such social isolation necessitated by the mode of the in-itself is treated in positive terms, in

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[116] *The Magnificent Seven*, 1960. Directed by John Sturges. USA: U.A.
[117] de Toth, op. cit.
[118] Mann, 1955, op. cit.
[119] Ford, 1956, op. cit

contrast to existentialism's presentation of its negative consequences. Instead, for the western, the freedom of exile in the wilderness is essentially liberating, since it makes autonomy possible. In this way, westerns subvert the conventions of domestic society, replacing them with an idealised presentation of the non-societal, autonomous self. In ideological terms, however, the western can be said to present the interests of the individual as best served by independence and competition, and understood in this way can be seen to promote the values of capitalism: 'the proud individualism of civil market society, the individualism of freedom and equality'.[120]

Meanwhile, the western outsider's freedom also extends to his mode of death, a further manifestation of the in-itself. Death runs like a vein through all western narratives in the same way that being towards death and an overriding concern with death and its implications are fundamental to existentialism, since it represents the ultimate negation of existential processes. Films which feature elderly heroes, particularly the end-of-the-west cycle of westerns, such as *Lonely Are the Brave*,[121] *Guns in the Afternoon*[122] and, most poignantly, *The Shootist*[123] make this connection overt, although these outsiders still maintain an autonomous mode of being. The message of *The Shootist*, for example, is that it is preferable for the hero to effectively commit suicide by fighting one last un-winnable battle than to submit to passivity and die in bed. In ontological terms, this is a conflict between authentically dying and inauthentically living. The doctor, the insider figure representative of the being-for-others, offers the following prognosis to the autonomous hero, who has been diagnosed with cancer: *Both of us have had a lot to do with death. I'm not a brave man but you must be. This is not advice, it's not even a suggestion, it is just something for you to reflect on while your mind's still clear... I would not die a death like I've just described, not if I had your courage.*[124] This speech designates Books as the outsider figure, the in-itself, one who, as a result, privileges authentic death (suicide) over inauthentic life due to his ontological state, namely that of the

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[120] Wright, op. cit., p. 193.

[121] Miller, op. cit.

[122] aka *Ride The High Country*, 1961. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. USA: MGM.

[123] *The Shootist*, 1976. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Paramount. Wayne was, in fact, himself suffering from cancer whilst making the film, a poignant reminder of the inevitable blurring which can occur between star persona and character, a tendency which is particularly marked in Wayne's career trajectory.

[124] Ibid.

in-itself. He is therefore not governed by the fear of death or societal convention, (the illegality of suicide), which governs societal selves such as the doctor (the being-for-others), and the justice system which invokes the law against suicide (exemplifying the mode of the crowd: the-one). It is important to note, however, that this conflict is presented in ontological rather than, as might more conventionally be the case, ethical terms. Instead, it presents choices between differing modes of existence, including the negation of that existence. With this in mind, the film undoubtedly depicts Book's last stand as brave, but one also gets the sense that he cannot act otherwise, that the primary expression of the autonomous in-itself in a situation such as this is to fight, to the death if necessary, since his mode of being makes existence in a state of societal inauthenticity, an impossibility. Since the film is explicitly located within a societal context, conveyed through trams, for instance, it emphasises the conditions needed for autonomy, conditions which are no longer available to Books because the wilderness has been destroyed. As previously noted in relation to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*,[125] then, societal developments signal the end of the in-itself, and so the authentic freedom conferred by autonomy is dependant upon a non-societal context.

In this way, both the western and existentialism indicate that full autonomy of the type practiced in the western cannot succeed within a societal context. That said, some elements of authenticity still remain in the ideology of individualism, enshrined within the concept of frontier, which underpins a distinct strand of contemporary American ideology as we have seen.

Conclusion

Freedom has thus been established as intrinsic to both existentialist literature and the western, and underpins the value systems and thematic concerns of both, owing to their shared focus on the individual subject. The methods by which western and existentialist literature convey such freedoms also intersect. Both draw on connotations and imagery of wilderness, for instance, which transcend concrete notions of space and place. The western uses the wilderness as a metaphor for

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[125] Ford, 1962, op. cit.

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freedom, and accordingly, settlements as necessarily constrictive. For existentialism, however, the wilderness has itself become threatening and sterile with the onset of urbanisation, while the urban is itself equally restrictive. In this way, existentialism represents a more sophisticated reading of the clash between individual and societal values than the western does, since it represents authenticity as having been eroded by the sterility of modern life, the city and the urban wilderness. By doing so, however, it simultaneously affirms the western's viewpoint, that nature is essential to freedom, both symbolically and literally. In existentialist literature, though, this benign conceptualisation of nature no longer exists, and, indeed, the mythological nature of the wilderness in the western would seem to suggest that it never actually did.

Moreover, specifically individualistic formations of freedom have been established as central to American ideology and by extension, the western as invoked through the western frontier and the mythological wilderness. Likewise, the conceptualisations of freedom to be found in the work of Sartre and Camus are notably individualistic, in their case primarily reflective of philosophical and ethical rather than ideological concerns. Much more significantly for the purposes of the thesis, though, the existentialist concepts which I have applied to the western's outsider, a figure frequently assumed to derive from the ideology of individualism, has proved him to be much more important than merely the bearer of American ideological values. Seen in ontological terms, he becomes a highly unified version of the autonomous mode of being, the in-itself. This is due to the western's non-societal, mythical context, which enables the presentation of complete autonomy and its expression through authentic activity such as the non-ethical, violent acts explored in the next chapter. In this way, the western presents differing modes of being-in-the-world and their implications both for lived existence and its negation, in a much clearer and more fully worked out way than existentialist works are able to do. This is because the societal context of existentialist ideas means that autonomy and its practice becomes highly problematic and therefore subject to alienation and punishment as we have seen in relation to the treatment of the existentialist outsider by societal beings. So the western and existentialist novels both project and idealise the non-societal mode of the in-itself, but the western's context appears to make the attainment of such a state of being possible, whilst the existentialist novel suggests the opposite. That said, the western's reliance

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on an essentially escapist, mythical non-social context, means that it too ultimately acknowledges the impossibility of autonomy within the context of that actual lived existence which the existentialism conveys through its usage of the conventions of realism.

As such, the western hero as template of outsider-ness raises the same ontological questions and issues as those raised by existentialist works, having political implications, such as the appropriate relationship between individual and a society, as well as ethical ones, namely the possibility of ethics for non-societal forms of being, which I argue to be incompatible with ethics as conventionally conceived. Understood in this way, existentialist readings of the western hero once again demonstrate that he is much more than merely an individualistic outsider, for his pure autonomy raises vital questions relating to, for example, the nature of human identity, existence and relationships with others, together with its rightful expression, questions which societally imbued existentialist works necessarily address by much more convoluted means.

Having established the significance of freedom for the western and existentialism, I now turn to consider a phenomenon which can be seen as a consequence of the mode of the in-itself, namely violence, which I argue to be the authentic expression of the autonomous mode of being. For Warshow, the role of violence in westerns is principally an ethical one. He argues, for instance, that it offers, 'a serious orientation to the problem of violence such as can be found almost nowhere else in our culture',[126] concluding that one of the, 'peculiarities of modern civilised opinion is its refusal to acknowledge the value of violence'.[127] However, I wish to argue that it is illogical to imbue violence and its corollaries, such as justice, with ethical co-ordinates for, understood in ontological terms, the in-itself of the western hero derives from a non-social mode of being and is thus essentially non-social. I will do so by the application of existentialist concepts and analysis to westerns and their heroes, which are once again seen to capture the autonomous mode of being-in-the-world.

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[126] Warshow, R. 1964. *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture.* New York: Anchor. p. 103.
[127] Ibid., p. 103.

Chapter Five
Existential Violence and the Western Hero

Introduction

Chapter Four demonstrated the ways in which western and existentialist texts concern themselves with the primacy of the individual, individualistic values and the interconnection between subject and society, expressed through their treatment of the outsider figure in relation to the concept of freedom. For the western, it seems reasonable to situate the outsider hero within a longstanding tradition of individualism in American culture that tends to equate freedom with the exercise of individual self-interest. As such, individual interests are seen to "naturally" generate conflicts, both with other members of society and societal concerns as a whole. Meanwhile, individualism is much less typically associated with existentialism, although Camus makes such constituents overt in his assertion that,

> More and more, when faced with the world of men, the only reaction is one of individualism. Man alone is an end unto himself. Everything you try to do for the common good ends in failure. Even if you like to try it from time to time, decency demands that you do so with the required amount of scorn. Withdraw into yourself completely, and play your own game.[1]

Much more importantly than ideological interpretations such as these, though, I established the western hero as emblematic of ontological concerns, the nature of being-in-the-world as non-societal individual, and the consequence of autonomy for the boundaries of individual freedom. I also proposed the western hero to represent the autonomous in-itself much more transparently than the existentialist works are able to do, owing to its non-societal context. And so, the western outsider figure raises ontological questions and concerns analogous to those suggested by his existentialist counterpart, without the complications generated by societal context. In the present chapter, meanwhile, I explore the nature of violence in the western in

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[1] Camus, A. Tr. Philip Thody, 1963. *Notebooks 1935-1942*. London: Harvest/HBJ. p. 171.

relation to existentialist ideas and concepts, which are placed alongside ideological formulations as befits the western's previously established roots in individualism.

Violent acts are intrinsic to the western film narrative and existentialist fiction, and can in part be attributed to the requirements of drama. Violence can also be seen as being essentially escapist and ideologically informed, representing a composite of individualism and the primacy of the masculine hero: 'in the western, the hero has rejected or left behind the traditional world, but he is not prepared to commit himself to the new order, for he senses that it will destroy his individual identity. In the end, he finds a mode of action, usually through violence, that reaffirms his individual code'.[2] As such, individual violence can be conceived as the ultimate exercise of individual power, stemming from the market economy model, which is arguably embodied by the western hero: 'Property is a confirmation of the individual self inasmuch as goods are gotten through one's own effort, one's own faith in oneself. But resident in this ideal is a violent reality; an individualised society is one in which people necessarily compete rather than co-operate'.[3]

Further, as mentioned in Chapter Three's discussion of masculinity, acts of heroic violence can also be seen to reflect a particular gendered mode of being, in psycho-sociological terms, for example, the violent, lone hero, 'insists upon asserting his inner-directed self in an increasingly other-directed world'.[4] At the same time, conceptualisations such as these, which associate aggressive characteristics with violence in a way that appears to be eminently reasonable, signal the process by which violence seems to "naturally" link with masculine qualities. In this way, violence is most frequently formulated as gender specific, and, frequently, biologically driven, the province of men. Although the perpetrators of violence are not wholly confined to the male gender in actuality,[5] Sartre's assertion that 'Men, it

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[2] Cawelti, J.G. 1976. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture.* London: University of Chicago Press. p. 250.

[3] Ryan, M & Kellner, D. 1990. *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film.* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. p. 227.

[4] Cawelti op. cit., p. 250.

[5] The following extract, David Adams, 'Gene Scientists Plan Aggression Drug', [Guardian Newspaper, 20/07/04], which contains a number of underlying assumptions, is typical of scientific reports on the gender imbalance of violence, however: 'In 2002, researchers at King's College London and the University of Wisconsin, Madison showed that one common form of a gene called MAOA that acts on

is said...do not *deserve* peace. That's true. True quite simply in the sense that they *make* war',[6] typifies assumptions concerning gender and violence in both the public and private realms. Such conceptualisations are mirrored in the representational sphere, which also treats violence as predominantly masculine in nature. Conversely, masculinity itself is frequently understood to be produced and defined by violence, a process which has been defined as the, 'symbolic definition of masculinity through violence'.[7]

I have argued that the outsider figure can be seen to be a medium for individualism. Understood in ideological terms, then, violence stems from the aggression provoked by the need for solitude. Such isolationism requires defence where any social contact occurs, thereby provoking essentially self-protective violence: 'Because the social world is necessarily interdependent, such isolation is necessarily aggressive. Aggression separates, whereas affection binds and makes one dependent... Freedom of action is his norm; it requires the repudiation of anyone who threatens his space or his sense of singular importance'.[8] I have gone further than ideological claims such as these, though, by suggesting that the western outsider can be recast in ontological terms, representing a particular mode of being-in-the-world with implications for the nature of lived existence. The mode of being he displays, the authentic in-itself, is essentially non-societal, which can be used to account for the type of "unethical"

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enzymes in the brain makes men more likely to be violent—but only if they experienced cruelty or rejection in childhood. Prof Pfaff said: "The end goal has to be to keep the guy out of prison, and we are mainly talking about boys. The gender ratio is incredible". Men are responsible for 94% of violent incidents within families, he said'. p. 3.

[6] Sartre, J.-P. 1985. *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War*. London: Verso. p. 127. This is taken from Notebook 5. The notebooks document the time Sartre spent stationed at a meteorological unit in Alsace during 1939 and 1940, in the period preceding the invasion of France.

[7] R. W. Connell, 'The History of Masculinity', in Adams, R. & Savran, D. eds. 2002. *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 250. Gender orientation certainly shifts in relation to typical fictional representations of victim-hood, in which the balance is weighted greatly towards the passive female across a range of generic structures. Specifically in connection to the western, though, Thumin argues that a passive male partner is frequently presupposed by what she views as the frequent sexualisation of violent confrontations such as gunbattles, redolent of stereotypical male-female power dynamics. While such combative situations typically involve worthy opponents, required to be powerful in order to generate the requisite tension, she makes reference to an underlying tendency of these confrontations to present: 'the dubious pleasures of spectacularly sexualised violence...a cover for a more disturbing model of male sexuality, one which requires a powerless partner (should I say victim, opponent?)'. Janet Thumin, 'Maybe He's Tough But He Sure Ain't No Carpenter: Masculinity and In/Competence in Unforgiven', in Kitses, J. & Rickman, G. eds. 1999. *The Western Reader*. New York: Limelight. p. 348. However, such concerns lie outside the remit of the thesis.

[8] Ibid., p. 215.

behaviour he typically demonstrates, for it is often argued that violence is, 'something that happens…beyond all morality'.[9]

It is certainly the case that if the western hero's behaviour were to be translated from the representational realm into lived practice he would be subject to punishment, as is his existentialist counterpart. This is because his acts are those of the free individual, which are in turn likely to impinge upon the freedoms of others. Reconfigured in ontological terms, however, the hero's violent acts become the inevitable outcome of his autonomous state of being, a mode which presupposes a non-societal context, as proposed in the previous chapter. As such, it makes no sense to judge his behaviour in terms of ethical norms derived from society, as his mode of being is necessarily non-social. In this way, heroic violence can be seen as an expression of autonomy, as indicative of the freedoms of the individual self, freedoms which are unattainable by societal selves, in the western's universe, societal others. It is therefore reliant on a sense of individual free-will lost to societal selves, and makes it possible to place an alternative perspective upon the western hero's role as executor of justice, not as the exercise of individualism in its most extreme form, but instead as the expression of his existential mode of being.

It has been argued that death provides the central focus of the western, 'death of a certain kind…death understood in a certain way',[10] and that this informs the western's tendency to revolve around rituals of death and killing, at the same time functioning as the primary influence upon the western hero's world value system, which I analyse in ontological terms as reflecting the extreme of self-negation. If this is so, then the genre's violence is placed in a different context from that displayed in, for example, the war film, which, while similar in terms of its propensity for violent scenes, has differing overall concerns. While combat and death undoubtedly constitute the main narrative focus of war films, for westerns they form an *underlying* thematic and metaphysical framework as well as functioning as a dramatic dynamo: 'As guns constitute the visible moral centre of the Western movie, suggesting

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[9] Colebrook, C. 2002. *Giles Deleuze*. London: Routledge. p. 38. Colebrook's assertion is based on Deleuze's phenomenology of cinema mentioned in Chapter One.
[10] French, P. 1997. *Cowboy Metaphysics: Ethics and Death in Westerns*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield. p. 3.

continually the possibility of violence, so land and horses represent the movie's material basis, its sphere of action'.[11] Such differences in treatment can also be attributed to differing contexts as Richard Collins indicates:

> it is not because firearms are one of the formal elements constituting the genre that violence is endemic to the Western, but because the era depicted in the Western was one in which people were armed and violence was endemic. Similarly, the reason that there are few pacifist Westerns is not because death by a .45 bullet is less unpleasant than death by a flamethrower, napalm or Lazy Dog, but because violence in the West is of a different historical nature from violence in war.[12]

This suggests that the ubiquitous nature of violence in the western's narrative is more nuanced than might at first appear, whether or not Deleuze's assessment that 'violence becomes the principal impetus'[13] is accurate. Furthermore, explanations for the violent nature of both the West and the western film genre remain contested. For Collins, the western reflects the intrinsically violent nature of the historical West, while Buscombe[14] maintains that, 'the West, as a region, was far less violent than the cities of the Northeast or certain counties in the South—popular myth continues to assert that the frontier was pre-eminent in the realm of violence',[15] an issue already broached in relation to frontier ideology in the previous chapter, but which will be viewed in ontological terms in this one.

Unsurprisingly, in view of its focus on the nature of existence, the existentialist novel also concerns itself with death, be it in individual[16] or group[17] modes. Indeed,

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[11] Warshow, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

[12] Richard Collins, 'Genre: A Reply to Ed Buscombe', in Nichols, B. ed. 1976. *Movies and Methods Vol. 1*. London: University of California Press. p. 160.

[13] Deleuze, G. 1986. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: Athlone. p. 167. Deleuze is explicitly referring to the western here.

[14] Collins's 1970 paper, from *Screen* Vol. 11, nos. 4/5, was written in response to Buscombe's article, 'The Idea of Genre in American Cinema', in *Screen*, Vol. 11, no. 2. It should be noted that the quotation cited here is from a later work: Buscombe, E. ed. 1998. 2nd edition. *BFI Companion to the Western*. London: BFI.

[15] Buscombe, ibid., p. 233.

[16] For example, *The Outsider*, Camus, 1963, op. cit., discussed at length throughout the thesis. Moreover, Brée discerns a direct connection between Camus' political and literary works and his personal qualities as I discuss later in this chapter: 'he sensed it [violence] in himself. It was through his writing that he sought the self-knowledge to curb it'. As such, 'he was engaged in a social struggle to achieve a greater measure of justice for all men'. Brée, G. 1974. *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment*. London: Calder & Boyars. p. 146.

Jacques Guicharnaud argues that violence and death, in particular violent death, are crucial to the dramatic depiction and exploration of ontological issues in fictional form as well as comprising a central issue in Camus and Sartre's politically engaged work:

> Everyday acts, taken one after the other, can be successfully used in the novel... But dramatic economy demands that the weight of dilution be replaced by the shock of concentration, and the effect is produced through a violent or monstrous act... If it is true that every act brings man's very being into question, murder, where even an illusion of reparation is impossible, is the best means of bringing it into play. Moreover, Sartre and Camus, in the belief that great violence is a sign of the times, use murder in all its forms. As death is the situation par excellence for bringing man's being into question, whether the tragedy be private or collective, to kill or be killed is the symbol of man's greatest problem.[18]

However, I do not wish to propose that death and violence, while conjoined to some extent, are inevitably—and inextricably—linked in fictional representations such as the ones under examination. After all, it is not a pre-requisite for acts of violence that they end in death, although in westerns they invariably do once the moment of catharsis is attained. Equally, violence is not intrinsic to death, though in the fictional realm, particularly action genres, violent death figures heavily.[19] Certainly, the two are to some extent interdependent, but the treatment and consequent reception of such themes can be wildly disparate.

With this in mind, I examine the ethical implications of violence as the expression of the masculine autonomous self, initially through Camus' work on justice, which

[17] For example, Camus, A., 1966. *The Plague*. Middlesex: Penguin, a work whose overall thesis is that collective violence is ultimately futile. As Brée puts it: 'In *The Plague*, violence is deadly faceless presence that works through the social organism, consuming individuals like a monstrous machine, purposelessly piling up their bodies like so much industrial "waste", and silently, relentlessly, invading all the spheres of private life... It is an all-pervasive evil, and, even in those who fight it, requires a total subordination to the conditions it imposes'. Ibid., p. 219.

[18] Jacques Guicharnaud, 'Man and His Acts' in Kern, E., ed. 1962. *Sartre: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall. p. 64.

[19] For instance, it may well be that the highly violent slaughter of a group of aliens in a science fiction film elicits no emotional reaction from the audience at all. Indeed it is not meant to, for such scenes can operate as the pretext for scenes of violence, without highlighting issues of a sensitive nature, such as moral issues. On the other hand, if the aliens have been introduced in a sympathetic manner, as embodying human characteristics, for example, then a similar scene could reasonably be expected to provoke an entirely different set of emotional responses such as empathy, for example. As a result, while violence is explored partly in relation to death in this chapter, it is not seen exclusively in those terms.

raises a number of questions pertinent to a critique of western heroic violence. For example, can the end ever justify the means as regards individual acts of violence? The western suggests that it can, by treating violence as a just response to evil. Secondly, I present Camus' identification of violence with regenerative properties and social progress,[20] which can be applied to the ideologically informed conquest of the West woven throughout the entire western film genre.[21] The discussion then broadens to include ethical and ontological implications, with particular reference to concepts that are widely used to justify acts of violence, both fictional and political. Here, I draw primarily on those elements in Camus' work which inform his representation of the outsider figure discussed throughout the thesis.

During the course of this chapter, then, I map a range of source material onto the chapter's principal concerns, in order to reveal the precise nature of the apparently symbiotic relationship between the outsider hero, violence, justice and death, in ontological terms, the negation of existence. I conclude by identifying some of the implications of my findings for the study of violent representations in relation to existentialist concepts.

Violence as Masculine Autonomous Expression

Violence is frequently seen as characteristic of individualism in action.[22] Recast in ontological terms, this becomes an indicator of the mode of the in-itself, which is primarily, though not inevitably, masculine in nature, due to its non-societal constitution, as previously established. Viewed in this way, violence can be seen as the expression of the authentic self, the state of autonomy as I go on to explore later. Be that as it may, violence is also assumed to be symptomatic of problematic aspects of the male psyche, particularly in feminist critiques:

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[20] I draw mainly on Camus, A. 1991. Tr. Alexandre de Gramont. *Between Hell and Reason: Essays from the Resistance Newspaper Combat, 1944-1947*. Hanover: University Press of New England, and Camus, A. 1988. Tr. Justin O'Brien. *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*. New York: Vintage, for such ideas.
[21] I discuss the ideological connotations of the frontier conquest in Chapter Four.
[22] I am not suggesting that it is only this, of course. I allude to the group variant in relation to lynching later in the chapter, but the individualistic variant necessarily remains the main focus of the chapter.

what act could be more crudely and stereotypically masculine than a show of violence? But while violence uses all the visible aspects of male utility—strength, decisiveness, courage, even skill—its purpose is only to dismantle and destroy. Violence stands in for action but is also an act of concealment, a threatening mask because it hides a lack of purpose.[23]

Further, violence can be viewed as a "natural" expression of male sexuality, an outlet for the release of those biological instincts repressed by the norms of civilised behaviour, which in turn engender psychological blockages:

Since release has been demonised, blockage becomes a mode of managing, although never curing, the trauma experienced by the men in the film. Not at all marked by sentimentality or nostalgia for a time when men were men, the film's tone is more of a sad acknowledgement that the crisis in masculinity it chronicles has become incurable, indeed, the norm of masculinity that can never find health through violence. All that is left is an image of a hysterical male body, torn between the competing and mutually unsatisfying, imperatives to repress and express.[24]

Though violence can convincingly be conceived as male-orientated in this way,[25] further gender conflations can be seen to occur in relation to the action genre, violence and masculinity. For example, Neale makes a number of assumptions concerning action genres that involve violence in his application of "the gaze" to male spectatorship:

If we take some of the terms used in her [Mulvey's] description...they can immediately be applied to 'male' genres, to films concerned largely or solely with the depiction of relations between men, to any film, for example, in which there is a struggle between a hero and a male villain...which implies that male figures on the screen are subject to voyeuristic looking, both on the part of the spectator and on the part of other male characters.[26]

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[23] Faludi, S. 1999. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man*. London: Chatto & Windus. p. 37. I analyse Faludi's ideas on masculinity in Chapter Three.

[24] Sally Robinson, '"Emotional Constipation", and the Power of Dammed Masculinity: *Deliverance* and the Paradoxes of Male Liberation', in Lehman, P. ed. 2001. *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*. London: Routledge.pp. 143-144.

[25] I will therefore not rehearse these arguments again, but rather, assume this to be the case in the following discussions.

[26] Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', in Caughie, J. & Kuhn, A. eds. 1992. *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. London: Routledge. p. 284.

In ideological terms, violence can also be configured as a power struggle: 'the issue of gun fighting is...about competition, dominance and power—overtly about the relations *between* men... The competitive strategy of the gunfighter is to inspire fear in his opponent, and fear is evidence of weakness, if not submission'.[27]

One of the key plot devices of the western's narrative, namely the bar-room confrontation between gunfighter and opponents, lends weight to such interpretations. These operate as a battle of wills between contestants, an arena in which opponents can uncover each other's strengths and weaknesses in order to determine status, as well as constituting both rationale and backdrop for the violent activities integral to the generic trajectory. For instance, Joe Starrett's enemies mock the apparently reformed gunfighter, Shane,[28] for his consumption of soda pop but this is not only a means to provoke him into that action which constitutes his raison d'être as action hero. Instead, Shane's deliberate refusal to comply both with the conventions of masculine drinking and the subsequent challenge to his dignity are intended to signal cowardice—submission—[29] to the onlookers. The composition of the drink is highly significant for it has childish connotations, emphasised in the eponymous novel by Joey's[30] observations concerning the barkeeper's reactions to Shane's request: 'Will hesitated, looked kind of funny and scuttled past me into the store room. He came back right away with a bottle of pop Grafton kept there for us school kids'.[31] In this way, its juvenile status gives Shane's opponents the opportunity to signal his subordinate status during subsequent visits to the bar. For them, Shane's manhood is called into question by his unconventional choice, which by its very nature challenges the convention dictating that the ability to consume large quantities of undiluted whisky signifies a fully evolved "masculine" male.[32]

On an ideological reading such as this, then, the dynamic of the bar room confrontation is essentially that of an aggressive, power-orientated competition for

[27]Thumin, in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., pp. 346-347.

[28] *Shane*, 1953. Directed by George Stevens. USA: Paramount.

[29] Shane's real motivation, of course, is a refusal to return to his "old ways", a desire that the narrative has to ultimately block, while it also generates much tension until the inevitable showdown.

[30] Joey is Starrett's son, a character who acts as an observer throughout the novel.

[31] Schaefer, J. 1963. *Shane and Other Stories*. Middlesex: Peacock. p. 53.

[32] Innumerable bar-room scenarios testify to this transgeneric convention.

status between rival males. In ontological terms, however, it is reconfigured as the type of conflict inevitably generated by the co-existence of the in-itself and the-one, the mode which threatens autonomy. Shane's refusal to comply with the norms of masculinity becomes a signal of his autonomous state of being, the in-itself, which precludes his acting in accordance with the wishes of others, which would signal the mode of the-one: the crowd mentality displayed by onlookers and opponents alike. In this way, his status as authentic hero is highlighted. Importantly, however, during the course of these events, Shane's heroic nature is revealed via his self-restraint, which, while seen as cowardly by his enemies, invokes qualities of heroic control, and thus, the power conferred by authenticity. In this way, he does not submit to the childish jibes of others by responding. To do so would be to acknowledge them as worthy opponents, namely equals, rather than the inauthentic crowd who challenge him. Instead, Shane acts primarily out of loyalty, on a friend's behalf when required to do so, thus satisfying both honour and audience expectations, and in turn enhancing his reputation for courage in the face of genuine injustice. As such, the reaction to provocation manifests itself in an appropriately controlled manner, whereby the challenge is answered with a response befitting to an experienced western gunfighter hero for, as Warshow puts it,

> the values we seek in the Western…are in the image of a single man who wears a gun on his thigh. The gun tells us that he believes in a world of violence and even that he "believes in violence." But the drama is one of self-restraint: the moment of violence must come in its own time and according to its special laws, or else it is valueless.[33]

In this way, masculine honour is satisfied, and Shane's status as powerful and chivalrous hero reinforced, the bar-room verbal sparring in effect an arena for the display of masculine power relations, in addition to affording a pretext for violence. More importantly for the concerns of the thesis, however, the bar-room becomes a space in which alternative modes of being-in-the-world can be displayed and tested, always to the detriment of the inauthentic, societal self due to the western's investment in authentic heroes. That said, however positive the film's treatment of authenticity might appear to be, it is significant that its authentic hero returns to a

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[33] Warshow, op. cit., p. 205.

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state of exile and possibly, alienation, on leaving the community. He is also wounded, perhaps fatally, thereby adding another layer of complexity, because the possible demise of the in-itself invokes the ultimate negation of existence. If this is the case then the film can be seen to acknowledge the successful incursion of societal beings upon the in-itself in a way that challenges the conventional trajectory of the heroic autonomous self. Further, it is important to note that the ultimate threat to the in-itself is signalled not by the mode of the-one, in this case, the group of villains, but rather the mode of being-for-others as represented by Starrett, his wife and his son, the settlers who eventually replace the in-itself in the western's trajectory of civilising processes, as established in the previous chapter.

Seen in ideological terms, the power balance between hero and opponent cannot be too great without sacrificing both dramatic tension and the veracity of the ensuing violent confrontation. As a result, Shane's prime opponent is an evil and highly effective gunslinger, Wilson, who represents the in-itself in its extreme, negative form. In turn, one of the key methods by which *High Noon*[34] generates suspense is through Will Kane's perfectly justifiable fear. This is not due purely to the numerical discrepancy if he is forced to fight alone, however, since it is clear that the townspeople feel equally threatened, despite the fact that the villains would be greatly outnumbered by a posse. Rather, Kane is additionally afraid because he knows his opponents to be dangerous, such qualities underscored by the frequent menacing shots of them, intercut with Kane's increasingly urgent preparations. Thus, they embody a very real threat, one which, combined with the temporal exigencies, sustains dramatic tension throughout the film even though the outcome is pre-determined by generic convention. On the other hand, recast in existentialist terms, the hero but also, interestingly, the villains can be seen to occupy the role of authentic beings, the in-itself, and so additionally generate the wish fulfilment for an audience aware that such autonomy is entirely unachievable within societal parameters, namely, existence alongside others.

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[34] *High Noon,* 1952. Directed by Fred Zinnemann. USA: United Artists. I explain the role played by the villains in more detail in Chapter Two.

Meanwhile, in *Once Upon A Time In The West*,[35] the villain Frank is presented as being utterly effective as a man of violence, in addition to embodying a dominant masculine force meriting only the strongest opponents. This power can be attributed entirely to Frank's violent masculine capabilities, but an existentialist reading could also suggest that it derives from the power conferred by autonomy because, as previously established in relation to *High Noon*,[36] it is not only heroes that can embody an autonomous state of being in the western. Understood in this way, Frank displays the mode of the in-itself in an extreme, and thus inauthentic, form which becomes a position of alienation, one which is diametrically opposed to the societal self, the being-for-others. It is irrelevant that these values are ethically "wrong" insofar as his violent activities are the expression of his autonomy, because they can be identified as intrinsically inauthentic. This is because acts like these are by their very ontological nature non-social, and thus not subject to socially derived values, in other words, ethical norms.

In accordance with the conventions of western outsider heroes, Harmonica also displays the mode of the in-itself, although this time not in extreme, that is negative, form. As a result, his violent activities can be seen as the expression of an authentic mode of being, although equally, their provenance in vengeance would be seen as problematic if viewed in ethical rather than ontological terms. And so, he is unable to engage with others whilst Jill, the heroine, embodies the being-for-others, a mode also displayed by the character of Cheyenne, who, in the following exchange with Jill concerning the consequences of Harmonica's autonomous outsider-ness, illustrates an awareness of the needs of others which runs contrary to the mode of the in-itself: *You don't understand, Jill. People like that have something inside... something to do with death. If that fellow lives, he'll come in through that door, pick up his gear and say "adios".* Moreover, Cheyenne's other-awareness proves to be accurate, as illustrated by Harmonica's final words to Jill, which also acknowledge the interconnectedness of his mode of being with civilising processes discussed in relation to freedom in the previous chapter:

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[35] *Once Upon A Time In The West*, 1968. Directed by Sergio Leone. Italy/USA: Paramount. I am aware that the film intends to parody western conventions, but it thereby highlights and perhaps even reinforces them in useful ways.
[36] Op. cit.

Harmonica: *I gotta go.* [pause] *It's going to be a beautiful town, Sweetwater.*
Jill: *I hope you'll come back someday.*
Harmonica: [very long pause, and then, in a tone devoid of conviction] *Someday...*

Meanwhile, in ideological terms, Frank's lack of that business acumen which comprises an alternative source of power is highlighted in a series of dialogic exchanges. For instance, his associate Morton is overtly, and justifiably, mistrustful of Frank's methods, and is thus at pains to promote money as the more powerful weapon:

Morton: *There are many things you'll never understand.*
[Morton pulls out money to show him. Simultaneously, Frank draws his pistol]
Morton: *This is one of them. You see, Frank, there are many kinds of weapons. And the only one that can stop that is this.*

The point is further reinforced in an exchange with the hero, Harmonica, which also broaches the issue of masculinity, this time though, indicative of the gender's universal qualities:

Harmonica: *So, you're not a businessman after all.*
Frank: *Just a man.*
Harmonica: *An ancient race...*

In a similar vein, Frank admits that sitting at Morton's desk feels *almost like holding a gun... only much more powerful.* Unsurprisingly, however, he is not content to let Morton dominate him in this way, so reasserts his own power and the value of violence by attributing Morton's reliance on money and verbal abilities to failings in masculine courage and physicality, drawing on the notion that "real" men fight rather than talk. First, Frank counters that his methods achieve the swiftest results: *My weapons might look simple to you, Mr. Morton, but they can still shoot holes big enough for our little problems.* Then, he knocks Morton off his crutches,[37] taunting him with the words: *Who knows...how far you'd have gone with two good legs, huh?* Finally, he concludes: *You've made a big mistake, Morton. When you're not on that train, you look like a turtle out of its shell. Just funny. Poor cripple talking big so nobody'll know how scared you are.*

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[37] Morton has tuberculolosis of the spine, and is therefore reliant on crutches.

By allowing Frank to win for a brief time in this way, the film seems to suggest that, prior to the full settlement of the West, Morton's "civilised", business orientated methods are of only limited use value in the acquisition of power. However, the episode amounts to a pyrrhic victory for the power of the non-moral individual, since the rapidly encroaching railroad depicted in the closing sequences indicates that the future belongs to businessmen and settlers, a message echoed by *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*,[38] which also foregrounds the railroad in its closing scenes.[39] Cheyenne views such evolution in positive terms, as befits his societal mode of being, observing that, *It will be nice to see this town grow.*[40] At the same time, Jill's enduring presence during the closing sequences—in which the last gunfighter, namely the hero, gathers his belongings and rides out of frame—indicates that, once again, the western acknowledges that the mode of being-for-others (Jill) and the-one (the railroad workers) survive in the civilised West, whilst also invoking the sadness involved in the demise of the autonomous in-itself: the outsider hero, who cannot be transplanted to a civilised setting as we have seen.

Frank's methods are clearly "villainous" when viewed in ethical, rather than ontological terms, namely self-indulgent, cruel and ritualistic, rather than swift and efficient as befits heroic forms of violence. Such character traits are graphically illustrated by Frank's prolonged hanging of Harmonica's brother, the horror of which is only revealed at the film's cathartic climax, wherein the entire sequence of events is finally allowed to unfold.[41] The camera pans back to reveal the brother hanging from an archway, standing on Harmonica's shoulders with a noose around his neck which, when Harmonica inevitably stumbles and literally bites the dust, results in his brother's death. In this way, both brothers are gratuitously and violently tortured, one in the literal sense, the other, Harmonica, psychologically, as he has to endure the psychological trauma of being the deciding factor in his brother's death. Further, the

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[38] *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, 1962. Directed by John Ford. USA: Paramount.

[39] I am certainly not suggesting that the two films' closing scenes are identical by any means. After all, the town and railroad are fully established in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. However, the railroad appears to perform similar symbolic functions in both films.

[40] Leone, 1968, op. cit. The poignancy of this comment is highlighted by the fact that Cheyenne will not live to see this occur, since he is bleeding to death at this point in the film.

[41] Prior to this, various fragmented events are shown in flashback form in order to generate tension and maximum psychological impact when the climax is finally reached.

torture endured by Harmonica means that the experience is constant revisited via the recurring trope of the haunting fragmented melody played on the same harmonica that was formerly wedged between his teeth by a smiling Frank with the words, *Keep your lovin' brother happy*. As previously noted, violence does not necessarily end in death in the western, though it usually does, as these differing outcomes make manifest. The termination of being-in-the-world that the brother's death portrays, though, differs from the deaths of the villains, since it is presented in a dramatic way, whereas the deaths of villains are not seen in dramatic terms at all, rather, as the negation of existence. At the same time, Frank's violent actions can be seen as an exercise of the in-itself although, as previously stressed, at the same time expressive of the negative extreme of this particular mode of being, in its own way equally inauthentic as the societal forms.

Further, Warshow comments that, 'There is little cruelty in Western movies, and little sentimentality',[42] and therefore, the villain Frank's negative expression of the in-itself provides an important contrast with positive heroic authenticity, which exercises violence only when required by the mode of the in-itself, primarily in the service of justice as discussed later in the chapter. In this way, while the hero and villain are equal partners in terms of the power conferred by autonomy, it is authenticity that distinguishes Harmonica from Frank, whose defeat stems from his opponent's positive autonomy. Justice is palpably on the hero's side, as invoked so powerfully by the flashback sequences. In this way, it is virtually impossible for the audience not to identify with the hero's quest for the vengeance required by authenticity. The authenticity of the mission is heightened by the emotionality of its treatment,[43] which can be seen as a distinguishing mark of spaghetti westerns: 'The strongly affective nature of Leone's treatment of the western has been described as emotional… Many of the spaghetti westerns are male melodramas… The non-verbal and affective strategies of melodrama and opera are conveyed in the iconography, in bodily movement…and in the use of intense close-up'.[44] In this way, Frank's

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[42] Warshow, op. cit., p. 205.
[43] The emotionality of the sequence of events is thrown into sharp relief by the excessively unemotive performance of the hero, which, as noted below, also applies to the Eastwood portrayals.
[44] Marcia Landy, 1992. 'He Went Thataway: The Form and Style of Leone's Italian Westerns', in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., pp. 217-218.

recurring question: *Who are you?* is more than a factual request, since he is aware of Harmonica's authentic desire for justice and, further, that it pertains to something he, Frank, has done. This conviction is further reinforced by Harmonica's responses to his ostensibly innocuous question:

Frank: *What do you want? Who are you?*
Harmonica: *Dave Jenkins.*
Frank: *Dave Jenkins was dead a long time ago.*
Harmonica: *Calder Benson.*
Frank: *What's your name? Benson's dead, too.*
Harmonica: *You should know, Frank, better than anyone. You killed them.*

And again,

Frank: *Who are you?*
Harmonica: *Jim Cooper, Chuck Youngblood.*
Frank: *More dead men.*
Harmonica: *They were all alive until they met you, Frank.*

And so, when Frank arrives at the railroad construction to find Harmonica prior to the final catharsis, the following exchange occurs:

Frank: *Nothing matters now—not the land, not the money, not the woman. I came here to see you. 'Cause I know that now, you'll tell me what you're after.*
Harmonica: *Only at the point of dyin'…*

Frank's face displays relief as a result of this interchange, for the mystery of The Man's[45] claim to him will finally be at an end. Thus, Harmonica has the psychological advantage, and Frank's recollection of the events, evoked by the harmonica being forced between his teeth, is achieved only at the point of death before he too literally bites the dust, slain by conscience as much as a bullet. It is important to note, however, that there is not a power imbalance between the hero and

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[45] Harmonica is only a nickname. Cheyenne describes him thus: *Do you know anything about a guy going around playing the harmonica? He's someone you'd remember. Instead of talking, he plays. And when he better play, he talks.* The Man's identity is never fully revealed, either to Frank or the audience, an enigmatic identity that accords with No Name in Clint Eastwood's spaghetti western roles, culminating in the previously discussed ghost in *High Plains Drifter*, [1972. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Universal]. "The Man With No Name" can be seen as the logical outcome of the stranger figure that all cowboy heroes embody, through their embodiment of the societally unattainable in-itself, as I have argued throughout the thesis.

the villain here. Instead, the inequality derives from their differing modes of being, the authentic and inauthentic in-itself in service of ends which need not therefore be posited in ethical but, rather, ontological terms which acknowledge the essentially non-social nature of the in-itself represented by the outsider figure, deriving as it does from a non-social mode of being-in-the-world, thereby rendering it irrelevant for socially derived norms such as ethics.

An alternative way in which the hero and villain can be presented as equal in terms of the power and skill generated by autonomy, either in positive (authentic heroic) or negative (inauthentic, non-heroic/villainous) form, is by the presentation of a covert mutual admiration between them. For example, in relation to Anthony Mann's hero/villain figures: 'The characteristic love/hate rapport of charming "villain" and near-psychotic "hero" indicates that the greater danger for the Mann protagonist is the possibility of becoming completely what he so resembles, the Mann villain'.[46] This 'rapport' is demonstrated by the principle male characters in *The Naked Spur*.[47] These all display aspects of the in-itself in some degree: the hero bounty hunter, (the authentic in-itself), a dishonourably discharged soldier, (formerly the-one when a soldier, now evolving into the in-itself in inauthentic form), and a murderer "villain", (the in-itself, again in its negative, inauthentic mode, although here, a concern for external validation indicates an embryonic sense of being-for-others as well).

Typically, the female character embodies the being-for-others, thus marking the boundaries between differing modes of being which can also be mapped onto gender to some extent as argued in Chapter Three. As Vandergroat says to Lina: *They're men, honey, and you ain't. Remember that*.[48] Viewed ethically, the characters exhibit differing degrees of moral ambivalence although recast in ontological terms, once again ethics become irrelevant to all but the female, for they all inhabit non-social modes of being, and so, 'the bounty-hunter and his prey do not seem very different'.[49] It could, perhaps, be argued that the positive elements of the authentic

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[46] The words of an American critic, quoted by Paul Willeman, 1981 in, 'Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male', in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., p. 209.
[47] *The Naked Spur*, 1953. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: MGM.
[48] Mann, 1953, op. cit.
[49] Deleuze, 1986, op. cit., p. 167.

in-itself are stretched to their limits in representations such as these. In this case Kemp, the hero is frequently hysterical and rarely chivalrous, motivated by greed and bitterness suggestive of alienation in ontological terms, although importantly, justice too becomes an issue later in the film, signalling the exercise of the autonomous in-itself. Kemp's quarry, on the other hand, the murderer Vandergroat, is notably appealing, evidenced by his dialogue which also unwittingly testifies to the existential co-ordinates of the western narrative: *Choosin' a way to die? What's the difference? Choosin' a way to live—that's the hard part*. Furthermore, Vandergroat lacks the hypocrisy discernable in Kemp's attempts to deny his basically mercenary motives,[50] and so the usual distinctions between authentic and inauthentic modes of being are reversed. Similarly, although Anderson, the former soldier, has been dishonourably discharged, he also displays some qualities indicative of an embryonic authentic mode of being, although his inherent selfishness, as opposed to autonomy, means that he is likely to remain inauthentic. Indeed, his lack of self-direction, coupled with impetuousness, owes more to the mode of the-one than the in-itself, redolent as it is of a desire to achieve worth in the eyes of others by means of money and power.

It therefore appears that Kemp is only marginally superior to the villain for much of the film if seen in ethical terms, although ontologically speaking, there are certainly distinctions between them which originate in their contrasting levels of authenticity. Furthermore, by the end of the film, Kemp has attained a fully authentic mode of being, although his acceptance of Lina and the prospect of settlement, albeit tentative and reluctant, signal this autonomy as temporary, to be abandoned in preference for the being-for-others.

Meanwhile, *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*[51] invokes ethical ambiguities to a more extreme degree, although not yet to the extent that it can be described as, 'a combat

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[50] This is demonstrated by Kemp's concealment of the bottom section of the poster referring to the $5000 reward bounty money available for Vandergroat's capture. Instead, Kemp claims to be pursuing him for reasons of justice. He wants to use the bounty money to re-purchase the ranch that his fiancé sold during his time in the army.
[51] *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*, 1966. Directed by Sergio Leone. Spain/Denmark/Italy: PC/CFP/PEA.

zone where neither law nor honor exist'.[52] Approached from an ontological, not an ethical, perspective, however, it makes little sense to label Tuco merely as "The Bad". Rather, in accordance with the villains previously discussed, his mode of being is not subject to societally derived norms, particularly in the non-social context of the film. Instead, he embodies the in-itself in *in*authentic form, conveyed clearly by an approach to others signifying an extreme state of self-interest: selfishness, as opposed to the fully developed, authentic sense of self particular to the authentic in-itself. Likewise, "The Ugly", in ethical terms equally "bad", also represents an autonomous mode of being, again in its inauthentic, negative form. In contrast, "The Good", the outsider hero, unsurprisingly embodies the authentic mode of the in-itself. Once again, however, the representation of the in-itself is stretched to extremes by the narrow dividing line which exists between pure self-interest and sense of self. That said, the in-itself is ultimately reaffirmed by the end of the film in the form of heroic triumph.

Gestures such as Blondie's compassionate treatment of a dying boy, meanwhile, simultaneously suggest the essentially detached nature of the in-itself, as well as that consideration for others which is lacking in its inauthentic form as displayed by the other two characters. In this way, in contrast to the selfishness of the villain with which it might be confused, the in-itself is not to be equated with selfishness. Rather, concern for others is perfectly feasible, so long as it does not threaten individual autonomy which, as previously noted, needs to be defended at all costs. The boy is powerless to threaten Blondie's autonomous state, he approaches a state of negation of existence after all, and so the ontological boundaries between them are strictly delineated. And so, compassion becomes possible.

As mentioned in Chapter Three's discussion of masculinity, violence can be approached in ideological terms, as reflective of masculine dominance, that individualism which "masculine" genres like the western have an ideological investment in reinforcing through heroic representational forms. As such, 'War films, westerns and gangster movies...are all marked by 'action', by 'making something

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[52] Jim Kitses, 1998. 'Peckinpah Re-Visited: Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid', in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

happen',[53] for example, 'Battles, fights, and duels of all kinds are concerned with struggles of 'will and strength', 'victory and defeat', between individual men and/or groups of men'.[54] Further, in addition to explicitly gendered connotations, heroic violence can be said to have an ideological aspect which keys into, but does not solely relate to, masculinity. It has been proposed, for instance, that we should recognise, 'the importance of violence, not as an expression of subjective values or of a type of masculinity, but as a constitutive practice that helps to make all kinds of masculinity'.[55] In this way, it is possible to view Blondie's treatment of the boy as redolent of power, of the boy's essential powerlessness, rather than as invoking their differing modes of being. Approached in ontological terms, however, autonomy should not be equated solely with power, although in non-societal contexts, it certainly confers power upon the outsider hero as already observed. Rather, existentialists argue the autonomous mode of being, the in-itself, to make the existential project outlined in Chapter Four, possible. As such, it represents an ideal mode of existence, which, as existentialist narratives tacitly acknowledge, remains unattainable within a societal context, but nonetheless worth striving for. Thus, human beings cannot achieve their full potential as individual subjects.

The non-societal context of the western, however, makes the presentation of such a state possible, as noted throughout the thesis. And so, the western outsider hero's autonomous state revolves around an ideal of human potentiality, in addition to being

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[53] Neale, in Caughie & Kuhn, op. cit., p. 284

[54] Ibid., p. 284.

[55] Tim Corrigan, Bob Connell & John Lee, 'Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity', in Adams & Savran, op. cit., p. 110. While the notion that violence can influence masculinity has relevance to the western to the extent that John Wayne's heroes, for example, have typically been deployed as macho role models, the role played by heroic violence can be seen as principally mimetic and stylised, rather than constitutive: 'A hero is one who looks like a hero... He is there to remind us of the possibility of style in an age which has put on itself the burden of pretending that style has no meaning, and in the midst of our anxieties over the problem of violence to suggest that even in killing or being killed we are not freed from the necessity of establishing satisfactory modes of behaviour'. Warshow, op. cit., p. 205. In this way, western costume is frequently used to imitate violent activity, such as gunplay, without the requirement for actual participation. A more explicit linkage can potentially be forged, however. Joanna Bourke, for instance, claims in relation to war games/stories that: 'Long before any prospect of real combat, boys and girls, men and women, created narratives of pleasure around acts of killing'. Bourke, J. 2000. *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-To-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare*. London: Granta. p. 16. On this account, representational violence "makes" masculinity and is inherently ideological, for it is harnessed in the service of statecraft: 'Combat literature, martial films and war games attracted men to the killing fields'. Ibid., p.16. It should be stressed, however, that connections between representations and behaviour are difficult to prove.

imbued with the individualistic mode of power generated by its cultural context, as ideological interpretations maintain.

The outsider hero's violence has been established as the active expression of the authentic in-itself, a characteristic which finds its negative counterpart in the villain's activities. However, an ontological approach suggests that it does not make sense to judge behaviour characteristic of a non-societal mode of being in societal terms, namely, ethically, a proposition which I go on to apply to justice shortly. In addition, the in-itself can be mapped onto gendered co-ordinates as we have seen, since it is primarily projected by the outsider hero figure, usually portrayed by males. However, this need not necessarily be the case, as I go on to consider in relation to the character Vienna later in the chapter. Here, I propose this hero(ine) to retain elements of the being-for-others— conventionally associated with both women and "civilised" men in the western as previously established—whilst primarily displaying the in-itself in common with the specifically male outsider hero.

Violence and Justice

The western narrative's provenance in the historical West is frequently held responsible for its violent elements. Collins, for example, asserts that, 'the era depicted in the Western was one in which people were armed and violence was endemic'.[56] Such assumptions are also used to explain its ideology. As such, Slotkin proposes that, 'since the western offers itself as a myth of American origins, it implies that its violence is an essential and necessary. Part of the process through which American society was established and through which its democratic values are defended and enforced'.[57] Equally, the notion that heroism is pivotal to the genre can be harnessed to explain, at least in part, its violent characteristics. As such, the western's presentation of a hero heavily imbued with warrior qualities determines its narrative structure:

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[56] Collins, in Nichols, op. cit., p. 160.
[57] Slotkin, R. 1990. *Gunfighter Nation*. New York: Harvard University Press. p. 351.

the true beauty of violence, [represents] an illumination of the passage of the hero, a manifestation of his power and his nobility, a moment of challenge. This clean, straight violence does not mark a defeat; it charts a road to victory. It is the violence of war or of the lone conqueror, and what it expresses is the courage to live, an awareness of the struggle between man and the elements, man against man, and an unleashing of the will to win.[58]

An investigation into representations of justice complements this approach, however, for justice appears to constitute the primary ethical rationale for heroic violence in the western. Therefore, accounts of heroic violence usually adopt a stylistic or ethical approach. This does not solely apply to the stylised violence particular to the spaghetti westerns, which Neale describes thus: 'The shoot-outs are moments of spectacle, points at which the narrative hesitates, comes to a momentary halt'.[59] Rather, the western hero, whose costume is so inextricably linked with the iconography of violence and combat, can be seen to offer a highly stylised embodiment of the phenomenon, despite its allegedly historical origins.[60] In this sense, such filmic displays are not designed with authenticity in mind, but are instead moments of spectacle legitimated by both heroism and "historical" context. As Warshow remarks,

> The Western hero is necessarily an archaic figure; we do not really believe in him and would not have him step out of his rigidly conventionalised background. But his archaicism does not take away from his power…it adds to it by keeping him just a little beyond the reach of both common sense and of absolutised emotion, the two usual impulses of our art…his own kind of relevance.[61]

As a result, 'the violence of men is seen as a thing too precious and significant to be given for money…the Western man's gift for violence may be freely given for honour or love, for the protection of the weak or the achievement of progress, but is corrupted when given for money'.[62] Even when this tradition is broken by the emergence of the mercenary figure in, for example Leone's spaghetti westerns,

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[58] Michel Mourlet, 'In Defence of Violence', in Hillier, J. ed. 1986. *Cahiers du Cinema Vol 2: 1960-1968.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. p. 134.
[59] Neale, in Caughie & Kuhn, op. cit., p. 285.
[60] The fact that such costume is frequently based on authentic photographs serves to further blur the boundaries between the historical and representational in generic iconography.
[61] Warshow, op. cit., p. 205.
[62] Buscombe, op. cit., p. 235.

elements of chivalry survive.[63] Structural considerations such as the conventions of the heroic adventure trajectory could also hold significance. Jacques Rivette, for instance, avers that: 'Violence has no other purpose, once the ruins of convention are reduced to dust, than to establish a state of grace, a void, in the midst of which the heroes, completely unfettered by any arbitrary restraints, are free to pursue a process of self-interrogation, and to delve deep into their destiny'.[64] Buscombe highlights narrative elements in a similar manner: 'Since both form and ideology require that the essential conflicts be resolved in a violent confrontation, it may be said that the irreducible core of the western story-line is to provide a rationalising framework which will explain and perhaps justify a spectacular act of violence'.[65] Likewise,

> Violence is a major theme in aesthetics. Past or present, latent or active, it is of its very nature at the heart of every creative act, even at the moment it is being denied. To deny that violence exists in a peaceable work is to acknowledge its presence at the deepest level...every work of art contains violence, or at least postulated it, if art is a way of appeasing violence through its awareness of the terms of the conflict, and the power to resolve which this knowledge confers.[66]

At the same time, the hero's function as instrument of justice appears to be a key component in this rationalising framework. The connection between ethics, ideology and justice is a complex one, though, as the western conveys the ethically problematic nature of killing through its codes:[67] Violent killing is treated as a natural and just response to external threats of violence—also killing—and so, 'The tactics used to counter a collective evil are determined by the character of the threat'.[68] In

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[63] I frequently refer to the No Name figure as an example of this type.

[64] Jacques Rivette, 'Notes on a Revolution', in Hillier, 1985, op. cit., p. 95.

[65] Buscombe, op. cit., p. 233.

[66] Michel Mourlet, 'In Defence of Violence' in Hillier, 1986, op. cit., p.132.

[67] A variety of codes are deployed in the western, for example, not drawing first, and the exclusion of women and children from acts of killing. I am not suggesting that these are always obeyed, but it is noteworthy when they are not. A key example occurs in *The Wild Bunch*, [Peckinpah, op. cit.], when, in a deliberately iconoclastic development, women are killed.

[68] Brée, op. cit., p. 220. This, then, interestingly complies with *The Plague*'s central message [Camus, 1966, op. cit.], which Brée maps directly onto contemporary concerns as mirrored in the representational realm: 'He [Camus] had not proposed to show a combat between "good men" and "bad men". He had proposed to show the gradual poisoning of the human atmosphere, such as we ourselves in the United States have lately, to some degree, been experiencing'. p. 201. Moreover, 'The plague is not merely a symbol of the 1940-44 occupation. It is any slide into collective repression and regimentation... In that context, man, in Camus's eyes, might fight in a worthy cause and still be a plague-carrier', pp. 201-202. I turn to Camus' ideas on justice shortly.

ontological terms, however, the interests of the self embodied by the western hero's autonomous mode of being become paramount over the interests of others typically encompassed by this ethically informed concept. Understood in this way, the relationship between ethics, justice and the individual is less clear, for it makes little sense to apply ethical co-ordinates to an intrinsically non-societal state of being, and so the heroic exercise of justice can be recast as the expression of an autonomous state of being, of freedom, as previously suggested.

Interestingly, French formulates the ethical paradox central to the western hero's violence explicitly in terms of the issue of "dirty hands"[69] which besets the warrior figure. The following interchange from *Day of the Outlaw* concretises the ethical dilemma. Here, the hero attempts to justify his present violence by appealing to his former role as agent of justice, a form of defence deemed unacceptable by his interlocutor in the light of civilising processes,

Starrett: *Ever known me break the peace, Vic?*
Vic: *No, but I've seen you put away some who tried to. I don't hold for killing*
Starrett: *You don't have to, long as you've got somebody to do it for you*
Vic: *I'm beholden to you for what you've done in the past, but things has changed, and we've gotta change with 'em*
Starrett: *I don't object to change. Just fences.*[70]

Meanwhile, French theorises the paradox thus:

> Perhaps the tragedy of the westerner is the tragedy of necessarily dirty moral hands. If that is the case, he might not be too different from Machiavelli's prince... It is not enough that the hero...be willing to forgo moral constraint and morally dirty his hands in a good cause. "He must be prepared to do wrong if necessary...[if] called upon by both circumstances and his skills. He is uniquely qualified to do wrong in detail to do right on the whole.[71]

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[69] It is perhaps significant that one of Sartre's post-war plays is entitled *Dirty Hands*, [Sartre, J.-P. 1955. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. New York: Vintage], thereby signalling contemporary ethical concerns.
[70] *Day Of The Outlaw*, 1958. Directed by Andre de Toth. USA: United Artists. I offer a detailed analysis in Chapter Two.
[71] French, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

The generic response to this moral dilemma, then, appears to be that the end—justice being achieved via the death of the wrongdoer—justifies the means, namely violent activity. Consequently, the hero becomes, '"A man who could kill his own brother"',[72] if such behaviour is required in defence of autonomous freedom. In this way, an ontological interpretation can explain apparently "immoral" conduct.

According to Camus' later stance on violence, however, the end can never justify means that entail killing. Such views are reflected in his rather extreme use of language, which deliberately equates both execution and warfare with state sanctioned murder: 'I once said that, after the experiences of the past two years, I could no longer hold to any truth that might oblige me, directly or indirectly, to condemn a man to death... People like myself want not a world where murder no longer exists...but one where murder is no longer legitimised'.[73] Although these ideas are intended to relate explicitly to societal violence, while my main focus is on individualism and its relation to ontological modes of being, they can nonetheless be productively interwoven. As established in relation to the outsider figure Meursault,[74] for example, Camus presents the transformative properties of violence. He argues that violence can reconfigure the individual's societal situation.[75] At the same time, violent methods both enforce and reinforce outsider-ness in a way equally relevant to western and existentialist outsiders, rooted in the analogous ontological modes inherent to both, as previously explored in relation to notions of autonomy and the authentic in-itself:

> in the classic western, as in the hard-boiled detective story, the hero's violence is primarily an expression of his capacity for individual moral judgment and action, a capacity that separates him from society as much as it makes him a part of it...the more detached and

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[72] The words of the director, Anthony Mann, cited in Willeman, op. cit., p. 209. This certainly applies to the outsider figure, together with Mann's own westerns such as *The Naked Spur* discussed earlier in this chapter.

[73] From 'To Save Lives', 1946, in Camus, 1991. op. cit., p. 120. Unfortunately, there is no room here into more depth concerning Camus' ideas on violence in this chapter, but this represents a point for future inquiry, namely a Camusian analysis of violence in the western, as I go on to indicate in the Conclusion to the thesis.

[74] Camus, 1963, op. cit.

[75] I am not referring to the psychological effects of violence on the individual, which may generate such emotions as anxiety in relation to the return to domesticated life. Such accounts lie outside the remit of the thesis,

mythical setting of the classic western made the hero's violence more ambiguous and individualistic.[76]

Moreover, in ontological terms, the mythical setting of the western enables the exercise of autonomy which goes beyond the ambiguities of individualistic conduct suggested by Cawelti, since it becomes a space in which autonomy can be given full reign as previously suggested. In this way, ethics is precluded by an autonomous state of being. Further, Greg Robinson summarises the existentialist conception of violence in a way that elides the ethical: 'individual self-assertion, even through violence, was the only way to achieve a sense of self'.[77] He draws on de Beauvoir's ideas in support: '"violence is the authentic proof of each one's loyalty to himself, to his passions, to his own will...anger or revolt that does not get into the muscles remains a figment of the imagination'.[78] Here, the detrimental impact that individual violence could potentially have for society co-exists alongside the affirmation that individual will should be exercised in pursuit of the autonomous self irrespective of consequences, as exemplified by the western hero.

Similar views are also evident in Camus' earlier work. As de Gramont comments, for instance, Camus was convinced that the autonomous individual was the main agent for societal transformation: 'it was the individual...who represented society's greatest hope. The Resistance, after all, had been made up of a small group of individuals, a minority in society. It is true that they could not rightly claim to have saved France on their own. But they could rightly claim to have saved France's integrity and honour'.[79] For Brée, such interconnections are also evident in his fictional representations since, as previously demonstrated, existentialism relies upon the promotion of the individual self as the most effective and authentic mode of being, albeit rendered impossible by the societally constrained context of existentialist works.

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[76] Cawelti, op. cit., p. 251.
[77] Greg Robinson, 'Choosing Exile: Richard Wright, the Existentialists, and Cultural Exchange', in Epitropoulos, M. G. & Roudometof, V. eds. 1998. *American Culture in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. London: Praeger, p. 174.
[78] Ibid., p. 174.
[79] Alexandre de Gramont, Translator's Introduction to Camus, 1991, op. cit., p. 34.

> it is one of the disturbing strengths of *The Stranger* to make the act
> of violence on the beach emerge from the most apparently passive of
> men. Camus's sense of the violence, wildness, and brutality
> surfacing everywhere in the thirties was not unique... Meursault's
> self-awareness, acquired too late, is the measure of Camus's acute
> self-consciousness. *Caligula* was born of a further meditation on
> violence. Caligula is the obverse of Meursault. He is a man
> committed. To his fictional character Camus arrogated absolute
> power over men, and freedom from the constraints of human law.[80]

In this way, existentialism concerns itself with the relationship between individual violence, the pursuit of autonomy and consequent tensions with societal modes of being, justice and ethics. Due to its analogous focus on the connections between the autonomous individual and society, themes of justice and violence also underpin the western narrative. For example, *Johnny Guitar*[81] presents such themes via female and male outsider figures (both of whom display elements of the in-itself and the being-for-others), and a female villain respectively (who vacillates between the in-itself and the-one) in a way that also recalls the gender issues raised in Chapter Three. Crucially for the concerns of the thesis, it also explores the raft of possibilities available to the autonomous self when confronted by the demands and desires of others.

Vienna is the primary outsider hero of the film despite its title, and so possesses the qualities and functions which that role implies,[82] thus demonstrating the non-gendered nature of differing modes of existence, despite the in-itself's previously established concentration within the predominantly male outsider figure. She can be said to represent the film's most fully worked through version of the in-itself. However, residual elements of femininity also signal the being-for-others, most evident in interchanges with her returned lover. For example, she declares that, *I do want you, Johnny...* exemplifying a need for others, for human contact, not encompassed by the in-itself. Prior to Johnny's arrival, though, there is more than a suggestion of Vienna's alienation from such feminine qualities, largely abandoned in preference for the power conferred by the in-itself demanded by her dominant role.

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[80] Ibid., pp. 146-147.
[81] Ray, op. cit.
[82] This can be said to include possession of phallic power according to Peterson, for Vienna 'is financially independent, runs her own saloon, and is the boss of several male employees. She is also in control of her sexual relationships, able to choose for herself which man she wants...rather than being chosen by them'. Peterson, in Kitses & Rickman, op. cit., p. 330.

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This role has been imposed upon Vienna both circumstances, in turn enabled by a formidable sense of self as manifested through a highly developed sense of autonomy. This becomes apparent at the most basic level of iconography, since Vienna wears the clothes of the male hero at the beginning and the end of the film when playing an active role, whilst her increasing contact with Johnny Guitar is underscored by her switch to highly "feminine" dresses.

Significantly, though, both the initial transformation to the in-itself and its eventual reversal are brought about by the subsidiary hero, Johnny Guitar, who previously abandoned Vienna at their wedding in defence of his autonomy. He 'rides into town on a horse like a typical western hero, bit, strong, and silent',[83] but despite this, is not the film's primary bearer of the in-itself. And so, he bears a guitar rather than a gunbelt,[84] although, in accordance with narrative gender conventions, he later acquires the requisite weapon and thus regains some degree of autonomy, though certainly not to the extent that Vienna possesses it. Guitar's need for Vienna distinguishes him as a combination of the in-itself and being-for-others, although willingness to plead with her for their reconciliation indicates that the being-for-others has won over the in-itself, thereby rendering him the lesser hero, despite the film's title. By the end of the film, however, there are no representatives of the in-itself remaining, for both hero figures have embraced the societal convention of marriage, emblematic of the mode of the-one, once again suggestive of the onset of civilisation engendered by the railroad.

Justice drives the film narrative via its contrasting depiction of the "just" violence of the hero in defence of the autonomy threatened by the lynch mob, who clearly represent the mode of the-one, the crowd who think as one rather than as autonomous individuals, and led by the villain, Emma, who combines the in-itself of the leader with a desire for convention, for vengeance at any cost, indicative of the-one.[85] As such, Vienna becomes the object of her frustrated drive for autonomy, previously

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[83] Ibid., p. 333.
[84] Interestingly, perhaps for gender reasons, he later acquires the requisite weapon and thus regains some degree of autonomy, though not to the degree that Vienna possesses.
[85] Alternative readings of the character argue her to be either a frustrated spinster or a lesbian who desires Vienna.

denied by gender conventions. This punitive attitude towards Vienna, whom Emma believes to harbour the man who killed her brother, can thus be seen as a conflict between the-one and the in-itself, non-autonomy and autonomy. Both women desire the power conferred by the full attainment of the in-itself, which is inevitably resultant in the destruction of the-one at the end of the film. That said, the in-itself embodied by Vienna is also supplanted by the mode of being-for-others, evidenced by Vienna and Guitar's reconciliation. This signals their recognition both for others and the need for others, even when that entails the affirmation of the values of the mode of the-one, as their imminent marriage illustrates. Once again, ethics is not intrinsic to an ontological interpretation such as this, which instead revolves around conflicts between differing modes of existence.

In contrast, viewed through the lens of ideology, Vienna is ethically sanctioned as the instrument of individualistic law. As such, she shoots Emma in a way that presents 'a conflict between a righteous individual...and an angry community'.[86] In addition, Vienna fulfils the conditions for righteous justice outlined by Bazin, which, 'if it is to be effective, must be drastic and speedy...and thus must ignore extenuating circumstances, such as alibis that would take too long to verify',[87] though, contrary to Emma's approach, this must stop 'short of lynching'.[88] Further, such distinctions between individual hero and villain/societal group violence echo Camus' elevation of the individual to the detriment of the group, which led him to conclude that: 'society as a whole could do little to improve itself',[89] because ideally, society would consist of autonomous individuals, a situation which is unattainable in practice, hence the alienation and punishment of the autonomous individual in existentialist works.

It is important to stress that the western does not present society as a collection of autonomous individuals either, relying, rather, on fictional modes of representation to convey distinctions between authenticity and inauthenticity. Therefore, as previously established, it presents stark polarities between the authentic and inauthentic modes

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[86] Ibid., p. 322.
[87] André Bazin,'The Western: Or The American Film Par Excellence', in Bazin, A Tr. & ed. Hugh Gray. 1972. *What is Cinema? Volume 2.* London: University of California Press p. 146.
[88] Ibid., 146.
[89] de Gramont, op. cit., p. 34.

of existence: the in-itself (the hero), the extreme in-itself (the villain), the-one (the community viewed in negative terms, as redolent of crowd mentality) and the being-for-others (typically occupied by "civilised" men and women). In contrast to Camus' views, the film seeks to justify Emma's death by presenting the end (the punishment of the villain) as justifying the means, since it is validated by Vienna's authentic status irrespective of ethical considerations. In ontological terms, then, Emma's death becomes an enactment of autonomy, undertaken in defence of the non-societal in-itself and thus distinct from societally imbued codes of ethics. With this in mind, the film promotes heroic authenticity even where this conflicts with the interests of the community, since Emma is acting on behalf of others as well as herself.

Alternatively, "righteous" killings such as these can be equated with the death penalty. Camus views this as state sanctioned murder, which can never be justified. At the same time, however, he acknowledges killing to be a "natural" outcome of relations between individuals when in a free context (such as that offered by the western). He also admits that, 'we would have to be completely utopian to believe that men would no longer kill other men… But in a more relative utopia we could demand that murder be no longer legitimised… Thinking in such terms…can help create the conditions of clear thought and a provisional agreement among men who want to be neither victims nor executioners'.[90]

Meanwhile, the western's representation of the authentic autonomous self reinforces the non-ethical co-ordinates of authentic freedom and its expression, manifested through "just" acts undertaken in defence of autonomy. This role is enacted through the western hero as ethically sanctioned judge, jury and executioner, provider of retributive justice prior to the establishment of State law. On Camus' account, however, the exercise of justice in defence of the autonomous self becomes deeply problematic. Instead, 'It [society] must show the executioner's hands each time and force everyone to look at them—the over-delicate citizens and all those who had any responsibility in bringing the executioner into being'.[91] In this way, all involved—hero, villain and onlookers—are rendered complicit in the act of "justice", have "dirty

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[90] From 'To Save Lives', 1946, in Camus, 1991. op. cit., pp. 121-122.
[91] From 'Reflections on the Guillotine', 1957, in Camus, 1988. op. cit., p. 187.

hands", even though the hero ostensibly acts on behalf of others. As a result, the western hero is not released from criminal culpability. Thus, Camus' conception of justice refutes French's proposal that 'The dirty hands of the westerner hero are, at least partially, cleansed by his sacrifice'.[92] For Camus, no sacrifice sufficiently compensates for the violent killing of another, even if such death appears to benefit the greater good. *The Just*[93] demonstrates this ethical standpoint:

Stepan: The organisation ordered you to kill the Grand Duke!
Kaliayev: Yes, but I wasn't ordered to kill children![94]
[...]
Stepan: Not until the day comes when we stop being sentimental about children, will the revolution triumph and we be masters of the world.
Dora: When that day comes, the revolution will be loathed by the entire human race.
Stepan: What does that matter if we love it enough to force our revolution on it, to rescue humanity from itself...[95] Don't you see what this means? Because Yankek didn't kill those *two, thousands* of Russian children will go on dying of starvation...
Dora: ...killing the Grand Duke's niece and nephew won't prevent a single child from starving. Even destruction has a right and a wrong way, and there *are* limits.
Stepan: [*violently*] There are *no* limits![96]

On the other hand, there appear to be some internal contradictions in Camus' work, for his treatment of Meursault's killing of the Arab appears to support acts undertaken in defence of autonomy[97] in a way analogous to the western's justification of authentic activity of this kind.

French takes a less uncompromising view of the consequences of violence, this time specifically in relation to the hero whom, he argues, 'sacrifices long-lasting relationships with other humans...the things he most cares about, e.g., the wilderness. He travels on West or...he self-destructs'.[98] Moreover, 'He has taken on "the diabolic forces lurking in all violence". He has internalised them, but his hardened heart and

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[92] French, op. cit., p. 92.
[93] Camus, A. 1970. Tr. Justin O' Brien. *The Just; The Possessed*. Middlesex: Penguin. This play depicts terrorist violence, and primarily concerns the clash between idealism and pragmatism. It is interesting to note that the female character, Dora, is overtly humanitarian in her approach here, thereby linking into previous discussions concerning the gendered nature of representational violence.
[94] Ibid., p. 28.
[95] Ibid., p. 29.
[96] Ibid., p. 31.
[97] Camus, 1963, op. cit. Such issues are discussed in more depth in, for example, Chapter Two.
[98] French, op. cit., p. 92.

practiced extreme loneliness are something of a match for them'.[99] Finally, French concludes that solitude is crucial to the western hero's conduct: 'He must pay the price for solitude. Yet, he seems prepared to do so and even willingly accepts his condition... Tragic? Perhaps. Heroic? Yes. Noble? I think so'.[100] An ontological reading of the western hero's condition, however, reconfigures this solitude, or outsider-ness, in positive terms, as enabling and demonstrating a state of authenticity, the autonomous individual rejecting societal modes of being, others, in favour of the in-itself. The negative consequence of such rejection of human contact, namely alienation, is only rarely attendant upon this mode of being, illustrated by, for example, *The Searchers*.[101] More typically, alienation is only generated by conflicts between societal context and a non-societal mode of being, as illustrated by the situation of the existentialist outsider.

Since French's views on heroic violence are so clearly informed by his assumptions regarding the inherent nobility of heroism, however, it could be argued that he has invested in, and in turn been absorbed by, the ideologically informed discourse of violence in the western, which reinforces its violent heroism on the grounds of justice. On the other hand, Camus' views indicate ways in which ideological investments such as these might be avoided, principally by highlighting the ideological assumptions underpinning conflations of violence, ethics and heroism. However, an ontological approach of the type woven throughout this chapter suggests ethics to be in any case irrelevant to the exercise of the in-itself as manifested through violent acts in the service of justice.

Conclusion

Violence is intrinsic, then, to depictions of the western hero for reasons beyond the purely dramatic, aesthetic or, indeed, ideological. I have attributed this phenomenon to the mode of existence embodied by the western outsider figure, the autonomous in-itself which existentialist texts and concepts fail to present in such unified terms due

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[99] Ibid., p. 92.
[100] Ibid., p. 92.
[101] *The Searchers*, 1956. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros.

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to their societal underpinnings. Ontological analysis suggests that the individualistic violence enacted by the western hero is best explained in non-ethical terms, since it derives from an essentially non-societal state of being. In this sense, violent activity becomes an extension of autonomous freedom made possible by the western's mythical, non-societal context, as a form of autonomous self assertion. Autonomy requires defence from the incursions of societal selves, defence which might well, and frequently does, involve violence, deemed acceptable and appropriate within the western narrative framework. Further, the mode of the in-itself is privileged by the western's promotion of individual heroism, which is generally understood in terms of individualism. However, I go beyond such ideologically informed perspectives by arguing that the western's narrative framework justifies and, indeed, valorises the exercise of the in-itself, regardless of its potential to threaten the freedoms of others. This is because the autonomous freedom of the in-itself is the locus of power for the western hero and so other societal modes of being are rendered unimportant.

Of course, such elision of ethical responsibility by reversal to pre-social forms of being within a non-societal context can have ideological implications in that the practice of individualism is enabled. However, ontological analysis of the type undertaken throughout the thesis has further implications for the autonomous individual, because it proposes a mode of being which is unattainable in a societal context as the existentialist novel so clearly demonstrates. In this way, while violence can, and frequently is, analysed in ideological, historical and even aesthetic terms, all of which have ethical underpinnings, viewed from an alternative, ontological perspective, violence becomes a corollary of the western hero's mode of being, a natural outcome of it. And so the ethical elements we might expect to find in other societally rooted individualistic heroes, gangsters for instance, are shorn away, for the western hero symbolises authenticity in its purest form, untainted by, and divorced from, societal context and its fundamental incompatibility with the in-itself. And so, the western outsider hero's violent activity is unconstrained by societal codes of ethics imposed by societal modes of being-in-the-world.

Conclusion
Reflections on the Outsider Archetype

It has frequently been observed that individualism informs representations of the lone western protagonist, the outsider figure. As we have seen, this ground is also shared with his literary existentialist counterpart. Indeed, such commonalities provided the starting point for the thesis's investigations into the nature of the western's representations of the individual in connection with existentialist themes and concepts. Accordingly, individualism underpins the western's treatment of issues such as ethics, justice and violence, typically manifested through its treatment of the relationship between the concerns of the individual and society, suggesting them to be inherently conflictual.

Meanwhile, in existentialist terms, the western's valorisation of individual self-interest in conflict with societal concerns holds significance beyond the purely ideological, and it is here that the originality of the thesis lies. This is because existentialist conceptualisations of the individual go to the heart of the nature of existence itself, of human existence-in-the-world, through concepts like individual authenticity, freedom, the alienation of the societal subject and the necessity for individual exile if full authenticity is to be achieved. Understood in this way, the outsider figure of the western is much more than merely the bearer of the American ideology of individualism and capitalism, for he is emblematic of the authentic, non-societal self which, according to existentialists such as Camus, has been virtually extinguished by societal configurations if, indeed, it could ever exist outside the realms of fiction or philosophy.

This accounts for the autonomous western hero's existence within the sphere of escapist fantasy, operating within a mythological, quasi-historical context. It is important to note, however, that the western's mythological underpinnings enable it to be as valid a form as existentialist works for ontological investigations into the nature of being-in-the-world of the kind undertaken by this thesis. In fact, it can be argued that the western's non-societal context makes its presentation of the non-societal self even more convincing, as demonstrated by the existentialist novel's

inability to present autonomy in a positive sense due to societal constraints which necessitate the outsider figure's alienation and punishment. Representations of the western outsider hero, meanwhile, are able to illustrate the implications of autonomy, for he operates within an entirely non-societal space, one which is not constrained or complicated by societal norms. This makes sense, for the ontological being of the autonomous outsider is essentially non-societal in nature, and therefore incompatible with societal formations. In this way, the western's context enables the western hero to be the most fully worked out representation of individual autonomy available in fictional form.

That said, both western and existentialist treatments of autonomy suggest that, ultimately, full authenticity is unattainable within societal configurations. This is demonstrated by the requirement for a non-societal, mythological context in the case of the western, and the constraints imposed upon outsider-ness evidenced by existentialist works, both of which illustrate the basic incompatibility which exists between the autonomous in-itself, and those societal modes of being-in-the-world, (namely the-one or mode of the crowd, and the being-for-others), necessitated by life within a societal formation. On this account, then, it appears that there can be no viable alternative to societal forms of being, as the mythical underpinnings of the western outsider, and the exile and punishment of the existentialist outsider, so clearly demonstrate. The in-itself is neither able, nor allowed, to flourish in a societal context by its very nature, and so compromise in the form of inauthentic, societal modes of being becomes inevitable.

Moreover, ontological conclusions such as these have further implications for societal codes and norms, as shown by my exploration of ethics, justice and violence in relation to the mode of the in-itself displayed by the western hero. I have argued that the non-societal self precludes the application of norms drawn from societal configurations such as ethics, which are intended to prevent conflicts with the interests and freedoms of societal others. This proposal highlights the incompatibility which exists between ethical norms and the in-itself. Even more crucially, it emphasises the congruence between freedom and the in-itself, freedom that is, from the constraints imposed by societal selves who wish to constrain individual autonomy

and its expression. Once again, the western's mythological context is crucial because such freedoms appear to be acceptable within the confines of the western's embryonic societal context. Consequently, it is still possible to present the hero as exercising and defending his freedom against the incursions of societal selves and the extreme, negative form of the in-itself embodied by villain figures. In this way, the defence of autonomy against the incursions of others is rendered reasonable in a way that would be entirely unacceptable within a societal context, as the existentialist novel's representation of the outsider at the mercy of the justice system and the judgements of others makes clear. And so, the in-itself cannot be achieved where the validation of others is required.

However, the originality of thesis lies not only in its findings, which relate to, for example, the nature of being-in-the-world, autonomy and its relationship to the societal self, ethics, violence and justice. It also lies in the adoption of a distinctive methodology, involving the application of concepts drawn from existentialism to an analysis of the western hero and filmic narratives. With this in mind, the western hero is recast from ideological into ontological terms. As argued towards the beginning of the thesis, the western hero tends to be analysed in terms of, for example, gender, cultural approaches such as American ideology, or alternatively, in relation to its historical co-ordinates. The approach adopted by this thesis, meanwhile, views the western hero through the lens of concepts derived from its commonalities with the existentialism of Camus and Sartre, their shared individualistic underpinnings, for example, as well as time-span. This in turn enables the thesis to offer creative, philosophically-orientated readings of western films in light of existentialist concepts.

With this in mind, I have positioned my ontological analysis of the western hero and his existentialist counterpart in relation to the dynamic of French-American cultural exchange, identified here as emergent in the light of the impact of the Second World War, a phenomenon which I have argued to form the platform for an approach of the type undertaken in this thesis. It is certainly the case that the impact of American culture upon French culture, evidenced by the work of the *Cahiers* group and encapsulated by the label *film noir*, has frequently been discussed. However, the implications this might hold for contemporary existentialist writers and their works

has not to the extent that there is a viable case to be made for such ideas having filtered through to representations of American heroism and vice versa. As such, it becomes possible to apply existentialist principles to the lone individual hero with his subjective moral codes, operational within an ethically ambivalent universe in which societal norms are viewed as dietetically opposed to individual freedom.

An ontological critique of the western hero, which acknowledges, builds upon and transcends the individualistic co-ordinates of the western and its heroes, has implications beyond the scope of the present work. For example, the phenomenon of violence which forms the backbone of the western narrative, and is most frequently analysed with reference to ideology, phenomenology and aesthetics, all of which have underlying ethical constituents, can be viewed in a different light when seen as the inevitable expression, and exercise, of the non-societal mode of the in-itself. Understood in this manner, violence is no longer susceptible to norms intended to apply to societal selves and configurations, namely, ethics. This enables a more nuanced form of analysis of the western hero's violence, thereby signalling the originality of one aspect of the thesis' ontologically orientated findings, in addition to a potential area for future studies of the western hero's activities, analyses of which tend to be imbued with ethics, as we have seen.

Furthermore, Camus' complex views demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of violence, which has wider political, as well as purely representational, implications, once again highlighting a potential direction for future work. Similarly, there is room for an ontological critique of the twin tropes of exile and displacement so crucial to existentialist imagery. After all, the prominence of geographical space in the western is frequently analysed in ideological terms, but not in relation to its ontological significance. Indeed, the notion of exile is pivotal to existential outsider-ness but remains an underdeveloped aspect of the western outsider hero, due to the high level of compatibility which exists between the western's mythological free space and the autonomous self embodied so fully by the western hero.

And so finally, we turn to *The Searchers*[1] in order to invoke the essence of the outsider archetype, coupled with that sense of alienation which, for existentialism, is attendant upon the authentic in-itself but only occasionally hinted at in westerns due to its insistence upon the inherently positive nature of autonomy. With this mind, the western's presentation of the authentic in-itself ultimately affirms the superiority of the power and freedom conferred by autonomy, whilst at the same time stressing the necessarily mythical nature of non-societal existence in-the-world as embodied by the western outsider figure:

> *What makes a man to wander?*
> *What makes a man to roam?*
> *What makes a man leave bed and board*
> *And turn his back on home?*
> *Ride away, ride away, ride away...*[2]

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[1] *The Searchers*, 1956. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros.
[2] This is the film's theme tune.

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Angels With Dirty Faces, 1938. Directed by Michael Curtiz. USA: Warner Bros.

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Attack, 1956. Directed by Robert Aldrich. USA: United Artists.

Badlands, 1973. Directed by Terrence Malick. USA: Warner Bros.

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Bend Of The River, 1952. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: Universal.

The Big Country, 1958. Directed by William Wyler. USA: United Artists.

The Big Sky, 1952. Directed by Howard Hawks. USA: RKO.

The Big Sleep, 1946. Directed by Howard Hawks. USA: Warner Bros.

Blade Runner, 1982. Directed by Ridley Scott. USA: Warner Bros.

Blazing Saddles, 1974. Directed by Mel Brooks. USA: Warner Bros.

Blood City, 1977. Directed by Peter Sasdy. GB: EMI.

Blue, 1968. Directed by Silvio Narrizano. USA: Paramount.

Blue Canadian Rockies, 1952. Directed by George Archainbaud. USA: Columbia.

The Blue Dahlia, 1946. Directed by George Marshall. USA: Paramount.

Blue Velvet, 1986. Directed by David Lynch. USA: MGM.

Bonnie and Clyde, 1967. Directed by Arthur Penn. USA: Warner Bros.

Born on the Fourth of July, 1989. Directed by Oliver Stone. USA: United International Pictures.

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Bowling for Columbine, 2002. Directed by Michael Moore. USA: MGM/United Artists

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Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia, 1974. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. Mexico: SCA.

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Bronco Billy, 1980. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Bros.

Buffy The Vampire Slayer, 1992. Directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Bugles In The Afternoon, 1952. Directed by Roy Rowland. USA: Warner Bros.

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Carlito's Way, 1993. Directed by Brian de Palma. USA: Universal.

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Casablanca, 1942. Directed by Michael Curtiz. USA: Warner Bros.

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[3] Titles in brackets hereafter denote the original titles of non-American westerns which I have, however, viewed in dubbed/subtitled format.

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Charlies Angels, 2000. Directed by McG. USA: Columbia.

Cheyenne Autumn, 1964. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros.

Chinatown, 1974. Directed by Roman Polanski. USA: Paramount.

A Clockwork Orange, 1971. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. USA: Warner Bros.

Colarado Territory, 1949. Directed by Raoul Walsh. USA: Warner Bros.

Comanche Station, 1960. Directed by Budd Boetticher. USA: Columbia.

Coogan's Bluff, 1968. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Universal.

Cowboy, 1957. Directed by Delmer Daves. USA: Columbia.

Crossfire, 1947. Directed by Edward Dmytryk. USA: RKO.

The Culpepper Cattle Company, 1972. Directed by Dick Richards. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Dances with Wolves, 1990. Directed by Kevin Costner. USA: MGM.

Day Of The Evil Gun, 1968. Directed by Jerry Thorpe. USA: MGM.

Day of the Jackal, 1973. Directed by Fred Zinnemann. GB/France: Universal.

Day Of The Outlaw, 1958. Directed by Andre de Toth. USA: United Artists.

Dead Man, 1995. Directed by Jim Jarmusch. USA/Germany: Miramax.

Dead of Night. 1945. Directed by Charles Cavalcanti. GB: Ealing.

Death Of A Gunfighter, 1969. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Universal.

Death Rides A Horse, (*Da uomo a Uomo*), 1967. Directed by Giulio Petroni. Italy: PEC.

The Deer Hunter, 1978. Directed by Michael Cimino. USA: Universal.

The Defiant Ones, 1958. Directed by Stanley Kramer. USA: United Artists.

Deliverance, 1972. Directed by John Boorman. USA: Warner Bros.

Desperado, 1995. Directed by Robert Rodriguez. USA: Columbia.

Destry Rides Again, 1939. Directed by George Marshall. USA: Universal.

Dirty Harry, 1971. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Warner Bros.

Django, 1966. Directed by Sergio Corbucci. Italy/Spain: BRC/Tecisa.

Django, Kill! (*Se Sei Vivo Spara*), 1967. Directed by Giulio Questi. Italy/Spain: SC/PC.

Django Strikes Again, (*Django 2: Il Grande Ritorno*), 1987. Directed by Nello Rossati. Italy: NC.

Dragoon Wells Massacre, 1957. Directed by Harold D. Schuster. USA: Allied Artists.

Dodge City, 1939. Directed by Michael Curtiz. USA: Warner Bros.

Duel In The Sun, 1946. Directed by King Vidor.USA: Selznick.

Easy Rider, 1969. Directed by Dennis Hopper. USA: Columbia

El Condor, 1970. Directed by John Guillemin. USA: MGM.

El Dorado, 1966. Directed by Howard Hawks. USA: Paramount.

El Mariachi, 1992. Directed by Robert Rodriguez. USA: Columbia.

El Topo, 1971. Directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky. Mexico: Producciones Panicas.

Enter the Dragon, 1973. Directed by Robert Clouse. USA/Hong Kong: Warner Bros.

Face of a Fugitive, 1959. Directed by Paul Wendkos. USA: Columbia.

Falling Down, 1992. Directed by Joel Schumacher. USA: Warner Bros.

The Far Country, 1954. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: United International Artists.

Fatal Attraction, 1987. Directed by Adrian Lyne. USA: Paramount.

Fight Club, 1999. Directed by David Fincher. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

A Fistful Of Dollars, (*Per un Pugno di Dollari*), 1964. Directed by Sergio Leone. Italy/Spain: Jolly Films/Ocean Films.

A Fistful Of Dynamite, (*Giù la Testa*), 1971. Directed by Sergio Leone. Italy: United Artists.

Five Card Stud, 1954. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: Universal.

For A Few Dollars More, (*Per Qualche Dollaro in Più*), 1965. Directed by Sergio Leone. Spain/Denmark/Italy: PCC/CFP/PEA.

Fort Apache, 1968. Directed by Henry Hathaway. USA: Paramount.

Forty Guns, 1957. Directed by Samuel Fuller. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

From Hell To Texas, 1958. Directed by Henry Hathaway. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Full Metal Jacket, 1987. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. USA: Warner Bros.

Giant, 1958. Directed by Henry Hathaway. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Get Carter, 1971. Directed by Mike Hodges. GB: MGM.

The Good Guys And The Bad Guys, 1969. Directed by Burt Kennedy. USA: Warner Bros.

The Good, The Bad And The Ugly, (*Il Buono, Il Brutto, Il Cattivo*), 1966. Directed by Sergio Leone. Spain/Denmark/Italy: PC/CFP/PEA.

Goldfinger, 1964. Directed by Guy Hamilton. GB: Eon.

The Gold Rush, 1925. Directed by Charles Chaplin. US: Charles Chaplin.

Gone With The Wind, 1939. Directed by Victor Fleming, USA: MGM.

Grim Prairie Tales, 1990. Directed by Wayne Coe. USA: East West Film Partners.

Gunga Din, 1939. Directed by George Stevens. USA: RKO.

Gun Fury, 1953. Directed by Raoul Walsh. USA: Columbia.

Gunfight At The Ok Corral, 1957. Directed by John Sturges. USA: Paramount.

The Guns of Navarone, 1961. Directed by J. Lee-Thompson. USA: Columbia.

The Gunman's Walk, 1958. Directed by Phil Karlson. USA: Columbia.

The Halliday Brand, 1957. Directed by Joseph H. Lewis. USA: United Artists.

Hang 'Em High, 1967. Directed by Ted Post. USA: United Artists.

High Noon, 1952. Directed by Fred Zinnemann. USA: United Artists.

High Plains Drifter, 1972. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Universal.

High Sierra, 1941. Directed by Raoul Walsh. USA: Warner Bros.

Hombre, 1967. Directed by Martin Ritt. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

The Horse Soldiers, 1959. Directed by John Ford. USA: United Artists.

Horizons West, 1952. Directed by Budd Boetticher. USA: United International Artists.

How The West Was Won, 1962. Directed by Henry Hathaway et al. USA: MGM.

Hud, 1963. Directed by Martin Ritt. USA: Paramount.

In A Lonely Place, 1950. Directed by Nicholas Ray. USA: Columbia.

The Indian Fighter, 1955. Directed by Andre de Toth. USA: United Artists.

It Happened One Night, 1934. Directed by Frank Capra.USA: Columbia.

It's A Wonderful Life, 1946. Directed by Frank Capra. USA: RKO.

Jesse James, 1939. Directed by Henry King. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Joe Kidd, 1972. Directed by John Sturges. USA: Universal.

Johnny Guitar, 1953. Directed by Nicholas Ray. USA: Republic.

Jubal, 1956. Directed by Delmer Daves. USA: Columbia.

The Kentuckian, 1955. Directed by Burt Lancaster. USA: United Artists.

Key Largo, 1948. Directed by John Huston. USA: Warner Bros.

The Killers, 1946. Directed by Robert Siodmark. USA: Universal.

The King And Four Queens, 1956. Directed by Raoul Walsh. USA: United Artists.

King Rat, 1965. Directed by Bryan Forbes. USA: Columbia.

Kiss Me Deadly, 1955. Directed by Robert Aldrich. USA: United Artists.

The Lady from Shanghai, 1948. Directed by Orson Welles. USA: Columbia.

The Last Frontier, 1955. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: Columbia.

The Last Sunset , 1961. Directed by Robert Aldrich. USA: United Artists.

The Last Wagon, 1956. Directed by Delmer Daves. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Lawrence of Arabia, 1962. Directed by David Lean. GB: Horizon.

The Lawless Breed, 1952. Directed by Raoul Walsh. USA: Universal.

The Left Handed Gun, 1958. Directed by Arthur Penn. USA: Warner Bros.

The Life And Times Of Judge Roy Bean, 1972. Directed by John Huston. USA: First Artists.

Lonely Are The Brave, 1962. David Miller. USA: Universal.

Lone Wolf McQuaid, 1983. Directed by Steve Carver. USA: Orion.

Ma Vie en Rose, 1997. Directed by Alain Berliner. France/GB/Belgium: CNC/ECF/ PCCAF.

Mackenna's Gold, 1969. Directed by Lee Thompson. USA: Columbia.

The Magnificent Seven, 1960. Directed by John Sturges. USA: United Artists.

Major Dundee, 1965. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. USA: Columbia.

The Maltese Falcon, 1941. Directed by John Huston. USA: Warner Bros.

The Man From Laramie, 1955. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: Columbia.

Man Of The West, 1958. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: United Artists.

The Man Without A Star, 1955. Directed by King Vidor. USA: Universal.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, 1962. Directed by John Ford. USA: Paramount.

The Man Who Would Be King, 1975. Directed by John Huston. USA: Columbia.

The Matrix, 1999. Directed by Andy & Larry Wachowski. USA: Warner Bros.

McCabe And Mrs Miller, 1971. Directed by Robert Altman. USA: Warner Bros.

Midnight Cowboy, 1969. Directed by John Schlesinger. USA: United Artists.

Misery, 1990. Directed by Rob Reiner. USA: Columbia.

The Misfits, 1960. Directed by John Huston, USA: United Artists.

My Darling Clementine, 1946. Directed by John Ford. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

The Naked Spur, 1953. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: MGM.

North by Northwest, 1959. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: Warner Bros.

The Oklahoma Kid, 1939. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. USA: Warner Bros.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? 2000. Directed by Joel & Ethan Cohen.USA: Universal.

On Her Majesty's Secret Service. 1969. Directed by Peter Hunt. USA: Universal International.

On Top Of Old Smokey, 1953. Directed by George Archainbaud. USA: Columbia.

One Eyed Jacks, 1960. Directed by Marlon Brando. USA: Paramount.

On the Waterfront, 1954. Directed by Elia Kazan. USA: Columbia.

Once Upon A Time In The West, (C'era Una Volta il West), 1968. Directed by Sergio Leone. Italy/USA: Paramount.

Out of the Past, 1947. Directed by Jacques Torneur. USA: RKO.

The Outlaw Josie Wales, 1976. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Bros.

Pale Rider, 1985. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Bros.

Pancho Villa, 1972. Directed by Eugenio Martín. Spain: Granada.

Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, 1973. Directed by Sam Peckinpah USA: MGM.

Platoon, 1986. Directed by Oliver Stone. USA: Hemdale Film Corporation.

Point Blank, 1967. Directed by John Boorman. USA: MGM.

Powder River, 1953. Directed by Louis King. USA: Fox.

A Professional Gun, (Il Mercenario), 1968. Directed by Sergio Corbucci. Italy/Spain: PEA/Profilms 21.

The Professionals, 1966. Directed by Richard Brooks. USA: Columbia.

The Quick And The Dead, 1995. Directed by USA: Columbia Tristar.

Rachel And The Stranger, 1948. Directed by Norman Foster. USA: RKO.

Rashamon, 1950. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Japan: Daiei Studios.

The Rawhide Years, 1955. Directed by Rudolph Mate. USA: Universal.

The Red Badge of Courage, 1951. Directed by John Huston. USA: MGM.

Red River, 1948. Directed by Howard Hawks. USA: United Artists.

Reservoir Dogs, 1992. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. USA: Polygram.

The Return Of Frank James, 1940. Directed by Fritz Lang. USA: Fox.

The Return of the Seven, 1966. Directed by Burt Kennedy. Spain/USA: C.B. Films/Mirisch.

Ride The High Country, 1962. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. USA: MGM.

Ringo And his Golden Pistol, (*Johnny Oro*), 1966. Directed by Sergio Corbucci. USA: MGM.

Rio Bravo, 1959. Directed by Howard Hawks. USA: Warner Bros.

The River of No Return, 1954. Directed by Otto Preminger. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Run Of The Arrow, 1957. Directed by Sam Fuller. USA: RKO.

Sabata, (*Ehi Amico... Cè Sabata, Hai Chiuso!*), 1969. Directed by Gianfranco Parolini. Italy: PEA.

Saddle The Wind, 1958. Directed by Robert Parrish. USA: MGM.

Le Samouraï, 1967. Directed by Jean-Pierre Melville. France: TC.

Sante Fe, 1951. Directed by Irving Pichel. USA: Columbia

Savior, 1998. Predrag Antonijevic. USA: IEG.

The Scalphunters, 1968. Directed by Sidney Pollack. USA: United Artists.

The Searchers, 1956. Directed by John Ford. USA: Warner Bros.

The Seven Samurai, 1954. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Japan: Toho.

Shampoo, 1975. Directed by Hal Ashby. USA: Columbia.

Shane, 1953. Directed by George Stevens. USA: Paramount.

She Wore A Yellow Ribbon, 1949. Directed by John Ford. USA: RKO.

The Sheriff of Fractured Jaw, 1958. Directed by Raoul Walsh. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Shenandoah, 1965. Directed by Andrew V. Mclaglen. USA: Universal.

The Shootist, 1976. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Paramount.

The Silent Stranger, 1924. Directed by Albert S. Rogell. USA: Monogram Pictures.

Smoke Signal, 1955. Directed by Jerry Hopper. USA: Universal International Pictures.

Some Like It Hot, 1959. Directed by Billy Wilder. USA: MGM.

Son of Paleface, 1952. Directed by Frank Tashlin. USA: Paramount.

The Sons Of Katie Elder, 1965. Directed by Henry Hathaway. USA: Paramount.

The Springfield Rifle, 1952. Directed by Andre de Toth. USA: Warner Bros.

Stagecoach, 1939. Directed by John Ford. USA: United Artists.

Star In The Dust, 1956. Directed by Charles F Haas. USA: United International Pictures.

Star Wars, 1977. Directed by George Lucas. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Stranger on The Run, 1967. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Universal TV.

Straw Dogs, 1971. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. USA: ABC Pictures.

Sunset Boulevard, 1950. Directed by Billy Wilder. USA: Paramount.

The Tall Stranger, 1957. Directed by Thomas Carr. USA: Allied Artists.

Taxi Driver, 1976. Directed by Martin Scorsese. USA: Columbia.

Tell Them Willy Boy Is Here, 1969. Directed by Abraham Polonski. USA: Universal.

The Terminator, 1984. Directed by James Cameron. USA: Orion.

Terror in a Texas Town, 1958. Directed by Joseph H. Lewis. USA: MGM.

Texas, 1941. Directed by George Marshall. USA: Columbia.

Texas Adios, (*Texas, Addio*), 1966. Directed by Ferdinando Baldi. Italy/Spain: BRC/Estela.

Texas Across The River, 1966. Directed by Michael Gordon. USA: Universal.

The Train Robbers, 1973. Directed by Burt Kennedy. USA: Warner Bros.

Thelma and Louise, 1991. Directed by Ridley Scott. USA: MGM.

They Died With Their Boots On, 1942. Directed by Raoul Walsh. USA: Warner Bros.

They Rode West, 1954. Directed by Phil Karlson. USA: Columbia.

Three Godfathers, 1948. Directed by John Ford. USA: MGM.

Three Kings, 1999. Directed by David O Russell. USA: Warner Bros.

3.10 To Yuma, 1957. Directed by Delmer Daves. USA: Columbia.

To Have and Have Not, 1944. Directed by Howard Hawks. USA: Warner Bros.

Today It's Me... Tomorrow You! (*Oggi a Me... Domani a Te!*), 1968. Directed by Dario Argento & Tonino Cervi. Italy: PAC/Splendid.

Tom Horn, 1979. Directed by William Wiard. USA: Warner Bros.

Tombstone, 1993. Directed by George P. Cosmatos. USA: Cinergi.

Touch of Evil, 1958. Directed by Orson Welles. USA: Universal International Pictures.

A Town Called Hell, (*A Town Called Bastard*), 1971. Directed by Robert Parrish. GB/Spain: Benmar/Zurbano.

Trail Street, 1947. Directed by Ray Enright. USA: RKO.

The Treasure of Sierra Madre, 1948. Directed by John Huston. USA: Warner Bros.

True Grit. 1969. Directed by Henry Hathaway. USA: Paramount.

Twelve Angry Men, 1957. Sidney Lumet. USA: MGM.

Two Mules For Sister Sara, 1969. Directed by Donald Siegel. USA: Universal.

Two Rode Together, 1961. Directed by John Ford. USA: Columbia.

Ulzana's Raid, 1972. Directed by Robert Aldrich. USA: Universal.

Unforgiven, 1992. Directed by Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Bros.

The Unforgiven , 1959. Directed by John Huston. USA: United Artists.

Vertigo, 1958. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: Paramount.

Vera Cruz, 1954. Directed by Robert Aldrich. USA: United Artists.

Villa Rides, 1968. Directed by Buzz Kulik. USA: Paramount.

The Violent Men, 1954. Directed by Rudolph Mate. USA: Columbia.

Wall Street, 1987. Directed by Oliver Stone. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Warlock, 1959. Directed by Edward Dymytryck. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

The Way West, 1967. Directed by Andrew V. McLaglen. USA: MGM.

Westworld, 1973. Directed by Michael Crichton. USA: MGM.

Where Eagles Dare, 1968. Directed by Brian G. Hutton. USA: MGM.

The Wild Bunch, 1968. Directed by Sam Peckinpah. USA: Warner.

Will Penny, 1967. Directed by Tom Gries. USA: Paramount.

Winchester 73, 1950. Directed by Anthony Mann. USA: Universal.

The Wind, 1928. Directed by Victor Sjöström. USA: MGM.

The Wonderful Country, 1959. Directed by Robert Parrish. USA: United Artists.

Wyatt Earp, 1994. Directed by Lawrence Kasden. USA: Warner Bros.

Yellow Sky, 1948. Directed by William Wellman. USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Yojimbo, 1961. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Japan: Toho.

Zulu, 1964. Directed by Cy Endfield. GB: Diamond.

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Big Brother, 2000- , TV Series, Channel 4.UK: Endemol Productions.

Rawhide, 1959-1966. TV Series, BBC2. USA: CBS/MGM TV.

24, 2002-03. TV Series, BBC2. USA: Fox Broadcasting Company.

The West, 1996. Directed by Stephen Ives. TV Series, BBC2. USA: PBS.