AT A STANDSTILL OR IN MOTION, ALWAYS LOOKING FOR
THE "FREEWAY": CHANGING PATTERNS OF RESISTANCE
IN THE FILMS OF WIM WENDERS

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1996

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC STUDIES

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2000

Department of _Germanic Studies_

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date _April 27th, 2000_

ABSTRACT

Wim Wenders's cinematic projects have recently changed from the anti-narrative road movies of previous decades. This shift in the German director's stance is only noted in an article (1996) by Roger Cook, and here, a reading is given as to why Wenders has switched over to films that embrace narrative form. The more recent release of Wenders's 1998 film *The End of Violence* (1998), however, now casts doubt on these limited remarks made about "the post-road movie."

The End of Violence can be seen as a valuable cipher that suggests an alternate understanding of this new direction for Wenders in the 1980s and beyond. In this movie, many details seem to coincide with the plots of the other three major pictures following the road movie period. In each movie, protagonists possess technological "super speed," but in each, this capacity is renounced by characters. In nostalgic returns to the world of physical motion, life for characters is then portrayed as being only marginally better. In the four different films there appear surveillance systems that are used to control all who do not use the "technology." With the exact repetition of this pattern of events in all his movies, one must believe Wenders is trying to communicate some sort of specific message with his post-road movie.

Indeed, it is believed that in the post-road movie, Wenders is repeating the theoretical focus he has had since the very beginning of his career; he is considering the ability of speed to obtain freedom for the individual from metanarratives. The older road movies centered on the idea of motion as being the great liberator for images from film narrative. With the pre-millennial "death of real speed," however, how one might free humans caught within the "(inter)net" of a computer-covered world changes. Given the modern advent of disembodying computer speed, the German director must re-evaluate his take on how stasis confines and speed frees elements from within total systems.

With today's evolutionary shift in the nature of speed, Wenders decides to opt for using the message, not the medium of film to encourage audiences to resist a totalizing world system. In accepting narrative, Wenders is now changing his cinematic mode, but nonetheless, his spirit of "metanarrative-busting" is intact. Wenders maintains his postmodern questioning in art, as, in his new films, he continues to cry out for the freedom provided by velocity. The only difference is that Wenders's films now have the complexity to recognize the impossibility of liberty in a world codified by information-gathering total systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Wim Wenders's movies are artistic projects that often appear as confirmations of various aspects of postmodern theory. The result of so many near perfect past correlations has been the recent collection of critical essays, *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: Image, Narrative, and the Postmodern Condition* (1996). This thesis takes its impetus from Roger Cook's contribution to the anthology, the article entitled "Postmodern Culture and Film Narrative: *Paris, Texas* and Beyond." Cook's article documents the substantial shift in Wenders's outlook on film occurring in the early 1980s, and of this period, makes the important observation that there comes about for Wenders, "a cinema that combines more traditional narrative control with a strong critique of postmodern culture" (123). The 1998 release of Wenders's *The End of Violence*, however, begs the continuation of these introductory remarks about the filmmaker's changed cinematic vision. For with this new film, additional clues are given as to the precise nature of Wenders's generation of films following the road movie.

Looking at the imagery and plot of Wenders's *The End of Violence*, one realizes there is a distinct pattern at work that binds it in with the other three major films following Wenders's identified transition stage of the 1980s. When considering *The End of Violence* along with *Wings of Desire, Faraway, So Close!*, and *Until the End of the World*, henceforth referred to as the two "Angel" movies and the two "Ends" movies, one is presented with essentially one identical plot-line, simply being repeated with different actors in changed settings. Such an emphasis suggests that Wenders has a specific message in mind for audiences. In delineating the nature of this idea, not fully visible at the time that Cook was writing, and placing it within the wider context of Wenders's long-term directorial approach, this thesis then sees itself as a valuable continuation of the original article. Furthermore, this thesis will argue the usefulness of regarding these new,

narrative-driven movies as being closely related in spirit to the road movies that preceded them.

Indeed, if one agrees that freedom, motion, and the interplay between these two ideas are the key elements in Wenders's early films, then the new generation of post-1985 movies appears as not such a career aberration for the director. These post-road movies chart a world where the real motion of people has given way to the instantaneous, out-of-body speed of computers. Implicitly and using analogy, these films consider the total systems that are created using computer capabilities--through information directories, consumer profiling, traffic cameras, satellite tracking programs, data-bases--and ruminate on whether this lessening of freedom for the individual is so extreme that we might be better off to avoid "progress." In determining the answer to this question, the old issues of liberty and how speed may aid or hinder its pursuit are again, thirty years later after the first road movie, at the forefront of Wenders's cinematography.

The work before you serves finally as an appropriate continuation to Cook's initial inquiry and as an addition to *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: Image, Narrative, and the Postmodern Condition.* Its appropriateness for inclusion derives from the clear postmodern picture that appears when Wenders's two mini-film traditions are joined together under the one rubric of understanding of "systems and motion." It is hoped that by the end of this thesis, the entirety of Wenders's film body will appear to readers as meditations on the nature of totalizing systems and the means for resisting them.

A Shared Postmodern Quality

In comparing the films acknowledged to be Wenders's early road movies and the four films of the period 1986-1998, much could be made of the apparent dissimilarities between the groups. In stark contrast to the open form in road movies such as *Alice in the Cities, Kings of the Road, The State of Things,* and others of what Wenders terms his "A-type movies" (Wenders, *Logik* 72), the four films of the last decade are structured

projects that accept script and tight narrative control. Nonetheless, seeing as Cook suggests that by 1982 the German director begins searching for new "oppositional strategies for his feature films" ("*Paris, Texas* and Beyond" 122), perhaps there need not be a discrepancy in the fact that these movies are so very different in terms of form. Perhaps Wenders is changing just the medium of his work, not the message for these film groups from opposite sides of the divide of 1982. Indeed, this will be precisely the argument, that Wenders's insistence on resistance and freedom remains the same throughout both periods of filmmaking, while merely the location for the deployment of this ideological program changes. In particular, starting in 1986 with *Wings of Desire*, Wenders trades in a medium for resistance (the road movie) for a message that resists (narrative content in films). In spirit, rather than form, it is an identical oppositional formula that is at work, and this is a resistance that possesses a particularly postmodern aspect to it.

Wenders's two film groups maintains a postmodern quality in a way similar to Jean-François Lyotard's understanding of *postmodernism* in his *The Postmodern Condition*. This happens in the road movies and the post-road movies because an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv) is taking place. Lyotard's further pronouncement of *postmodernism* as nothing more than "rewriting modernity" (qtd. in Docherty 15) will then be taken to be an understanding analogous to what was presented above from *The Postmodern Condition*. In these two definitions of *postmodernism* given by Lyotard, there is an equivalence, for in both cases there are objects at the center of discussion (*metanarratives* and *modernity* respectively) that are being resisted by an outside force (either they are not believed, or even in some cases they are being rewritten). More than *postmodernism* being simply an act of obstruction though, this is a concept that will be understood in this thesis as interference against specific targets, opponents called the *metanarrative* or *modernity*.

The use of a term such as *modernity* places the object of resistance inherent in the project of postmodernism squarely within the specific socio-historical context of Europe and the New World from the beginnings of the Enlightenment until the near present. Reasons for a discontent with the *Zeitgeist* of this era are given by Adorno and Horkheimer, who pronounce at the outset of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" (3). The individual's recantation of myth in favor of rationality in the modern age "radiates disaster triumphant" because all that has taken place is the switching of one set of false idols for another. Modern science and rationality may make the claim for a more accurate understanding of the natural world, but after its hubris is stripped away, the simple fact remains that it is simply another system making impossible claims at universality.

All systems that claim universal applicability are necessarily subjective (and dangerously so, because they believe themselves to be perfectly objective) because of the gap that exists between the complexity of being and its attempted truthful formulation through language or conceptual thought (Docherty 8). It is the central belief of this thesis that reality is a system so complex that no symbolic representation can ever be created that represents it with absolute accuracy. Hence, as paradigmatic logics are applied more thoroughly throughout a system, the difference between the "real" and its attempted representation will become obvious. In encountering new phenomena, however, these all-encompassing theologies will not discover, but rather will bend reality to its will. The certainty of a mathematical consciousness recreates the world in its own image: mathematical eyes watching a mathematical sun setting on a mathematical world, with a brilliance and beauty expressed only in numbers (Docherty 6). And yet do the numbers do justice to what is going on?

Essentially, in the construction of any episteme claiming universal applicability, a certain violence will repeatedly be used to maintain the appearance of infallibility for the paradigmatic logic. The violence it enacts is the recognition of elements within the

system only insofar as they fit into the spots reserved for them *a priori*. In a world where rationality rules supreme, multiple forms are fixed to become mere position and arrangement, history is abbreviated into solid fact, and process, in general, experiences its own dissolution into matter (Adorno and Horkheimer 7). A mechanistic *ratio* deals badly with a world of whose nature is (almost random) motion, and so our systems "lie" about reality, claiming it to be governed by clockwork-like rules. For this reason, the rational structures of the modern age claiming impartiality, can become "totalitarian" (Adorno and Horkheimer 6), and with that, radiate "disaster triumphants."

Although we have located modernism and modernity here as beginning in the eighteenth century, associating it with the rational structures of science and rationality, really any act of establishing world boundaries will constitute the building of a metanarrative.[1] Surely religion is the largest metanarrative of them all, and it cannot be claimed to be an institution of the Enlightenment. Postmodernism in this thesis then will be taken in the most general sense of the word. As opposed to some understandings of postmodernism, where there may be fewer comprehending adherents than theorists themselves, this thesis sees postmodernism simply as the recognition of the danger inherent in any all-encompassing system of thought.[2] Following from this, it includes also the subsequent act of resistance ("rewriting" or "incredulity") that results from such an awareness in the modern age. The world is always much more complex than the way paradigms wrap it in their thinking. This is postmodernism at its simplest formulation, and it is also an accurate reflection of the subtext running throughout both of Wim

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[1] And so, this paper qualifies Lyotard's claimed equivalence between *modernity* and *metanarratives*, by saying that modernism is characterized by metanarratives, but not necessarily always vice versa; metanarratives are not always the product of modernity.

[2] The point is correct that the portrayal of the universe as "a chaos never truly quantifiable (but always nearly so by scientists)" is a metanarrative in and of itself. Though it claims a vision of the universe that explains all reality, still, it is a different type of total world system than others that have been mentioned. Indeed, more than anything, the metanarrative at the heart of this thesis is simply a warning about human's over-confidence when conceptualizing the world. Seeing as the history of our race is filled with representational system after representational system that has been proven wrong, a healthy dose of skepticism should be in order for people.

Wenders's film groups: Wenders's *road movies* tell audiences the real is more diverse than what we see in mainstream American movies; the German director's *post-road movies* warn of a world where similar simplified total visions of the world now have the ability to be grafted onto the chaotic real (existence), physically replacing the dynamism of the universe with a man-made "order."

The Quality

Wim Wenders constantly uses the coefficients of motion and stasis in the four major works of the past decade, as well as in the earlier projects of the road movie. Irrespective now of these films and their contents, stasis is traditionally the state at which systems and paradigmatic thought are established. Especially in rational structures, the slower and more ordered an environment is, the more susceptible it is to quantification. The harder it is to examine and observe phenomena (perhaps molecules and atoms because of their size, or suns and stars because of their distance), the more difficult it will be to create a grid of knowledge that can contain them. Nonetheless, size and distance are only momentary impediments to regimentation, that are overcome as soon as people can outfit themselves with technological tools that enhance their sense of sight.

No matter what kind of "glasses" are actually developed though, there still is a finite limit as to how fast human beings are able to think. As a result, speed and motion, applied to elements within systems, are the only ways that the fallibility of a "system" can truly be exposed. Speed is the greatest difficulty for scientists, for thinkers, for all, because velocity hides its object, permitting it the only cloaking known to the systematizing act of "the examination." With any examination, the "examined" becomes fitted and forced into the space assigned it by the organizing logic of the paradigm. This "forced fitting" is what postmodernism fights, and for this reason, speed and motion are always allies on the side of the postmodern's exercise of rewriting. To accelerate then

always becomes the agent of freedom for that thing shackled by the bonds of a metanarrative.

In Wim Wenders's early form, the road movie, it is explained by the director himself that these films are part of an action to free "images" fixed in place in the grid of cinematic narrative (Wenders, "Impossible" 36). The rules of narrative in film constitute the construction of a metanarrative, for both create a world process that organizes all and assigns value to all phenomena within the system. *Narrative* is etymologically related to *metanarrative* because it performs the same function as the latter; both look at the real world and then provide a simplified schematic for it (in the case of film narrative, what the "world" is, is that which is reproduced on screens for audiences). Both (film) narratives and metanarratives are essentially in the "blue-print business," creating a plan of the world that posits a center (a foundation), a defining of elements, and an "infallible" mechanism defining exactly how elements are to interact with each other.

In narrative, like the metanarrative of religion, the limited number of elements from the real that are recognized are seen to "move" about in a repeatable and simplistic type of manner that already suggests the massive gulf that lies between the reality and the way it is cast by these conceptual systems. Under Christianity, what happens in the world (as it is understood by that system) is that all action is reduced to a loop of ordered paths of motion falling under the rubric of "sinful" and "virtuous" behaviour. This is all that is happening in their model of the workings of the universe: everything is either evil, which is begotten by sin, or it is virtuous, which ultimately is always rewarded.[3] This pattern explaining all movement in the Christian universe is so internalized that the converse become as accepted as the obverse: sin not only causes misfortune, but misfortune is retroactively deduced to have always been caused by a prior sin. This is all that the world

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[3] Depending on the sect of Christianity, rewards are seen to be made "in this world" more by a television evangelist's intervening God, but more problematically for how I am portraying it here, in the "next one" by many others. Nonetheless, the very act of praying, consistent for all Christians, implies the belief that God is active and reacting in the physical realm.

starts to be about in this example of a metanarrative: the many directions of spontaneous movement that is reality become dumbed-down and forced to fit within the pattern of a binary causation.[4] Is this, however, an accurate view of the world?

In *narrative* a similar type of misleading "routing pattern" takes place, and a description is created of how things interact with one another that is applied to all elements in the world. What is notable about film narrative is that the images taken from real life provide for sequences of action that are likewise entirely facile; in the world of narrative, all things must lead unambiguously into new, always-related, and meaningful situations. Guns on table must lead to deaths, they don't just sit there. People walk down a set of stairs for a reason, there is no such thing as a chance encounter. Good always prevails against evil before the end of the story. This is the artificial world of narrative. Though reality (and this is my view) is random, chaotic, and without meaning, story-tellers portray it in their tales as being something totally "clean." Through narrative, all of existence is imbued with a misleading type of meaningful causation. Reading and going to films makes all of us into heroes and actors, as we narrativize our chaotic, random existences and endow them with their artificial coherence.

An introduction, a problematic, a resolution: narrative will always be this series of hermetically-sealed boxes, one following after the other, providing like any metanarrative, really only a crude approximation of the real world at best (Wenders, "Impossible" 36).[5] And so, in implicitly and explicitly making claims about how the

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[4] The facile nature of this fictive world view becomes most tested when things happen that appear to "buck" the (only possible type) of causation suggested to exist by the metanarrative. In Christianity, this might be when great numbers of many people needlessly die (world wars), and people are left asking how can God be at the center of existence, ordering all. In particular, one is left wondering how this great mass of people could all have been sinful, for that is the only way to explain the great pain so many were forced to suffer through. "-arratives" (*metanarratives* and *narratives*, that is) are models of the full universe that convince people ultimately to understand only certain types of causation. On a small scale, glaring anomalies can be swept "under the carpet." When the good woman of the village dies tragically, one can suppose there are not so virtuous things that the woman secretly did. When it is whole nations that are destroyed, people begin to doubt the mechanism of reality that claims all is part of a cycle of virtue-reward and sin-damnation.

[5] The "-arratives" create worlds with artificial overly-tidy order. Things move and cause further

world works, metanarratives proper and narrative in general simplify the totality of existence into a mechanical formula. This equation is drilled into people's heads and causes people to miss different and alternate connections (if indeed any exist) between the "various things that happen in the world."

But why should one really care if images are being trapped and abused by the totalizing world of a film script? Simply put, the problem with *building* narrative, boiling the complexity and chaos of the world down to one plot line with one hero, is that ultimately it deludes people. People look to stories for meaning in their own lives (Wenders, "Impossible" 36), and in accepting the film-narrative structure imposed on reality as meaningful, people internalize the same filter when they view "life." A limited understanding of the world is then inherited by audiences, leading to a dangerous tunnel vision. It is for this reason that the totalizing rules of this system should be challenged. If we do not, then Wenders believes that people will try to fit their life into a Hollywood-style narrative mold that simply does not exist. Wenders confirms the danger of narrative cinema in an interview:

> Film can certainly disturb seeing. It can make something visible, but it can also make something invisible. A film can actually cause one's eyes to close; many films don't do anything but this. You come out of them and for the next few days you are blind. Your eyes almost glued shut! (Wenders, "Interviews" 72)

As such, throughout his early films, Wenders announces that he will strive for something he repeatedly calls the "pure act of seeing." He hopes to do away with the rigid system of exclusion/inclusion in narrative that comes about because of the snowballing logic of the system.[6] As Wenders remarks in "Impossible Stories": ". . . every word tends to belong to

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events only in certain ways. By providing motion and injecting it into the vectors of these artificial worlds, things go off in different directions and do not cause what they are "supposed to," according to the logic of the metanarrative. And so, by adding speed, the artificial worlds projected by total world systems become rendered as things that are closer to reality (and not the stylized models they are now).

[6] As to Wenders's success in allowing (chaotic) reality to come through in his filmmaking, and never allow the abbreviation of complexity that comes from filming in an "ideological manner," much should be questioned. Though this thesis believes he does not fully accomplish what he sets out as his political vision of cinematography, nonetheless his intentions remain interesting and certainly virtuous.

a sentence and sentences tend to belong to a coherent whole . . . [t]here seems an inevitability in the way stories come to be told" (35). Paradigmatic logic generally creates the effect that no one sees what there is, but rather only recognizes what has always been. It is like every astronomer who looked up at the sky before Galileo; they see the same stars and planets as he observed, but because of the established laws of the day, they are subconsciously programmed not to notice the obvious contradictions that lie before them in the heavens. In essence, when there is an established total system, the logic of this system conditions how people encounter any new phenomena or data, and often it does so in a way that continues to perpetuate the status quo.[7] The method through which Wenders intends on breaking the iron grip of the total system of narrative appears to be through the disruptive force of speed. Motion will break down the clear path of interaction that narrative claims is how "the world works." Put more eloquently, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young has helped me formulate that what Wenders aims at is, "changing the speed at which objects are presented to make them more 'real' and to thus achieve a 'more natural' representation of the 'natural' chaotic state of the world."

In the road movie, Wenders injects motion into narrative by having crews travel and simply film whatever happens. Beginning with situations he hopes "would develop into a story" ("Impossible Stories" 39), Wenders sets out on the road with actors and creates a "daydream," a filmed picture that meanders and drifts according to what the

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[7] To make this point clear, it may be useful to imagine a simple, enclosed environment. In a hypothetical world, a person sits, watching red balls fall out of a machine at a rate of ten balls per second. This is all that exists in our imaginary world. And now, let us suppose that the person in this world has had it drilled it into him that in life only one thing happens: "Red balls fall from the machine at a rate of ten per second." While we are in this fictional world, perhaps we can also add one more proviso; we may also suppose that the person never tires or becomes bored of watching the balls dropping from the machine.

And so, returning to the notion that reality is often experienced in an inevitable sort of way, we would expect that if one day the balls that started falling were all a little oval, or perhaps a little more purplish, or that one in every 1000 balls was orange, these things would not be noticed. The person would ignore this information or not trust his senses or claim that it had never happened. And so, there is a normal way that things are supposed to happen, and this framework has an inertia to it that prevents people from suggesting that experienced data is in conflict with the model of the world they have.

crew encounters on the road (in the "real" world), not according to what is in the script. Of *Kings of the Road*, it is noted,

> after ten weeks of shooting we found ourselves still in the middle of the journey, although I had planned to finish the film by then. [. . .] The central problem was this: How should the story end? Or: How could it be transformed into a movie? [. . .] So we broke off the filming and tried to drum up some money so that we could shoot for another five weeks. Of course there is the danger that a film of this genre could go on forever. ("Impossible Stories" 39)

Believing that no human direction is being followed in such a method, Wenders (naively) feels that the fixed models of progression and resolution inherent to narrative are being overcome. The contingency provided by speed and travel now provides the sustaining allure for narrative-indoctrinated audiences, as they are presented, not with images forced into a formulaic, laid-out pattern, but rather with an autonomous "reality" that unfolds "naturally" before them (as it does in real life). In allowing undirected velocity to place the multifaceted workings of the "real" into films, instead of simply repeating the static direction of artificial scripts, Wenders's road movies attempt to involve audiences in the process of the re-discovery of the actual (chaotic) nature of being. This intent, successful or not, is clearly vocalized when Wenders calls the road movie,

> [. . .] films that do not simply appear on the screen in front of the spectator like a given object [. . .] they take the finger away completely and present things for their own sake. . . ("Interviews" 71)

There is the hope that the rigid structure of narrative that produces stylized versions of reality and how things "work" in the real ultimately gets undone when Wenders introduces speed into the mix of his filmmaking. With "jet packs" attached to the directorial "finger" mentioned above, the confident certainty of an uni-directional plot is eliminated. Films may now go off in any direction, at any time. All bets as to what audiences should expect are now off, for cinema now ceases to repeat the version of the real that mainstream American films pass off in their films.

Wenders's method of the road movie, to use speed and motion to combat narrative's artificial vision of the world, ceases, however, when Wenders reaches the period 1986-1998. In this period, audiences are again presented with systems and the speed that goes on within them. This time, however, motion does not take place within the very making of the film, but rather only in the plots of the respective projects. Previously, "narrative" itself was the system, its shackled images to be freed by the speed included in the filmmaking process (and then shown on the screen). Now, however, the system exists on a completely different level: it is within the worlds portrayed in the plots of Wenders's films. This is seen in each of the last four films where people's existences are placed repeatedly within discernibly regulated and monitored orders. In the "Angel" movies, Chronos (Emit Flesti) sits and lords over a finite world of human beings, and in the "Ends" films, a hi-tech surveillance system from the American government sees all, identifying and assigning value to all units within their boundaries. Common to both pairs of projects is the premise of imagined environments where all is known and ordered. In these worlds without "unknowns," people are fit into the slots deemed appropriate for them, and they are forced to be that and nothing else--a scenario analogous to what Wenders recognized as the plight of images within the narrative of a film. In the "Angel" and "Ends" movies, characters who act as nails, sticking up and not quite fitting in with the "master plan," find themselves quickly bashed over the head with the deadly violence of a hammer.

The "system" that Wenders is referring to with his four most recent films is in fact a version of the world that is seen around us today. This is believed to be allegorically presented by the angel figures in the first diptych, while in the second duo of films, the cause of Wenders's changed thinking following "the crisis of the early 1980s" (Cook 123) is more exactly identified. It is, of course, none other than the world experiencing the throes of a computer revolution.

Here in these films, a changed life condition for humankind on the planet finds its expression in near McLuhanian terms, as spectators are presented with computer bodies no longer bound, but rather extended around the world in "global embraces" (*Understanding Media* 3). Using their super-speed to be ahead of those who still rely on physical speed, governments in these films are able to create essentially totalitarian super-states. These systems are founded on the "embrace" of computer speed, but they use it to choke the movement of people not traveling the information super highway. As in the example of Christianity and narrative, these systems are out to create and impose patterns of interaction that are fewer and more intentional than the multitude of ways that exist in reality. Diverting people into narrow alleys of action, this system freezes the interaction of the units of an otherwise thriving and moving world.

The masters of this new system take their power from using the inner space of electronic networks to transcend the physicality of the world. In each of the four newest films, one is presented with a singular, dramatic formula on the part of Wenders. First of all in this technological Passion Play will be a protagonist, and he is a "specialist" who regularly jacks into the "system" with ease. The characters of Damiel, Cassiel, Trevor McFee and Mike Max all fulfill this function, but in the course of every movie, each ultimately decides to reject his life as an (allegorical or actual) electric computer vector. Existing as perfect motion is a lonely, alienating existence, and to regain community, the antidote to this lifestyle, these characters get off their technologically-enhanced joy(less)-rides to come to rest at zero velocity. While at this standstill, they can interact with others and establish new domestic lives. Nonetheless, all four now find themselves haunted by the system based on perfect *computer* motion of which they were once a part. In their new, slow lives, computers, digital cameras, and the instantaneous speed of others keep them in check and contain them. For the angels this is seen in the unapologetic, supernatural guardian-figure (Time) who lords over them, while for Trevor McFee and

Mike Max it is the American government that pursues them, observing, knowing, and anticipating their every move.

In the face of the instantaneous motion provided by digital technology, the endings to these films suggest the hope futile that *physical* speed can still provide a means for eluding the totalizing drives of metanarratives. No train, plane, or automobile can now furnish the individual with enough speed to elude the examination and categorization by the "system." Driving down the road in a car is now no longer enough to furnish break-outs such as occurred in the road movie.

From a certain perspective then, there has in fact been little change in Wenders's work of the last thirty years. Since the beginning, the German director has been concerned with securing the autonomy of things so that they are not manacled and positioned by the immutable laws of whatever modernist ethic. Using a meditation of stasis and motion, he shows in his movies that systems are founded upon immobility, and that the addition of speed into their mix can undo their control. Nowadays, Wenders has upgraded his campaign of the 1960s and 1970s, wherein he supported the right of images to resist narrative order, so that he can fight a computerized world system's efforts to fix the human individual in place, in pre-ordained, narrative-like spots. Nonetheless, Wenders's previous optimism of the 1960s seems, with the death of any sort of virile, real speed, to have given way to a sad acceptance of a worse world awaiting humankind in the future. At that point, one assumes, there can be no more postmodernist activity, there will be no effective re-writing or incredulity towards the state that surrounds and confines us.

Chapter 1

EARLY WENDERS

Talking about his experiences as a student during film school, Wenders once

reflected in an interview upon those turbulent times of the 1960s:

> I was in the middle of all the political unrest, living in communes, at times with
> people who later turned radical and went underground . . . I got out of that scene. I
> have often thought that many of these people had some great ideas, but that they
> wanted to realize them in a way that was completely masochistic. (Wenders,
> "Interviews" 62)

While admittedly he did not always partake in the clashes that in popular

imagination mark that time of great cultural upheaval, Wim Wenders nonetheless was a

child of his generation. If the way he chose to implement his personal 1960s revolution,

through his art, was not as extreme as the methods of some of his contemporaries, still

Wenders was in many ways in step with his peers' thought during this time of cultural

questioning.

Numerous articles note the impact that Vietnam war protest, rock 'n roll music,

and anti-capitalist drives had on Wenders during this decade (Cook and Gemünden,

"Wim Wenders's Cinema of Displacement" 13-16). Indeed, instead of accepting the

restraints of generally conservative and austere post-war living, Wenders advocated for

the generation of more "freedom." Eschewing the immediate ethos of that time in

Germany, the narrow confines of "[e]veryone must work hard and make money for

themselves and the prosperity of the state" (Gellhorn 205), Wenders happily embraced

the break-out from conformity that was made possible by the 1960s. He felt conservative

Germany in the 1950s and 1960s to be different in degree, but not in nature, from the

totalitarian state of the 1940s it had succeeded (Cook and Gemünden, "Wim Wenders's

Cinema of Displacement").

Of this confining world that Wenders rode away from on the wings of rock 'n roll ("with so much force and electricity that it spread like wildfire, it ultimately led me to take my life into my own hands ("Interviews" 63)), Martha Gellhorn remarks in her memoir *"Ohne Mich*: Why I shall Never Return to Germany" (1964):

> [Young Germans] were taught to learn by heart, to obey not think, and they learned their lessons well. . . They were defensive about their parents (none of whom had been Nazis) and humourless; dutiful children reciting the approved ideas. They weren't going to threaten the world, but, dear God, you could perish of boredom here. . . In my opinion there is no New Germany, only another Germany. . . Germans have been taught obedience systematically, as if it were the highest virtue, for as long as they have been taught anything. . . Germans are still trained as before in their old authoritarian way. (205)

In those years just prior to the '68 movement, Wim Wenders was typical of his generation of "change" of the 1960s, who hoped to free themselves from the stifling milieu mentioned above. How this thesis looks at Wenders's films will suggest that this young man was one of the few of his decade who, in later life, never gave up on this ideal of freedom. Indeed, it will be shown later on, that in his present films, Wenders still remains in many ways a 1960s radical.

1960s radicalism in Germany was of course similar to the counter-culture at that time in other Western countries, but particular to the Federal Republic was a special, intensified opposition on the part of youth. The generational discord in Germany was exacerbated as a result of the country's prior history and the period of dishonour surrounding Nazism. For the young Germans who resisted in the 1960s, there was the sense that the war and what had immediately preceded it were taboo subjects, things unspoken whose silence implicated their parents at the same time as it shamed them, their off-spring. More than simply a topic of conflict between the old and the young, however, this forced "forgetting" of the Third Reich intensified the 1960s counter-culture movement in West Germany in and of itself, simply for the fact that it was this act of obligatory amnesia. This "black hole" (Wenders, "Talking" 55) in German post-war

culture had to be filled, and ultimately it was filled through installing "pristine white" American structures and culture. Whereas the strong American presence was not resisted in the FRG immediately in the 1950s, by the time of the great social upheaval in the late 1960s, this would change dramatically.

Trying to come to grips with the "hole" in culture (the erasure caused by Nazism) and that which had "plugged it up" (America and capitalism) intensified student protest in Germany, and importantly they should be viewed as factors that shaped and molded Wenders's thought at this time. Indeed, the vortex and "the America in it" are important means for orientation to Wenders's filmmaking. As will be shown, together they both created the director's personal demon of the late 1960s (metanarratives) and then ultimately suggest to him the means for overcoming its power (resistant art in the area of media). The enemy for Wenders would be the confident certainty of what one may call modernist representations of the world; his response to this danger would be to provide speed to the elements of metanarratives' rigid, simplistic models of the world. In so doing, the artificiality of these total world views would be exposed, thereby allowing reality to shine through.

Life in a Depressurized Cultural Cabin
or
How the 1960s in Germany Came to be About Trying to Plug a Hole

From Wenders's perspective, post-war Germany enthusiastically received American structures and values because nothing else had been available to take the place of 20 years of tainted German culture jettisoned at the close of the war (Wenders, "Talking" 55). In the absence of substitute artifacts to replace the Nazi times, Germany became desperate to acquire a new legitimate system of traditions, values, and cultural customs (Corrigan 1). Turning to America, it was no surprise that Germany enthusiastically received such things as Armed Forces Radio Network "Hit Parade" and

widely-available American films. These were "gobbled up" as quickly as they could be flown in (Geist 2), but even years later, in the critical years of cultural questioning, it was still common to embrace American (foreign) imports as superior and favored over one's own cultural goods. Wim Wenders himself is widely quoted as saying that rock 'n roll "saved [his] life." Wenders explains in an interview with Jan Dawson, saying:

> [Rock music] was for me the only alternative to Beethoven (and I am really exaggerating here) because I was very insecure then about all culture that was offered to me, because I thought that it was all fascism, pure fascism; and the only thing I was secure with from the beginning and felt had nothing to do with fascism was rock music. (Dawson 12)

In a time then opposite to own present day (Baudrillard, "The Silence of the Masses" 27), the Germany of the post-war years experienced, as Wenders did, an ongoing lack of sanctionable ideas, habits, and routines for the people to engage and believe in. This "black hole" caused by the war would draw America into Germany very tightly. Showing this tendency, Wenders confesses: "I was easy prey for [. . .]American myths, for I lived in a country without myths, a country I saw as having neither stories nor history. . . Huck Finn's Mississippi was much closer to me than the Rhine or the Mosel" ("Talking" 55).

In the late 1960s, though, the strength of the American cultural embrace would ultimately lead German students to believe that their own nation was more complicitous than most in the up-keep of a world system of capitalist repression. World-wide, the main object of resistance by counter-culture movements was not so much the near and particular structures, as the monolithic system behind it all, coordinating and operating global repression and exploitation. In the German context, this opposition was complicated, for the "international adversary" (capitalism) was, at the same time, the face of the supposedly more benign local and particular governing relations. America as "capitalism" was the enemy, but Germany itself was now America. In the heartland of Europe then, this country appeared as an "America-prime," a strange and ludicrous theme park some 40 years before the construction of Euro-Disney. Thus, the critique of global

capital systems for German radicals (of which Wenders was one) in the 1960s became

characterized by extremity; for anti-capitalist and anti-American drives quickly rendered

themselves as a close self-analysis of all that had been instituted in Germany as culture.

For Wenders, in viewing this American, global capitalist cultural take-over of

Germany, the extent of subversion was that--as a character in his *The American Friend*

announces, "The Yankees have even colonized our subconscious." Capitalism had

reached the ultimate stage of where, mobilizing all in the name of absolute consumption,

now something akin to "mind control" was being instigated on an international scale. The

consumerism taken from America became the new creed for the people of the post-war

world, and Wenders objected to the blinding, stultifying effects of such a "religious" life.

In particular, Wenders felt the ability to think freely and live in a complete way was being

lost as a result of this new total belief system. The means for the proselytization of this

theology was through the nature of the medium of the ascendant American TV culture.

During the 1960s, the general concept of America was a confusing one, for it was

something held forth to be both celebrated and reviled. Just as the Cleaver suburban

family unit was the building block of the repressive capitalist world order, at the same

time, America was also the beatnik, the student activist, the rock musician, symbols who

heralded the coming of an age of less hypocrisy and rigidity. In contrast to this patterning

of a "bad" and "old" America, giving way to a more open and allowing "youthful"

America, in the one cultural sector of film and television, the opposite schema seemed to

be taking place for Wenders. Indeed, for Wenders, so much of "the current" in film

seemed somehow to be controlling and incarceratory, forming together to serve as the

basis of capitalist control.[8] Growing out of Wenders's general student counter-culture

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[8] Wenders talks about this in his essay "Talking About Germany" when he comments,

I do not want to bore you with further details about Walt Disney, especially since it has taken on a quite different look today. I lived out my childhood dream of the "Promised Land", and now I know that Ducksville is in reality Los Angeles, and Uncle Scrooge is Donald Trump. The dreamland of my childhood has become a nightmare; the happy images have turned into images of

thought, the one issue of American film and television would become for him the most pressing aspect of the unwelcome American colonization.

Wenders's ability to recognize American monopoly capitalism as a totalizing vision of the world, and that its control emanated from media, derived from the similarity between the historical conditions occurring in the 1960s and the 1930s in Germany. Indeed, the apparency of American "mind-control" coming out of Hollywood is a natural observation for someone who has just suffered the after-effects of the "mind-control" Nazi Third Reich. The Nazi regime was really the first of the modern age (along with communist Russia) to develop absolute conformity of populations. Seeing as this was achieved through a totalitarian structure that was based on control of the organs of communication and media, Wenders develops a proclivity for seeing media as the culprit whenever large groups of people start to eat, breath, and think together.

The salient way in which Wim Wenders, however, sees "new" Hollywood as a danger is the way in which it uses and ab-uses images. A certain "speeding-up" of shots and magnifying of explosions, characters, and speech, leads to the creation of an overall "suped"-up version of the old film culture, the so-called "Golden Age" of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s in America. This culture was one that for Wenders had previously been content to simply produce in its best moments, "nature as it was." Old American movies had practiced something far different from the rigid system of exclusion/inclusion of TV narrative. They would never boil the complexity and chaos of the world down to one plot

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violence and a form of entertainment that sells ease, pleasure, and immediacy to the highest bidder. This way of life that I missed so much *here* has become in the meantime a product over *there*, a form of advertisement. . . I came home in part because I could no longer stand Disneyland; the breath of "true images" no longer exists, only the bad odor of lying images (56-57).

Given that Disneyland is an anagram for the real capitalist world and its real-life victory, the entertainment emanating from America can be seen as an ideological pabulum that makes all who digest it, grow up in a certain, particular way. In essence, American television makes its viewers into able consumers. TV watchers are indoctrinated to view, understand, and take in the world in a way which helps capitalism.

line with one hero, into narrative ideology's crude approximation of the real world. The movies Wenders has in mind from the 1950s, that do not create simply a "version of reality," are slow-moving Westerns that allow autonomous "reality" to unfold "naturally" before audiences. In these films, we see all sorts of interaction and causation, not just the progressive development that is the staple of mainstream American film in the 1960s and beyond.

As now a "self-propagating media industry" (Cook 176), however, new Hollywood is no longer simply satisfied to capture reality "coming into being." This of course is not a cost-efficient use of image. A quick zoom-in, followed by a rapid flash-back, and then a "mean-while" could accomplish more than the "wide shots" of old TV cowboys melting into landscapes. Hence, in the place of his favourite, especially non-mainstream Westerns of his youth, where reality and its images may "quietly and unobtrusively spread out for ninety minutes and nothing else" (Cook and Gemünden, "Introduction" 21), the television logic of tight narrative structure begins a period of ascendancy in the 1960s. In line with a specific level of capitalist development, the mode of cinematographic process is changed to further the consumerization of the masses.[9] As suggested in the introduction to this thesis, the capturable images of reality are not allowed to take over the screen, but rather a discreet ordering process takes place, hurrying the progression of introduction to problematic to resolution, the necessary series

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[9] This is of course not to say that narrative did not exist on the silver screen until after 1967 and that narrative (in any medium) did not exist until capitalism. It is really more of a question of degree and the perspective from which Wenders himself views the history of film.

Oft-repeated is the impact American filmmakers such as John Ford, Sam Fuller, and Nicholas Ray had on Wenders in his youth. As the Cook and Gemünden introduction to *The Cinema of Wim Wenders* points out, the latter two were directors who, not accidentally, existed on the "fringes of the studio system" (13), toiling away with a naive filmmaking that harkened back to the first decades of cinematography, the 1920s and 1930s. Coinciding with Wenders's resentment of the capitalist dimension in film, these independent filmmakers, themselves out of step with the 1940s and 1950s, symbolize Wenders's wished-for ethos for the decade--a non-narrative-obsessed-one. And so, the 1960s serve as a sudden switch to narrative-driven features only really so far as in they signaled the final death knell to an old-time cinematic sub-tradition. This was a sub-culture still subsisting on the marvel and wonder of simply being able to capture the wide spaces of the world.

of narrative's hermetically-sealed conceptual boxes. This plan to convey the world in an affected abbreviated way (with limited number of ways for things to happen) becomes a danger for people because this simplification of reality in a metanarrative like religion or any rigid political orthodoxy: it sets up a model for how things are to work in life, and if phenomena in the real disputes this, the belief system has an inertia to it that causes people to ignore these contradictions. This process of watching life through the logic of a paradigm essentially limits people's ability to live full lives. Indeed, with a "Truth" in their possession, people establish a hierarchy of beliefs. The paradigm is more important than anything else, and following from this position, things that contradict it can be sacrificed as being "non-essential services." They may include heretics, anti-clerics, and blasphemers, but they are people, all of them.

In the late 1960s and later then, there is the feeling for Wenders that a "dehumanizing" America (Wenders, "Interviews" 83) exists, based in that country's film and television industries. Wenders sees "mind-control" occurring, not because TV/cinematic narrative has simply sprouted up at this time. Rather, it starts coming to the fore because narrative is now intensified more than ever before. All around the world, people begin to become mindless automatons, "imitating in a helplessly dumb fashion this American crap" (Wenders, "Interviews" 84). Those who watch, live "almost mindlessly, like in a science-fiction novel where the people have been administered drugs and are controlled like zombies" (Wenders, "Interviews" 84). This voodoo effect comes about because Tinsel Town has radically changed the relationship between camera and image. Instead of displaying the world "as it is"--wide, open, and with a myriad of elements that interact with each other in a variety of manners (and not necessarily furthering plot progression)--the new, non-naive Hollywood puts forth a constructed Lego world, where the sacred image becomes a tool to be, with the worst of intents, reduced, reused, and recycled. It explains the world and offers people a meaningful place for people to create identities; in this way, it is accepted as a new religion.

This regime of tightly controlled manipulation of images takes the beauty of reality, however, ("the landscapes of John Ford") and can turn it into a billboard ("Marlboro country") (Wenders, "Talking" 56-57). It does this for, instead of letting cameras and filmed reality "flow," all is packaged in a go(stop), go(stop), go(stop) format. As such, people become habituated to such viewing patterns, to watching the world with the slow, dead eyes of "zombies." The tyranny then of America's capitalist colonization of Germany and much of the rest of the world (in the 1960s) will be for Wenders, at least in the realm of film, associated with the technique of tight cinematic narration adopted from television.

As part of what Jan Dawson calls a "radical subculture" (qtd. in Corrigan 4), Wenders then began to firmly resist the credo of an American Dream that was little more than "a marketing campaign" (Wenders, "Talking" 55-56), directing people to think, act, and buy in a certain, directed way. Wenders especially would combat this dangerous patterning that (artificially) imposes meaning on a chaotic "real," by turning to the cinematography that, as a boy, the vortex had originally compelled him to engage in. Wenders would discover his personal revolutionary response to "bad" 1960s narrative America by returning to "traditional" methods of cinematography suggested to him by non-mainstream Hollywood Westerns of the 1940s and 1950s.[10]

Because his revolt consisted of turning to traditional methods, the revolutionary nature of Wenders's road movie filmmaking has in the past been somewhat obscured. Still, it should be kept in mind that throughout his oeuvre, all usages of "traditional"

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[10] Again, the point is well-taken that in the 1950s, cinema was not devoid of narrative. Still, the point is correct that in the films of Wenders's favourites of the period, Fuller and Ray, and in the vast majority of films in general, there was not the same total manipulation of image going on that later developed in film culture. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the attitude of movie-going audiences today to these older films is one of boredom and marvel at "how slow it all is." The cinema of the 1950s does represent a time of slower "development" (read 'less-intensive manipulation of images'), where characters more "meander" than operate in the direct and immediate manner of cardboard cut-outs with expected missions. The 1950s then do serve as a time of different cinematic vision to that which follows it in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

methods are calculated responses to the culture of enslavement that Wenders finds emanating from a monoculture America. He uses them to try and engineer escapes for people so that they can get out of living life in the limited way that comes from viewing existence with the internalized expectations of Hollywood narrative.

Don't Let it Escape!

As a 12 year-old in Düsseldorf in 1957, Wim Wenders received the gift of an 8mm film camera from his father. From the second floor of his home, the young boy would often focus his camera upon the cars outside his house and wait for passing images to move into the sights of his motionless, fixed camera. Wenders was never able to find the words to explain why he was shooting this fixed shot, over and over again. Given the historical circumstances that Wenders was growing up in, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that the answer to his father's question, "Was machst du denn da mit deiner Kamera?," lay for the future director purely at the technological level of the mechanism of the camera.

The ability of the camera to capture segments of time was naturally a tool of great importance for a boy growing up in a place that, as Wenders has remarked, was "a country. . . having neither stories nor history" (Wenders, "Talking" 55). Nothing ever seemed to stay in Germany; the world before the rubble of 1945 and then the rubble itself eventually disappeared into nothingness. In such a transitory world then as the Germany of *die Stunde Null,* a fair argument can be made that a person such as Wenders would be naturally predisposed towards a technology that promised permanence. As a result, since the very beginning of his career, Wim Wenders had been somewhat drawn to the basic, essential, one might say original cinematographic task; that of capturing and preserving of reality. Indeed, in interviews, Wenders will often quote Paul Cezanne to defend his "trapping" of the world passing by. He paraphrases, "Es steht schlecht. Man muß sich

beeilen, wenn man noch etwas sehen will. Alles ist dabei, zu verschwinden" (Wenders, *Logik* 34).

The impetus for such a remark is not only Wenders's personal experience of a world "floating away" in the aftermath of the war. It is also helpfully understood as the recognition, by someone fully immersed in 1960s thought, that American narrative is a dangerous, hegemonic force, restricting vision such that the individual only notices the world when, "Alles ist dabei." What Wenders calls the "naked fascism" ("Interviews" 82) of Hollywood (TV logic-inspired) narrative blinds people to the real world, by setting up a system of expectations and patterns of visibility. In this way, narrative serves as a kind of *grands écrits*, it is a total world system, no different in type, only degree, from the political regime that preceded it in Germany. As a result, Wenders feels compelled in his early pre-road movies, to don the mantel of the old-fashioned cinematographer. He does so, however, in order to combat the decay of our vision at the hands of Hollywood. Hence, at this point in his cinematographic career, any pretensions to narrative on Wenders's part are subordinated to the greater aim of simply capturing pictures. The dangerous edging of any movement towards narrative is of course to be abhorred and avoided.

And so it is that Wenders created initial works such as *Same Player Shoots Again* (1967), *Silver City* (1968), *Alabama: 2000 Light Years* (1968), *3 American LPs* (1969), and *Summer in the City* (1970). In all these films the common denominator is the re-occurring motif of the primacy of the image, "unfolding naturally" for the audience. As a result of this ethos, in the place of accepting an authoritative version of the universe, like religion, Wenders refuses to impose subjective meaning on the flux of existence. Instead, he will simply attempt to reproduce the world as it appears in our daily life, a series of random events that are not as meaningful as the logical progression of happenings in a book. The success of this action remains somewhat in doubt, though

Wenders's intention of getting more "real" and less "stylized total world vision" is quite clear.

In *Same Player Shoots Again* one sees a limping gangster with a gun, shot five times, each time with only slight variations in the tinting of the image. That is all. In *Silver City* there is a series of ten three-minute shots from an immobile camera, each capturing some mundane aspect of the Munich cityscape. And nothing more. In a conversation about *Summer in the City*, Wenders remembers the six days in which that movie was filmed and says,

> In [diesem Film] fuhren wir mit dem Auto durch einen Tunnel in München, und ich filmte das aus dem Seitenfenster heraus. Dann ging es durch den Tunnel durch, der ist sehr lang, und dann wieder raus. Es ist fast eine Minute, wo man auf der Leinwand nur schwarz sieht bzw. Lichter vorbeiziehen sieht, und als ich die Mischung gemacht habe, kam hinterher der Mann, der hinten im Raum sitzt und die Bänder einlegt, und sagte zu mir. . . warum ich denn. . . nicht geschnitten habe. Da habe ich ihm gesagt, 'Der Tunnel hat leider solange gedauert, der ist 800 Meter lang.' (Wenders, *Logik* 12)

Throughout these pictures, Wenders is interested in allowing reality, not the maneuvering of "representation" of reality ordained by narrative, control the screen. In acting as a traditionalist, Wenders is now embarking on a highly radical path in filmmaking.

And yet a fundamental problem likely appears for Wenders with these pictures. None of these features are commercial successes, because, thoroughly inundated with the tempo and speed of TV/ Hollywood narrative logic, audiences yawn and disregard Wenders's slow-moving, "pointless" projects. Wenders is simply shooting the world "as it is," people passing by a window, a car driving all the way through a tunnel, the fixed camera capturing unorchestrated movements of life. He does so because this is "reality," something a German coming out of the vortex, but especially a German in counter-culture 1960s thought can appreciate when facing the propaganda of an ideologically-constructed Hollywood "perfect world." The tight, manipulative hand of narrative though is what audiences want, and yet this is precisely what Wenders (at this point in his career) will

refuse to provide. Wenders will not manipulate images (or believes he is not doing it to the degree as other types of film), for to do so would lead precisely to American cinema, where not only the means, but also the message and effect are incarceratory. As Wenders explains in 1982 of "that" type of cinema,

> I always have the physical sensation of being tied to a rope--as if cables were running from the screen to each seat. Like dogs on a leash: this is the impression I often get at the movies today; and I can empathize with dogs who want to be freed from their leashes. (Wenders, "Interviews" 78)

The recognition here is that in the very act of manipulating cinematographic images, you manipulate the understanding film audiences can have of the world. The world is, as the German director elucidated at the Livorno film festival in 1982, essentially a highly complex system, where random events and actors interact with each other in equally unpreordained ways (Wenders, "Impossible" 36). The outputs produced in reality do nothing but provide for further events and actors, perpetuating the high-speed, multi-directional cycle of life (Wenders, "Impossible" 36). Vision for those who are exposed to television will become manipulatingly limited; television's tight authorial control puts forth a version of reality which claims that a certain logic can coherently group the random units being shown. In spite of the fact that Wenders is himself in this profession of "tight narration," he is a cinematographic "story-teller," he admits he is guilty of nothing less than "an outright sin" (Wenders, "Impossible" 36). He will say of himself, "I have to confess that in my whole life I have not experienced a single story" (Wenders, "Impossible" 36). And so what to do? Narrative-indoctrinated audiences demand and will accept only "script," confusing this formula with the diverse and multifaceted workings of the real world.

As a way out of this conundrum, where this principled artist must create artificial completeness or meaning, it seems to this author that Wenders is forced to come up with something that coincides at least partly with audience expectations. Wenders's new

(beginning in 1974 with *Alice in the Cities*) path in film that deals with this problem, will be the creation of the *road movie*.

How to Fight Narrative without really Resorting to Narrative in the First Place

      Understanding how Wenders can possibly get out of the paradox of finding a way to create a compelling non-narrative film that narrative audiences will still watch, is clarified by an understanding of a film narrative's relationship to the "world of potential images" it ultimately derives from. Reality being equal parts "not much going on" and "a whole lot going on," narrative then will be this metanarrative that takes particularly the latter aspect of reality and chooses which elements it wishes to recognize, reproduce, and allow to be shown on a screen. Narrative attempts to persuade audiences that a mono-directional, logically-developing series of freeze-frames of the action of the real, is the "real." Nonetheless, the "real" is a multifaceted, multi-directional matrix without meaning. As such, the paradox Wenders is trying to solve is to find a means of convincing audiences that there can be something more worthwhile watching than buying into the reduction of complexity which narrative imposes upon reality.

      Previously, Wenders's advantgardism was to present reality through the method of "the fixed camera on the fixed object," of showing a Chekhovian gun on a table, but with a twist. Defying Anton Pavlovich, Wenders would refuse to allow anything to follow from it for many hours, weeks, years. To do otherwise would support the regular pattern of imposing ideology and its subjective meaning onto the real. Quickly, however, Wenders learns that audiences cannot understand this type of radical-traditionalist act, the task of showing a world at rest. There is nothing happening here. But when Wenders shifts his traditionalist method from championing the slow-moving, and opts for the other extreme of reality, speed, his traditionalism becomes a truly revolutionary cinematic method. And so, in order to get the attention of audiences attuned to Hollywood/TV narrative, Wenders decides in the early 1970s, to move from capturing a reality where

nothing happens and trades it in for the flipside of a world moving only at high speed. Now it becomes Wenders's prescription that for our culture to escape the confining bed imposed by narrative, society must be turned onto *speed.*

In particular, in his essay "Impossible Stories" Wenders makes the critical observation that there are striking similarities between going on a journey and building a narrative. He says, "[a] journey is an adventure through time and space. Adventure, time, and space--all three are important. Stories and journeys have them in common" (39). Even more obviously, however, the commonality between narrative and Wenders's new film type is that both are founded on the same basic element: motion. The only difference is that narrative yells "cut" every five seconds, and then stitches the various takes together into a singular, uni-directional, logical framework. As a result, by employing the motif of the journey in the cinematographic process itself--with the very simplest of preparations: a few cars, cameras, and a crew--Wenders can go onto the road and film a reality other than the lazy "yawner" of a "fruit bowl with various lenses" for 45 minutes. Filming whatever "turns up" in fast-moving real-life journeys, this thesis believes that Wenders has found the solution to his quandary of how to connect with narrative-dependent audiences. By going on the road, Wenders is presented with the very framework for an acceptable pseudo-narrative, that nonetheless is not laid-out as a pre-formulated constrictive narrative world. Indeed, in so far as the "moving real" provides the necessary speed for narrative, it may provide so much dynamism in this pseudo-narrative that the artificiality of the stop-go, stop-go, stop-go method is broken down for narrative-indoctrinated audiences.

And so, this thesis suggests that Wenders decides that the strategy for overcoming the manipulations of Hollywood will be to flirt with the idea of narrative, but while he creates the illusion of it for his audiences with the "pseudo-narrative" of the road movie, he will never need to fully commit to it.

Freedom for All

In choosing motion to assure audience interest, the very format of road movies will presuppose that certain elements are present. First and foremost of these requirements will be that the protagonist must possess a motivation for being on this trip. If Wenders's films will be pieces in which there are never any explicit beginnings or closures to the action, merely a beginning and ending to the filming of it, then these will not be documentaries of insurance people on business trips. Rather, these films will place eternal wanderers at the forefront of their scripts. Similar to the nature of the road movie itself, the protagonist too, as the lone fixed component to the script, must be a "daydreamer" who "zigzags" back and forth. Such a pre-condition is necessary as an impetus for the venture that will take up the duration of the film, but will never truly be resolved. To do otherwise would involve the "lie" of creating "a coherence where none exists" (Wenders, "Impossible" 40): the building block of creating a totalizing world system. And yet, at the same time as the damaged individuals of the road movie will never find closure to their tasks, still these wanderers will embody a supreme virtue for Wenders. Of them, the director speaks:

> Diese Personen haben das Glück, nirgendwohin gehen zu müssen. Für mich bedeutet es auch eine Freiheit: Weiterzugehen ohne zu wissen, wohin. Daß man kein Haus hat, wohin man zurückkehren muß, das ist für mich ein durchaus positiver Gedanke, das hat eine Anziehungskraft. (Wenders, *Logik* 49-50)

Wenders's radicalism has led to the point of portraying characters who are little more than chemical molecules, bouncing and wandering around aimlessly, combining and then breaking apart eternally. His traditionalist admiration of early films, borne of the experience of growing up in a society lacking permanence, has lead to a film method where he films with a free hand the beloved roamings of "the free." At the very least, this is the type of impartiality that Wenders hopes to have. The fact that he still is the one that edits (makes decisions on the inclusion and exclusion of the various images) the various

takes together into the "whole" of a film contradicts the belief that his projects are free from the biases of man.

Through making films that (they themselves) do not know where they are going, Wenders sees himself as undertaking a new direction in filmmaking. He is allowing stories to develop as they will, thereby overcoming what he feels is the discernible political dimension within American mainstream films. Indeed, Wenders's projects will be political in the sense that openness of the films that he produces is so great that (hopefully) no existing order can be confirmed. While such a claim is somewhat suspect, seeing as each film is ultimately Wenders's ordering of the real, not the real itself, the director will claim in *Logik* of his road movies:

> Es ist alles veränderbar, alles offen, alles bedroht. Der Film hat keine expliziten politischen Inhalte. Aber er macht nicht dumm. Er macht seine Figuren nicht zu Hampelmännern und die Zuschauer deshalb auch nicht. Leider tun das so viele 'politische' Filme. (Wenders, *Logik* 30)

Because of the simple fact of its openness, Wenders thinks that the road film cannot stand for any particular ideology; it will be impossible for it to replicate or help maintain any imagined *Bestehendes*, a word Wenders uses to describe "standing order." The road movie will be a *deicide*, an assassination of God, for the film figuratively destroys him and the world, creating a new autonomous world (not just the simplified version of it as found in the "-arratives") that can stand in his place. Wenders becomes the "creator of worlds," not just a landscape painter of the real, because, overcoming the discernible intent on the part of an author, Wenders's projects have multi-directional motion that is not saturated with compulsive, meaningful causation. These road movies are as complex as reality (it is hoped). Indeed, in comparison to "[d]ie amerikanischen Männerfilme vor allem der letzten Zeit" which are "ja reine Verdrängungsfilme: Filme, in denen die wirkliche Beziehungen, zu den Frauen, aber auch zwischen den Männern, verdrängt sind von der Story, der Action und dem Unterhaltungszwang" (Wenders, *Logik* 23),

Wenders's films try to be free of such biases. They have the lofty and perhaps naive goal of trying to show things as they "really are;" the vast complexity of life and reality cannot help but come through in projects where there is no other agenda than to capture whatever of interest appears on the other side of the lens.

As such, in talking about an epic road film like *Kings of the Road*, Wenders may rightly claim, "Dieser Film ist die Geschichte von zwei Männern, und das auf eine andere Art als die Männerfilme aus Hollywood" (Wenders, *Logik* 23). Unlike the stylization so apparent in (new) mainstream American cinema, the road films of Wim Wenders are different, being as they are, made up of whatever simply comes up in the course of watching actors deal with situations in which they have only the vaguest of inklings as to what is going to happen. Essentially, the Wenders road film is an improv, broadcasting from mobile studios, far from home and going who-knows-where. Its relationship to images is perceived to be cooperative instead of dominating, and as such, hopes not to metanarrativize the environment into a false coherent *logos*.

Though it is supposed "that projects where there is no other agenda than to capture whatever of *interest* appears on the other side of the lens" will lead to an escape from narrative, there is a shortcoming here that does not prevent the environment from being "metanarrativized" into a coherent whole. With the one word "interest," given above, Wenders's project is undone. Though he does collect images in an unbiased, non-partisan way, by choosing only "that of interest" in the editing process and perhaps in the shooting as well, there is a non-natural, irreal slant given to a movie. When it becomes filled only with "interesting" episodes, then audiences watch something more "sit-com" than "reality unfolding." As such, since Wenders cannot ever eliminate the human element from filming (the impulse always to impose meaning or make things "meaningful"), one is right in asking whether narrative is being avoided in the road movie or is simply being (willfully) denied.

Cooling Down the Engines

Wenders has appeared in this chapter as a radical typical of his up-bringing in the 1960s, but it has also been emphasized that he was also heavily influenced by the great puncture in the German cultural envelope of 1945. Growing up amidst the rubble of a bombed-out, defeated nation, a certain lack of permanence was a decisive factor in shaping Wenders's early experiences. As Wenders states in "Talking about Germany" of his childhood, "I found myself in the middle of the vacuum" (55). Indeed, the lack of any stable order caused the invitation of American cultural structures to take hold in Germany throughout the film director's youth. The American order that established itself in the post-war period world appeared to follow a duplicate mode of development as the prior Nazi regime. Using media, authorities in the 1930s and 1940s had been able to convince the German people that reality existed in a certain, simplified way. Was it being done again?

As Wim Wenders reached maturity and tried his hand at the art of filmmaking, his method would be seen to react against precisely these two movements associated with the vacuum: firstly against the transitoriness of the world and secondly against the manipulative, artificial (American) world that had been installed in the place of the world swallowed by the "whirl pool." And so, one sees two simultaneous movements taking shape in early Wenders film. A traditionalist tendency, born of the marvel and sheer wonder of being able to capture reality (like the first generations of cinematographers), becomes used as the basis for opposing the ordering and valourizing of certain images by new mainstream 1960s, 1970s American film. The accumulation of filming with an ideological agenda, of filming in an American manner, leads to a world where the freedom of people has been lessened. The internalization of film patterns blind people, creating walls to their seeing "everything" when they look at existence. In the road movie, Wenders believes he has developed a plan for narrative-junkie audiences to come back to reality, and overcome the narrative structure of orchestrated stops and starts (contained

motion) they so crave/demand. Admittedly, one might successfully argue that such a maneuver is not a means to break the narrative habit "cold-turkey," but rather seems more like a methadone in the stead of Hollywood heroin. Anything that limits film narrative's conditioning of people's perceptions of the real is to be welcomed as something possible and useful. Nonetheless, one is right to question whether, in this case, the methadone really worked that well (or at all).

Wenders's potential treatment strategy comes through the accurate recognition that "film stories are something like travel routes" (Wenders, "Impossible" 36); narrative is this speed that is simply vectored, directed, and substantially edited. Setting out on the road with a camera crew and speed and contingency as his (non-) compass, Wenders creates in the road movie a pseudo-narrative, something he believes is an unconscious exploration of reality that avoids the pitfalls of ideologically-oriented Hollywood productions. Using the frame of a journey--which "always entails curiosity for the unknown and creates expectations and heightened perceptions" (Wenders, "Impossible" 39)--Wenders's road films will begin with a situation that is hoped to eventually snowball, of its own accord, into something akin to a story. Seeing as stories always require a certain amount of control--Wenders claims, " they know their destination and they know how to get there, they have a beginning and an end" (Wenders, "Impossible" 39)--there is quite a difference between new mainstream American film narrative and Wenders's genre of "pro-reality" film. Indeed, Wenders perceives the road movie as being such a radical break from prior forms, that he would likely disavow any genetic linkage to the prior (classical) tradition of "road tales" he borrows from. The difference between Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Wenders's road projects is that while both are travels that go on and on and on, in the latter, there is what the German director feels is a further "openness of form." The bodies of Wenders's films are so "non-controlled" in terms of direction that there is not even the centering narrative thread of "having to return home" for the protagonist. Characters are precluded from successful returns, going back

to a Penelope they left behind. In a sense then, the road movie is one step beyond the type it originally derives from; with the sense of any fixed travel route completely smashed, the road movie removes the final "beam support" of a story that directs the prior road takes of Homer and Cervantes, making them partially-ordered narratives and not the "real," simply disclosed.

The Wenders road movie then contains no story proper because it is a project so open and free that it possesses the danger of being filmmaking that "could go on forever" (Wenders, "Impossible" 39). The people in these movies have "kein Haus . . . wohin man zurückkehren muß", and as a result, any avenue of action is possible and no destination becomes probable. Such a film will be a mystery that unfolds for the audience in much the same sort of unexpected way as it did previously for the crew when they filmed it (in chronological sequence), traveling between the geographic and literal start and end points of the movie. As such, these films by Wenders will not artificially claim a model of certainty to characterize world systems. The road movie shows the world as uncontained motion and leaves it as a thing often complex, confusing and sometimes inexplicable. Wenders is using the contingency of speed to further his, as in the words of Jan Dawson, "radical subculture" goal of resisting a type of American-inspired media representation that directs people to be conscious of the world in a particular, singular way. He is using speed to upset the fixed system of cognition that forms the basis of high capital society's organization.

Chapter 2

**U-TURN? THE SPEED OF ROAD MOVIES
AND THE SPEED OF THE POST-ROAD MOVIE**

Wenders's take on Hollywood filmmaking at the time when he first begins

producing road movies is that the former "points" rather than "invites." Selecting images

capturable from the "real world," American mainstream films (especially of the late

1960s and beyond) abbreviate the world and excessively manipulate the sacred "image,"

thereby establishing particular patterns of viewing and expectation on the part of

audiences. It is wondered whether such a simplified understanding of the workings of the

universe is favourable to the maintenance of high capitalist society.

After experimentation with means of cinematography, Wenders decides that the

means for overcoming American mainstream films' incarceratory "media-vision," is to

concentrate on breaking down TV-logic-inspired narrative. Like Wenders's new

revolutionary mode of cinematography, typical Hollywood narrative is also formed upon

speed. However, unlike the road movie, Hollywood's motion is one that is cut down,

contained, and separated into ziploc-sealed boxes--such that it can be made "safe."

Hollywood is a simplified edit "cut-job" of the dynamic tempo of life produced for

audiences who are reassured by the order it promises.

With the "could-lead-anywhere" road movie, there is now a competitor to

Hollywood. This is a non-narrative film that is still basically acceptable fare for audiences

attuned to traditional narrative structure. This acceptance of the road movie will derive

from the interest that is inherently produced by speed. In his theoretical writings, Wenders

refers to these road movies as "group 'A'" films, and says of this personal genre:

> All of the films in group 'A' began with certain situations that I hoped would
> develop into a story. For this transformation to take place, one can apply the
> method of daydreaming. What I mean is, stories always require a certain amount
> of control; that is, they know their destination and know how to get there, they

> have a beginning and an end. A daydream functions completely differently; it does not have this dramaturgical control. It is rather something like a subconscious guide who wants to move ahead, no matter where to; every dream is headed somewhere, but who can say where? Something in the subconscious knows where, but one can only find out by letting things take their course; and that's what I've tried to do with these films. The English word *drifting* expresses this very well. It is not the shortest path between two points, but rather a zigzag course. Perhaps a better word would be *meandering* because it implies a route but with detours. (Wenders, "Impossible" 39)

Despite perhaps the unfortunate use of the words "drift" and "meander," words which in English also have the connotation of "a lack of speed" associated with them, motion, nonetheless, is the integral aspect of this new type of movie. The use of these terms is intended simply to imply a lack of "vectored" motion, for, like a river, the road movie can suddenly cut from one side of a mountain to the other in a matter of meters.

With such films that have no set, expected "flight path" then, there can never be (as in the Hollywood film it challenges) the promise of anything specific to come. There is not the calculated format of stop/go/stop/go/stop going somewhere, with a point, to produce a meaningful struggle, ultimately to forge an outcome and complete a nice, full, hermetically-sealed story. Racing, shooting, speeding across the screens of our movie houses, the films of Wim Wenders can and often do end up anywhere. And it is in this way that they hope to be part of a political campaign. They are part of the "pure act of seeing" so hoped to emanate when the authorial control is minimized, thereby undermining audience expectations based on mainstream American film. Indeed, a very different organization of images (than that which Hollywood puts forth) appears when Wenders takes audiences "on the road." This can be taken as a common motif for the road movie, taken here to begin after 1972's *Scarlet Letter* (a narrative film), and lasting up until the Cannes Palme D'Or winner of 1984, *Paris, Texas*.

Consisting of three main works, Wenders's so-called "group 'A'" movies, *Alice in the Cities*, *Kings of the Road*, and *Paris, Texas*, will be shown in this chapter to confirm the theoretical basis of the road movie developed previously in the introduction and

chapter 1 of the thesis. After the period of the "crisis" of the early 1980s (Cook, *"Paris, Texas* and Beyond" 123), however, there comes a new type of film that utilizes speed in a different way from the road movie. These films feature a motion that is dominant in the majority of scenes within the movie, but time and time again, this is a speed that is staged and based only on script. It is intentional speed, not the revolutionary motion that comes out of the contingency of filming without intention. Though related to the "group 'A'" film (the road movie), Wenders's new generation of cinematic projects in the 1980s and beyond no longer uses velocity as a revolutionary disruptive force. Rather, these movies seem to accept the ineffectiveness of speed as an agent for freedom in a world where the physical has become obsolete.

Clean Narrative Boxes? Or Plowing Right Through Them!

In the 1974 film *Alice in the Cities*, Wim Wenders claims that he has finally found his "eigene Handschrift" (Wenders, *Logik* 117) in cinema. Here, action begins with a deadbeat German reporter climbing out from under a dock, getting into his car, and driving across America. By the end of this black and white film, a series of improbable meetings have taken place, leading Philip Winter (Rüdiger Volger) in a search through Germany with a young girl (Alice) for an elusive, unknown grandmother. Winter's charge being relinquished, there is, however, no indication of whether the protagonist has been healed of the psychic troubles he was diagnosed as having by his New York girlfriend (Edda Koeckl). The movie ends in so far as the audience is not presented with any more film, not in that resolution or closure is had. No authoritative vision is given as to how the world "works." Rather, reality is shown simply as a complex series of not necessarily-linked episodes.

In the next film (b/w) starring Volger, *Kings of the Road* (1977), the actor plays a film projector repairman traveling up and down the narrow strip of the Federal Republic bordering the GDR. After a chance suicide attempt that takes place before him as he is

shaving, the trucker pairs up with the "kamikaze" child psychologist who had sought to end it all. In their travels together, the two men ultimately break down the barriers that separate them, only to have this intimacy ultimately force them to take different paths. The honesty of having no protective guard rails between them at all, frightens the two men until they are repelled by each other's presence.

After this comes another b&w, *The State of Things* (1982), to be followed by the essentially "fly-by-night experience" (Cook and Gemünden 66) of *Paris, Texas*. Although partially scripted by U.S. author Sam Shepherd (as a starting set of guidelines for the film), this project too was an open one that required the American's restraint from allowing Wenders to go "on the road" too much. In his discussion about the location of filming, Wenders confesses that originally, "ich wollte nach Alaska, dann in den mittleren Westen, dann zurück nach Kalifornien und weiter nach Texas" (Wenders, *Logik* 86). Although this film had "von Anfang an mehr Geschichte als [die] früheren Filme," nonetheless it shares the characteristics of the road movie described thus far.

Beginning with Travis walking out of the Mojave desert, it ends with him leaving Houston on the freeway, without the expected Hollywood reunion of child, mother, and father having taken place. It is an open project created by the same cinematographic mood as previously in Wenders's career. It is with pride that the filmmaker can say of this project, as he could of the other cases presented, "Wir sind zwar auch durch die Nacht geflogen ohne Instrumente" (Wenders, *Logik* 86). Here, as in other road movies, there is not the need to create a mapped-out, defined vision of the world, complete with the exact grid co-ordinates of man within some sort of Cartesian cartography. Rather, being of the school of thought that sees the world as infinitely wide and filled with the wild and inexplicable, Wenders feels no compulsion to try and artificially quantify it with the readings of various dials, gauges, and read-outs. He could use instruments, but ultimately these would all simply be guesses, suggestions, and hunches, subjective advice upon which too rigid a dependence could lead to ruin.

In all of these road projects, the travel of one or two characters as multi-directional vectors will take up the duration of the film. As the famous example of the "write-at-night/film-during-day" experience of *Kings of the Road* shows, there is no one central idea or issue that the road movie sets out to solve, and that by the end has in fact finally been resolved. Indeed, such a cinematographic model would presuppose that some sort of discernible hand is guiding the film, and that the film is actually setting out to do anything in particular at all. There is, however, hoped to be no will in the road movie other than to allow reality to come through for audiences and "survive" the process of cinematography; finally, perhaps the real can be accurately (re)produced on screens. As such, the road movie will thwart the theater-goer who deigns to try and force a singular meaning or theme upon the work, thereby imposing a false coherence on the group of random images originally collected from the real.[11] It will be able to do this because the road movie has no meaning, it is just reality being presented.

Indeed, rather than there ever being one movie being presented every time a Wenders road movie is released, there are perhaps many films together, quasi-stitched, one-to-the-other within each feature. For 20 minutes the movie will go here, for 20 minutes it will go there, and then not "back and forth," but rather the road film will continue in new and further different directions following this. The simple guise afforded by maintaining the same character(s) during these twists and turns, fools narrative-indoctrinated audiences into the belief that this is "one of their films," when it patently is not. As well, the absolute denial of narrative as an independent and autonomous body (portraying a confident vision of the world/ a metanarrative) is

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[11] Indeed, writers who cannot cope with the idea that the road movie is a subtle protest against Hollywood narrative often try and place a narrative structure on these Wenders films. For example, they make sense of *Kings of the Road* by calling it some sort of thoughtful, European (and hence understandably slow-moving) look at men's relationships. And yet, this is an empty descriptor, for what film is not about relationships? All "relationship" means is that people are doing things either with or against another person. What has happened is that critics are attempting to assign intentional values where there really are none, and finding this, they retreat to the vaguest, most basic observations of events.

achieved by the fact that the road movie pseudo-narrative has only a *de facto* beginning and end; the road movie has a very porous skin indeed, for without a formal introduction or conclusion, the characters possess imaginary existences that extend well outside and beyond the body of the work.

Leaving the movie theater, audiences may suppose as they get into their cars to go home, that the protagonists of the road movie are likewise continuing their own trips, rambling down highways, somewhere far, far away. A common postmodern disavowal then is taking place here, and this repudiation of fixed borders is precisely what Wenders hopes may ultimately save our culture from the "mind control" instigated by Hollywood's directed, deterministic linearity. By presenting the chaotic mix that is reality, and resisting the natural impulse to impose order on existence, Wenders is hoping that the nature of the world will finally shine through for the people in the movie theater.

The Road Movie Takes a U-Turn

Taking a look now at the films of 1986-1998, the "Angels" diptych and the pair of "Ends" movies, one quickly detects a rhythm to them that is far different from the established format that defines the road movie. Not only does there come a certain point in all four of these recent films where motion stops for those on the road, but in each picture, the stories are scripted narrative, all planned-out projects representing the imposition of a director's will on the world. Audiences are now served up "man-made worlds" in the stead of "real worlds."

Mirroring this, one must feel that the car of the road movie has crashed. Instead of getting out of the car and choosing to walk to the blinking lights of the town that lies off in the distance, the protagonists now get out of their cars and are happy to sit down on the pavement. Figuratively speaking, characters now start their own lives there on that speck of asphalt, they build a hut, grow crops and have kids. They wish no longer to be "cut off" by their speed, but rather, have themselves locked into the manacles of past and future.

And so, while certainly the four latest major (after 1985) features by Wenders all represent motion (liberation) in their opening sequences, seemingly following the pattern of previous road movies, nonetheless, these various vectors are all ones that are bound to crash!

The End of Violence

In the memorable domestic poolside cellular phone squabble beginning *The End of Violence* (*violence* is *speed* as Virilio says, and so, literally this film could be the *End of Speed*), both Max and his wife are poised for motion. Sitting at his hi-tech gadget chair, the director is moving himself and information at trillions of bytes a second around the world with the click of a mouse; a sudden conference call in the middle of their domestic dispute then propels Paige (Andie MacDowell) to make good on her threat to (get in her mini-van jeep and go) fly to Guatemala. Describing her (now ex-) husband to detective Doc half-way through the film, she certainly seems to confirm the suggestion made that they are motion people. She says, "Mike is like a rocket. . . and I always wanted to be along for the ride." Such an observation, however, is a reminiscence though, for Mike has already "crashed" at this point in the film: the detective the comments were addressed to has arrived only in order that light might be shed on the circumstances of Mike's recent car-jacking. Deprived simultaneously of the means for motion (Mercedes) as well as wealth (Mercedes again), Mike Max has been "grounded." This new state will both characterize his person and the plot direction of this film; it is the death of vitality, the finality to an omnipotent world embrace, the end of "violence" in the widest possible sense of the word.

The theft of the German sports sedan need not though, as Wenders's road movies have previously shown, necessarily lead to stasis. Often enough in the road movie, the "crash" is simply a prerequisite aspect of being on the road. The loss of one means of transportation forges the means for new turns in the pseudo-narrative: people enter into

new contracts and commitments with other people, and the road movie becomes
extended, now with a different vehicle, now with new faces added on with the original
individual character(s). A prime example of this is to be found in *Kings of the Road*, as in
the beginning, Bruno looks on in amazement when Robert (Hans Zischler) intentionally
drives his VW Beetle into a river at high speed. Bruno then helps the man who tried to
kill himself out of the river and makes him comfortable in the cab of the truck; thus
begins their journeying together. Though not (as we shall see) accurate to call it a road
movie, the 1991 *Until the End of the World* follows a near identical pattern, as the movie
begins entirely not because of speed, but rather the contingency that occurs when it goes
out of control. Claire Tourneur's car collides with a bank robber's get-away car, and
giving the men a lift to the next town, she becomes involved in the searching that will last
much of the film. Indeed, the need to get the windshield fixed, provides the means for the
entrance into her life of the mysterious Trevor McFee. As such, the "crash," the
"accident," or some sort of "engine trouble" need not serve as any kind of impediment to
motion in the Wenders film. Although Wenders's "unconscious /asleep at the wheel"
method of cinematography may produce disruptions in motion, these took place
previously as hiccups that resulted in the spasmodic gyrations of being flung even farther,
headlong into motion.

      Nonetheless, in *The End of Violence*, as in the other three films of the period
1986-1998, such incidents cease to be the intensifying factors that they once were. In the
period now to be examined, the "crash" or "fortunate fall" in the plot no longer impels
characters further on into open space. Rather, as characters are making their way through
the "dark forest" of the night and their car breaks down, they find themselves all of a
sudden at grandmother's house. Happy now to take up a sedentary somnambulism in the
fairy tale house's LAZ-EE Boy™, there can be no more questing for these people. And
besides, there are people now watching. They are locked into a pattern of expected
(suburban) living, where there is controlled authority placed over their lives. They have

dropped out of hyperspace to float dead and unmoving in the tight restraints of social order. This pattern of events comes to pass in all four films under observation, and this coincides intentionally with Wenders's new profound belief in the early 1980s of "narrative's potential to sustain both individual and cultural identity" (Cook and Gemünden 84). However, what is it that Wenders finds so important that he will repudiate the critical writings of the late 1970s and early 1980s that claim the impossibility of stories and the intense danger involved with stasis?

Following the hold-up under the overpass to Santa Monica in *The End of Violence*, whatever "rocket" Mike Max once was, now gives way to a much less spirited tempo. In this respect, his fall then is similar to what goes on in the Berlin of the angel movies; certainly, in the movie about the city of (Los) Angel(es), Mike Max's epiphany occurs under identical as to what motivated Damiel and Cassiel to follow Peter Falk's example to "make the switch." Now as a person "out of the office," out of corporate, cyberspace America, the Pullman character of *The End of Violence* can enjoy the "simple" pleasures of living for the first time. He can experience the joyful occurrence of a family dinner, "manuel" (sic) labour with his Mexican brothers, cold beers, the camaraderie of his new adoptive social group, and ultimately by the end, the possible love of a former El Salvadoran spy for the CIA. He has undergone what appears to be a redemptive process wherein he has been made aware of the organic, natural, pastoral life of man; something new to a man of speed. Being "weighted down" becomes cause now for ecstasy, and a place for all appears in the closed, mapped-out space of the family. In such a static, unchanging site, there is room for the production of Truth. Andrew O'Hehir remarks on his website review, "[i]n the course of this odyssey, [Mike Max] will learn such homiletic truths as 'there are no enemies or strangers, only a strange world,' and (no kidding) 'You can't go home again.'"

The important point to make here is that really, there should be no truths that can be learned from a (revolutionary) Wenders film. These can only be learned when one

comes to a stand-still and it is possible for reflection to begin. In motion there can be no thought, there is only "the moment." In the "moment" there is no greater picture, there can be no pattern of events, for there is no mechanism strong enough to initiate "order." There can be no overarching system which takes this instant into account; there is, in short, no truth on the highway. Truth comes and exerts itself only when you are pulled over to the side of the road. At high speeds, order bends and becomes fluid, such that understanding is elusive. This mutual exclusivity between motion and the ability to implement systems of order, to operate "thought," thinking," or "ratio" is intimated by the Franco-Czech author Milan Kundera, who observes in his novel *Slowness*,

> There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. Consider this utterly commonplace situation: a man is walking down the street. At a certain moment, he tries to recall something, but the recollection escapes him. Automatically, he slows down. Meanwhile, a person who wants to forget a disagreeable incident he has just lived through starts unconsciously to speed up his pass, as if he were trying to distance himself from a thing still too close to him in time.
> In existential mathematics, that experience takes the form of two basic equations: the degree of slowness is proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting. (39)

While here the novelist seems to be talking not about "systems of order," but rather simply about "memory" and "forgetting," these categories are, but in fact, different sides of one and the same coin. With speed and acceleration, one forgets for the sole reason that thought has been banished. The ability to sort out and order units of information in sequence (memory) is wiped clean by velocity--like rain drops blown off the hood of a car moving at high speeds. The corollary to an "existential mathematics" of a slowness necessary for memory then will be the flipside to this scenario. One remembers as one slows down, because the barriers to cognition/orientation brought about by motion have ceased, and the process of assembling ideas and languages in a closed system can now begin.

Realizations and truths, such as Mike Max learns in his grounded state with the Mexican gardeners, necessarily will happen because the character has come to a stop. The permanence of such ideas, however, takes on less rigidity as one speeds up, for with velocity, the tight, reined-in control of a system begins to experience turbulence. The question remains though, why is Wenders no longer trying to bend and break these fixed systems of "truth"? Why is he trying to erect what can only come about at stasis: paradigmatic world systems?

Until the End of the World

The espousal of such a differing stance to Wenders's previous views on film will be seen to be isolated not merely to *The End of Violence*, but rather is repeated throughout the other films under observation in the period following *Paris, Texas*. Although Wenders previously agreed with the statement that *Until the End of the World* was the story of an Odysseus/Penelope, who "um die Welt flitzt und es nicht schafft, nach Hause zu kommen" (*Logik* 132), even the most cursory of examinations of the film rejects such a supposition as specious. In contrast to the road movies, Penelope (Claire) is able to come home in this film, just as all people find "home" in the other three movies of the period. As opposed to this being a film about "longing" and "striving", the unrequited quest, *Until the End of the World* is in fact more a project about artificially clean achievements and conclusions. This happens for all the characters of this 180 minute film.

At the outset of the odyssey, one does indeed see a wide assortment of characters on the move or in search of something; there is a woman looking for love, a scientist hoping to restore his mother's eyesight, a father wishing to fulfill a promise to his wife, a blind woman looking forward to all this attention, bank robbers looking to recover their stolen money, a missing persons detective trying to recover a bounty, and a novelist attempting to win back his ex-girlfriend. The ultimate conclusion to this film, however,

will be a warm and fuzzy "arrival at home" for each of these protagonists, as they all find their "pot of gold" at the end of the rainbow. The woman ends up healed, the scientist restores his mother's sight and is reconciled with the father, the bank robbers get what they want, the detective gives up his search for the missing person, and the novelist figure learns to accept that he cannot have Claire the way that he wanted. The final scene to the film exemplifies the spirit of this new type of film, for there is a joyful round of "happy-birthday" sung in different languages by a circle of friends brought together from around the world by video conference. The Wenders film now appears as what he formerly so despised emanating from "TV logic"-infected narrative film: he has capitulated to the forces that advocate pre-constructed action that is poured into an industrial story mold (in this case, it is "happily ever after").

In this movie, the same sequence of events is playing itself out as previously outlined in *The End of Violence*. A group of characters, originally at motion in a mad race around the planet, find fulfillment through deceleration. Coming to a standstill at zero velocity, all the characters are able to rediscover social bonds and establish the terms of endearment that were so lacking in their lonely, vectored lives. In marked contrast to the beginning of the movie, that saw a large unwieldy cast of characters embarked on different journeys, the second half of the film sees the joining of all these characters together in a United Nations-like community of love, respect, and goodwill in northern Australian. In the Outback, a queer assortment of characters, an aged, blind French anthropologist, her husband, her American son, the Aboriginal Mabantua tribe, the French bank robber Chico, a German detective, an American author, and an East Indian woman come together to form a commune based on equality and mutual respect. They have the hope, that using this model, mankind will be able to weather the storm of its greatest challenge ever, the threat of nuclear annihilation. The new millennium begins with this band of grinning expats from the world of speed clapping shells and rocks together to provide rhythm for a "mother earth" celebration of dance. Friendship,

belonging to family, and sense of community are the values that are championed by these people marooned in rural Australia. This is, in fact, as the sound track intimates, a totally new beginning: they are a revitalized Eden colony, and Sam and Claire are designated as the future's new Adam and Eve.[12]

The Angels Diptych

The bodies at rest in the "new Hollywood" endings of *The End of Violence* and *Until the End of the World* were also already repeated back in *Wings of Desire* as well as in *Far Away, So Close!*. The "Angel" films portray inquisitive celestial messengers in Berlin, for whom all is well until one angel decides to reject this (black & white) existence, to take on ultimately the coloured[13] life of man. This state of being, wherein these angels, "haben keinerlei Macht mehr, sind nur noch Zuschauer, Zugäste all dessen, was geschieht, ohne die geringste Möglichkeit, daran teilhaben zu können" (Wenders, *Logik* 99) will be taken to be a condition synonymous to motion. Although the notion of what the angels claim to be, *Zuschauer*, has the connotation of being a person at rest, in chairs or on couches in an auditorium, precisely the opposite state of affairs is seen to be at work. And it is this paradox that leads us in the direction of the new type of "absolute

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[12] The searching, questing, and adventure of this film last until the shooting down of the Indian nuclear satellite. With the dispersal of the nuclear matter into the atmosphere, all electronic circuitry experiences the "nempa" effect and goes out of order. As a result, Sam and Claire's plane crashes, and the couple must make their way across the desert to the land of the Mabantua people. Stepping out of the cabin of their light Cessna to begin this impossible journey, the Peter Gabriel song about the Garden of Eden, "the man in the woman, the woman in the man," is played.

[13] This minor detail in fact possesses great significance because Wenders says that his films that operate in "very open systems" are always to be done in black and white (Wenders, "Impossible Stories" 37) . To have a film switch from black and white to colour will then not only indicate a shift in vision for characters in the film itself, but also implicitly suggests a change in cinematic strategy on the part of the director. Indeed, in lieu of speed, travel, non-conclusion, wanderings, and meanderings, all perfectly acceptable directions for a black and white Wenders film, the decision to film part way through the movie in colour will imply the coming of stasis, of agreement, or fatigue, and ultimately, of narrative itself into the mix of *Wings of Desire*. The same pattern of events will be seen to reoccur in *Far Away, So Close!* as a multi-faceted, multi-directional cinematic body becomes, with the introduction of colour, suddenly more intentional, more directed, and ultimately funneled towards a specific end message. In so doing, it becomes a metanarrative.

speed" that characterizes Wenders's new generation of films. Ordered from on high to bring solace to beings who are in such great pain, the angels are perpetual motion carriers who will communicate the word to those in need. Though the angels still must have fantastic, feathery wings so that they can fly to those in need, these are vestigial wings, not to be taken as emblematic of the true state of their nature.

Compelled to provide for a condition he himself cannot comprehend (because of his noncorporeality), the Bruno Ganz figure opts to fall out of orbit, in order that he will be able to enmesh himself in social bonds. He "makes the switch," deciding on love, family, and hot Italian meals.[14] What he then understands as a human is far different from his experiences at "super speed" for the simple fact that for the first time, he is able to enter fully into community. Never was it experienced in its entirety before, because the social only can come through limitation; something of which the angels hardly have any experience.[15]

Of the many dimensions the angels possess making them near perfect, it is the one capacity of absolute (light) speed that can be interpreted as the basis for all the rest of their lofty abilities. Their total knowledge derives from--like McLuhan's description of

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[14] In *Faraway, So Close!* Damiel gently brags to his invisible former companion, "Ach, Cassiel du wirst nie wissen wie mein Pizza schmeckt. Es ist ein Jammer!"

[15] "Standing" around Berlin monuments, waiting and listening, these angels really do not really enter into any sort of "brotherhood" with each other, other than possess a certain "pride of species." They will not marry and they do not start angel "families." The main tie they possess is becoming accustomed over the centuries to a co-worker. For Damiel, the partner is Cassiel, and after their "split" Cassiel is paired up with Rafaela. The reason these relationships never truly can be significant is that the people in them are near-perfect beings. In *Wings of Desire*, Damiel will talk to Cassiel while seated in a dealership for-sale car about his observations of people taken that day: such apparently banal stories are the only stimulus in an angel's life, because all else is confidently assured. They possess supreme knowledge about everything except for the vivid and confusing world of man.

The lack of knowledge on this one topic (man) leads to dialogue between the two angels (the first step towards community), and only through this dialogue can come the partial binding glue of relationship. Since this is the sole topic the two discuss, their relationship must necessarily though be limited. They need each other in just one way; they do not experience the complex and multifaceted network of reciprocating demands and obligations that exist between mortal folk. The very nature of humankind being "limited," we are the ones obliged to go out and enter into innumerable, subliminal contacts with one another. It is precisely our imperfections that ultimately weave us in so very tightly with each other into societies; if you are perfect, simply put, you do not need anyone else.

the "technological simulation of consciousness" (*Understanding Media* 3) suggested by Mike Max's office in *The End of Violence* and the digital travel of *Until the End of the World*--their ability to abolish space and distance. This is all that speed and motion are, the vain attempt to come to grips with the fact the individual cannot be everywhere at the same time, that one is imperfect because he or she is victimized by their inability to traverse geography at will. The angels, however, have conquered all of this. And although they wear wings, these are most assuredly only symbolic wings that are never used. To have actually to rely on a method of transportation would eat away at the perfection of being every- and anywhere at any given moment. In this regard, these messengers' identification with the (Angel) Statue of Victory and the winged Bronze Chariot atop the *Brandenburger Tor*, both locations where the angels regularly congregate, can be seen as nothing more than nostalgic retrospectives for these super-speedsters.

For the partner he left behind, Cassiel, there can be no greater wish than to find out what messages, what truths, his friend has discovered. And so in the second angel film, Cassiel falls too. However, as opposed to being simply content to receive the "messages," being able to enjoy the benefits of being at "stasis," the Otto Sander figure decides that it is not enough to simply fall. He must be worthy of the fall. In stark contrast to the route taken by Damiel, who falls to the static life of love, domestic responsibility, and the happiness of pizza-making non-ambition, Cassiel's journeying and questing do not end once he makes the "switch." He does not have a relationship with a woman, to "fall" into suddenly, at a bar. Rather, he jumps prematurely and must therefore feel out the sort of man he is, before entering community. Ironically, the moment of certainty that he is good and therefore worthy to enter into fellowship with other humans, comes at the very moment he sacrifices his own life; the site of Cassiel's martyrdom is literally placed between heaven and Earth, and here, on a bungee-cord harness, he finds his long-wished for "place-of-rest." The film then ends with people joining in around the dead body and

celebrating. Cassiel has arrived. "Nous sommes arrivés," read the subtitles as the film ends.[16]

Tracing Over Steps

This chapter has attempted to document what appears to be a new pattern of events taking place within Wenders's films of the past decade. It has done so without any theoretical explanation as for why this shift may be taking place. In marked contrast to an earlier cinematographic method that forsook narrative, exploding it with motion, Wenders seems to have done away with the project in ethics of the "road movie." Now, Wenders has gone all the way over to the other extreme of championing the metanarrative of narrative when previously, he had so vehemently disavowed it.

Whereas in such films as *Alice in the Cities*, *Kings of the Road*, and *Paris, Texas*, images are discovered by audiences in the same as they appeared to Wenders and his crew during the shooting, the four films of the period 1985-1998 espouse a far different ethos, while at the same time bearing an outward resemblance (the dominant motif of speed) to the road movie they are different from. Indeed, these new films are ones that now advocate having the audience intentionally led to a certain point chosen by the director. To lead to a particular point implicitly means that the "ride" has come to an "end" and that a stop, a braking, an arrival has taken over from the motion of liberation. What is so interesting about the "end of motion" that occurs in the cinematographic process of these road movies is that this is a shift echoed in the very plots of these movies. Not only is speed no longer used to undo the construction of movie narrative,

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[12] Stasis and death are ideas linked in this moment, for immediately after the death of Cassiel, the subtitle concerning "arrival" appears and then there is the "fade to black." Thereupon, there comes the information that the movie is dedicated to Curt Bois, recently deceased, who had appeared in the first angel movie. Two people and their deaths then are associated with "arrivals" of sorts.

but, strangely enough, (as a type of reminder to audiences?) each film will literally be about speedsters who give up "the great liberator" of motion in their personal lives.

In having "ends to motion" in both the medium and messages of his new set of movies, Wenders is now embracing the bases of metanarrative structure. Given such a maneuver, it is understandable that one may want to ask, "Why is Wenders doing something that is the very antithesis of what he advocated for the past twenty years?"

Chapter 3

NARRATIVE AS METANARRRATIVE, WORLD AS META-WORLD

When, at the beginning of his career, Wim Wenders first comes up against the simplified world put forward by mainstream American cinema, he rails against the "fake" reality it creates. Existence is constant and total motion, and any time that humankind attempts to quantify it in its entirety, it is destined to fail. It is impossible to achieve the goal of describing and containing the whole of existence, because the world is made up of such complexity that static formulae can never do justice to its dynamic nature.

As a result, human totalizing theories can only succeed in categorizing all of existence through artificially slowing the world down to a tempo with which it can deal. Only through a forced deceleration of the units of reality can logical structures come in and "explain the world away." Essentially, in the creation of mainstream film narrative, Hollywood, as so many systems before it, turns the complex real into a cardboard cut-out passion play.

Given that these insights were had by Wenders himself many years ago, what is to be made of the director's newer projects of the 1980s and beyond that now embrace the very narrative he formerly reviled? These recent movies possess *some* of the markers of Wenders's previous revolutionary filmmaking, but each time these "signs" come up, they are qualities that are asterixed (*). These post-road movies may begin as Wenders's revolutionary black & white projects, but each ends in colour: evidence, as Wenders admits, of a very different personal ethic in his filmmaking.[17] As well, there will be a speed that plays dominant roles in each of the "Angel" and "Ends" films, but this is a motion unrelated to the movement of the camera crew on the road during production. As

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[17] In the essay "Impossible Stories" (1982), Wenders states that in his career, black and white film indicates "road movie" and revolutionary motion, whereas colour productions will always be a marker for his movies that embrace narrative and "normal" Hollywood film.

in the previous road movie, speed appears in these new post-road movies in almost every scene, but now the motion is an intended one, derived entirely from the cues of a pre-formulated script.

The motion portrayed in these new Wenders films then is never a facet of "reality unwinding," but rather it is a rational, planned-out vector made to further the "grand scheme" of the director's plot. In that this motion "stops" in each of the films' plots, and it is divorced from the cinematic process that creates the movies, it would appear that Wim Wenders is no longer a director who is concerned with "perpetual motion" and the gifts it bestows. Instead, it seems he is edging towards the stasis that interrupts constant speed and simplifies and breaks down the dynamism of the real.

It seems then quite natural that some would want to criticize Wim Wenders for this recent turn, seeing as in previous texts, he had already acknowledged the problems of accepting selective representations of the highly diverse workings of the world. In the films now of the last decades, the German director apparently is casting his lot in with all who establish boundaries, those who draw the lines that help create ideologies of finite systems. Nonetheless, an understanding of the type of narrative that comes to take over from the "pseudo-narrative" must be considered before Wenders and his film are dismissed.

Listening to the Hum of the Engine

Roger Cook makes the accurate assessment that since the early 1980s, Wim Wenders's films switch from being narrative-resistant to narrative-embracing projects. In this new narrative form, they begin to issue forth a "warning about the growing threat the media industry poses to (post) modern society" ("*Paris, Texas* and Beyond" 121). Though there decidedly are discernible warnings of one type or another in Wenders's new narrative films--each can be seen to be "preachy" on some apparent topic--it is not this that is telling about Wenders's new direction in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond. Rather,

what is poigniant about these films is the fact that the take on speed in the very plots of each film is the same, (identically) repeated over and over again. In depicting the obvious "death of speed" again and again since 1985, Wenders is creating a new type of freedom film; it is one attempting to alert audiences to the current limiting of liberty they presently face and will be experiencing in a total world system where computers organize information.

The two film groups of road and post-road movies both contain "motion" as a central focus to their plots, but in the latter set of works, concurrent with a lack of motion in the cinematographic method that produces these films, motion is clearly seen to end in the plots as well. In 1997's *The End of Violence,* audiences watch a parable taking place about the computer user and virtual speed in the age of computer revolution. This exemplum is not a new plot for Wenders. It is, rather, the most obvious demonstration of a plot that has been used in the other three major films following the turn away from the "road." As in *The End of Violence*, in *Wings of Desire, Far Away, So Close!*, and *Until the End of the World*, one sees characters involved with the condition of "super speed," who, depressed by this lonely state-of-affairs, decide to drop out of warp. Concomitant with a break-down of speed in the actual filmmaking process, the post-road movie depicts characters who refuse speed in their own lives. Instead of accepting the great power of the virtual world, the only real speed left to man, the protagonists of these films embrace the happiness that comes from reverting to stasis and being able to connect with people.

The reason they do so is that their speed was a damning, alienating one. Imagine yourself in a car that travels at only one speed: a million miles a second. Under such circumstances, how could you ever receive radio waves and listen to your favourite stations? Could you ever wind down your window to yell and wave at a friend passing by? Despite the immense power that comes with the virtual speed demonstrated in all the plots of the post-1985 movies, it basically cuts you off from society. The tempo of virtual

speed (as seen with the life of angels in the first two films) is so extreme that its world separates you from the world of the living (mortals).

Fight Fire with Fire, or Declaring War to Stop Violence. . . Or Using Narrative to Combat World Systems?

The movies of the post-road period are composed of script that accepts narrative. The reason that they do, derives from a changed stance on the part of Wenders. In the early 1980s, Wenders announces (most clearly in the interview with Wolfram Schütte from the *Frankfurter Rundschau* [1982]) that he can now deal with "script," for he has been persuaded about something he calls the (possible) redemptive power of narrative. He sees the potential for a "fresh start in narrative" (Cook, "Paris, Texas and Beyond" 122), though, all in all, Wenders is fairly vague about his reasoning for believing in a new type of "myth-making" type of narrative film. Nonetheless, in the 1980s Wenders seems to acquire a belief in "narrative's potential to sustain both individual and cultural identity" (Wenders, "Interviews" 77). Long gone it seems are the critical writings of the late 1970s and early 1980s that lament the existence of "impossible stories." Perplexingly, Wenders has now chosen to receive his former enemy.

This thesis suggests that the reason that Wenders ultimately becomes interested in narrative (to sustain individual and cultural identity) is not because he means to be a "Hollywood filmmaker," who draws everyone together and homogenizes them in a conservative sort of way. Instead, Wenders sees narrative, this paper contends, now possibly in a resistant manner, that can become an allied tool in the process of "connecting with the masses." In the Schütte interview (1990), Wenders eats crow, and this is the great shift of 1982 alluded to throughout this thesis, when he concedes that, "Ultimately, stories are needed to convey messages" (Wenders, "Interviews" 75). Wenders confirms his repudiation of the road movie at this time when he admits: "To my

mind, films that give up on telling stories and only depict situations are not viable" (Wenders, "Interviews" 75).

And so, finally Wenders understands that narrative is a necessary evil, the only universal language that exists for connecting with audiences. Though it is a homogenizing type of body, using it, Wenders will not attempt to turn all people into the adherents of one mythology. This may be one result of prolonged exposure, but, it is Wenders's aim to utilize American mainstream narrative film because suddenly it is important for him to reach people. And why try and now "reach all the people," what is the point of that?

Wenders sees a threat on the horizon today so great that he must collaborate with narrative in order to get a specific message out. The nature of this danger is literally and figuratively alluded to in all the previous four films. It will be argued then that narrative and the "end of speed" that ultimately figures so prominently in the plots of the post-road movies have particular connotations that do not in fact reflect an affirmation on Wenders's part of any sort of "modernist ethic." Instead, given a changed world condition, today audiences are viewing Wenders's shift from a medium-driven resistant message (the road movie) to an internal plot message that resists.

Traffic Alert!

In the modern world, with the ascendancy of virtual landscapes, proof of who is in charge is perhaps best garnered by scouring the plains of television. Doing so, one witnesses immediately the total dominance of computer tech companies in our day and age. Whereas in the past, physical consumer items were the staple of TV commercials (plastics, chemicals, and cars), now, previously unheard of web sites, internet providers, and e-businesses are the cornerstone of the financial well-being of the big TV networks. "Virtual pillars" are the ones that hold up our postmodern society itself. Their stock prices show the faith with which the West obsesses about this new technology.

With the coming of our new technology-based order today, the weaknesses and strengths of what determine the dominant discourse of the age have changed as well. This necessitates a new set of resistant strategies, and this is something that this paper believes Wim Wenders recognizes himself. However, the particular problem for all who seek to withstand this new ascendant cyber-culture is the fact that it has perfected what all societies in the past have tried in vain to achieve. This is not to say, of course, that there will be no homelessness in Los Angeles in 2008. Rather, the present and future virtual-based world has overcome being biased towards either time or geography. Rather, nowadays, the technology exists such that those with the means are not limited by either condition. God died long ago; with the advent of virtual culture, one can add distance and waiting to the list.

The way in which this thesis can claim that Wenders's recent film is reacting against a changed world condition (without Wenders having declared this to be his intent) comes from the wealth of background we know about the director. So much points in the direction of "new resistance for a new technological age" that it must be an avenue that is seriously considered by all. Essentially, Wenders is the 1960s radical who foresaw, anticipates, and understands the nature of media technologies. He has always been on the cutting edge of theory and technology. Indeed, Roger Cook puts forward the idea, in his "*Paris, Texas* and Beyond" article, that in the early part of the 1980s, Wenders is already thinking in his movies about types of Baudrillardian implosion of the real into the simulacra. Looking at *Paris, Texas*, Cook believes "the effects of the postmodern environment of electronic communication interfaces and simulated screen realities" ("*Paris, Texas* and Beyond" 124) are fully visible. Contemporaneous (1984) to and in the same vein as this insight, there is Wenders's long meditation on "the cultural identity produced by the American entertainment and media industry" ("*Paris, Texas* and Beyond" 127), the poem "American Dream." And throughout the German director's career, there will be a critique of technology that is, as Gemünden notes, the vocabulary

of Adorno and Horkheimer and their concept of the culture industry ("Oedi-pal Travels" 214).

As a result, it should by no means be a stretch to believe that Wenders notes and is aware, as early as the mid-1980s, of the coming age of computer revolution. Indeed, in the conversation published as "The Dubious Revolution" with Buchka from *SDZ* in 1990 (only just after the first post-road movie), Wenders is seen already to be publicly discussing the ramifications of the world's digitalization. Answering the question, "what advantages does High Definition have over present-day technology? It can't just come down to having twice the number of lines in a picture, higher resolution, or the undeniable brilliance of the image?", Wenders makes the following observation:

> It's the transition from photography to digital information! The moment you make a digital recording of a television picture, the picture becomes indefinitely reproducible, without any loss of quality, and infinitely manipulable. You'll never know what was ever true about the picture.
> I've just spent three weeks in Tokyo working on High Definition. We were the first foreigners who were allowed to work with that medium and that technology at NHK. For me, it was like being brainwashed! As a film-maker you're used to accepting what you've got on the cutting table as reality. That's it! OK! But with a digitally recorded image, you can do anything you like, and no one will ever be able to say, 'That's not right! There should be a house standing there. 'Abracadabra', five minutes later the house is gone as though it had never been. The information 'house' has been deleted. . . You can fiddle with a film-negative, but the expectation of truth that you bring to the image still demands to be satisfied. Not in digital TV. The image has no necessary relation to the truth any more. (*The Act of Seeing* 71-72)

What Wenders is talking about here are simply the effects that come about in one specific field due to the digital revolution. It is not really related to the specific course that he intends on taking in his new type of post-road movie film. In these new projects, there really is not the opposition going on against "type of film production" any more, and the digital means of its creation or manipulation. That is too small an aspect of what is today a total shift for human society in every aspect of its organization. Rather, in the post-road

movie, what will be viewed is a general counteraction against the computer technology that is creeping into every segment of our society.

To see this, it is instructive to examine the broader consequences of digitalization that Wenders and Buchka immediately pick up on, later in the same interview. Continuing with their conversation, they remark of the new technology just experienced in Japan, that it must be the dream of any propagandist to possess these technologies! In particular, Buchka begins, saying:

> (B)When Stalin had Trotsky airbrushed out, you could tell.
> (W)Not any more, Trotsky's feet have disappeared along with the rest of him.
> (B)That would be an utterly new quality. . .
> (W)There's no relying on anything any more. You work with a medium that's no longer subject to any notion of truth or accuracy, where all that matters is what you do with it--and you can do *anything* with it. (*The Act of Seeing*, 72)

And here finally, we have the crux of the new computer age as identified by Wenders. It has the ability to manipulate the world absolutely, for systems exist that need no referentiality to the original. Virtual technologies eliminate causation,[18] slander the original, and make invisible the real world. They can do all of these things because they are faster. With world computer systems, one has control that is faster than the real.

The fact that computers can absorb the real (and instantaneously smother and delete whatever they do not like) creates an enormous impact for what we have presented thus far as "Wenders's thought." Wenders, the radical of the 1960s, long viewed the world as being under the yoke of a successive series of metanarratives, *grands écrits* that contained the world with some sort of static, restrictive (because of its attempts at

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[18] Here the "virtual technologies," as metanarratives in general, are posited as being opposite and counter to "causation." So as not to create confusion, let it be understood that while totalizing world theories are intimately connected with the artificial creation of "cause-and-effect," imposing it upon the real, the "natural real" still does contain "causation," a leading of things to beget other "things." What is suggested is that the nature of the new evolutionary step of metanarrative is so great that not only does it misrepresent and artificially intensify the relationship between elements within a system, but that it also can erase and rewrite this bond. Causation, a normal aspect of "reality," can be turned on its head by those who control the new virtual computer narrative orders, and made to exist anywhere and at any time.

totality) representation. To create the logical foundation of whatever total world view in the past, one needed to simplify and slow down the "real." Now with computer technology, there comes the potential of the perfection of metanarratives, where the speed and dynamism of the real no longer serve as an impediment to the constructing of metanarratives. Previously, the movement of the real was always to be at odds with its simplified representation within the metanarrative. Now, however, the gulf between object and symbol has been erased, for things that do not "fit" in with the logic of the system no longer are pressured to conform. Rather, the digital metanarrative of perfect speed simply re-writes the real to suit its purposes; the binary of "real" and the "representation of the real" in our paradigms (object and symbol) has been collapsed into one, and the world is left with a virtual reality that is now "reality."

While the coming now of a perfect model of the real is not such a bad thing, it is not the prospect of perfection of a metanarrative that is in fact harrowing. The problem is that man remains imperfect, and given this technology of perfect motion, all the caprices and shot-comings of puny humans now have been imbued with super-strength. Whereas the result of metanarratives of the past have basically been disasters, such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, racism, the atrocities of totalitarianism, and the ethnic genocides of the 20th century, the technology of the computer age make it possible that frail humankind will now inflict these tragedies on a scale that is even grander. It is the time of a potential "general accident" (Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst* 89), when human "mistakes" are no longer "specific, local and situated in time and space" (Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst* back cover). Rather, the world is faced now with the prospect of absolute doom in a sort of instantaneous "eternal return" sort of way. Virilio informs readers:

> Through the new communication technologies, we have created the possibility of an accident that is no longer local, but global, and that would occur everywhere at the same time. We are faced with an original phenomenon: the emergence of the accident of accidents. (*Politics of the Very Worst* back cover)

Beginning now, the whole world is enveloped by the tentacles of virtual systems that makes everything containable by those who control computers (whoever they happen to be). Previously, if an object had a head-start and the same technological apparatus as the metanarrative, it could never be caught by the eyes that detect, calculate, and incorporate. In the past, motion enabled one to "speed up the fixed categories of the machine" and cause it to go out of control, thereby exposing the faulty wiring within; there was the basic sense, that if things were heated up and got going, it was possible to break out of any (meta)narrative. In previous times, speed was all, and to accelerate was always the agent of freedom for that thing shackled by the bonds of a system. Now, however, according to Virilio, "From now on we will not accelerate any more" (*Politics of the Very Worst* 51).

This comes about from the fact that world systems no longer have to ascertain the whereabouts of an object and then coax it to stay in its position, but rather, now "forced fitting" can be done automatically. Through computer systems and networks, certain people have instantaneous access to all places and all times. And so, for those elements that resist the directives sent out from the center, now non-compliance is met not with escape and pursuit (as with heretics of the early Christian church who were hunted down for their alternate visions of the "real"). Instead, resistance is simply and instantaneously eliminated. People and forces that do not "fit in" with the organizational strategies of the world order are airbrushed away like Trotsky's foot, as if they were never there. Whereas physical speed and motion previously were these allies on the side of the postmodern's exercise of rewriting, now they are negligible forces of resistance, completely powerless against something that can be any- and everywhere with complete immediacy.

The upshot of this new technological shift is that computer networks are all-powerful, and in this omnipotence, there is a resultant absence of freedom for movement of the units of the real. The world is left as a very small space, and claustrophobia within the system begins for all. Paul Virilio is particularly adept at

spelling out the logical progression of such technology in his *Politics of the Worst*, when

he makes the following observation about the terrain open to us in the future:

> The Earth will still have a circumference of 40,000 kilometers, but it will not be traveled anymore. Let me return to the example of the elevator and the staircase. When a staircase goes up to the tenth floor and next to it there is an elevator, the staircase is lost and everyone takes the elevator. In this case, it is no longer a question of a building but rather of the world that surrounds us. . . It is hard to imagine this situation of confinement for the coming generation. (59-60)

And so, as a consequence of the new total information technologies that "organize

networks of relations and information," one is left with a "perspective of a humanity that

is not only unified but also reduced to uniformity" (*Politics of the Very Worst* 12).

Quite obviously, this is no longer a game of art, as it relates to images, pictures,

and movies, and the number of pixels on a DVD screen. Rather, the challenge nowadays

is of total systems that are extended to embrace all people on the planet. And so, given the

appearance, past, present, and forthcoming, of "highly-evolved world systems," the game

has changed, and Wim Wenders's film of resistance has simultaneously been prompted to

shift. Given the danger of this evolutionary "super species" of virtual metanarratives

based on perfect speed, it seems to this thesis that Wenders's concern for the entrapment

of images within Hollywood-type film narrative quickly must take a "back seat" to the

containment of human subjects within a world system run by computers.

Both of these systems, old-style metanarratives and the new computer-driven

"total systems," limit the movement of constituent part; nonetheless, today, grave concern

must be had over virtual speed because, given its absolute nature, escape now becomes

basically impossible.

Checking Out the Car

The basis for claiming the shift of resistance from medium to message in the films

of Wim Wenders was proposed in the previous section by referring to interpretations of

Wenders's written insights about the coming of a digitalized world. If the argument in this thesis is "what occurs in Wenders's films," however, then it is of course necessary to deal with the movies themselves. However, it is important to note that the resistance in Wenders's new films is a very subtle one, an opposition that only really is fully apparent when understandings of the director's writings and these films converge.

The reason for this ambiguity on Wenders's part is difficult, but is explained in appendix I of this thesis. Though Wenders is trying to send an important message in these projects of the post-road movie, one that can only be transmitted by narrative, Wenders must be careful not to be too heavy-handed with his missive in these works. Didactic narrative works as a double-edged sword, for stories that attempt to instruct too obvious a lesson is ignored as propaganda. And so, this thesis will make the suggestion that the take on narrative and the message Wenders is attempting to spread, is, basically, for the director to "play it cool." Despite Wenders's low-key, non-overt approach to disseminating this idea of "the death of real speed," still the strength of utilizing identical plots in each of the last four major movies is enough to suggest, if not outright prove, that Wenders has a new pet project dealing with securing liberty in our modern world.

Given the new challenge of a world being over-run by computer networks, Wenders, the German radical, quietly, and without admitting it to anyone, engineers a new type of film experience in the 1980s and beyond. In his four latest "post-road" movies (for the road has become meaningless in a world of cybernetic perfection), the German director chronicles humankind's unfolding present-day world condition; beginning with individuals of consequence, persons at the top of the chain of computer control in *Wings of Desire, Faraway, So Close!, Until the End of the World*, and *The End of Violence*, Wenders examines the options that are realistically available under such a world paradigm.

To talk to Virilio, the French dromologist, the main option for people in the world of virtual speed would be for one to get on the information super highway and go! If one

is at least playing the game, then one has the luxury of being part of the "danger," and one is not simply one of the endangered luddites who can be so easily victimized. Virilio intimates this point in *Speed & Politics*, as he suggests in militaristic fashion of potential options for the citizens of the future:

> Safety is in Assault simply because the new ballistic vehicles make flight useless; they go faster and farther than the soldier, they catch up with him and pass him. The man on the battlefield has no safety, it seems, other than in a suicidal entrance into the very trajectory of the speed of the engines. . . From now on, general safety can come only from the masses in their entirety reaching speed. (23)

Indeed, in this point about the need to reach terminal velocity oneself, Wenders seems to concur; for at the outsets to all the post-1985 movies, one sees protagonists who are turned onto super-speed, and therefore are human subject that, if not in control of themselves, then are, at least, momentarily able to elude the monitoring of the "system." The important point that Wenders makes in documenting the trajectories of all these "missiles"--Damiel, Cassiel, Claire and Trevor, and Mike Max--is that in their powerful computer lives, the virtual speed that provides them with partial safety, also renders them as alienating speed itself. Wenders's observation about "super speed" in all four of his post-road movies possesses this sophistication that Virilio's adage of "get virtual in the age of virtual" lacks. Each of Wenders's pictures show that while super speed is a half-way-effective shield from the virtual system of control, at the same time that it enables one to escape oppression, it is a guarantee for self-repression. For, either one is somewhat free and moving around the solid matter of the universe, encircling it, and hence greater than it (though alienated and fused with the virtual motion), or one has become the solid real, mind-bogglingly slow-moving and contained by the super-speedsters of the virtual. Essentially, the safety that Virilio hopes for in turning to machine/computer "super speed," is shown by Wenders to cut people off from their nature and render them as the very appliances they use.

Each of Wenders's post-road movies then depict super-speedsters of the virtual world who, fully alienated by having to move messages but never receive them, opt to slow down and (re)gain the metabolic. The second half of all of Wenders's films (post-1985) shows what comes for those who have recanted the (questionable) freedom had through "suicidal entrance into the very trajectory of the speed of the engines." In the streets of Berlin, in the outback of Australia, and in Los Angeles in the barrios, audiences are presented with subjects who have been divested of their instantaneous motion, and hence the ability to dispute their representation within a system of perfect motion. They cannot decide who they are, where they want to go, and how they wish to conduct their lives. This control is had now only by the system and the people who operate it through their computers.

Although each character has undergone what appears to be a redemptive process wherein he has been made aware of the organic, natural, pastoral life of man, something new to "men of speed," still each person now has extremely limited choice in their lives. In *Wings of Desire*, for example, Damiel is only permitted to run his pizza shop. For those in the post-road movie that mind their own business and lack ambition, there will not really be great problems; these are not heretics bent on disrupting the status quo. However, for those characters such as Cassiel in *Faraway, So Close!*, the Faber family in *Until the End of the World* and the Gabriel Byrne figure and Mike Max in *The End of Violence*, persons who might want to put their feet one step over the line with their own personal agenda, then there is no other recourse but to suffer the wrath of the system's law. All bodies that come to rest in the four movies become, for Wenders, watched bodies that are under surveillance; and each ultimately is subject to the caprices of a system that does not appreciate "nails that stick up." Given this, Cassiel is set up for death, the head of the Faber clan is abducted by the U.S. government, and Gabriel Byrne is assassinated by distant sniper fire.

Re-W(e)nd

What one sees in the development of the 1960s radical filmmaker Wim Wenders's career is a resistance against both his German and American "parents." Importantly, this conflict against both parents is framed in terms of distrust of media, the technology Wenders associates with his "father figures." At the heart of radio, television, film or whatever media will always be either the essence of the technology itself or the message it aims at carrying. Early on and then for the better part of his career, Wenders decides to focus on the mechanism of media, the method in which the images are fixed into narrative wholes.

Looking at the construction of narrative in American mainstream film, Wenders suggests that within this very formatting of information there is something that enslaves audiences. This narrative creates simplified versions of the real that nonetheless purport to be the real. Becoming indoctrinated with this way of understanding the world, human cognition is directed down specific and limited avenues. As a result, existence and the space for people to live in becomes lessened.

In recent films, however, Wenders seems to have gone over to this (dangerous) narrative, and many want to know the meaning of this shift. In allowing narrative to take over his cinematic method, Wenders appears to be duplicating the establishment of power relations that contain and withhold (simplify the world into totalizing vision), as opposed to free and permit (present the true multi-faceted chaos of the real). Nonetheless, despite the obvious narrative nature of his recent projects, Wenders claims to be the same filmmaker he has always been. An acceptance of narrative being a near total contradiction to much of his career, and not giving much elaboration as to the basis for his new mysterious venture, many today are left mystified. One could remain befuddled, or perhaps one might also turn a discerning eye to investigate the exact nature of post-1985 movies, and see if there could be a possible explanation located within them for this change.

This thesis takes the stance that in the last four films, Wim Wenders recognizes the implications of the fact that cars and automotive physical motion have ceased being the mode of defining our modern-day environment. In the past, real speed was Wenders's magical means for undoing the organizational structures of metanarratives, thereby obtaining greater freedom for people. Presently, however, Wenders sees a changed world condition which will forever undermine the effectiveness of what has been his ally in combating confident modernist visions of the world. In particular, the instantaneous speed provided by computers now makes physical speed obsolete and simultaneously enhances the ability for systems to incorporate all.

As a result, in the early 1980s, due to this developing technological advance, specific repercussions are to be felt by Wenders and his format of cinema. The real-life development of metanarratives of "perfect speed" necessitates radical action on the part of the German director, for with the entirety of the outside world having the potential now to be wrapped around a computer chip, the stakes in terms of world representation have changed dramatically. The threat to liberty in a world where metanarrative systems can contain all in the blink of an eye is immense. It is in the face of a threat of this magnitude that Wim Wenders goes over to narrative. Narrative is now being used because the stakes are so high, and the message of the "death of speed" must be got out to the masses. Though the plight of abused images within narrative is great, Wenders feels compelled at this time to accept narrative so as to communicate the new risk facing the world, in the message, not the medium of film.

These post-road movies then continue to appear as "motion films" like the road movie. The speed on the screen is, however, not derived from the disorganized adventuring of a director on the road with cameras but no script. These are films, rather, where the speed being portrayed is an intentional motion, not something happening as a direct result of the method of film creation. What one sees in these films is the constant repetition of the plot formula found in *The End of Violence*. Here, and in all three other

films, characters traveling at warp computer velocity ultimately find they can "come out of the machine" to avoid the alienation of sitting at and living "in" a computer. Nonetheless, the happiness that comes each time from renouncing the status of solitary computer vector is shown to be illusory. Once on the ground and using physical motion, Damiel, Cassiel, McFee, and Mike Max are watched and chased by the "system" they left behind. This system, made up of all those with computer speed (or the allegory of this given in religious terms in the "Angels" movies), will be able to map, follow, and contain all the units within the world system of the movie. Ultimately, those with the obsolete physical speed (inside the confines of this order) find themselves utterly dependent on the caprices of those in charge (the lords of the computers).

An analogous position then is being taken to the thinking which originally gave rise to the revolutionary desire for the road movie, earlier in Wenders career. The German director continues to cry out in his new films for the freedom provided by velocity, but now his films have the complexity to recognize the impossibility of liberty in a world codified by information-gathering systems. Therefore, while the cry of "Ahh, for the freedom of the open road!" may still be heralded forth by the Wenders film, it has now become a nostalgic lament rather than a triumphant proclamation.

At the same time, the difficult situation arises that this is not a message that can be openly broadcasted, for to do so would undermine the nature of what Wenders is trying to communicate. It is, as Wenders confirms with Peter Buchka, a subtle project he is undertaking: in conversation, Wenders says (1990), "A television image, you know, 'writes itself', it's not a solid image, it's built up line by line on the screen. So I tried to make a film to read 'between the lines' if you like" (*The Act of Seeing* 71). The reason for a changed resistance now to be found in the message "between the lines of Wenders's current projects" is the massive impact of computers and their take-over of our planet today.

BELL LAP

Wim Wenders is a filmmaker with admirable social concerns, who attempts to use his film projects as revolutionary vehicles for providing people with more freedom. Indeed, as a postmodern artist, Wenders is constantly trying to undermine and undo metanarratives, theories that believe that the many aspects of the universe can be reduced to essentially a single equation. Boiling the universe down to a comprehensible "logical framework," however, is either naive or criminal, for the only truth that exists is that reality is too complex to be fully explained. For this reason, the real will constantly be at odds with whatever theory people develop to try to represent it all. Wenders's mission in his art then is to alert people to the simplifications of the world inherent in metanarratives and aid in effecting break-outs from this limiting understanding of existence.

What metanarratives do is create the illusion that there is meaning in the vast chaos of the universe. Because they try to put a certain "spin" on things, any system of thought that tries to make total sense of all aspects of man's environment may be termed "ideological." Metanarratives believe themselves to be perfect, able to take into account all the elements within a system. In the conceit of this belief, the totalizing theory will variously ignore, willfully mis-represent, and do a certain violence to anything that contradicts it. These acts will be as ruthless as adherents' certainty of their theory is.

Meaning, however, is something that the multi-directional universe can never be "forced to carry." There is no mechanism to reality, and attempts to recast it conceptually as anything other than it "is," must ultimately fail. In fact, the only way to explain reality would be to build a full-scale model of the universe. For this reason, Thomas Kuhn sees a constant cycle of metanarrative/paradigm boom and bust, all through the history of the theoretical sciences (but existing also in cultural history). Dominant theories are created, and as phenomena appear that do not agree with this system, this counter-evidence is ignored, mistreated, or done away with until such time as the majority of people can no

longer "look away." Finally, the metanarrative in question will be seen as "false" and reformulated as something new.

Wenders was born in Germany under one of the most ruthless of all metanarratives, the master narrative of National Socialism. It looked at the universe and imprinted the concepts of *race* and *purity* as the lone means for explaining and understanding the entirety of being. Believing absolutely in how the racial doctrines of the Nazi party portrayed existence, many Germans took this belief structure as a formula for the universe. With "Truth" finally discovered, many people became unafraid of committing what were, in truth, great acts of barbarism against their fellow countrymen. Wenders's later postmodern incredulity, questioning all totalizing systemic theories (the same as Nazism in their claims of certainty in understanding "existence"), is likely related to the influence of this personal history. Fearful of the negative potential inherent in creating any confident vision of the world, Wenders fights all metanarratives. As such, his career exploding metanarratives appears as an act of contrition for the nation.

Wenders's method for "busting open" totalizing world visions is based on introducing the element of speed into the mix of the metanarrative. Speed serves as a means of resistance against the metanarrative system, firstly for it prevents any incorporation into the "body of known facts." "Truths" are always erected on the edifice of stasis, and if things cannot be slowed down enough to be caught, then metanarratives cannot contain all. Apart from this "cloaking function," speed also challenges the metanarrative in a second way: the application of motion to elements already within a system destabilizes the fixed positions assigned them by the center. Adding speed to the fixed pillars of systemic logic acts as an earthquake, hoped to bring the support beam of any metanarrative crashing down in ruin.

Given these liberating capabilities of motion, Wim Wenders, as a 1960s counter culture radical, decides to attack the metanarrative of his day: American capitalism. He does so by offering up what he sees as resistance to its means of control. The site for

American control is expected to be similar to the prior metanarrative that most had impact on him, Nazism, and Wenders begins what he hopes will be a revolution in the area of media. Meditating on what it is about media that makes it dangerous, Wenders hits upon (Hollywood-type) narrative in film, something that, at the time of his formative years, is becoming more "naked" in its apparency. To Wenders's mind, the picture of the world as put forward by American mainstream film's narrative is none other than a metanarrative, and the German director sets out to stop its control of our lives.

Wenders sees American mainstream film narrative as a metanarrative, in that it disregards the true chaos of existence and creates a total vision of the world that boils the multi-directional aspects of reality down into static conceptual boxes, such as introduction, rising action, climax, and conclusion. Watching many films, modern film-goers internalize and project the law of film onto their own lives, and they begin to view the world as if it were a movie. Like religion, political fanaticism, or other rigid belief structures of the past and present, people use the narrative in Hollywood-type film as a prism that will explain the world in a full and meaningful way. People have begun to assume the narrative eyes of cinema, and Wenders worries about the outbreak of an epidemic of the disease of narrative (Wenders, "Interviews" 84) that turns people into "zombies," looking straight-ahead and never noticing the things in the "periphery of existence."

The metanarrative of Hollywood narrative is created when directors select acceptable images from the real to be reproduced on the screen. To undo the human factor in this process of imposing "meaning on the universe," Wenders tries to show audiences how artificial this whole construct is. He hopes to explode the ideological assemblage of images chosen by Hollywood film by turning to a type of revolutionary film that involves speed. In this revolutionary project called the *road movie*, Wenders offers up something half-way between man's manipulation of the real (the direct development of narrative) and reality itself (the universe unwinding naturally in its multi-faceted way). Wenders

takes one half of reality's motion and stasis (for it is made up of these two constituent parts), and nudges his reality-based filmmaking in the direction of eternal motion.

What "injecting speed into the filmmaking process" means is that a director goes traveling on the road without a script, and simply films. Utilizing the contingency provided by motion, Wenders's "just filming" produces a "pseudo-story" for a movie, that is, nonetheless, (he feels) not really controlled by any person trying to "impose meaning" on reality. Driving across the time and space of the actual journey of "the filming," appropriate images are captured by a camera pointed out the window of a car. The real thus is randomly generating images for a movie[19] also about a journey and motion; these are films that have ceased existing as instruments onto which man projects his own ideological version of reality. Now these movies are "reality itself," slightly ambiguous and in flux.[20]

The road movie then is Wenders's attempt to offer an escape for people out of a world whose perception is guarded by our dependence on narrative form. In every person's head lies the internalized world formula provided by Hollywood film. Using it like any metanarrative, viewers recognize and make sense of the real only so far as their pre-conceived world theory will allow them. The road movie though is a revolutionary movement that attempts to free viewers from this theology, using motion to disrupt the fixed category-boxes on which the metanarrative is based. In dislodging these fixed bases, spectators are made to remember that meaning does not really exist in the "real." Wenders's road movies cause a "rush," a continual torrent of action that bears down on audiences like a river. This unceasing motion ordained by reality itself, not intended by man, is completely at odds with the planned-out world encapsulated in Hollywood

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[19] This is a film, however, that is not a documentary.

[20] For narrative-indoctrinated audiences, road movies will appear boring and "pointless," but this is not unexpected. Indeed, such films will certainly be "pointless" in the sense in that they have no overt hand guiding their development.

narrative. In the extremity of this contrast, it is hoped that the spectator's narrative expectations would be broken down, and their liberation from Hollywood media-vision be effected.

Ultimately though, this thesis contends that this decade-long project fails to alter audience's dependence on narrative, and so it will be suggested that Wenders opts for a changed direction for his film in the early 1980s.

The Thesis

Just given was the background from which this thesis departs. The impetus for this work, however, is the fact that Wenders appears to have radically changed his mode of filmmaking starting in the 1980s. Wenders has recently started on a different, rather ambiguous direction in his film. While in certain ways "post-road movies" appear similar in their infatuation with speed to the revolutionary road movies, their Hollywood narrative format seems to contradict the idea that they are motivated by the same social agenda of liberation. These new films seem half-way in the middle, and so the natural question is, "Is Wenders tending towards a completely new direction in cinematography, or is it more of the "same" for him in his filmmaking?"

Clarification as to whether these new movies following the 1980s are a continuation of Wenders's revolutionary[21] traditions of the past, or are even something absolutely new, was first attempted by turning to the anthology by Roger Cook and Gerd Gemünden, *The Cinema of Wim Wenders: Image, Narrative, and the Postmodern Condition.* Most of this collection's articles focus on Wenders's work of the distant past, because these movies are safe objects for discussion. There, of course, little is in danger

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[21] Wenders's filmmaking truthfully includes narrative aspects in the past, as well as dominant revolutionary sections. Basically, the most accurate characterization is that Wenders can be seen as a revolutionary "dabbler" throughout his career, creating commercial narrative projects (1970s non-road movies *The Scarlet Letter* and *The American Friend*) in-between his road movies which decried the use of narrative.

of being upset by new "revelations." Nonetheless, Roger Cook's own contribution to the compilation, "Postmodern Culture and Film Narrative: *Paris, Texas* and Beyond," was an exception that bravely set out to define Wenders's new generation appearing since the 1980s.

In Cook's analysis, Wenders has long feared that, unchallenged, the "dominant media industry" (122) would control all through the deceptive world representation furnished by its manipulation of images. This holds true for the 1970s, and Cook sees this concern "spiritually" continued for the recent projects of the 1980s. Wenders's heart in recent times remains in the same place, but the site of resistance seems to have shifted from medium to message. Apparently, Wenders has become convinced that Hollywood's "media-vision" (122) can be undone using normal narrative film, and in the 1980s and 1990s, he decides to use narrative to stop a metanarrative. Wenders supposes (somehow) that his narrative films will "envelop images in a new web of meaning" (122) in a way far different from how American mainstream film narratives construct their stories, and in this way, lead to liberation.

According to Cook then, the post-road movies are still "revolutionary" projects that fight Hollywood. Nonetheless, no specific explanation is given as to how Wenders plans on using the center's method of overt image manipulation (inherent in narrative) to combat the hegemony of totalizing systems (or American mainstream film). Cook simply announces that change occurs in Wenders's movie format, but for the most part, eschews explanation to concentrate solely on description. Whatever the rationale for the start of these traditional narratives that strongly critique postmodern culture (123), Cook's article applies this explanation of the post-road movie to only one film (allegedly) different from the preceding road movies. Though this thesis would disagree with the inclusion of *Paris, Texas* among the newer generation of films, the larger issue of contention is whether anything more can be said on the topic of Wenders's new film group of the post-road movie. This paper puts forth the idea that understanding what Wenders is trying to do in

his new films becomes only *truly* identifiable with the release of a film in 1998, and could not really have been determined prior to this.

This thesis departs from a new position of knowledge with the release of *The End of Violence*, two years following the Cook article. With the advantage of this hindsight, my work attempts to show how, by looking at *The End of Violence* from a certain perspective, in fact, all the movies following the early 1980s appear as part of one coherent group. The movies of this group share all basically identical features and importantly appear as a continuation of the obsession with freedom had by Wenders since his earliest film days. However, rather than specifically targeting the metanarrative of Hollywood's narrative vision, the post-road movie will be a continuation of Wenders's opposition to metanarratives, generally understood. In this, the major difference in the 1980s and 1990s films will be a fine-tuning of the meditation on speed and stasis and their respective abilities to free or confine. This further sophistication to what is really the same world view had by Wenders in the 1960s comes about from a recognition of recent technological progress in the world around us.

Finding Commonalities

Cook's article implies that there is no over-arching pattern to post-road movies, and suggests rather, that each film of this group is individual in its eye of criticism of postmodern society. He understands *Paris, Texas* as focusing on the simulacra of urban America, while the "Angels" films are meditations on Berlin before and after the wall (Cook, "Angels, Fiction, and History in Berlin: *Wings of Desire*" 164). Were he to talk about the "Ends" movies, Cook would probably say that they too have specific messages; respectively, they would be about the poison of technology and the negative and positive aspects of violence in film. Just as these four films following (what this thesis regards as the final road movie) *Paris, Texas* are likely to be viewed as each being unique, nonetheless, upon viewing the most recent film of 1998, *The End of Violence*, warning

bells must go off for viewers. The reason for alarm is that with this picture, it finally "clicks" that Wenders is amazingly repeating the same plot over and over again in each of his four post-road movies.

In the recent lynch-pin movie of *The End of Violence*, one watches movie director Mike Max's journey from super-powerful media mogul to life as a humble Mexican gardener. The way in which this scenario is similar to the previous three films of the post-road movie period will be in the specific "readings of speed" which qualify this switch from "high" to "low." Initially in *The End of Violence*, the Hollywood director figure is unhappy, and so we see that he is a "super-fast mover." Mike Max is literally a person going at "max"imum speed: he is referred to as a "rocket," and from an odd-looking technological throne in the opening sequence, he is able to move his atoms and mind around the world in the click of a mouse. When Mike Max slows down in terms of velocity, however, his life acquires greater meaning. At a state-of-rest (typified by walking or simply driving in an old rickety truck), he is able to re-establish social bonds with people and find true joy in living for the first time.

Ultimately though, this technological super-speed=bad/ physical slowness=good opposition is moderated by the proviso that while slowness is a preferred state, still not all is perfect with this momentum of life. When one enters the slow physical world, one becomes susceptible to the surveillance power of those who have not given up the power of super speed. People who can "warp" anywhere in the blink of an eye contain, in all four films, those who toil in the simplicity of the physical realm.

As actors Bruno Ganz, Otto Sander, and William Hurt come to rest in their respective films, after having the suspiciously computer-like ability to traverse the globe nearly at will, they find, like Bill Pullman in *The End of Violence*, a joyful existence that is being contained and watched by others. The surveillance of their otherwise-contented state is made that much more frightening as the powers that watch, arrange by each film's end, a killing, a kidnapping, and a kidnapping/killing. In all four films then, there is the

dominant plot motif of people who inhabit "virtual" worlds of super speed, ultimately renouncing this irreal realm. Entering into stasis, they become fixed, examined, and at times, dissected by the powers that envelop the world in a system of known facts and allowed movements.

The very title of Wenders's 1998 film offers an oblique answer to the criticism that the German director has in mind here with this movie specifically, and the post-road movies in general. As the "end" of "violence," there is the indication that the subject being dealt with is a certain death of vitality, a conclusion to wild movement. Taking a quick look at Paul Virilio's *Speed & Politics* while watching the film, the understanding of "violence" as being *equivalent to speed* is re-enforced (55). *The End of Violence* and the other films are all part of a meditation on the state of mankind in a world that is being increasingly over-run by computer systems. Under such a state, physical speed is no longer "fast enough" to provide the "out" from incorporation into a world system that it once did. This end to physical motion (violence) is obvious in the 1998 project through Mike Max's stasis at a computer console (while moving nonetheless at giga-byte speed), and each aspect of this journey will be echoed, exact part by part, for the characters in the other three previous films.

Though the powerful world of virtual computer speed lacks satisfying substance for practitioners of its art, the pastoral returns engineered in each of the films are never really successful either. Time cannot be turned back so that people can live in a world where technology is forgotten. Hoping otherwise is to be delusional, and therefore the take on computer speed in *The End of Violence, Wings of Desire, Faraway, So Close!,* and *Until the End of the World* is a highly ambivalent one. "Damned if you use it, oppressed if one does not" is the theme for films marking the death of human motion's ability to out-run, and hence be invisible to the sensors of the computer age.

The Framework Binding Two Movie Traditions Together

The world depicted in *The End of Violence* and all the other post-road movies functions for people as a metanarrative like Nazism or Hollywood narrative. It is a "totalizing world system," in that using data bases, surveillance cameras, and electronic tripwires (or their celestial counterparts), an elite "computer class" (cast as angels at times) is able to contain all the units in an environment. In the post-road movies, audiences thus witness a reformulation of the conditions that launched and anchored the road movie. The road movie was concerned with securing the freedom of images manacled by the totalizing vision of the world offered through American mainstream film narrative. Now in 1998, the same formulation is being reconstituted. This time, however, it is the surveillance capabilities of computer users' virtual speed that envelop *humans, not images*, and contain them in fixed, categorized spots.

The computer revolution experienced in the 1980s and 1990s (at the time when the four films under discussion are produced) creates a totalizing world that functions as a metanarrative with significant evolutionary differences over what Wenders was previously so fond of "busting." Whereas metanarratives of the past possessed various frailties, the current system this thesis sees Wenders as anticipating, overcomes this all in the perfection of its speed. With this new type of metanarrative, there are no more opportunities for break-out, because in a world of virtual control of the real, all is contained and hemmed-in. If physical speed tries to undo the established borders of the super metanarrative, the units of the world can be switched around instantaneously to block this movement.

Be it images or human beings that are being locked into slots of expected and allowed movement (metanarrative grids), it would seem that Wenders should be no more concerned with the plight of one of these states of affairs than the other. Nonetheless, Wenders *does* opt for becoming active in the plight of "locked-in" humans after his decade-long interest in the "rights of images"; however, Wenders does this because,

facing the prospect of metanarrative 2.0, a "perfect" system without bugs or flaws, it would be irresponsible for him not to shift his area of resistance. Wenders radically changes his film style in the 1980s (to a "normal type") because no greater threat exists, to his mind, than this evolutionary step of metanarratives "becoming impervious to speed."

With the sudden appearance of this lethal metanarrative "super species," Wenders likely feels the impetus to quit fooling-around, "play-fighting" and "shadow-boxing" with what he must secretly admit are arcane philosophical musings (the road movie). In the past, his theoretical film sorties were shown to be ineffective, and an "intellectual" action completely misunderstood by audiences. With the stakes being now so high, however, Wenders shifts, and becomes intent on "really connecting" with audiences. For this reason, he capitulates to the common people's level (of narrative) in the 1980s in order to be able to communicate in a way that will be understood.[22]

And so, the turn to narrative film by Wenders in the 1980s and 1990s actually does turn out to be a patterning of images that resists as opposed to promotes the dynamics of metanarrative-based thought. In a subtle way, these films begin the repetition of a message that is hoped ultimately to alert audiences of the dangers of the new world system that has them surrounded. Were the image locked into as advanced a metanarrative as humans now find themselves trapped in, the road movie would not nearly be enough to to effect an escape.[23]

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[22] Still, the message he transmits in the post-road movie is not overt, as evidenced by a lack of resounding response on the part of those who have watched Wenders's films. This thesis, however, is not informing people of his message because it is forced to, Wenders once again having failed to be relevant for people. Rather, Wenders has wisely chosen not to hit audiences over the head with a sermon. He is proceeding slowly, and in this respect, Wenders is probably prudent, for absolute clarity of message can undermine a project's effectiveness as much as establishing it within forms as inaccessible as the road movie.

[23] Indeed, the road movie could not even manage to break open the older, imperfect metanarrative-type and obtain liberty for the image.

Through the Finish Line

The use of the word "freeway" in the title of the thesis has been a linguistic effort to draw together two elements, speed and liberty, that this work sees as integral to understanding the entirety of Wim Wenders's film career. While these two elements have long been recognized in the road movie stage of Wenders's career, this thesis sees itself as making the important discovery that these same factors continue to play a significant role in the recent, apparently "mainstream," post-road movies.

That Wenders's two main film groups are related may be a surprising suggestion, for, even from an cursory glance, Wenders's old and new projects appear for many to be diametrically opposed. It is bewildering that after a decade of postmodern filmmaking, Wenders is allowing narrative to take over his cinematic method, thereby duplicating the patterns of power relations that contain and withhold, as opposed to free and permit. As opposed to breaking down the borders established by metanarratives, Wenders's new movies display exclusionary practices that perpetuate a hierarchy of the valorized and the excluded. At least, this is what is happening in Wenders's post-road movies on the level of form or structure.

Taking note of the story of *The End of Violence* (1998) and its connection with prior post-road movies, one realizes that Wenders might not necessarily be giving up on creating artistic productions of resistance. Though he is no longer fighting Hollywood (as Cook suggests), he is passionately continuing to oppose metanarratives. The difficulty in identifying what is going on, stems from the fact that Wenders is adapting to a world where the rules of "the game" have changed significantly. In particular, seeing as the means of motion for a planet have switched from physical velocity to virtual speed, things correspondingly get complicated when one wants to start a revolution. And so this will be the argument, that as speed forms both the basis of a metanarrative's control (and with a lack of this, its downfall), the perfection of speed in the computer age must, out of

necessity, change how Wenders goes about his art of creating films that resist metanarratives. This evolutionary step on the part of totalizing world theories demands that a corresponding developmental step be taken in Wenders's method to "breaking them down." As such, different means of resistance must be searched out that are other than simply "how films are made."

In determining what Wenders's new strategy will be for dealing with metanarratives of virtual speed, one must recall the original basis of Wim Wenders's development as a revolutionary filmmaker. Wenders's "resistant heart" coming from his opposition to his German and American "parents" and framed in terms of distrust of (their) media, his life-long career is a campaign that aims at the mechanism of media. In the road movie, Wenders suggested that the very format of film, story, is enslaving in much the same way as Nazism or whatever other metanarrative is. Wenders's postmodernist observation, that we are all limited in viewing the world through the lens of Hollywood film, however, gives way to a greater postmodern fear in the 1980s and 1990s. This time, he sees greater and more pressing foes as a result of the fact that speed has become instantaneous, and now escapes are no longer possible from our world (the system).

Given that escape can no longer be engineered, in his new post-road movies, Wim Wenders attempts to alert audiences to the complexities of this changed social condition using content. Now, however, instead of employing a resistant medium, a plaintive cry begins to be sounded forth in the message of his film. Hoping to fight the threat of a different type of metanarrative (than Hollywood filmmaking), Wenders shifts the site of his resistance from the medium of his film, to the message. Now, his revolutionary film will no longer be based on how cinematography takes place, but rather, through what is filmed. That Wenders must use the loathsome metanarrative of Hollywood narrative to warn of an even greater metanarrative is a move made surely out of desperation. This

desperate message, however, will be a coded one, so as not to become as invisibly disregarded as the warning label on cigarette boxes.

Nonetheless, Wenders must surely become more clear in his future post-road movies if anyone is to pick up the hint.

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Appendix I

The Way They Handle

From the very outset of this thesis, one aspect of the basic approach is likely to have troubled readers. The claim has been made that the four post-road movies are all identical in the message they convey and that these movies share a common spirit with the road movies of the 1970s. This assertion is made tenuous by the fact that all this allegedly becomes fully apparent only with a viewing of the fourth film of the latest group. If Wenders is attempting some sort of revolutionary maneuver, then one would be correct in saying that this is a method tenfold more obscure than the project of the road movie. It seems unfathomable indeed, why Wenders would switch from unwatchable art house movies being his vehicle for convincing people of industrialist/capitalist injustice, only to create films that, while somewhat popular, had their message of liberation for the masses so buried within the projects that no one would notice them. It would seem to be a trading of the ineffectual for ineffectual. So, is this thesis wrong in its surmisings?

Though a little implausible, I think the thesis has its merits and they are strong. Despite the improbability of it all, the fact remains that in Wenders's last four feature films, there is a pattern that is repeating itself. As far as can be seen, the explanation given is the only known way to make sense of these repetitions. Certainly Wim Wenders must be methodical and calculating to have "hidden" this message in each of four films without tipping off any of the hundreds of thousands of audience members who watched them. And yet, perhaps here we have a partial explanation for why nothing has yet been noticed; by never being overt with revolutionary content, as he was in previous decades, the German director has been able to cultivate for himself something which he has always lacked. Wenders has created a fairly influential position for himself in Hollywood and has gathered discerning "A level" audiences that will always watch him. If Wenders has not yet let loose with a clear message exhorting people to freedom from the "new" metanarratives that surround them, still this does not nullify the fact there is a subtext of

revolutionary content in each of these films (or rather the lament of a revolutionary who sees revolution as no longer possible).

Furthermore, one may wonder if it may be a "retrospective bomb" that Wenders is planting for his fans in these films. Wenders perhaps will become increasingly clear in his references over the next two to three films, and at the time when audiences finally understand what he is trying to say, he will simply refer them to re-view all the films of the preceding twenty years for clarification of his message. Either this will happen, or Wenders will ultimately come out and hit audiences over the head with the message of liberty for a world that has perfected information codifying systems. This he will do either in his next major film (potentially the much-hyped and long-awaited collaboration with Bono in *The Million Dollar Hotel*) or at some point when he believes his audience base and his personal stature to have reached the level where people will heed his message.

Seen from this perspective, these intentional plot repetitions may appear as the nervous release of a mime's secret, momentary secretions of truth in an otherwise straight-faced performance. In any event, the future career of Wim Wenders is one to which it is well-worth keeping tuned in to.

Appendix II

Straight Talk from your Mechanic

Of course, an enormous contradiction lies at the heart of this thesis. The entire body of the work is a repeated attempt to establish a coherent framework that groups the last four major films of Wim Wenders as one specific type. Using the violence of classification, one may argue that a certain fast-and-loose play is being engineered, that intentionally blurs the particular nature of these pictures. In attempting to create an awareness that these films are "identical" and of the same cinematic genus, this paper is engaging in the very exclusionary modernist ethic that Wenders and this paper's sympathies decry at the outset. Holding up Wenders's artistic integrity as being an example of anti-systems, postmodern thought, this thesis simultaneously seems to engage in creating its own "mono-vision."

Is this thesis then simply taking that which can be chosen from the "real" and recognizing units only so far as they can be used to support preconceived conclusions? Is (artificial) meaning being imposed on a multi-faceted system of various, random movements? Perhaps this is the case. Certainly there is much to be said about the complexity of the individual, and the disservice and misunderstanding created by a non-acceptance of each's unique nature. And yet, while there is a contradiction that exists at the heart of this thesis, it does not automatically nullify the merit of this academic work.

What this project believes to have accomplished is not the creation of a new truth, a fresh orthodoxy for all who would follow in discussions on Wenders. Rather, food for further thought is the aim of this thesis; it is satisfied at simply developing and experimenting with additional perspectives on this group of films. It is like shopping, and the thesis is offering something perhaps like a pair of pants "to be tried on." If this thesis does not fit, there are other things one might try on, and eventually the reader will likely purchase or acquire something, somewhere. As such, this thesis is an *essay*(er), a try, an

attempt, and nothing more. It presupposes alternate variants may exist and might be as, if not more worthy.

The lone intention of this work was to alert the reader to the significant repetitions that appear throughout Wenders's films of the last two decades. As much as these movies are each one-of-a-kind, still the echoes that reverberate throughout them all as a group is unmistakable. Out of the chaos of reality, this thesis attempts to fashion perhaps a kind of artificially clean order. But even if the extreme cleanliness of the pattern is artificial, can one still doubt that there nonetheless is some sort of pattern at the heart of this all?