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BAKHTIN'S CHRONOTOPE ON THE ROAD: Space, Time, and Place in Road Movies Since the 1970s [1]

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Abstract. *The paper deals with the notion of film genre in general and the road movie, perhaps the most American and much contested genre in particular, employing Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope*.

Key Words: *Film, Genre, Road Movie, Chronotope*

While the notion of genre has been ubiquitous in film studies from their very beginnings, it remains notoriously vague and conveniently, or perhaps intentionally ambiguous in its application. In our essay, we will approach the notion of film genre in general and the road movie, perhaps the most American and much contested genre in particular, employing Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. This approach entails a theoretical and methodological focus on the construction of space and time in and through texts that are never unmediated or "natural," always already ideological, historically specific and constitutive of genres. Although Bahktin's theoretical framework has frequently been applied to literary forms (such as the novel) and even though an affinity between chronotopicity and film has occasionally been recognized, the features of various chronotopes have, to our knowledge, hardly been systematically applied to film genres or theorized at the level of film as a medium. Our intention is to bring back space and place on the agenda of cultural theory in general and a Cultural Studies approach to movies in particular. While the first beginnings of a "spatial turn" in the humanities have been noticeable since the 1980s (especially in the work of New Cultural Geographers such as Edward Soja), space and place are frequently underprivileged concepts in contemporary analyses of cultural phenomena.

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For several reasons, our focus in this paper is on road movies since the 1970s. For one, the 1970s are the decade immediately following a shift of paradigm in the genre that began with the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* in 1957 and found a filmic codification with the release of *Easy Rider* in 1969 (Cohan & Hark 6). In what we call the "post-*Easy Rider*" era,[2] the very term "road movie" had entered the landscape of US popular culture.

Secondly, with the advent of mass tourism and the crisis of home and the nation for the Vietnam generation, place and space as socially constituted categories were re-negotiated in the road movie. Whereas in the decades before, the genre had articulated traditional American values like family, nationalism, and patriotism, the post-*Easy Rider* movies interrogated the old ideological securities and ultimately disrupted the notion of home whether as "the family" or "America." In a way, then, we consider road movies from the standpoint of a "situational rhetoric", in the sense of cultural studies' commitment to contextualism, regarding texts (and genres no less) as articulations of a specific socio-historical context.

Beyond the chosen timeframe, our selection of films is meant to reflect the multiple manifestations that relations of place, space, and time have been given in road movies since the 1970s. Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope offers a theoretical means of describing these relations disregarding boundaries between so-called auteur or arthouse films (by Wim Wenders, Jim Jarmusch, and others) and popular Hollywood movies (such as *True Romance* and *Kalifornia*).

CHRONOTOPES OF THE ROAD

Although studies of settings may be found in both literature and film studies, most tend to subordinate locales to plot rather than explore their significance in terms of space, time, and place. Conceived of in analogy to Einsteinian mathematics in the 1930s and 40s, the chronotope serves as a means of measuring how, in a particular age, genre, or text, real historical time and space as well as fictional time and space are articulated in relation to one another; Bakhtin's term refers to the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed" (Bakhtin 84).

The chronotope operates on two important levels: first, as the means by which a text represents history; and second, as the relation between images of time and space in the text, out of which any representation of history must be constructed. The chronotope of a particular text thus functions as an ideological index, but can also be used to discuss a whole genre. In some chronotopes, mainly those of travel and uprooted modern life, time takes precedence over space; in the more idyllic, pastoral chronotopes, space dominates time. The particular way in which these indicators intersect in a text is what constitutes its characteristic chronotopes, which are also affected by historical factors such as attitudes to nature, geography, class, race, and gender.

As to the social significance of the chronotope as a textual feature, Bakhtin believed that the emergence of a recognizable chronotope within a narrative offers audiences an opportunity to invest the causal chain (or lack thereof) with their own values. The

[2] We conceive the term as including *Easy Rider*, as this film does not simply mark a point of transition, but contributes decisively to the paradigm shift alluded to. Arguably, this codification owes as much to the 1960s TV series *Route 66* as to Kerouac's novel and *Easy Rider* (cf. Cohan & Hark 8).

chronotope of the quest for the Promised Land, for instance, if articulated as the road to California, may suggest to the audience a particular American myth along with all its ideological implications. For their part, audiences learn to superimpose and complete chronotopes over the plot as it unfolds. In the course of a genre's changing face, chronotopes thus become important sites in a narrative, not only "fleshing out" its narrative, but allowing its "knots" of meaning to be "tied and untied" (Bakhtin 150).

Bakhtin furthermore argues that the clearest textual expression of the link between space and time in Western culture is the road narrative, in which time spent means ground covered. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin wrote of what he called "adventure narratives" that

> [o]f special importance is the close link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the road ('the open road'), and of various types of meeting on the road. In the chronotope of the road, the unity of time and space markers is exhibited with exceptional precision and clarity. (98)

What is more, Bakhtin noticed the road's potential for encounter, where people separated by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet: "any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another" (Bakhtin 243). Bakhtin furthermore emphasizes the fact that the road chronotope is a metaphor "made real." He described this process as follows: "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history" (Bakhtin 84). A typically spatial effect of the road chronotope is what is frequently described as the "snowballing" effect (in *Thelma and Louise*, for instance), with actions gaining momentum as the protagonists drive across a space that is anything but empty. Another chronotope that frequently intersects with the road is the chronotope of chance as described by Bakhtin. The time which characterizes moments of chance in a narrative is that of random contingency or, as Bakhtin puts it: "Should something happen a minute earlier or a minute later, that is, should there be no chance simultaneity or chance disjunctions in time, there would be no plot at all" (Bakhtin 92). In narratives frequently intersecting with the chronotope of random contingency, internal time takes precedence over historical time as a general shift from time to space takes place, a space infected with the apocalyptic ideology of a "time out of joint." While Bakhtin was primarily concerned with chronotopes of the novel, critics such as Robert Stam have recently suggested that the chronotope seems in some ways even more appropriate to film as a medium in which "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete" (Bakhtin 11) for, whereas literature plays itself out within a virtual, lexical space, the cinematic chronotope is quite literal, splayed out concretely across a screen (Bakhtin 1).

In the following, we will take a brief detour through some ways in which the road movie has been defined recently. After offering an initial critique of these attempts, we hope to make apparent that the conceptual flexibility and openness of Bakhtin's chronotope offers many advantages over a number of existing approaches. As Bakhtin insisted, chronotopes, even within a single text, are always multiple and relative. In our view, therefore, any attempt to fit a text or even a genre into the category of a single chronotope is destined to fail. Rather, we will follow Tamara Danicic in her view of the multiplicity of space-time relations in a single text or genre which she describes as a "matrix" of "local" chronotopes (Danicic 312).

DEFINING THE GENRE, FOR BETTER OR WORSE

To find a generic definition of the Road Movie that is neither prescriptive nor essentialist in its claims is a difficult task. Genre criticism, which has evolved as a distinct branch of film studies since the late 1960s, has long recognized the existence of what Andrew Tudor calls "extreme *genre* imperialism" (Tudor 95). The search for one "factor X" in every film belonging to a certain generic category naturally relies on an arbitrariness of choice, and leads to the ridiculous in- or exclusions of individual films on the basis of this very arbitrariness (Hollows et al. 85).

Such essentialist tendencies as well as the rigidity of traditional genre delineations have both contributed to the fact that more often than not, the Road Movie is not even considered a genre of its own (see, for instance, Barry Grant's edited volume). As Vivian Sobchack notes correctly,

> [t]he road picture is often […] considered a subgenre of the adventure film, itself broad and ill-defined, or it is dealt with as a discrete category, discussion of which tends to elide issues of its generic status. (134)

Susan Hayward's characterization, from her book *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, is an attempt to clear-cut the fuzziness of the road genre boundaries; in doing so, she produces a standardized definition appropriate for an encyclopedia:

> Road movies, as the term makes clear, are movies in which protagonists are on the move. Generally speaking, such a movie is iconographically marked through things as a car, the tracking shot, wide and wild open spaces. (300; emphases removed)

The normative claim of her statement exhorts a deconstructive analysis. First of all, saying that "the term [road movie] makes clear" that "protagonists are on the move" is a superficial view, as the term itself does not clarify anything, but rather invokes complexity and ambiguity. The only thing the term "road movie" can be said to imply is that roads must be in some way important in these movies, since they appear in the generic name–but there is nothing specific about how roads figure, what function they have, etc.

Also, it is not the protagonists only that are on the move; and the tracking shot, used by Hayward as an iconographic marker, is clearly a simple cinematographic device.[3] "[W]ide and wild open spaces" are not necessarily iconographic markers either, as there are many road movies in which the setting's landscape is a concrete jungle rather than the classic open range of the Western. Even cars, in our view, are not well suited to name as requisite ingredients of the genre–in the classic *Easy Rider*, for example, motorcycles instead of cars are the prime means of transportation.

Hayward proceeds in a similarly normative manner, stating that "[t]he road movie is about a frontiersmanship of sorts given that one of its codes is discovery–usually self-discovery" (Hayward 300). However, Hayward does acknowledge that the road movie tradition is highly gendered, and points to the merit of *Thelma and Louise*, who challenged the masculinist conception of the road film a decade ago. Nevertheless, Hayward fails to mention both the ways in which women protagonists have subverted the dominant mode and to acknowledge that there is no reason to claim the masculinist tradition dead, as

[3] Significantly enough, Laderman claims that it is not the tracking shot but the traveling shot that is characteristic of the genre.

most of the road films produced since *Thelma and Louise* are again to be located in the traditional narrative mode of the male hero on the road of discovery. In this tradition, many travel narratives configure the road as a highly gendered space by focusing on the male flight from domesticity and by linking man, machine, and mobility (Crang 88-9).

From a chronotopic point of view, however, Hayward's most disputable claims are that "[g]enerically speaking, the road movie goes from A to B in a finite and chronological time" and that the narration "normally" follows "an ordered sequence of events which lead inexorably to a good or bad end" (Hayward 301). Both this ultimate "good" or "bad" categorization and Hayward's description of a standardized diegetic timeline evoke the impression that what she defines is the stock Hollywood picture of the last ten to fifteen years instead of the road movie, a genre that has produced a variety of time-space configurations and plot developments, ranging from episodic and circular structures to open and/or ambiguous endings.

This brief overview of some recent attempts to define the road movie in terms of genre, quite intentionally, reveals much of our dissatisfaction. As it seems, many critics are trying to press the road movies into particular typologies, whether based on narrative structure or inventories of distinct constitutive features (Corrigan 143-5). Such a normative fixing assumes that the road movie is no longer productive, but rather constitutes a closed set of filmic texts mirroring a cultural and historical context just as immutable. Any new road film, consequently, would have to be expected to fit unproblematically within this seemingly pre-existing set, "found" a new subgenre-such as "trucker road movies" (Bertelsen 154)—or as not belonging to the genre at all.

For all this dissatisfaction, our own starting point towards a definition of the road movie genre--Bakhtin's chronotope--discourages any attempt at standardization, normativity, and rigid categorization of entire cultural texts from the very beginning (thus it is not our intention to assert a chronotopic approach over any other). Still, a chronotopic "definition" is useful as a structural *tool* in order to deconstruct generic categorizations and show their arbitrariness. Based on the concept of chronotopicity, our categories are not based on hermeneutic analyses of the films considered, but rather on the multiple space-time relations in these road pictures.

In our view, place, conceived of as the physical manifestation of spatiality, of social space as created, experienced, and lived by real people, is constituted by social phenomena. As recent work in Cultural Geography has shown, place is never a given, but always a social space to be negotiated and (re)produced (see Crang's overview). Film, as a socially determined set of practices, no less than the experience of everyday life, constructs spaces and places according to specific chronotopes; these, in turn, do not exist in a social void but interact with and depend on a number of other realities such as gender, race, and class. Together with narrative concerns and conventions, the forces mentioned above combine to form recognizable entities that can be analytically described *as if* they were pre-existing categories.

THE ROAD AS SETTING

The films discussed in this category not only share the road as the main setting which--by nature--most road movies do, but they focus primarily on the journey of their protagonists. Yet, emphasis is placed more on their temporal movement than on a specific

road or destination as the realization of geographical and historical space. Therefore, a character's motivation for being on the road or a specific destination--even if known to the audience--do not necessarily convey any exact geographical information but merely function as a point of departure to start the plot. Unparalleled in this respect is Sissy Hankshaw (Uma Thurman), the protagonist in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, who does not hitchhike with a purpose, but because she experiences anxiety and discomfort whenever she stays in one place for too long. In *From Dusk Till Dawn*, the dialogue between a girl and one of the bank robbers (who has taken her family hostage) illustrates the vagueness and relative insignificance of destination:

> Kate: Where are we going?
> Ritchie: Mexico.
> Kate: What's in Mexico?
> Ritchie: Mexicans.

Unlike with other chronotopes of the road movie, here the protagonists' journey "takes place" in a continuous movement--while there may be short interruptions, the journey continues its progress until the very end of the movie or may actually go beyond that: Sissy will travel as long as she is able to, and the two survivors of *From Dusk Till Dawn* find themselves far form being settled in the end.

As the chronotope of the road in these films lacks a specific spatial realization, the centre of attention shifts to a metaphysical level, namely the characters' inner journey and their negotiations of personal (albeit still socially constructed) space while they have to overcome geographical as well as personal obstacles on their way. In drawing on the adventure plot, which has its roots in Greek mythology (Vice 210-2), the chronotope of the road as setting charges the road with the function of a meeting place for characters who would otherwise perhaps never meet. As in the course of travelling the roadies' personalities, stories and backgrounds are revealed, a change of personal development can also be triggered off by a fellow traveller--their fates are intertwined, if only for a short while. While the protagonist of *The Straight Story* states that he has to make his trip on his own, he still talks to a pregnant girl on his way and helps her with her decision to get back to the home she had run away from. As Roger Ebert puts it, "the movie isn't just about the old Alvin Straight's odyssey through the sleepy towns and rural districts of the Midwest, but about the people he finds […]" ("The Straight Story"). Again, in *From Dusk till Dawn*, we encounter Jacob Fuller, a priest who has lost his faith because of the death of his wife and regains it with the unlikely help of a bank robber.

So the chronotope of the road as setting does facilitate a kind of bonding between characters which is less restricted than in traditional road movies where, as it seems, it is mainly reduced to two characters (cf. the so-called "buddy movies" or the famous outlaw couples such as Bonnie and Clyde). Here, bonding is generally not gendered and can even occur in the interaction of a group of people. In these relationships, however, there are constant struggles for the various characters' positions, in relation to each other as well as to the world at large. Nevertheless, bonding and mutual understanding start and end in one space, the road, sometimes originating in a purely pragmatic or even forced relationship, especially in *From Dusk till Dawn*, where the family first taken hostage by two bank robbers finally end up as their kidnappers' only allies against an army of vampires. It is as though only while moving along the road do the characters construct their

own space, leaving it up to other travellers to recharge these places with meaning and refashion them in new time-space relations.

ESCAPING ON THE ROAD

In general terms, what we call the "chronotope of escape" on the road has informed many films that are generally recognized as road movies and many more that are not. In this instance of a chronotope frequently encountered in road movies, the road functions primarily as a means of escape and is characterized by a movement away from "something," a movement in which ground covered equals chance of success in the escape. Popular, i.e. frequently depicted causes for this escape include, among others, a relationship, the police, the world of organized crime, or any combination of these. Remarkably, the movement characteristic of the chronotope of escape very often seems to lead to the end of all roads, some sort of "land's end": the ocean, a swamp, or the Grand Canyon. Regardless of the specific locale, this is always a place where the chronotope of escape must necessarily come to an end. This may have to do with the impossibility to reintegrate into society after whatever has happened on the road, as is the case in the German films *Bandits* and *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* as well as in *Thelma and Louise*--or may function symbolically as a kind of rebirth as it does in *Down by Law*.

While this category may at first seem to coincide roughly with what Laderman terms "the outlaw road movie" (Laderman 177), his definition is ultimately thematic and therefore includes every single film that features criminals on the road--whether the latter attempt to escape or not. Again, we seek to place emphasis not on a thematic commonality (such as the theme of the outlaw or escape), but the interdependent and yet distinct relationship between space and time in these films. Like any other chronotope, that of escape can be made to serve a variety of ends. In *Thelma and Louise*, for instance, the chronotope of escape is given the appearance of an explicit social critique of the patriarchal system. Using the crosscutting format typical of many road movies--juxtaposing stable, grounded, and oppressive society with the mobility on the road--the film codes Thelma's marriage and Louise's job as static and enslaving, thus making their trip an escape from the patriarchal law of domestic servitude and economic dependence even before they actually become fugitives of criminal law. Louise's car, a 1966 convertible T-Bird, figures prominently in this opposition, as it nostalgically evokes the countercultural era of the road movie. Significantly, *Thelma and Louise* furthermore effects something of a synthesis of the escape and quest chronotopes discussed here. It is the "snowball effect," as Louise puts it, of their initial attempt to escape from oppression, which turns them into outlaws and introduces Mexico as the mythic destination of their escape. Escape, however, remains the dominant chronotope throughout the film, as Thelma and Louise opt to take the longer, indirect route (circumventing Texas altogether), thus emphasizing the narrative and political significance of their journey rather than the destination. When the police finally corner them at the Grand Canyon, rather than face prison and the patriarchal oppression they originally fled, they drive over the cliff in what seems to be an affirmative suicide (which nevertheless allows for a variety of positive and negative readings).

Arguably revising the gendered road of *Thelma and Louise*, *Bandits* depicts a female rock band escaping on the road and in the process offers a dynamic political critique of

popular culture. For protagonists who are triply marked as outsiders – as prisoners, rock-band, and women – it is the literal escape from prison which turns them into rock stars. As with *Thelma and Louise* before it, the gender concerns of *Bandits* effects a blending of the escape and quest chronotopes insofar as it dramatizes the former's fugitive mobility and the latter's visionary (one-)directionality. In the latter's case, the quest to leave the country takes the form of crossing the ocean into an exotic other place. However, at land's end, at the end of the road, the end of the band called "Bandits" is not chosen but imposed, a result of the police misinterpreting their actions.

Regarding the film's complex generic position, there seems to be a distinct trajectory at least partly determining its generic status as a "rock 'n' road" movie: the more popular the band gets, the more the film becomes a road musical, integrating performance elements from the genre of the music video seamlessly albeit implausibly into the road movie narrative. As a result of the song sequences' flaunted lip-synch and sudden appearance of instruments, repeatedly evoking the playful artifice of *A Hard Day's Night*, *Bandits* thus at times suspends the chronotopes of both escape and quest on the road without disrupting their overall momentum.

Less interested in gender relations than in its display of "restrained irony" and "jaded cool" on the road (Laderman 145), Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* also hints at the chronotope of escape, albeit in an almost perfunctory manner. In its characteristic knowingness of the genre's conventions, the film introduces and then deconstructs the chronotope of escape on the road when its two male buddies Willie and Eddie are caught cheating at a card game and take off with their booty. Displaying a general "been there, done that" attitude, the film depicts their escape as neither close nor by any means exciting; they simply go "to see something different", not knowing where they go.

In an altogether different although equally postmodern manner, *From Dusk till Dawn* and *Natural Born Killers* both depend, at least briefly, on the chronotope of escape. The outlaw couple of Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*, in particular, is more traditional in terms of its gender roles. While Laderman argues that its first hour--which is set on the road--"radically reinvented" the imagery of the road movie through the use of postmodern irony and reflexivity, its main innovation in terms of chronotopicity can be found in its rendering of the escape from home and stability as a matter of escaping a "television sitcom" childhood and its corresponding aesthetic.

As a general rule, bonding along the road (usually homosocial) is possibly one of the strongest effects of the chronotope of escape on the road. As the characters are on the run together, they share the same car, the same perception of time and space--in other words, they share the backward glances on the lookout for whatever they are escaping from. On the other hand, social and historical contexts are at best incidental to this chronotope: although the setting of the films discussed above is quite realistic, it is not essential to their construction of time and space. This chronotope is predominately relational and revolves around the question of how much space (and thus, by implication, time) the protagonists can get between themselves and their pursuers.

However, and this demonstrates quite well the impossibility of categorizing these films once and for all according to merely one (albeit dominant) chronotope informing them, all of the above also exhibit numerous other chronotopes. Jarmusch's *Down by Law*, for instance, actually begins with a very different chronotope, that of urban New Orleans, of city streets – and then moves to another distinct chronotope, namely that of the prison cell, where space is completely arrested and time has to be marked on the wall

in order to be felt at all. Only then does the protagonists' escape trigger a shift to the chronotope of escape on the road.

STUCK ON THE WAY

In terms of narrative development, these narratives usually start with the main character already moving along the road, "a road that leads from the open highway to the devil's mouth" (Morris). The reason for the main character hitting the road in the first place can frequently be found in a dubious past and involves motives such as flight from the Russian Mafia, gambling debts, or any other form of persecution. Sometimes those reasons remain unclear throughout the whole film (as in *Last Man Standing*, in which the hero does not even tell his real name--he simply calls himself "John Smith," a reference to *For a Fistful of Dollars*).

After the introduction of the hero, the plot does not evolve until the protagonist's movement is arrested by supposedly minor obstacles: his car breaks down, is broken down on purpose, or the protagonist runs out of money. The spatial movement is no longer proportional to the movement in time but is halted--still, the main motif remains the road and the main character's obsession with getting back on the road: home cannot possibly be found in the nightmarish places they encounter in the American West. Significantly, these towns are virtually interchangeable – only the twists and turns of the plot fill their empty and deserted places with life. As Ebert puts it in his review: "In a sense, we've been in Red Rock many times before: It's a town where plots lie in wait for unsuspecting visitors […]" (Ebert, "Red Rock West"). In this respect, the chronotope of being stuck on the way is defined much more by the absence of the road than by the presence of a small town--a point which is perhaps best illustrated by *U-Turn,* whose title refers to the road-sign that starts the protagonist's troubles (rather than to the film's setting, Superior, Arizona). Needless to say, he would have by-passed all the danger had he been able to stay on the road. Off the road, these towns not only suggest an absence of the road, but also of historical and local time, literally arresting movement as a specific space-time relation of the road movie. Although the protagonists are stopped dead in their tracks, the impulse of the trajectory that carried them into the small town affects the stagnant web of relationships as a destabilizing force. The chain reaction caused by the arrival of the protagonist thus brings about a more or less violent struggle over space. In John Fiske's words:

> So renters make the apartment, the place of the landlord, into their space by the practices of living; the texture of objects, relationships, and behaviours with which they occupy and possess it for the period of their renting. Space is […] produced by the creativity of the people using the resources of the other. (160)

These towns, therefore, which would otherwise have remained unspecific places along the road for every traveller, become sites of struggle only when the main characters start to get involved with the townspeople and have to carve out their own space. Especially the loss of his car leaves the protagonist exposed to considerations and places which he cannot call his own. One critic suggested that what the Coen brothers did by investing *Blood Simple* with such a chronotope was "examining life under a microscope or putting rats through mazes" (Hoberman)--putting their protagonists in devastated places

filled with unsettling stock characters to let the audience watch their struggle for time and space.

The hero of such narratives is left alone in a state of inertia just until the plot begins to snowball, causing more and more unexpected twists and turns in the protagonist's life. Although he tries to escape—usually more than once—he cannot break the vicious circle. Major decisions affecting narrative development are usually reached in a limited number of specific locations such as the garage, the bar or the office of the (usually corrupt) sheriff.

While the chronotope of the road in these movies uses elements of the Western, the suspension of movement and its corresponding space-time relation entails the hopelessness and dreariness of film noir. Partly for that reason, the plot is prominently gendered: the hero is generally male (thus the masculine pronoun above). What is more, there cannot be any "male bonding" as the hero ends up being subject to hate by more or less all the citizens whereas bonding with the femme fatale, as a rule, ends fatally. As the bond is none of the heart but frequently only based on monetary interests, sexual relationships usually involve double-dealing and unscrupulous opportunism. At best, the couple find themselves forced into a state of outlawry as in *Blood Simple*, the only film discussed under this heading in which love seems to exist--still, this does not prevent the hero from being shot in the end. Only after the final showdown has taken place and has conveniently resolved all the plot's various twists and turns, the protagonist (should he survive) is now free to leave the place of his disastrous adventures and get back on the road - alone, just the way he started his journey.

JOURNEYS TO THE PROMISED LAND

Quite unsurprisingly, the quest for the "promised land" in the US-American cultural space is often embodied by traveling to California. Movies in which California is a mythic cocaine, a land of infinite freedom where "you don't have to buy fruit, you just pick it from the trees" (as the lowly killer protagonist Early in *Kalifornia* believes) and where the sun is always shining, abound.

However, the concept of the Promised Land does not necessarily rely upon any "real" geographical basis; usually, the idea of such a place is enough to inspire a whole subcategory of road movies. Needless to say, the path to this land of glory is long, winding, and troublesome, and often initiates the travelers into maturity and adulthood. The maturation necessitates both a temporal and a spatial movement, but once accomplished, the happy end is near (as in the fairy-tale ending of Lynch's *Wild at Heart*, which is exemplary in overstating the case)[4] The family reunited after a breathtaking cross-country flight from Evil, all that is left to do for Nicholas Cage is to sing Presley's schmaltzy "Love Me Tender".

The movies which employ the chronotope of the quest for the Promised Land start at Paradise's opposite as the through and through blameless protagonists are often trapped in hellish situations (*Made in USA, Wild at Heart*), unsuccessful jobs (*Kalifornia, Far and Away*), or other confining situations such as imprisonment (*O Brother, Where Art Thou*) or probation (*Wild at Heart, Kalifornia*).

[4] The fact that film critic James Naremore views *Wild at Heart* as a "neo-noir" (107) rather than as a road movie again points to the vagueness of generic categorization per se.

Somehow, time is out of joint and the characters are out of place; consequently, their projected destination is one where they hope to find a home (also within themselves), some illusionary place where space-time relations are perceived to be still unharmed. Mobility is conceived of as a journey back to, not from, home (Laderman 144), and in most of these films, the protagonists seem to arrive there at least temporarily. In *Paris, Texas*, the seminal film by Wim Wenders that seems to belong into the quest for the Promised Land[5] category as well, the protagonist Travis himself is not reintegrated into his family, but "has achieved a certain 'destination' – the restoration of his family – even though he is not part of it" (Laderman 144).[6] According to cultural geographer Michael Crang, in the majority of Wenders' films, America's open spaces (such as the desert) are used both as an indicator of a (in our view Western-masculinist) mentality and as a physical setting. In this manner, the European director purports a certain picture of the United States specifically located (and sometimes dislocated, as in Travis, the uprooted main character) in place and time, and thus the "whole possibility of driving in this way becomes Americana–a fragment designed to convey to the European audience something about America specifically" (Laderman 144).

Made in USA, an eco-road movie from the late 1980s, somehow diverges from the pattern of the happy ending and most openly subverts the chronotope of the Promised Land: the teenage heroes, having desperately sought the California surf, eventually plunge into the ocean spray, but as the camera slowly recedes, the idyll is destroyed by a neighboring power plant and smoggy air instead of California sunshine. The movie is illustrative of what David Laderman has named the "pastoral impulse of the road movie" that emphasizes a romantic vision beyond society and dramatizes Leo Marx' famous concept of the Machine in the Garden (Laderman 18)—or the car in "natural" space, for that matter.

Other movies of this category end on a much lighter tone, and preferably on an uncontaminated romantic beach, such as *True Romance*, where Alabama (P. Arquette) and Clarence (C. Slater) celebrate their lucky love in pastel-tinted sand and thus are allowed to live happily ever after. That the violent outlaw couple, which always represents a variation on the Bonnie-and-Clyde model (cf. Leong et al.), may survive and stay together was hardly possible in road movies before the 1990s; in *True Romance,* the happy end is visualized by the chronotopic image of the ocean in the sunset that represents infinity and stability in terms of both space and time.

Similarly, *Kalifornia* finally ends the yuppie couple's nightmarish journey with serial killer Early (B. Pitt). The bankrupt intellectual couple and their white trash counterpart,[7] Early and his "mama" (J. Lewis), are together out of mere necessity, the former needing someone to share gas and wheel, the latter to escape the police and Early's probation officer; however different in design, both couples share their California Dreaming. Like in most road movies, the characters' bondings in this movie are drawn *along* lines of gender, but also *across* lines of class, as Duchovny admires Early's powerful violence and blunt masculinity, and Lewis is almost lovingly mothered by Carrie, the emancipated photographer and the most sensible of the quartet. With respect to plot motivation, it

[5] Cf. Laderman 142. His categorization of *Paris, Texas* is one of the few points of agreement. We doubt, for example, that the film is "a road movie out of time" that deemphasizes road travel (ibid.).

[6] As Crang notes, it is important to think through Travis' early flight from domesticity in terms of a gendered "geography of distribution and dissemination" (88-9).

[7] Laderman terms this parallel characterization the postmodern "doubled" couple (177).

seems that the quest for the Promised Land-movies rely on fate rather than chance, on predetermination rather than on coincidence. What saliently unites all the characters in these films is their stern determination to find answers–to whatever questions they have.

CRUISING CITY ROADS

Characteristically, the spatial movement of what we call the chronotope of city roads is circular, as in both teenage cruise-films such as George Lucas' *American Graffiti* and taxicab stories like Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and Jim Jarmusch's *Night on Earth*, the drivers always return to and/or depart from the same locations. The formula "time spent = space covered," therefore, applies only if space is not conceived in a linear sense of moving ahead.

In terms of space, crossroads and traffic lights are probably some of the most important structural devices that determine narrative development: cabbies meet their passengers and cruisers meet their peers to arrange car races and exchange gossip. When the teens stop their cars at red traffic lights in *American Graffiti*, sidelong glances through the open window liberate gestures and verbal communication from the private confinement of one vehicle and translate them into another.

Lateral views are also highly important in the taxi films, as they allow the drivers to observe street life, thus giving them the illusion of stepping out of the loneliness of their job and being a part of the social space of the street. In *Taxi Driver*, DeNiro is an outsider bound to the very surroundings he detests; his moralizing voice-over observations always fall upon the same shabby locations and are seemingly the reason for his return, as Ebert observes: "Travis could in theory look for fares anywhere in the city, but he's constantly drawn back to 42nd Street, to Times Square and the whores, street freaks, and porno houses" (*Cinemania 97*). Accordingly, one of the most important questions among the cabbie community is whether a driver works at night and "does the ghettoes." All the New York places pertinent to the film--from the red-light district boardwalks to the lonely diners--are gloomy spots of aggression, anger, and despair, and thus paint a picture of a society doomed to failure:

> In popular films such as […] *Taxi Driver,* a harder-edged view emerges, not just of New York City, but by extension, of American society as a whole. Like the dark negations of earlier community models, these glimpses of a "family," a "neighbourhood," a "town meeting," and a "hero of the people," respectively, share an intertextuality marked and persistent enough to congeal into a view of the world. (Montgomery 3)

The darkness of time-space relations in *Taxi Driver* eventually leads to Travis' complete alienation; he is "God's lonely man" for whom "one day [is] indistinguishable from the next, a long continuous chain" into nothingness. His experience of time is as slow as the slow-motion camera until he starts his murderous vengeance.

Although the cabbies in *Night on Earth* are loners like Travis, they escape alienation by communicating with their passengers, who, naturally, determine spatial movement and sometimes also the car's pace. Like Scorsese's and to some extent also Lucas', Jarmusch's interest is in the socio-cultural spheres a cabbie continuously crosses. His episodic taxi film presents a whole variety of historicized and sometimes conflicting social spaces –

from Times Square and the representative buildings of Helsinki to Brooklyn and working-class quarters in the Finnish capital, from the tourist spaces of Rome to its outskirts and back. Each episode transgresses both these different social spaces as well as boundaries of public and private. The taxi is of course privileged in such a transgression, as it is always a public and private space at the same time (though not always to the same degree). For Corky (W. Ryder) in the first episode, the cab is her living room, while for most of the passengers it is just a means of transportation. Likewise, most of the drivers and some of the fares relate their personal pasts while driving/riding into the future–in the Rome episode, the Italian driver Roberto Benigni confesses his sexual sins so exhaustively that his fare, a Catholic priest, eventually passes away. Other passengers, such as the blind Parisian woman (B. Dalle) riding with a black immigrant driver from Ivory Coast, seem to emerge out of nowhere and disappear into the dark again.

The different places are, in an essentially chronotopic manner, tied together only by the ticking clocks and old-fashioned globes that situate all the places Jarmusch covers in terms of time and space (Andrew 137). All of the characters meet just because of a time/place coincidence but are otherwise not connected to each other. As David Lakly states:

> Jarmusch shows that [his characters in *Night on Earth*] come from […] very different worlds that lack connection. This lack of connection is at the very heart of Jarmusch's films. He attempts to portray such different characters to show the audience that 'it takes all types' to make this America work, and understanding that is the first step to understanding each other.

Thus, Jarmusch's use of chronotopicity is an apt means to depict a social vision of the world as a better place, a vision that also transgresses the screen-space, as many of the scenes in the cabs are shot from outside of the windshield, again creating a barrier between the characters and the audience. Jarmusch uses this approach to force the audience to separate emotionally from the film and accept the unique characters that inhabit his world (cf. Lakly).

DEAD END CITY AS THE END OF THE ROAD

Related to varying degrees to the chronotope of "stuck on the way", the quest for the Promised Land, and of escape on the road, the chronotope of "Dead End City" revolves around questions such as what happens when the road doesn't go on or when the Promised Land turns out to be just another dead end. Remarkably, much like the Promised Land can be identified with California, that dead end in American film seems to be almost synonymous with Las Vegas. Obviously, this is connected to the city's fame and popular representations as a modern day version of Sodom and Gomorrah--an analogy that holds not only in terms of sin, but also in terms of time and space. One either leaves as soon as possible or runs the risk of losing the ability to do so: should one have second thoughts and turn back even for an instance, one may find oneself fixed in space forever. Similarly, Ben Sanderson (N. Cage) in *Leaving Las Vegas* displays an eerie awareness of the kind of chronotope that popular (Hollywood) film mythically attributes to the city of Las Vegas: of all possible places, he goes to Vegas in order to drink himself to death; his instincts tell him he is in the right place.

The road as such features only marginally in these films, both visually and structurally, as the chronotope of Dead End City is characterized by a predominance of space over time. In fact, space has been arrested, and so has historical time. The opening gesture of one prominent example, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, provides a fleeting glance at its historical context only to then flick it away. Stagnation and death catch up with the protagonists in Dead End City, and only the very lucky are ever able to leave again. But these are all people who at some point were *on the road* to Las Vegas, and their arrivals are usually narrated in flashback (what Bakhtin has described as the "chronotope of memory"). In the majority of cases, Dead End City is populated by people who have their own road to talk about and remember--it is not a place where you grow up, it is a place that exists only somewhere along the road. Certainly, the case we are arguing here does not imply that any "city film" in which the protagonists do not go anywhere makes implicit reference to the chronotope of the road (and all its associated connotations of freedom and chance) via its absence; rather, we wish to include only films in which the road is absent insofar as it is a goal that is never attained, an escape never made, or the Promised Land never reached.

Characteristically, there is no "bonding on the road" in Dead End City. To the contrary: as much as Dead End City is the antithesis of the road as unrestricted mobility, intrigue, corruption, and betrayal are in the hands of one's best friends. Nevertheless, there are people who manage to leave: the two protagonists of *Fear and Loathing*, for instance, do leave Las Vegas, but they never stop travelling, maintaining a drug-induced trip for the entire duration of their stay in Dead End City. To their hallucinatory vision, Las Vegas is inhabited by predatory human-sized reptiles and other perils, and they barely manage to escape.

CONCLUSION

The concept of a "chronotope of the road," as Bakhtin introduced it, necessarily explodes the random categories elaborated on in our essay, as there usually is more than just one particular chronotope to be found in any film. Our view through a chronotopic lens allows for this kind of arbitrary classification, for it is in itself a concept characterized by flexibility, variability, and mutability. These are the crucial qualities of any space/place/time relation, and they are as crucial for the road movie in its multiple temporal and spatial manifestations. As many critics before have noticed--and as even those who have tried to pin it down to some essential formula have had to concede, the genre has always been changing lanes and taking new turns, thereby going way beyond formulaic expectations.

Consequently, none of our categories can contain any film in its entirety unless you ignore the textual multiplicity of the chronotope in all of those films. For example, *From Dusk Till Dawn* exhibits the chronotope of escape as well as the quest for the Promised Land-category and the stuck on the way-movies. *Down By Law* employs the chronotope of the prison cell, which is similar to the road in that it facilitates encounters with unusual people, whereas the dead end city-films employ the chronotope of the road only as framing--the city formerly seen as the Promised Land turns out to be a trap. The biographies of these protagonists also commonly shows features of the chronotope of escape. On the city roads, the main characters usually remain stuck in their respective cities. *Kalifornia*

as well as *True Romance* and *Wild at Heart* clearly articulate the chronotope of escape, while *Paris, Texas* also foregrounds the chronotope of the road as setting.

In terms of Cultural Geography's analytical framework, place is understood as the socially and culturally marked intersection of space and time. Thus, despite its material qualities, the road itself, like the vehicle, is rather a space than a material place, although it certainly is located in a specific environment charged with social and cultural meanings. The chronotopes we have elaborated above are some of the many possible permutations of space-time-relations within that located space, and therefore do not ascribe a single meaning to the road, but allow for many possible chronotopic interpretations.

Requisite places in the road movie, such as diners, gas stations, motels and garages, differ from the road in that they are not ephemeral spaces, i.e. places destroyed by speed, to use Paul Virilio's phrasing. These are locales given an internal structure by the social interactions taking place there, interactions which themselves are necessarily classed, raced, and gendered. The same holds true for any type of landscape, whether urban or rural, crossed by road movie protagonists, for landscapes always carry with them a heavy cultural and historical baggage. It does make a difference whether characters are moving through Monument Valley or Mississippi swamps, and even more so if one of them is Native American or African American.[8]

The meaning a particular place takes on in a road movie, however, varies with the chronotopic structure within which it is placed. In this way, motels and diners recall Bakhtin's discussions of the drawing room or the stairway (Vice 207) in literature as places with specific social functions. The liquor store at the beginning of *From Dusk Till Dawn* is a telling example in so far as it signifies quite differently before the spectator realizes that the movie's main chronotope (in the first part at least) is that of escape. Similarly, Mel's Diner in *American Graffiti* is so prominent a meeting place because it works within the chronotope of the city road and its significance would be dramatically altered if the chronotope changed to that of escape or the quest for the Promised Land. Significantly, most of the places encountered along the road can furthermore take on a meaning similar to that of the threshold in Bakhtin, representing the most important breaking point, crises, and decisions that can change characters' lives. The road can confer to the most banal diner the chronotopic characteristics of a threshold, leading to limitless possibilities including success or destruction. As these illustrations indicate, Bakhtin's conceptualization of the chronotope is equally useful for an analysis of place as articulated in the socially constructed space of a filmic narrative.

As our analysis of road movies in terms of the chronotope has tried to show, there is no longer any such thing as a single chronotope of the road (as originally described by Bakhtin), even less than there is a unified definition of "the road movie." An all-inclusive definition usually provides no more than a list of superficial features instead of any new insight into or productive engagement with the road movie as a genre.

[8] Although instances of ethnically marked protagonists in road movies are rare, recent decades have opened up the road genre for films like *Powwow Highway*, *Smoke Signals*, *Get on the Bus*, or *Boys on the Side*.

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For a Fistful of Dollars (Sergio Leone, 1964)
From Dusk till Dawn (Robert Rodriguez, 1996)
Kalifornia (Dominic Sena, USA 1993)
Kings of the Road (USA 1976, Wim Wenders)
Last Man Standing (USA 1996, Walter Hill)
Made in USA (Ken Friedman, 1988)
Night on Earth (Jim Jarmusch, 1991)
O Brother, Where Art Thou (Ethan and Joel Coen, 2000)
Paris, Texas (Wim Wenders, 1984)
Red Rock West (John Dahl, 1992)
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BAHTINOV HRONOTOP PUTA

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Rad se bavi pojmom filmskog žanra uopšte, a posebno filmom putovanja, možda najameričkijim i najosoporavanijim žanrom primenjujući pojam hronotopa Mihaila Bahtina.

Ključne reči: *Film, žanr, Film putovanja, Hronotop*