

2009

# Shadows fall on main street: Film noir travels out of the city

Anthony LaPorte  
*University of South Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

---

## Scholar Commons Citation

LaPorte, Anthony, "Shadows fall on main street: Film noir travels out of the city" (2009). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.  
<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/2056>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

Shadows Fall on Main Street: *Film Noir* Travels Out of the City

by

Anthony LaPorte

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Liberal Arts  
Department of Humanities  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Margit Grieb, Ph.D.  
Daniel Belgrad, Ph.D.  
Phillip Sipiora, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
November 5, 2009

Keywords: movies, Thirdspace, imagined communities, Preminger, Welles

© Copyright 2009, Anthony M. LaPorte

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
<i>Outline and Argument</i> .....	2
<i>The Origins of Film Noir and Spatial Considerations</i> .....	5
<i>Methodology</i> .....	14
CHAPTER 2: XENOPHOBIA IN SMALL TOWN AMERICA.....	16
<i>Fallen Angel</i> .....	18
<i>The Stranger</i> .....	25
<i>Signs and the Social Structure of Harper</i> .....	29
<i>Formalism and Realism in Film Noir</i> .....	31
<i>Film Noir and Imagined Communities</i> .....	34
CHAPTER 3: THE VISUALIZATION OF THIRDSPACE.....	38
<i>Gun Crazy – Film Noir and Mobility</i> .....	44
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION.....	56
REFERENCES .....	62

# SHADOWS FALL ON MAIN STREET: *FILM NOIR* TRAVELS OUT OF THE CITY

Anthony M. LaPorte

## ABSTRACT

After World War II, film audiences of American crime dramas, later termed *film noirs*, witnessed the relocation of several film narratives to settings outside of the traditional urban environment. These films began to defy the conventional notion that crime only exists in densely populated cities and began to incorporate alternative spaces, like suburban communities, small towns, and the open road, to tell their stories. This thesis examines how social and geographical spaces contribute to, rather than oppose, a *noir* sensibility by employing an intertextual analysis of three *film noirs* set in locations out of the city: *Fallen Angel*, *The Stranger*, and *Gun Crazy*. This project explores the possibility that *noir* cinema is not bound to a conventional urban environment, but that the ambiguous essence of *film noir* can also flourish in non-urban settings by preying on the fears and anxieties many Americans experienced after the end of the War.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Film noir* criticism has not always originated predominantly in academic institutions, rather, simple observations made by members of different sectors of the cinematic community constitute the main body of early critical writing, done during a period of time preceding academia's wholehearted acceptance of film as a relevant field of study. In line with most film critics, early writers on the topic of *film noir* looked for common themes, motifs, and styles to discuss the construction of a new genre—the American crime drama—but largely failed to recognize that these films went beyond the usual escapism associated with much of Hollywood's output during and after World War II. Following the war, these American crime dramas made their debut overseas in France, and it was there that French critics Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton noticed that these films shared not only similar storylines but each appeared to share a similar visual aesthetic and “dark” sensibility. For these critics, *film noirs* were much more than escapist tales in the style of police procedurals involving criminal seduction. Borde and Chaumeton's observations triggered *film noir* to become a heavily debated genre and field of study.

Film scholarship has devoted much attention to the themes and artistic style that characterize *film noir*. As such, most examinations focus on the “classic” representatives of the genre, such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941),

*Double Indemnity* (1944), *Murder My Sweet* (1944), *Detour* (1945), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), and *The Lady From Shanghai* (1947). However, very little of the scholarly literature pays specific attention to the spatial environments of *film noir*, presumably because the generic conventions ostensibly demand an urban setting, even though the aforementioned films *Detour*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and *The Lady From Shanghai* are prominently set outside of urban landscapes.

Most Hollywood *film noir* films are set in an urban environment and rely on this concrete landscape to depict in the narrative and evoke in the audience feelings of anxiety, isolation, desperation and claustrophobia. The city is viewed in *noirs* as the home to criminals and morally questionable characters, a space set apart from where wholesome, family-centered rural community members or townsfolk reside. The city, a densely populated space, affords individuals a safety net of anonymity useful in concealing their identity and covering up their legal transgressions. In the country or in a small town, conversely, familiarity is commonplace and recognition high.

### *Outline and Argument*

In this thesis I address the gap in scholarship involving setting and examine how *film noir* functions in a space outside of its typical urban landscape, more specifically small town America. I will investigate how social expectations are affected by this filmic relocation and how space is exploited to heighten the moral ambiguity of the characters and situations and add confusion to a

community defined by traditions and conventions. I discuss the particular manifestation of *noir* style in an alternative non-urban setting by employing intertextual analysis to Otto Preminger's *Fallen Angel* (1945), Orson Welles' *The Stranger* (1946) and Joseph H. Lewis' *Gun Crazy* (1950).

This thesis will pick up on a missed opportunity to explore how the criminal, at home and conventional in the urban setting, typical of classic *film noir*, is strategically relocated into the non-urban setting of these films. I will argue that *Fallen Angel*, *The Stranger* and *Gun Crazy* represent a transcendence of conventional notions about geographical expectations in *film noir*. Each film confronts the audience with a safe, traditional community disrupted by the presence of a foreign and/or unconventional visitor (in some cases more than one). These films introduce a foreign element into the safe confines of an otherwise socially regulated, traditional community and demonstrate that criminal activity occurs wherever people live, and is not confined to densely populated spaces. The films contemplate the implication of this spatial breach on the norms and values of the community inhabitants. In each of the films, all made after World War II, the introduction of a character not belonging to the community, an "Other," serves to prey on the anxieties of the American people by providing a representation of the existing feelings of xenophobia after the war.

It is my contention that the relationship between occupied space and *noir* techniques function the same regardless of their setting and, in some cases, those *noir* films displaced from the urban streets accentuate the ambiguous nature of these films that is so indicative of the *noir* style. By playing on an

audience's expectations of social organization among small town communities, *film noirs* in these nontraditional settings are able to defy conventional storytelling techniques used in the classic crime dramas during World War II and visually capture feelings of xenophobia that may mirror those of an audience in post-WWII America.

My discussion will begin with a historical overview of the definition of *film noir* and explore the treatment of space in *film noir* scholarship. I will examine how the urban landscape came to be a defining characteristic of *noir* style and describe how the discussion of setting has become a way to categorize *film noir* and how its location is studied mainly in reference to urban locales. While many scholars acknowledge that some *film noir* takes place outside of the city, and sometimes predominately on the open road, their analyses remind their readers how these particular films stray from *noir* conventions but admit that they are part of the discourse nonetheless.

The next section will jointly discuss two films: *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger*. I will apply Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities in my analysis and describe how his concept lends itself to *noir* narrative because of its inherent fragmentation of individual identity in reference to community and socially regulated space. Both films are set in small town America and are able to function independently of major metropolitan areas. While each film was working under certain Hollywood restrictions, both end with justice being served. However, the conclusions also maintain that these two communities are not as safe as they once appeared to be and have been permanently altered.



The final section will discuss how *noir* style functions in a mobile environment through an analysis of the film *Gun Crazy*. I will utilize Edward Soja's concept of Thirdspace to examine how a narrative that maneuvers through numerous environments reconciles itself within its main characters to form a sense of reality, which is based on criminal activity to achieve the American dream of wealth and happiness. Instead of focusing on how these three films stray from the classical representations of *film noir*, I will examine how their *noir* qualities interact with their environment to create a greater sense of anxiety, isolation, desperation and claustrophobia, due to their close proximity to an idealized American working-class community.

### *The Origins of Film Noir and Spatial Considerations*

In 1945, a decade before the term *film noir* appeared in print, Lloyd Shearer discussed the trend and popularity of crime-based American film narratives. Shearer was one of the first to recognize Hollywood's influx of films utilizing chiaroscuro in its imagery and equally murky subject matter. Instead of focusing his attention on the dark themes, innovative style, genre characteristics, or storylines of films such as *Double Indemnity*, *Murder My Sweet*, and *Laura* (1944), Shearer concentrated on explaining the reasons for the films' popularity with audiences. He suggested that audiences simply enjoyed going to the theater and were pleasantly surprised to find violent themes in which they could experience situations that would never occur in their own perceived realities. Secondly, he claimed that Hollywood studios were subscribing to the idea that

one successful crime film would lead to another—the “time-honored Hollywood production formula of follow-the-leader” (10), a formula still alive and well in present day Hollywood. Shearer was also preoccupied with the psychology of crime thrillers, their filmmakers, and audiences’ preoccupation with the sinister characters within them. It was only natural for these films to be set in urban environments since many of them were based on hard-boiled detective novels written by successful authors like James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler. Shearer quotes who he calls the authoritative expert, or studio, saying, “The public likes well-done crime films for the very same reason they like good detective stories. They’re escapist and interesting” (13). This suggests that American audiences enjoyed experiencing cinema that allowed them to view the pictures as witnesses without ever having to experience any of the same consequences so many witnesses in these crime dramas were faced with. The crimes existed outside of their reality.

In Borde and Chaumeton’s seminal essay, “Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*,” first published in 1955, the authors not only coin the term *film noir* but also describe it as a distinctly new type of American film. Like Shearer, Borde and Chaumeton also wrote about the aesthetic of these crime films but were even more interested in the audiences than he had been. Borde and Chaumeton focused their attention on the reception of *film noirs* and highlighted the emotional effects these crime films had on audiences. In contrast to Shearer’s psychological approach, however, Borde and Chaumeton’s discussed these films in terms of theme, style, and technique. French audiences did not have access to

this new brand of American cinema until 1946. When these crime-themed films finally reached overseas, French moviegoers were bombarded with violent images, themes of corruption, and sexual ambiguity. The French word *noir*, meaning “dark” or “black,” was selectively chosen to describe a series of films that were not only aesthetically shadowy in their composition, but whose story was sinister and ominous in tone and subject. Borde and Chaumeton are arguably the reason why so much attention has been given to the visual style of *noir* cinema because the films they chose to discuss were all originally released during what Shearer observes to be a time when Hollywood essentially released copies of previous box-office successes. Due to their similarities in lighting, narrative, and camerawork, the settings in which these stories took place went largely unnoticed and, perhaps, thought unnecessary. In their essay, Borde and Chaumeton make an important assertion: “Often the *noir* aspect of a film is linked to a character, a scene, a setting” (18). They choose to define *film noir* in terms of the themes (characters and story) and filmmaking techniques (scene construction) based on the films released in France in 1946 rather than focus specific attention on their settings.

It was not until the 1960s that *film noir*, along with the study of film in general, became an established field in academic circles. In these early days, most *noir* criticism existed within the confines of genre scholarship, exploring the characteristics that categorized *film noir* as a new type of film based heavily on Borde and Chaumeton’s observations of theme and style. Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg’s book *Hollywood in the Forties* (1968) constitutes the first

scholarly attempt to analyze spatial structures as a key element to *film noir*.

While many *film noir* scholars consider Higham and Greenberg's work lacking in rigor and depth, and dispute their inclusion of a series of films as part of the genre, it is important to note the authors' departure from theme as a sole object of inquiry for *film noir* criticism. In their spatial analysis, Higham and Greenberg describe how compartmentalized structures, like trains and elevators, are important devices used in *noir* cinema because of their representations of confined mobility. They also describe cocktail bars as vital to the *noir* atmosphere: "mirrors, stretching to the ceiling, reflect the stew of faces, each one predatory, doomed or afraid, and the glasses are piled in pyramids, often to be smashed by one of the principals in an outburst of rage" (20). Higham and Greenberg maintain that trains, elevators, and bars are all focal points, or at least references to, a distinctly urban environment.

Higham and Greenberg also consider the contrast of light and dark in the small town setting of *Fallen Angel*. They mention how doors appear to open into warm, lighted interiors from dark streets, an effect you would not have in an urban setting where the intensity of street lighting (or lack thereof) often matches the interior. A decade later, in 1974, Janey Place and Lowell Peterson used again an approach that studies *film noir* visual motifs, focusing in particular on lighting techniques in films of the 1940s and 1950s. They assert, "nearly every *film noir*, even of the cheapest "B" variety, used night-for-night [lighting] extensively as an integral component of their *noir* look" (67). This meant that filmmakers shot the majority of their scenes at night and employed artificial light

for all light illuminating the mise-en-scène. The night-for-night lighting choice provides insight into the specific visual images that filmmakers wanted audiences to experience when filming an interior setting. Place and Peterson also emphasize *film noir's* interior visual style characterized by shadowy images, many times with the help of Venetian blinds, even when brighter light is accessible to its characters.

Thinking about these characteristics that define a genre is necessary, but first one has to accept that *film noir* actually is a genre. Raymond Durnat, arguably a pioneer of *film noir* studies and, at the same time, perhaps one of the most controversial of its critics, insisted that *film noir* was not a genre (1970). He emphasized his assertion by maintaining that all previous consideration for *film noir* as a genre was simply describing it as such based on central motifs, or cycles. Durnat then labeled each of the *noir* motifs he observed, citing eleven different ones total. In "Paint It Black: the Family Tree of the *Film Noir*," Durnat organizes films to fit within his categories, and then spends the remainder of his essay giving a short description of each motif. Some *noir* critics took issue with his heavy reliance on previously published ideas. The vigorous criticism of Durnat's work stems from his attempt to showcase the complex definition of *film noir* through a deconstruction of generalized themes described in the work of Borde and Chaumeton. While Durnat may not offer any breakthroughs in scholarship, his work undoubtedly initiated a new discourse over which methods of study should be employed in subsequent *film noir* studies and what aspects of

the films should be the central focus, considering theme and mise-en-scène were the predominate areas of emphasis.

Scholars continued to cite Durgnat's work but mostly in the negative, referring to its problematic explanation of the term and genre *film noir*. Two years after Durgnat's essay was published, Paul Schrader entered the controversy with a fresh perspective; he introduced the idea that *film noir* was not just a style of American cinema, but also a historical artifact that could be studied in the same manner as the often referenced seminal films from movements such as German Expressionism and The French New Wave (1972). He offered three phases of *film noir* as frameworks for study while also recognizing the problem with attaching dates to an otherwise indefinable series of films. The phases he suggested were the Wartime Period of 1941-1946, the Postwar Realism of 1946-1949, and the Psychotic Action and Suicidal Impulses of 1949-1953. Schrader also examines *film noir* as a "creative release" for filmmakers working under an otherwise totalitarian system. Schrader offers a very useful insight into the study of *film noir*:

"Rather than haggle definitions, I would rather attempt to reduce *film noir* to its primary colors (all shades of black), those cultural and stylistic elements to which any definition must return" (54).

Schrader ultimately suggests that the true themes found in *film noir* are not the overt themes recognizable through a transparent storyline, but concealed in its style. He examines how *film noir* techniques "emphasize loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, insecurity, then submerge these self-doubts in mannerism and

style” (58). To Schrader, *film noir* was not simply presenting escapist narratives to a passive audience, but, rather, a series of interactive motifs that initiated a dialogue between the filmmakers and the audience and confronted an American audience with the realities of war. He posits that “perhaps the over-riding *noir* theme [is] a passion for the past and present, but also a fear of the future” (58). However, the interactive dialogue between audience and filmmaker that Schrader described still focused attention on the urban woes between police and street criminals in his Postwar Realism phase and continued into the final phase only to have the *noir* hero become “painfully self-aware” (59) and, ultimately, destructive. Schrader discovers a vital aspect to *film noir* studies—interaction between audience and subject matter presented—but fails to explore what an audience takes away from a film after actively participating in its narrative, especially *noir* cinema that reached beyond city limits only to corrupt every facet of the American landscape.

Regardless of how Schrader chose to direct his critique of *film noir*, he opened the door for the application of various schools of thought, particularly philosophy, to contemplate *film noir* as something more than an American phenomenon. For example, in 1975, E. Ann Kaplan published the first feminist critique of *film noir*. Kaplan focused heavily on how the other characters in the film view women and how the audience constructs limited ideas of women as they are introduced to stereotypical depictions of either the submissive female that supports the male roles or the *femme fatale* that challenges masculinity in

these *noir* films. Other scholars have since expanded on Kaplan's work to include a broader range of gender studies.

In 1976, Robert G. Porfirio elaborated on the existential motifs frequently found in many *film noirs* and noted a linking force in many of them: confused individuals facing a chaotic world that s/he cannot accept as reality. Porfirio observed the interaction of these confused individuals and focused on the choices they make and what affect they have on each other. In his approach, Porfirio argues that the environment plays a vital role in the choices these confused (mainly male) individuals make. He draws a parallel between the *femme fatale* (a stock character in many *film noirs*) and the urban landscape. He suggests that the female figure is usually associated with the natural world but the dominating female figure in *film noir*, the *femme fatale*, is located in the material world of wealth and power—a highly industrialized, man-made environment. According to Porfirio, when the *femme fatale* collides with the city, she instills in the city a mother/whore dichotomy, adding to the male protagonist's anxiety and apprehension to make decisions. The *femme fatale* achieves this through her mobility within male dominated spaces, namely bars or any other location after the sun goes down, and her ability to wield seemingly equal power, many times with a gun in her hand.

Many scholars agree that the same forces that reinforce female stereotypes also reinforce the concept of masculinity in *film noir*. Virtually all *film noir* storylines center on a male hero or antihero and can be divided into the categories of the investigative thriller (the male as professional investigator), the



suspense thriller (the male as victim who must restore his reputation), or the criminal-adventure thriller (the male as outlaw who must face the consequences of his actions) (Krutnik 1991). In his book, *A Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*, Frank Krutnik's critique of traditional representations of masculinity concludes with his analysis of role reversal in the film *Gun Crazy*. For once, a woman who is his equivalent—a gun-twirling sharpshooter equal to his skill—strips the male hero of his position as dominating authority. This disturbance in gender roles is emphasized by the couple's nomadic relationship as criminals on the run. Their attempt at a "normal" life is impossible from the beginning and their unusually carnal relationship ends with the male reaffirming his masculinity by killing his lover in the dense fog of a muddy swamp. The spatial breach involving multiple locations throughout the film, mostly outside of urban settings, is epitomized in the end with the death of the two main characters in a setting far removed from civilization.

Contemporary trends in film criticism not only investigate meaning in a film beyond style, narrative or where it is historically situated, but also reviews the way in which contemporary films appropriate some form of *noir* aesthetics. According to Mark T. Conard, the derivative term "*neo-noir*" has frequently been applied to films released after the classic *noir* period to describe films that employ *noir* themes and/or sensibilities (2007). Regardless of how problematic this idea appears, considering these films cover several decades and were not as restricted by censorship as were the *noir* directors of the 1940's and 1950's, analysis of *neo-noir* has found firm footing in contemporary film criticism.

Unfortunately, such analysis amounts to little more than an unoriginal way of defining a collective aesthetic that, as of today, appears to elude definition. The main problem that many scholars have with *neo-noir* is that it allows filmmakers to consciously work within the *noir* style and, at times, overtly display action or meaning because of their ability to work within a rating system as opposed to working within a strict system of censorship.

### *Methodology*

The following chapters expand on the previous scholarship regarding spatial structures and analyze specific sequences from *Fallen Angel*, *The Stranger*, and *Gun Crazy* to explore the treatment of narrative movements found in *film noir* and how they function outside of the urban landscape. My exploration of these three *film noirs* will employ an intertextual analysis beginning with an application of Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" to explore the influence that a displaced outsider has on the interaction patterns of smaller, more traditional and self-contained communities in the films of *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger*. I will then utilize Edward Soja's concept of Thirdspace to provide a framework from which to analyze the relocation of *film noir* to a mobile setting, positioning *film noir* as a visualization of Thirdspace through its construction of perceived and conceived realities in the film *Gun Crazy*. Expanding on previous *film noir* scholarship, my analysis will show that *noir* fiction is not bound to a conventional urban environment, but that the ambiguous essence of *film noir* can also flourish in non-urban settings. My exploration of *film noir* exists independent

from the confining restrictions of the urban landscape so indicative of previous *noir* studies involving spatial structures, environment, and setting.

## CHAPTER 2: XENOPHOBIA IN SMALL TOWN AMERICA

The aftermath of Pearl Harbor in 1941 transformed Hollywood forever. “A major military center throughout the duration, Los Angeles enforced blackouts, dimouts, and civil defense air-raid drills in the wake of growing fear and anxiety that Japanese forces might attack America’s West Coast” (Biesen 60). This resulted in stunted Hollywood film productions, which eventually led to the translation of American anxieties onto the big screen through stereotypical depictions of racial and ethnic minorities. The Federal Bureau of Investigation required foreign aliens to register for a mass investigation. Many of these registrants were German filmmakers now working in Hollywood after escaping Nazi-occupied European states (Biesen 2005). The xenophobic reactions to foreign entities on American soil were apparent in all forms of media, including Hollywood films.

During the war, *film noirs* reinforced the xenophobia that seemed to overtake the American people. Fortunately, audiences were exposed to new *noir* themes at the end of World War II that confronted their prejudices head on. *Film noirs* released just before and during the war established with their audiences a kind of reception contract showcasing violence on the screen while maintaining a separation that enabled filmgoers to witness these acts from the safety of their theater seat. When the films ended, viewers could return to their comparatively

ordinary lives without the fear or threat of dark forces invading their community. This implied contract gradually lost currency at the end of the war and directors began to challenge their audiences by preying on post-war trauma and xenophobia instead of reinforcing their legitimacy of foreign stereotypes. While the cityscape was still the predominant locale for *film noirs*, a few directors successfully displaced *film noir* from its urban environment and set their stories in small town America. For these films, the non-urban and sometimes rural settings did not lessen the ambiguous nature of *noir* and, instead, allowed for a new plotline to thrive: a stranger strategically invading the communities of honest, working class citizens. Ambiguous relationships tend to run rampant in the big city because of the limited interaction people have with each other, although their streets are more densely populated than those found in the small town. *Noir* directors rely on their audience's expectations of clear, established relationships among small town characters because honesty is the driving force among these types of communities. When a person enters into the boundaries of these small town, the authenticity of the community, both the social spaces contained within it and the physical boundaries of the town, is questioned and confronted with the reality that communities are in fact imagined and constructed by its members rather than impermeable spaces governed by natural order.

While physical, geographical boundaries are certainly a reality, the regulation and protection of such boundaries against intruding outside forces, be it influences from a more metropolitan area or criminal activity perpetrated within, is impossible and unavoidable. *Noir* directors understood this illusion of safety

and visually demonstrated how boundaries are indeed penetrable, especially those *film noirs* set in small towns.

Two *film noirs* released after the end of World War II, Otto Preminger's *Fallen Angel* (1945) and Orson Welles' *The Stranger* (1946), constitute excellent showcases for *noir* directors exposing the xenophobic and fortification tendencies present in post-war U.S. society. These films present, within the narrative and with visual cues, the idea that a community's exposure to and penetration by an outsider, someone that may not even be of the same national origin, creates a sense of chaos. The very notion of boundaries as an actual fortification of space is momentarily suspended and, finally, restored. Albeit order is reinstated in these films' conclusion, the affected spaces are nonetheless transformed with lasting effects. Unlike other *film noirs* set in small towns, like *Suddenly* (1954) or the film *The Killers* (1946) told in flashbacks, *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* both rely on a second character, also an outsider and complementary figure to the primary intruder, to solve the crime that is committed in each town.

### *Fallen Angel*

Director Otto Preminger's opening sequence and title credits promptly establish a sense of anxiety among his audience. The camera uses a point of view shot, simulating the perspective of a driver negotiating the perilous twists of a winding highway at night. Eventually, it becomes apparent that the driver is operating a bus and soon thereafter the sequence concludes with a stop in the city identified as Walton. The introduction of someone descending from a bus

and the camera's focus on a sign identifying the location as Walton alert the viewer that this film, albeit a *noir* feature, is not set in a big city and highlights the fact that the film's primary character is not a resident, but rather a visitor. This character, also the main protagonist of the story, Eric Stanton, is hence coded as mysterious from the start and his initial actions, recorded at what is labeled as a bar but resembles and functions more in the way of a diner, depict him as a morally questionable individual. If *Fallen Angel's* "diner" functioned like the seedier bars found in many urbanely set *noirs*, it would represent the central location for characters who are morally and ethically ambiguous to interact. However, the diner in *Fallen Angel* allows for a mix of people to convene and appears to be a socially acceptable business in the town. This is confirmed by the lighting used when Eric first walks through the door. *Film noir* relies heavily on sharp lighting contrasts, which are employed heavily when a character walks from a darkened exterior into an equally darkened interior that would otherwise be lit.<sup>1</sup> Preminger chose to present the interior of the diner as a bright space with an atmosphere that emphasizes a feeling of wholesomeness and safety. Instead of relying on lighting techniques to demonstrate contrasting elements within the scene, Eric's rude demeanor is contrasted with the warm interior of the diner. He does, however, offer a cigarette to Judd who replies with, "No thanks. Never touched them." This quick exchange demonstrates Judd's perceived superiority, which turns out to be an ironic twist when he is discovered later to be the killer.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lighting like this occurs most often in *film noirs* like the *Maltese Falcon* or *Double Indemnity* in which scenes take place in an office darkly streaked with Venetian blinds when a light or lamp could easily be turned on to brighten the room.

The lighting, however, does appear differently when the *femme fatale*, Stella, makes her entrance. Shadows abound and a long shot is used to capture Stella's entire body in the center of the frame. The camera, as well as the lighting, frame her in much the same way that classic *femme fatales* have traditionally been introduced in order to emphasize sex appeal and their mysterious abilities to seduce men.

Preminger strategically conceals Judd's identity and status in the town until we eventually learn that he too is a kind of stranger to Walton since he left the police force in New York to nurture his "health." Judd's status as an ex-cop appears to have made it easier for him to gain acceptance as a welcomed citizen of Walton. Judd's character can be looked at in one of two ways: he is either an outside perpetrator or a citizen of Walton who commits murder. In the minds of the townspeople, he is initially considered a citizen when he helps police with the investigation of Stella's murder but his position shifts to outsider when they discover his guilt. Eric's status in the community undergoes the exact opposite transformation. He is viewed as an outsider, and potential killer initially, but this perception changes when he eventually brings Judd to justice. The last lines of dialogue in the film are an exchange between Eric and his wife, June. After Judd's arrest, June asks Eric where he wants to go. He responds simply with "Home." Considering what the viewer has learned about Eric's past from the film's narrative, "home" is an ambiguous location. However, the film's narrative suggests that he intends on staying in Walton with June, because he was finally able to face a situation from which he would normally have run away.



Eric Stanton first enters the safe confines of Walton as a brash personality who lies to a hotel clerk his first night, swindles Walton's citizens with the help of a traveling fortuneteller, and eventually weds one of the town's wealthiest sisters only to use her money to run away with Stella. Although Eric is an extremely domineering and scheming character, his clash with the community, and his eventual acceptance by its citizens, is the driving force at work in forcing Walton to face the realities of outside forces that have and will continue to cross Walton's city limits. Eric provides a glimpse into the world outside of Walton and his work with helping others—for his own benefit of course—touches the lives of all those with whom he comes into contact. It would not be too far of a stretch to compare Eric to a kind of savior, but, in true *noir* fashion, this messiah has a sketchy past. While Eric's initial love interest is Stella, he grows to trust June and takes the opportunity to force June to experience new things in life, to reach beyond her small town roots and expand her expectations on life. He taunts her by saying things like, "You're afraid to step out of your tower" and "One shouldn't set a limit on what one can do." He continually insists that June's sister, Clara, is the reason June has been so oppressed all of her life. Eric's suggestions are certainly on point, especially in light of June's sister Clara's controlling nature, but nevertheless it is more than unconventional to allow a female *noir* character (other than the *femme fatale*) to side with a man that is using marriage as a vehicle to obtain money for unethical reasons. This kind of resolution causes confusion for the audience as to which character will provide a reliable anchor for identification.

The small town of Walton is much more than it appears. Its citizens continually profess that Walton is filled with “honest people” who do not want to get mixed up in anything, but at the same time the town functions as a kind of vacuum. It is no secret that Stella is looking for a way out of Walton, but the film suggests that others do not share her need for something other than what Walton can offer her in the community. We are introduced to Stella as she is forced back into Walton. It is discovered that this was not her first attempt at escaping the small town life only to be pulled back by forces beyond her control. Like Eric, Stella is unkind to anyone unless she benefits from him or her. She makes her first appearance after her return from a relationship gone sour and a promise for a new life that never delivered. Interestingly, although Stella fits the definition of a *femme fatale* in look and demeanor, she is perhaps the most honest individual in the film. She keeps her end of the bargain with Eric and is never too shy to say how she feels. Predictably, her behavior with men coded as “immoral” does not go unpunished. It is not enough to be an honest citizen of Walton; one has to commit fully to membership in that community. Like the urban cities in so many *film noirs*, Walton takes on the significance of a character in the narrative and hence wields a considerable amount of control over its citizens. Even the cunning actions of Eric cannot subvert the town’s control; Stella fails in her attempts to escape and June fails to give in to her urge to depart and chase her dreams.

The film transcends Walton’s small town boundaries and ventures into the densely populated city of San Francisco on two separate occasions. Here the viewer discovers that Walton does indeed have its limitations as suggested by

Eric. Eric's first step in gaining access to June and Clara's money involves marrying June. As long as June remained in Walton, there was no chance of her getting married quickly. San Francisco is also where the sisters keep their money. This fact certainly differentiates between the socioeconomic statuses of the sisters compared to others in Walton. Walton, too, has its limitations with its inability to house large sums of money. It is also unable to rely on its citizens to solve Stella's murder mystery. Instead, the Walton police hire Mr. Judd, an out-of-towner, as lead investigator and give him a tremendous amount of power, especially considering his status as outsider.

Stella's murder initiates a series of events leading to the crime's resolution as well as Eric's acceptance into the community. It can be safely assumed that a crime such as this has never occurred in the town of Walton. Feelings of xenophobia start to take root in Walton's population after Stella's death and Preminger introduces the town's xenophobic tendencies after contrasting the criminal events with a short trip into the big city reminding his audience of the unusual occurrences taking place in Walton that would not appear as strange in the urban setting we quickly maneuvered through. The audience knows that Eric is innocent but there are few cues as to who else could be a potential suspect. Stella's employer, Pop, a nice, naïve inhabitant of Walton serves as one possibility, but his potential as perpetrator is not quite credible. The discovery that Judd is in fact the killer subverts conventional notions concerning law enforcers and audience expectations of geographical locations. As is the case in most *film noirs*, corrupt lawmen belong in urban environments, not in small

towns. Additionally, Judd is in town for reasons that bring into question his character altogether, whereas Eric has simply drifted into town. Judd's unethical questioning techniques in his prior job "in the city" affirm his outsider status, as a character apart from the ostensibly honest citizens of Walton. This juxtaposition allows for a sense of order to be restored in the small town but it also causes the townspeople to become uneasy about other members of their community, especially considering their acceptance of Eric into the town's social sphere, a space into which they had previously admitted Judd.

*Fallen Angel* concludes with a sense of justice being served. The crime is solved, the killer is discovered, and the hero of our story has been absolved of all his previous transgressions and given a place to call home. However, Walton is changed forever. Preminger follows the Hollywood expectation of a happy ending but only provides such an ending for the events we have just witnessed. Considering that much of *film noir's* narrative lies beneath the surface of standard storytelling techniques, it is impossible to believe that the citizens of Walton will continue on with their daily lives as if nothing happened. Their sense of safety within the confines of their community's space is permanently altered. The same transformation of a safe space occurs in the town of Orson Welles' *The Stranger*.

## *The Stranger*

Like *Fallen Angel*, *The Stranger* elicits ominous audience anticipations through its title sequence involving a clock tower. The very first images immediately confront the viewer with two statues that are part of a clock: one angelic and the other demonic. This heavy-handed symbolic imagery continues throughout the film. The opening sequence is followed by a scene depicting a public meeting held in the “Allied War Crimes Commission” department which serves to inform viewers immediately of the reasons for Mr. Wilson’s visit to the small Connecticut town of Harper as well as Konrad Meinike’s journey to the United States. It is revealed that Meinike is purposefully allowed to escape from prison (but we are not provided with the location of this prison or his reason for being there in the first place). Wilson proclaims full responsibility for this “risky” tactical move in the presence of several international representatives of the Commission (the only discernable accent heard is French). Wilson represents the United States and demonstrates strong leadership tactics but with a hint of reckless abandon. *The Stranger’s noir* protagonist, in this case Wilson, is obviously willing to take chances but, at the same time, maintains respectability. His character channels the private detectives of early *noirs* who are capable of moving easily between spaces of structured law and criminal activity. But Wilson is much more than those private detectives trailing a cheating lover or some two-bit criminal. He is a government employee using his position to stretch the law while international governing bodies approve of his ethical transgressions in judicial matters. For the audience, Wilson reaffirms expectations of American

leadership: take charge, use force, and get the job done. It is no surprise that a character like Wilson would appear favorable to a U.S. audience in the wake of American success in WWII only one year previously. For this reason, while Meinike and Wilson eventually descend upon Harper as strangers, Mr. Wilson is already a trusted character and stable source of identification for viewers. Welles strategically parallels Meinike and Wilson's journey to Harper to highlight a sharp contrast between not only their conflicting personalities but also their differing social manners in public spaces. Meinike's face is sullen and his gestures are controlled and rigid. Wilson, on the other hand, is confident and sociable when encountering new people and is presented as a straightforward type of person. The first encounter with Wilson ends with him declaring, "This obscenity must be destroyed! Do you hear me? Destroyed!" to the representatives of the "Allied War Crimes Commission." What the obscenity actually is or why it is labeled as such means little to the audience in reference to the moral character of Wilson. This makes his entrance into the space of small town America that much more complex. It is safe to assume that an audience would sympathize and relate to Wilson even if Welles had provided more information on Meinike's character, and why specifically Wilson and the Commission needed to be involved, because of the successful U.S. involvement in the war. Wilson's entrance into Harper is accepted as just and right, although the audience is provided with no information about the obscenity Wilson speaks of.

The introduction of Meinike alludes to several potential threats to U.S. national security. First, a ship is seen traveling at night, immediately associating

Meinike with immigration. Welles chooses to edit this sequence by using techniques most associated with a montage. However, instead of folding time and space to further the story, Welles does the exact opposite and leaves his audience not understanding when, where, or how the events are occurring. Welles quickly resolves these ambiguous images when it is made clear that the man and woman trailing the foreigner are working with Wilson and hence carrying out a legitimate assignment. In juxtaposition to this, Welles relies on classic *noir* techniques, such as sharp lighting contrasts, close ups shot in an unbalanced frame composition, and unnatural camera angles, to establish Meinike's illegal entrance into the United States through the town of Harper, Connecticut. Meinike's thick accent is closely associated with Nazi Germany when he demands an answer as to the whereabouts of Franz Kindler from the photographer setting him up with a new and forged passport. He commands the photographer to relinquish the information in a manner reminiscent of a military setting. With World War II looming large in recent history, this scene leads viewers to assume that Meinike is working under orders of the Nazi party. However, it is never made clear as to what his mission is exactly, considering the war is over and we are unaware of the nature of this post-War Nazi political entity.

Meinike and Wilson have their first encounter in a bus as it is arriving in the town of Harper. Wilson accidentally drops his pipe and Meinike, perhaps fearing that his accent will be heard, says nothing. While Meinike's accent may have sounded suspicious, his decision to stay silent and hurry off the bus

appears equally odd. This scene establishes that two different strangers have penetrated the town of Harper while concealing the fact that neither of them is “The Stranger” from the title. Wilson’s immediate trailing of Meinike, again, mimics the actions of classic *noir* detectives. The “Allied War Crimes Commission” is obviously intent on remaining invisible to the people of Harper, in other words, to keep the town in a state of ignorant bliss. Hence, it is only clear to the viewer that the town’s space transforms to give way to outside criminal forces, while the community remains unaware. As the events unfold, especially upon the discovery of Meinike’s dead body, Harper’s community is harshly confronted with criminal activity stemming from a foreign enemy and the remainder of a war that had seemingly been successfully concluded. Instead, elements of war have crept into the boundaries of Harper and directly confront the citizens of the small town. Welles reminds the viewer that the criminal activities normally associated with the big city, in this case murder, have a tremendously more dramatic effect when placed in a small community, due to the close social networks prevalent in such a space. The news travels fast within Harper and, unlike the newsreels during WWII, information is not clear to everyone and few authorities are present to establish order or initiate a formal investigation.



### *Signs and the Social Structure of Harper*

The structure of Harper, both socially and geographically, is presented in various ways throughout the film. Welles continuously reminds the viewer of the social structure of Harper through the use of signs. Throughout the film, various notices, on walls, notes, and markers, communicate information vital to the narrative or warnings to the narrative's characters. The first sign shown in a close up reads: "HARPER SCHOOL FOR BOYS ESTABLISHED 1827" in a scene where Wilson is trailing Meinike. The presentation of an educational institution, especially one that is strictly for boys, suggests that Harper is not only a picturesque town in New England, but also a town that uses middle-class educational institutions to anchor its respectability and social structure. Harper's affluent and educated inhabitants, gradually introduced into the narrative, reaffirm this impression of a solidly bourgeois community. The school sign, although predominately informational, also functions as an ominous warning because it evokes the stereotype of an all-boys school governed by discipline and order. Wilson and Meinike do not fit into this tightly controlled space. Wilson glances at the sign as he runs by ignoring its implications and possible consequences. Wilson finds himself chasing Meinike into a gymnasium where he is greeted by more signs purposefully added to the mise-en-scène. As Meinike runs alongside a wall a sign announces: "KEEP THIS SPACE CLEAR, FIRE EQUIPMENT." Meinike grabs for an axe on the wall but has no luck with prying it from its base. He continues to elude Wilson and finally finds an opportunity to injure Wilson by swinging a gymnastics ring at his head. Once Wilson is unconscious, Meinike

sneaks out of a door signaling: “ANYONE USING APPARATUS IN THIS ROOM DOES SO AT THEIR OWN RISK.” The various signs shown in this sequence warn the trespassers of consequences for invading a space in which one does not belong and is not welcomed. When the characters disregard these warnings, they are punished for their transgressions. Wilson is knocked unconscious and Meinike has now been outed as a fugitive.<sup>i</sup>

Welles continually evokes stereotypes of Nazi Germany’s regimented Prussian military structure and behavior of its members in *The Stranger’s* narrative and imagery. Rankin’s attitude toward the humanity, as described during the infamous dinner scene, emphasizes his belief in a dominant race, one that will eventually rise up and take legitimate control. Wilson is the only person that suspects Rankin and his suspicions are confirmed during Rankin’s discussion at dinner. Until Rankin is able to execute his grand scheme of a new Nazi uprising he understands that he must continue to act as an upstanding citizen of the community. As the film progresses, so does Rankin’s frustration with remaining quiet. Welles effectively reveals Rankin’s inner turmoil when the antagonist devises a devious plan to kill Mary. Rankin strategically arranges an elaborate scenario that hinges on a series of events executed in perfect timing. Part of his plan involves remaining in the drugstore and playing checkers with the owner after he calls Mary to meet him at the tower. When Rankin approaches the phone in the drugstore a sign declares: “GENTLEMEN, DO NOT DEFACE WALLS! USE PAD.” He obeys the instructions, but proceeds to draw a swastika

---

<sup>i</sup> Welles uses a similar technique in *Citizen Kane*. He allows the camera in a tracking shot during the opening sequence to defy the sign of “KEEP OUT” posted at the entrance of the Kane estate.

on the pad. He is simultaneously following instructions and defacing public space, much the same way the Nazis used excuses of “only following orders” during the war while committing horrendous acts of violence. Rankin recognizes that his drawing of a swastika could be construed as an act of vandalism, but he also believes that he is able to do so “legally” since he follows the instructions and uses the pad. This scene is perhaps the most important and telling depiction of the nature of “The Stranger.” Rankin believes that his actions, including the murder of Meinike and Mary, are means justified by the end result. The same could be said for Wilson’s actions. However, an audience facing post-War realities, especially in a small town not directly affected by regimented blackouts such as those occurring in larger coastal cities like Los Angeles, reconciles their fears and anxieties through their trust in the U.S. citizen’s transgressions because of their similar national identity and perceived value system.

### *Formalism and Realism in Film Noir*

The characters depicted as living in the small towns of Walton and Harper nurture close ties to their community. These social bonds and expectations of social order, depicted both visually and inscribed in the narrative, parallel the political climate of contemporary audiences and national convictions in post-WWII America, as well as a recognition of the atrocities that had occurred during the war, but were perpetrated by a foreign nation. Nationalism bears heavily on the reception of films, especially when it involves an audience that has lived through a recent war. As mentioned in chapter one, film scholar Paul Schrader

categorized films following the war as part of the Postwar Realism period (1972). Most films produced by and released in Hollywood during this period used both formalist and realist techniques to visually relate their story; it is unusual to find films that rely heavily on one style at the expense of the other. When filmmakers do emphasize one style they, however, do so with a specific outcome in mind. For Preminger and Welles, placing their characters in the streets with ordinary people suggests that they sought to bring out in their audiences fear and insecurity. Most *noir* films rely on formalist film methods, like varied editing techniques and unrealistic lighting and framing, to bring out specific emotional responses among audiences. Preminger and Welles chose to strategically incorporate formalist film techniques into their films while simultaneously infusing each with scenes employing realist film techniques, predominantly found in social settings where the characters are interacting with one another. The scenes depicting realist qualities are the moments when the audience relates most to the characters and the circumstances the characters find themselves involved in.

During the war, Schrader asserts that *film noir* could be described as having an affinity with melodramas that “lacked the distinctly noir bite the end of war would bring. As soon as the War was over, however, American films became markedly more sardonic—and there was a boom in the crime film” (54). Of course, there are always exceptions to these observations as even Schrader has pointed out himself. However, Schrader’s suggested phases of *film noir* as frameworks can serve as an interpretive model for *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* to be analyzed as artifacts germane to a pivotal time in American

history. These films represent cultural artifacts caught between what Schrader defines as “postwar disillusionment” and “postwar realism.” Each film retains some of the melodramatic qualities of previous *noirs* but infuse this idealistic setting with a harsh realism of post-War society.

Scholars who have provided a definition of *film noir* have made mention of some form of style or technique inherent in the genre. Style and technique are two of the building blocks involved in formalist filmmaking. One of the most famous examples of formalist filmmaking is Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) in which a mixture of sharp editing, unnatural camera angles, and sharp contrasts between light and shadow heighten the emotions from the audience through the intensity of the various dramatic scenes. I do not agree with Schrader that *film noirs* released after WWII removed all formalist qualities in order to focus on realist styles of storytelling. Instead, directors of *film noir* tried to replace melodramatic tendencies with realistic portrayals of everyday life, easily recognizable to the average American citizen. It did not quite work as a sole method of filmmaking since formalism is an integral part of *noir* storytelling through film. However, the trend toward realism that Schrader suggests is part of the setting found in both *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* in which traditional depictions of everyday American lives are captured mainly through a character’s interaction with their environment using longer takes and less editing.

Realist qualities of *film noirs* are more apparent when set in a small town because of audience expectations and convictions of what constitutes a small town and, more importantly, how the small town is distinguished from its big city

counterpart. *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* are obvious examples of this, but *The Killers* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* also lean toward realist tendencies as their stories are set away from the densely populated metropolitan area. However, the concept of a small town's social structure is highly idealized in *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger*. Small towns are generally depicted as having a single main street dissecting the town and the population consisting of morally upright citizens who have lived there all of their lives. *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* do not stray from these stereotypes but add a foreign element into these idealized landscapes in order to shatter the myth of any community's security and, instead, highlight that these communities are imagined ideals, both socially and geographically, and not realistic spaces. The representation of community or space in *The Stranger* and *Fallen Angel* is fluid and constantly in flux; it evolves rather than remaining fixed and static and hence undermines the confidence of its citizens, and by extension, the audience.

#### *Film Noir and Imagined Communities*

Benedict Anderson's work on concepts of national identity and imagined communities provides insight into the narratives and visual styles inherent in *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger*. As to not confuse setting as part of style it is important to note that directors of *film noir* used production design, lightening, and costuming as a way to create the setting. It is through art direction and cinematography that filmmakers are able to display representations of the setting, which functions as an element of the narrative. In *Fallen Angel*, the

setting of the story outside of a major cityscape emphasizes the importance of community. In *The Stranger*, the setting also highlights aspects of communal living but it goes further and casts the community eventually as a stand-in for a national entity, as an extension of WWII configurations of Germany as enemy and defeated nation and the U.S. as liberator and victor. However, in each film, the communities at the narrative's conclusion are transformed forever. Although each solves the mystery behind the criminal acts, their perceived sense of security is forever altered. For Anderson, communities as socially and geographically static entities are an impossibility. He defines this impossibility as "imagined communities" because the spatial boundaries of communities may be physically determined but do not necessarily match or organize the social structure or regulation of its members. Instead, the cultural acceptance and promotion of a perceived identity by each individual of a community lead to processes linking territory and space to a sense of belonging (1991). In other words, the individual need to belong to a larger group initiates the formation of communities and creates a false sense of security within a space, because it is impossible to control the actions of others, whether they are part of the community or an outsider.

Preminger and Welles initially present their small towns as what Anderson would call a "real community" where everyone in the community knows each other directly. Anderson uses the term "real community" only as a way to discuss "imagined communities." Anderson believes that belonging to a "real" community is an impossibility, especially in the U.S., because even the smallest town, like

Walton or Harper, contains members of the community who do not have direct contact or direct knowledge of every individual of the town. Both Preminger and Welles undermine the stereotype that small towns are so tightly connected that any crime would have to be done by an outsider, since only “good” people would be allowed to be part of such a community. However, the criminals of *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* are actually outsiders that are part of the community and have become accepted by its members. In the situations depicted in the films, the “real” community dissolves and its citizens are confronted with the reality that their idealistic, traditional space—their home—can be altered, manipulated, and possibly destroyed.

The purposeful change of setting in *The Stranger* and *Fallen Angel* from a classic *noir* metropolis into the confines of a small town determines the changes in patterns of social interaction for characters in these *noir* films. Most relationships in classic *film noir* are based on deception and determined by desires for power and control, the sensibility of *film noir* itself changes when only one morally ambiguous character is inserted into a tight-knit, traditional community full of seemingly wholesome people. The morally ambiguous character is not an unusual element found in an urban setting, but that same individual appears disruptive in a non-urban context. The changes of setting and consequent altered patterns of interaction in these *film noir* features become essential to the narrative. The disruption of a smaller community’s ordinary way of life shapes the way in which its inhabitants view their perceived and conceived space, an outlook which usually confirms their safety from the outside world but



is now no longer intact. While filmmakers of *noir* cinema were expected to conform to Hollywood conventions of supplying narratives with “happy endings,” Welles and Preminger submit to this practice but not without supplying a unique version of it; the characters in these directors’ films have undergone a transformation as a reaction to experiencing an outside force threatening their idealized community. The narrative conclusions of *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* both provide closure and a sense of justice, in the tradition of a Hollywood ending, but the reality that morally questionable activities of the *noir* tradition were not confined to big-city America leaves the audience wondering if the same could happen to them.

In *The Stranger*, Rankin’s new wife, Mary, provides some of the best insight into the idea of an imagined community. She says at one point, “In Harper, there is nothing to be afraid of.” She makes this statement to reassure herself of her safety in her community and, at the same time, sets the mind of viewers at ease. Later, the truth of her statement is undermined by the film’s narrative when the audience witnesses criminal behavior taking root in a small town like Harper, and seeds of Nazi ideology being planted into U.S. soil. Welles confronts an American audience with the idea that war, not just localized crime, is indeed an everyday reality and threat and may occur anywhere on the continent and not just in a far off place like Pearl Harbor.

## CHAPTER 3: THE VISUALIZATION OF THIRDSPACE

Edward Soja's work in the evolution of geographical and social spaces is often described as post-modern, in the sense that his analysis refutes notions of self-contained and or monolithic structures with a singular function. Soja expands on the idea of Henri Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality, which include Spatial Practice (perceived), Representations of Space (conceived), and Representational Space (lived) (1991). Soja furthers Lefebvre's notions of confined space and describes what he calls "Thirdspace" as a new "awareness" to the spatial crisis of the 1960s, where the growth of industrialized activities forced urban expansion of major cities worldwide. No longer were people able to neatly distinguish between the duality of material space (i.e. real, concrete space) and socially constructed notions of the concept of space (i.e. imagined, cognitive interpretations of space). Soja recognizes that perceived and conceived spaces are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, influence the formation of the other (1996).

It has been noted by several film scholars that filmmakers of *film noir* worked in a heavily censored industry and were forced to discover new methods of storytelling to convey hidden meaning in their work, especially if their film was based on a popular novel not subjected to tight scrutiny for content. For this reason, the concept of Thirdspace is visually realized in *film noir*, since it allows

audiences not only to witness the action occurring within the frame (perceived space or Firstspace), but also the imagined world hidden from view (conceived space or Secondspace). The conceived space in *film noir* is imagined not only through visual clues presented throughout, but also relies heavily on the audience's understanding and organization of social norms. For this reason, *film noir* that occurs in a mobile setting allows for a careful examination of traditional expectations held for those characters depicted as drifters with no permanent space to call home. When these social norms are confronted with the possibility that drifters, especially drifters whose history is available to the audience within the filmic narrative, e.g. Bart in *Gun Crazy*, the social boundaries begin to change and perceived and conceived ideas of mobile space begin to merge together and complicate the story, since many times the viewer's assumptions do not match the action and their expectations are not fulfilled.

In *Gun Crazy*, the perceived mobile space that Bart and Laurie occupy functions differently from other *film noirs* situated mainly on the open road, such as the classic *Detour* and *The Hitchhiker*. The open road in *noir* cinema generally evokes feelings of desperation, isolation, and claustrophobia, even though the space appears limitless compared to the tight confines of urban offices or sleazy hotels and bars. In one way, *Gun Crazy* could be described as a classical American road movie in that the couple's departure is a conscious decision. However, as the film progresses, we witness a transition from the couple's life on the road as a form of rebellion defying traditional American ideologies to an involuntary displacement more closely resembling the German road movies of

the 1970s in which the characters' road trip becomes an existential journey of self-discovery (Mittman 2003). Instead of the open road visually portraying a sense of isolation for Bart and Laurie, the gun-wielding duo view the open road as their home and conceive a space quite different from other *film noirs* set in the same type of mobile space. However, the constructed spatial awareness, or Thirdspace, in *Gun Crazy* is only maintained through the audience's knowledge of Bart's character, as presented at the beginning of the film, and how his history interacts with Laurie's mysterious past. Laurie's past is a fragmented array of time spent in England, criminal activity in Missouri, and a hint of some childhood memories spent on the California coast. Laurie is first introduced as coming from England when working her magic with a gun at the carnival. However, the only clue perhaps verifying this fact is found in the origins of her gun, not her accent. The fact that she killed someone in St. Louis, MO is initially hinted at and not confirmed until she kills again.

The Thirdspace constructed in *Gun Crazy* allows Bart and Laurie the ability to maneuver through various social spaces while maintaining autonomy and control in a space otherwise described as a kind of limbo, with which the open road is notoriously associated. Thirdspace also allows for the formation of their conflicted identities through their relationship as both husband and wife and co-criminals. All aspects of their lives, including their morally ambiguous modes of behavior, are never mutually exclusive of each other and, instead, exist concurrently. As Soja explains:

“*Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history” (56-57).

Soja presents his concept of Thirdspace by describing the dichotomies inherent in perceived and conceived spaces. However, he labels these spaces as “moments of social space” and discusses how these seemingly opposing forces between perceived and conceived realities fully develop in lived space (1996). In *Gun Crazy*, the formation of Bart and Laurie’s spatial reality is not fully realized until the end of the film when their constructed safety zone, only achieved and maintained when the two are together, is confronted and eventually penetrated by the police. The final chase sequence in the film demonstrates a slow destruction of Bart and Laurie’s lived space and eventual obliteration of Thirdspace when Bart kills Laurie.

Throughout *Gun Crazy*, the perceived space, or Firstspace, relies heavily on the performance of Bart and Laurie. Their performance includes their initial meeting, the way they interact with each other as two drifters, and their eventual venture into a life of crime. We see how they perform their relationship as husband and wife while never separating their intimacy from their criminal acts. Instead, their criminal behavior strengthens their commitment and reliance on one another. In *film noir*, Firstspace is presented as the surface level of the narrative in which an audience witnesses actions taking place on the screen,

therefore, Firstspace in film is maintained by the camera's framing. Soja describes Firstspace as the material world constructed with limits (1996), much the same way that moving pictures are physically created within a set framework.

The interpretation of Secondspace dominates the field of *film noir* studies through its focus on the decoding of signs and the deciphering of language to identify concealed meaning. In *film noir*, Secondspace is the conceptualized space hidden from view that relies on the mental capacities of the audience to construct meaning through what the camera presents within the frame (Firstspace), dialogue, and visual cues, like lighting and editing techniques that conceal or distort the setting within a frame. *Gun Crazy* complicates ideas derived from Secondspace because it manipulates preconceived notions of how a person who has no permanent residence—a drifter—is supposed to act by presenting Bart as a misunderstood good natured young man who would never hurt anyone. He has no ambiguous past like Al Roberts in *Detour*. Instead, Bart is a caring individual who only commits crimes because he wants to make Laurie happy. Laurie, on the other hand, functions as a *femme fatale* with a mysterious past. However, unlike the stereotypical *femme fatale*, Laurie demonstrates that she has true feelings for Bart, however sadomasochistic in nature they might be.

Secondspace is particularly apparent in *Gun Crazy* after Bart and Laurie are on the run from their final job where Laurie leaves two people dead. In this scene, Bart and Laurie arrive at their getaway car with what they view as few complications. They escaped as planned with the money and arrive at their second getaway car without being followed. Throughout the film Laurie has

always maintained a dominant role in their relationship. She manipulates Bart throughout the film and has now convinced him to commit one final robbery. Up until this point, Laurie's ideas and actions suggest that she plans on getting in the second getaway car and going in the opposite direction as Bart, as planned, but without any intention of ever reuniting with him. As Laurie quickly gets in the second car and pulls away her actions reveal for a moment that Bart will never see her again, since she hardly acknowledges Bart as she grabs for her share held in a suitcase. Bart abruptly wants to hold a conversation with her and apologize for what he said to her the night before. He tells her to "be good" and Laurie responds with a simple "sure" as she dashes toward the other vehicle. However, her facial expression changes as she drives in the opposite direction and she turns back to Bart only to turn her car around and flee with Bart in his car, unplanned, to the California coast together. For the first time in the film the couple tries to physically separate but realize they are helpless without the other. The realization that they have created a rare bond, and unique mobile space in which to live, forms a lived space incomprehensible to a typical 1950s audience with conservative ideals.

Bart and Laurie's constructed Thirdspace defies normality. While Laurie is presented as dominant throughout the film, the end sequence with Bart and Laurie making one last attempt at escape into the mountains, and eventually the swamps of Bart's hometown, alters any sense of dominant or subordinate power structures and reveals a fluidity of resistance emanating from the couple. Both Bart and Laurie do their best to protect their unusual conception of home but are

ultimately killed in their struggle to maintain the space they mutually occupy and maintain in the world.

The mobile space fueling *Gun Crazy* allows for a formation of Thirdspace through visual cues and an audience's interpretation of meaning through their own understanding of reality. Employing Soja's concept of Thirdspace to derive meaning from *film noir* narrative is not a strategy that can only be used in *noir* films set in mobile spaces. However, *film noirs* set on the open road allow for careful examination of perceived, conceived, and lived spaces since most focus on the intersection of the material world with the imagined without privileging one over the other. The application of Thirdspace in film studies allows for new scholarly inquiries into the participative relationship films have with their viewers. The concept of Thirdspace allows for the exploration of how setting dictates character development based on the viewer's background knowledge of spaces, even spaces not directly experienced but understood through other means, like the depictions witnessed through media outlets, other films, books, etc. Soja's observations work well with the rich spatial landscapes that many *film noirs* offer, since many times the settings function as a character in *noir* narrative.

#### *Gun Crazy – Film Noir and Mobility*

The beginning titles of *Gun Crazy* are extremely deceiving. An establishing shot of a dark deserted street corner being drenched in rain captures the words on a sign, located on the left side of the frame, "DOBSON'S FEED & GRAIN." The rural store front contrasts with a vertical sign blinking "HOTEL" in



neon light, a sign normally associated with the city. Additionally, the two signs visually oppose each other in the frame with “HOTEL” situated on the right. This introductory sequence, a bewildering set of images, continues, and further complicated matters, with the arrival of a young boy on the scene, turning a corner and approaching the camera in the center of the frame between the two signs. He is not the typical shadowy figure lurking in the streets but a clean-cut boy looking vulnerable with no physical protection from the rain. The camera pans back to reveal a store window and the film cuts to reveal a crazed look on the boy’s face as he shatters the glass to steal a gun on display. His amateurish attempt at theft is hindered as he slips on the pavement, causing his loot to slide in front of a dark figure dressed in a trench coat. As the camera pans up to reveal the face of the mysterious man, the sequence continues to confound as the next scene depicts this staple of a *noir* figure, the detective/investigator, as the town’s sheriff. He is not, however, pressing for a conviction of the perpetrator, but instead testifying in court on behalf of Bart, the hero/antihero of our story. While this filmic introduction is meant to supply foundational knowledge of Bart’s obsession with guns, it also presents several conflicting images, with regard to setting. Bart’s introduction becomes further complicated by a flash-forward of his returning home after being away for several years and visiting a local carnival. We learn that Bart’s teenage years were spent in a reform school followed by the military, where he was legally allowed to hone his skills of shooting a gun. This experience had been the result of his court sentence for his original misdeed. His isolation from a traditional community is what the judge deemed necessary for

Bart's well being, as well as for those in the larger community. Bart's concept of "home" is skewed. For the first part of his life he is a member of a community living with his family. Bart spends the second half of his life in reform school and the military separated from society. We soon discover that Bart's ability to shoot a gun is the only aspect of his world that matters, that is, until he meets Laurie.

Laurie's character in *Gun Crazy* functions quite differently than expected from the typical *noir femme fatale*. Indeed, she emits a certain dangerous air, but her genuine attachment to Bart, and his to her, sets her apart from the conventional *femme fatales* whose motives for criminal behavior are usually selfish in nature. It could be argued that Laurie would not be able to accomplish her crimes alone and needs Bart as her partner. However, the end of the film demonstrates that her need for him is sincere and not just the result or foundation of a criminal relationship. To Laurie, Bart is her ideal mate because he shares her fetish for gunplay. As Frank Krutnik notes, "*Gun Crazy*, originally released as *Deadly is the Female*, is much more extreme than its predecessors, in that the violent sexual passion of the lovers is inherently transgressive" (220). Krutnik's observation demonstrates how the director, Joseph H. Lewis, was able to conceal sexuality while simultaneously complicating the relationship between Bart and Laurie.

The carnival, too, is inherently transgressive. It arrives into town and transforms the atmosphere into a surreal fantasy. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the carnival as a space where transgression is tolerated and even encouraged through its distortion of social order in the form of masquerades and an emphasis

on games (1984). Bart is never associated with any sense of a “home” and his return to the place he grew up is strategically altered to demonstrate Bart’s distorted sense of reality. With the carnival in town, Bart is not given the opportunity to return to a place that resembles any memory of what he once considered home. Bart has no plans for his future, immediate or long-term, so when he is offered a job to work with Laurie in the carnival he immediately accepts. For Bart, his dream of making a living through his love of guns becomes a reality and having a beautiful woman on his side sharing his passion is an added perk. Bart gives no thought to stabilizing his life after years of separation from society. Instead, he continues to live as if he were a drifter, even after his marriage to Laurie. However, Laurie and Bart’s meeting and eventual relationship is not what one would consider romantic. Their courtship begins with a bet—a type of game—and involves their ability to “out shoot” the other in a series of challenging targets as they continuously exchange innuendos with each other. Bakhtin relates games, and the devices normally used to play them, like cards and dice, to time and the future (1984). The potentially fatal game played between Bart and Laurie determines their future life together. When Laurie realizes that Bart’s skills equal hers she immediately latches onto him and their creation of a space set apart from traditional society begins to take shape.

Bart’s work for the carnival reveals the corrupt circumstances involved in traveling through towns and robbing townsfolk out of money. He neither condones nor condemns this practice, which foreshadows his eventual fall into a life of criminal behavior that functions much like the carnival. Bart has had very

limited experience with the world outside of his reform school and military upbringing, and Laurie preys on his naïve mentality to provide for her what she wants more than anything: action. Laurie's verbal need for action signals, to the audience, that she will never settle down with Bart to provide him with a stable home and family-centered life. The carnival owner predicts what the future holds for the pair and calls them "a couple of wild animals" as an insult. However, the carnival owner's label proves to be eerily accurate as evidenced in the depiction of the couple throughout the remainder of the film. Thus begins the couple's savage relationship and fatalistic career as traveling criminals. Like *Gun Crazy's* unconventional setting, Bart and Laurie's criminal relationship is equally as unconventional. Bart's character is presented as sympathetic, while Laurie, a *femme fatale* in every sense, remains a mysterious figure with a hidden past. The blending of two conflicting characterizations adds to the tension of the space Bart and Laurie occupy. It could be argued that the *femme fatale* is usually paired with a man who shares her moral ambiguity, but only until the man decides to opt for what is just in the end. In *Gun Crazy*, Bart is manipulated into a life of crime, although he remains aware of its moral consequences.

*Film noir* has been analyzed and characterized by scholars as a genre that infuses sex subversively into its imagery and narrative. Hollywood had set rules and standards, through the Production Code Administration (PCA), regulating the portrayal of physical contact between an unmarried couple in a bedroom scene. The PCA created what became commonly known as The Hays Code outlining in detail how sex could be dealt with on the screen. Much of the

Code addressed how sex could not be used in any way that defamed the institution of marriage (Naremore 2008). Therefore many *film noir* directors inserted half hazard marriage sequences into the film plot to circumvent these rules and showcase more intimate scenes between the protagonist and his love interest, who was often a *femme fatale*. While the marriage proposal and inferred wedding scene between Bart and Laurie could, at first glance, be categorized as one of these quick fixes aimed at avoiding censorship, upon closer inspection it also functions as a vital part of the story. After Bart and Laurie are fired from their carnival jobs they embrace the road with no other plans than simply being together. Bart casually suggests marriage and Laurie immediately agrees. They make a stop at a small chapel set in the middle of nowhere announcing itself as “The Desert Justice.” The walls of the building are covered in writing advertising the establishment’s offerings: wedding licenses, cocktail bar, café, and motel. The Desert Justice is a conglomeration of spaces that all function in some way to satisfy the needs of potential customers. The establishment emerges abruptly in the frame and the dwelling appears empty. The newlyweds immediately go on their honeymoon and travel to various parts of the country beginning in various national parks, such as Yellowstone, and ending in Las Vegas where they inevitably lose all their money. The montage of their honeymoon mainly involves outdoor settings and open spaces. It is not until they reach Las Vegas that their happiness is stunted. The contrast in settings, between the open road and the city of Las Vegas, suggests that isolation from society allows the couple to live without constraints and worries. It is only when they step outside of their

exclusive world that their lives begin to spiral out of control. They are only happy when they are alone together or when firing a gun, and happiest when they are able to combine their time together with gunplay.

The honeymoon sequence offers viewers a look at Laurie's softer side. Although she desires action, she is truly happy with Bart for this short amount of time. When the money runs out, so does Laurie's carefree attitude. Laurie suggests robbery as a means of survival—something when mentioned in the film appears to have been discussed between the two on a previous occasion—when in actuality she views stealing money as a way to preserve their carefree lifestyle. Bart's reluctance to get involved in a life of crime is trumped by Laurie's need for her man to show her danger and excitement. Laurie wants more out of life than complacency and routine but never knows how to articulate exactly what she expects. All she knows is that she wants an abundance of what she defines as "things" and needs money to get them. Laurie craves the action and relies on their criminal activities to ensure mobility (their first job involves robbing a travel agency). This also underlines her disinterest in laying a solid foundation for their future. Although the couple continuously discusses settling down and leading a normal life, they convey these dreams in a way someone might talk about winning the lottery—it is a pleasant dream, but they know it will never turn into reality.

In one of the most famous sequences of its time involving a single editing take, the director tracks the criminal pair from the backseat of their car as they rob their final bank before planning their next big job. It is within this scene that

the viewer is witness to the action in close proximity to the perpetrators. Bart slowly winds his way through the parking lot until he finds a space close to the bank's entrance. Laurie waits in the car but then feels the need to distract a policeman outside of the bank by exiting the car and chatting about guns. Bart runs out of the bank moments later and is initially stunned to find Laurie not only out of their getaway car but knocking the policeman unconscious. They quickly exit the scene of the crime without anyone on their trail. The viewer, back in the car with Bart and Laurie, experiences how the couple secures their space from the outside world.

Bart begins to face the repercussions of their actions over time. He confesses to Laurie that he thinks about their crimes at night and wakes up questioning his own realities. He does not isolate their crimes in his dreams but, rather, determines that *nothing* in his life were real anymore. Unfortunately for Bart, but fortunate for Laurie, he lacks the vocabulary to explain to Laurie what he means by his statement. Laurie secretly shows concern about Bart's thoughts and is quick to remedy the situation by emphasizing her love for him. Laurie also begins to reflect on their past but in quite a different way. She comes to the realization that all of the money they have stolen has not assisted with their goal of living the good life. Instead, she complains that they are always broke. Laurie convinces Bart to do one final job for which they will take their time and devise a detailed plan. Bart and Laurie's preparations to rob a company's payroll office involves much more than simply walking in, grabbing the loot, and exiting the scene of the crime. They each get jobs at the company as a cover and learn the

layout of the building for their escape. We do not know how much time has elapsed but it is implied that several weeks have passed. Laurie secures a position as a secretary to the payroll officer and Bart works as a deliveryman. At this point, both of them have jobs and have the opportunity to put the past behind them and lead the normal lives they imagined. Instead, Laurie's thirst for adventure and greed for riches seals their fate as the marked bills from their robbery thwart their seemingly flawless getaway. Until this point, all of the small robberies committed by Bart and Laurie have resulted in no punishment for the couple. It cannot be ignored that the first time they break out of their constructed reality of carefree living and succumb to traditional modes of livelihood (e.g. obtaining employment) is the moment they experience a threat to their criminal relationship. The possibility of getting caught, even though they are killed before the police can apprehend them, not only predicts the dissolution of Thirdspace but also affirms its existence and relevance in the narrative.

Bart takes Laurie to the California coast with plans of heading south to Mexico. They settle into a hotel room before Laurie embarks on a shopping spree. Her conspicuous consumption and her desire to have a good time as well as show off her new wares causes Bart to bring the marked bills into circulation, thus setting the couple up for discovery. Their interactions in a public space of commerce and community exchange, much like the setting of Las Vegas, is ultimately their undoing. The happy couple enjoys the rides and games of the Santa Monica Pier and decides to go dancing. Bakhtin's subversive notions of the carnival appear again in the story and function as bookends to the



relationship between Bart and Laurie; they begin their romance and end their criminal relationship both at the carnival. While en route to the dancing hall, Laurie is sequestered by a carnival worker to play his game of guessing Laurie's weight. She politely refuses and Bart moves her along. As they walk away the gamekeeper calls them "tourists." This scene takes no more than seconds to unfold but it is representative of the film as a whole. Bart and Laurie are indeed tourists. They travel continuously exploring a world in which they will never find a place to settle down and be content. Instead, they have created their own space of existence, a liminal space that exists only between the two of them. This space is built upon the specific narrative of this counter-genre *film noir*, i.e. as they rob their way through small town America only to be at the mercy of the big city that discovers their identity. Bart and Laurie's night out is yet another moment where they step out of their safe space and thoughtlessly enter into a society they wish to participate in without recognizing the consequences involved. The viewer begins to witness how the pair are unable to distinguish between the physical world filled with law and order and the Thirdspace they occupy, which allows them to strengthen their romantic bond through their criminal activity as long as they remain mobile and unwilling to settle down. Nonetheless, they are able to escape from the city and hop a train back to Bart's hometown where his sister Ruby still lives. Bart and Laurie are immediately not welcome in his sister's house and stay the night against Ruby's wishes. The following day Bart is confronted by his two childhood friends who demand he turn himself over to the proper authorities. His friends, now a news reporter and police officer, try to reason with

Bart and advise him that *their* town is not a space in which violence is tolerated. The two friends emphasize that Bart is not a part of this town, nor was he ever. In this scene and through this dialogue Bart's friends reaffirm the protagonist's position as outsider in his own town. This new realization for Bart echoes back to Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities and confronts him with the reality that his home exists with Laurie, not within the physical confines of Walton, and distorts his sense of belonging in a space representative of his childhood and containing the only family he ever had prior to his marriage to Laurie. Bart's interaction with his so-called friends solidifies the formation of the Thirdspace in which Bart and Laurie occupy. Bart's return to his sister's house is his final attempt at gaining a firm grasp on the realities of his and Laurie's actions.

By the end, Bart and Laurie struggle to preserve the space they have created between the two of them to the extent that it begins to collapse in on them—literally. A manhunt ignites as the pair drives off into the mountains in a final attempt at an escape. They eventually find themselves in a swamp and do their best to hide and rest at the same time. In the early morning they wake to a dense fog surrounding them along with the police. The criminal couple becomes immobile in the fog that envelops their physical space. They are stranded with no belongings and realize that the only thing left in their lives is the bond they share, the Thirdspace that submits to the inevitability of entropy. They are given the chance to turn themselves in but Laurie, unable to cope with the idea of entrapment, threatens to kill anyone that attempts to come near them. As the

police slowly move in, Laurie makes a final attempt at aiming her gun into the fog. Bart, unable to watch Laurie kill his friends, fires his own gun at her resulting in the police opening fire upon Bart. The film ends with the destruction of not only the criminal couple but also of a mobile space created by two drifters that collided with one another in what appeared to be the perfect match.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In his book, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, Edward Dimendberg observes a change in setting from urban space to other spaces for *film noir* films released after 1947. In spite of this shift, however, Dimendberg maintains that “urban space never disappears entirely from *film noir* [but] toward the end of the 1940s it loses its former monopoly as the dominant spatial mode of the film cycle” (211). While Dimendberg contends that *film noir* can function outside of the cityscape, he suggests that the shift in setting to alternative locations signals the beginning of the end of *noir* cinema, at least in the terms of accepting *noir* as a specific time period, or movement, in film history. Yes, interestingly, if we consider that the Motion Picture Production Code governed film censorship until 1968, then one might beg the question: how does the setting in *film noirs* affect whether or not these films are admitted into a canon characterized most in terms of narrative, style and technique?

It is well known that directors of *film noir* were working under tight restrictions that forced them to incorporate unorthodox storytelling techniques, like extreme camera angles or asymmetrical framing, to bring hard-boiled crime dramas to the screen. For this reason, *film noir* evolved over a few decades as directors pushed creative boundaries and skirted the censors. However, directors straying from traditional filmmaking practices was not the only contributing factor

to the emergence of *noir* cinema. Filmmakers were also heavily influenced by WWII and the ways in which Americans reacted to the war effort, especially those directors, like Otto Preminger and Billy Wilder, who escaped to Hollywood from Nazi occupied nations. At first, *film noir* was viewed as a new form of escapist cinema based upon popular crime fiction. As the films became more aggressive and seductive through their ambiguous displays of sex and violence, so did the audience's reaction to them.

Challenging the traditional urban landscapes of the majority of *noir* films and shifting to other American locales was a natural progression for *film noir*, especially at the end of WWII, a period in which the American people began to harbor paranoid fears of enemy invasion on American soil. No longer were *film noirs* confined to the concrete landscape of the big city. The urban space began mixing with other spaces, like suburban communities (*The Big Heat*), small towns (*The Killers*), the open road (*Detour*), and even out in the desert (*The Hitchhiker*). Until recently, these films were often seen as anomalies within *film noir* studies. *Noir* films set outside of urban spaces not only defy and challenge *noir* traditions, they also represent a facet of *film noir* that is of equal value to the field of *noir* studies, a facet that should be included when these individual films are examined alone, as well as when these films are examined collectively.

The three films I analyzed in this thesis, *Fallen Angel*, *The Stranger*, and *Gun Crazy*, are unique, considering that they do not rely on a larger metropolitan area to fuel the story. Instead, the settings play a major role in the narrative; the space in which the characters occupy becomes a focal point, a part of the story

itself. For this reason, each of my films lends itself to the spatial theories of Benedict Anderson and Edward Soja. As we understand that meaning can be derived from an examination of how people interact within their social and geographical spaces, we can better understand the characters.

I am not suggesting that spatial theory is the only remaining relevant avenue left to study in the multi-layered field of *film noir*, but I recognize that setting is certainly a crucial element to consider when examining *noir* cinema, especially when the *film noir* in question explicitly defies the traditions of urban settings so prevalent in *film noirs* produced before the end of the War. Applying Anderson and Soja's theories allows for new interpretations of *film noir* set outside of the big city because it allows these films to stand alone and be examined independently of their predecessors. Anderson and Soja provide useful tools for exploring the relationship between these three films and the spatial movements found within their narrative.

Anderson's concept of imagined communities provides new insight into the mechanics of idealized small town communities, exploring how these communities cope with interference from the outside world, namely influences from the big city. Morally questionable characters are nothing new in *noir* cinema and, many times, such characters are internally conflicted and continuously searching for answers. It is their own internal conflict that motivates their moral ambiguity. For this reason, *film noir* relies on the audience's interpretation of an alternative perception of reality, produced by letting the audience in on the lies and deceit, to tell its story. *The Stranger* functions as a perfect example of relying

on an audience's sense of reality, as that film presents both sides of Wilson, as well as Rankin, to the audience, letting them in on the secret early in the film so they can witness, first hand, how the community responds to the events that unfold. In *Fallen Angel*, Preminger denies access to secret knowledge and chooses to treat his audience like a member of the Walton community; both are unaware of the murderer's identity and reliant on a corrupt investigation. Although Welles and Preminger choose different techniques to involve their audiences, they both rely on the assumption that their viewers have an awareness of how traditional small town communities and their citizens respond to, and interact with, drifters and strangers. In the end, Welles and Preminger pacify the censors by implying that justice has been served, yet both directors leave behind a tremendous amount of residue in their stories. The remaining ambiguous residue destroys any notion of closure for the characters—or for the audience—and presents more problems than the conclusions solve. Both *Fallen Angel* and *The Stranger* leave the viewer considering the possibility that these communities, after experiencing a trauma, will never function the same again. Instead, the citizens of Walton and Harper have confirmed that the boundaries defining the space in which they reside cannot withstand the potential of dark forces returning to their communities. Therefore, their socially constructed harmonious existence is confronted with the threatening prospect that their reality is an imagined interpretation of space.

If Anderson's theory of imagined communities facilitates better understanding of the role of space in *The Stranger* and *Fallen Angel*, then it is

Soja's expansion of Lefebvre's "trialectics of spatiality" that illuminates the politics of space in *Gun Crazy*. When employing Soja's concept of spatial relationships in film analysis, the viewer is required to interact with the narrative in order to derive meaning and understanding. The inherently ambiguous qualities found in *film noir* complicate such an interaction between audience and text. For this reason, recognizing the differences between Soja's ideas of Firstspace and Secondspace, and how they contribute to the phenomenon defined as Thirdspace, can assist in an audience's understanding of the ways in which *film noir* settings do not function as a passive element, but, rather, in many cases, have the capacity to dominate the scope of interrogation and interpretation. The multitude of settings overlapping throughout *Gun Crazy* provides an excellent canvas for which to analyze the treatment of various spatial forms, both physical and cognitive, and demonstrates how Thirdspace can be visually realized through a creative combination of characterization, setting, lighting, editing, camerawork, and, especially, the viewer's interpretation of images produced onto the screen.

Spatial theories provide new lenses for which to analyze *film noir*. After decades of *film noir* scholarship, I contend that an examination of the social and geographical spaces, which serve as the setting of these films, can contribute something worthwhile to the *film noir* conversation. Through such an examination, my thesis demonstrates that these settings, which intersect with (and in some cases distance themselves from) concrete urban centers, provide new insights into the ways in which Americans interact with *film noir*. More



importantly, my examination of the role of space within *film noir* reveals how this heavily-censored, dark cinema influenced the formation of an American identity after the end of the War.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised ed. London: Verso, 1991.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Biesen, Sheri Chinen. *Blackout: World War II and the Origins of Film Noir*. Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Borde, Raymond & Etienne Chaumeton. "Towards a Definition of *Film Noir*." *Film Noir Reader*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Alain Silver & James Ursini. New York: Limelight Editions, 2005. 17-25.
- Conard, Mark T. *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009.
- Dimendberg, Edward. *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Durgnat, Raymond. "Paint It Black: the Family Tree of the *Film Noir*." *Film Noir Reader*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Alain Silver & James Ursini. New York: Limelight Editions, 2005. 37-51.
- Fallen Angel*. Dir. Otto Preminger. Perf. June Mills, Eric Stanton, and Linda Darnell. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1945. Film.
- Gun Crazy*. Dir. Joseph H. Lewis. Perf. Peggy Cummins and John Dall. United Artists, 1950. Film.
- Higham, Charles & Joel Greenberg. *Hollywood in the Forties*. London: A. Zwemmer Limited, 1968
- Kaplan, E. Ann. *Women in Film Noir*. Rev. ed. London: British Film Institute, 1980.
- Krutnick, Frank. *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*. London: Routledge, 1991.

- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991.
- Mittman, Elizabeth. "Fantasizing Integration and Escape in the Post-Unification Road Movie." *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective*. Ed. Randall Halle & Margaret McCarthy. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University press, 2003. 326-348.
- Naremore, James. *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*. Updated and expanded ed. California: University of California Press, 2008.
- Place, Janey & Lowell Peterson. "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir." *Film Noir Reader*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Alain Silver & James Ursini. New York: Limelight Editions, 2005. 65-75.
- Porfirio, Robert. "No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the *Film Noir*." *Film Noir Reader*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Alain Silver & James Ursini. New York: Limelight Editions, 2005. 77-93.
- Schrader, Paul. "Notes on *Film Noir*." *Film Noir Reader*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Alain Silver & James Ursini. New York: Limelight Editions, 2005. 53-63.
- Shearer, Lloyd. "Crime Certainly Pays on the Screen." *Film Noir Reader 2*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Alain Silver & James Ursini. New York: Limelight Editions, 2003. 9-13.
- Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Stranger, The*. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Edward G. Robinson, Loretta Young, and Orson Welles. International Pictures, 1946. Film.