Narrative Uses of the Topoi of the Western in Post-9/11 American Television Commercials

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Table of Contents

Introduction: “Pioneers, Outlaws, Indians, and Gas:” The Myth of the Western in Television Ads Since 9/11 ................................................................. 4

Chapter 1: The War on Terror as Frontier Warfare: Figurations of the Old West in Post-9/11 (Para)military Recruitment Commercials ......................... 33
  1.1. “They're There, Now and Fifty Years From Now”: The Myth of the Cavalry in Post-9/11 USAF Recruitment Ads .................................................. 43
  1.2. Defenders, Avengers: Shades of the Alamo in Post-9/11 Border Patrol Recruitment Videos................................................................. 66

Chapter 2: Liminal Mediation in Times of Crisis: The Presidential Campaigns of George W. Bush and Mitt Romney....................................................... 93
  2.1. “She Must Be Scared – and So Do You”: The Specter of Ethan Edwards and the 2004 George W. Bush Presidential Ads...................................... 99
  2.2. “A Good Man With(out) a Gun”: Mitt Romney’s Presidential Bid and the Legacy of Shane................................................................. 130

Chapter 3: Automobiles in the Garden: Cowboys, Homesteaders, and the Pastoral Tendency in Contemporary Car Advertising.............................. 159
  3.1. “Forget There’s People and Things That Ain’t So Simple as This”: Dodge Ram and the Cult of the Cowboy................................................... 166
  3.2. Towards a Techno-Pastoral: Dodge Ram and the Cult of the Homesteader................................................................. 194

Chapter 4: Consumable Others: Simulations of Ethnicity in Food Industry Advertising in Post-recession America.............................................. 214
4.1. Consumable Others: Simulations of Ethnicity in Food Advertising in Post-recession America................................................................. 221

4.2. “Down Here in Old Mexico”: Commodifications of the Carnivalesque in Tequila Ad Campaigns .......................................................... 245

Conclusion: Come to Where the Flavor Was: The Myth of the Western in the New Gilded Age................................................................. 267

Works Cited ..................................................................................... 273

Primary Sources ............................................................................. 273

Secondary Sources ........................................................................ 281

Other Sources ................................................................................ 305
Introduction: “Pioneers, Outlaws, Indians, and Gas”: The Myth of the Western in Television Ads Since 9/11

Set in rural Wyoming in 1999, Annie Proulx’s “What Kind of Furniture Would Jesus Pick?” is a story of an aging rancher whose life has been a string of professional and personal failures. Ineffective as a businessman and equally unsuccessful as a husband and father, Gilbert Wolfscale leads a life of an old bachelor, attending to his cattle and caring for his ailing mother, whose death—along with the prolonged drought that stymies his business operations—renders him a recluse amidst the seasonally inhabited, gentrified landscape. In keeping with the fatalist air which pervades Proulx’s short story, solitude and lack of rain only spell more trouble for the protagonist.

As usual in the ranch world, things went from bad to worse. The drought settled deeper, like a lamprey eel sucking at the region’s vitals. He had half-seen the scores of trucks emblazoned CPC speeding along the dusty road for the last year, and knew that they were drilling for coal bed methane on BLM land adjacent to his ranch. They pumped the saline wastewater laden with mineral toxins into huge containment pits. The water was no good, he knew that, and it seemed a terrible irony that in such arid country water could be worthless. He had always voted Republican and supported energy development as the best way to make jobs in the rural hinterlands. But when the poison wastewater seeped from the containment pits into the ground water, into Bull Jump Creek, into his alfalfa irrigation ditches, even into the household well water, he saw it was killing the ranch. (Bad Dirt 80)

As can be inferred from the above excerpt, Gilbert Wolfscale is a curious paradox, not unlike other characters in Proulx’s short story. Facing a potential economic disaster, he puts his political preferences aside and joins an unusual
alliance of ranchers and environmentalists to fight the drilling company. Their resistance seems futile, as the law sides with the corporation, and the ongoing fracking poisons the soil and spoils the water in his wells, depriving Wolfscale of his (already meager) source of income. And yet, although “everything told him that the day of the rancher was fading” (69), this third-generation Wyoming cattleman refuses to concede to unbridled modernity that encroaches on his land, and obstinately continues to scrape along, even if it seems against his own better judgment. Wolfscale knows “the old world was gone” (62) but persists in his efforts to maximize profit by cutting the middleman (he fails due to limited market leverage), dabbling in turkey farming (he falls short of projected Thanksgiving sales results, and ends up eating most of the meat himself throughout the winter season), and selling surplus hay to his neighbors (until the drilling irreversibly wrecks his grazing grounds). Disenchanted and embittered, he gradually surrounds himself “with an atmosphere of affronted hostility” (62). Subscribing to conspiracy theories and externalizing his own mercantile shortcomings, Wolfscale projects his ambitions on his sons who, much to his chagrin, prove completely disinterested in following in his footsteps, wise enough to avoid getting “caught in the downward ranching spiral of too much work, not enough money, drought” (67), despite Wolfscale’s desperate attempt to lure them back home by having the ranch electrified and buying a brand new TV set. If anything, they treat the ranch as an a dubious pastime when compared with the glitz of Denver, or the more modest pleasures of a Wyoming small town.

A small-time landowner, Wolfscale (un)wittingly replicates the fate of his ancestors, and seems bound to spend his final years putting up a hopeless fight against the structures of ownership that were established and cemented long before him. Standing up to the corporations and their lobbyists, Wolfscale is as doomed to
fail as those who once stood up to cattle barons and fossil fuel moguls. From the opening sentence, Proulx portrays the Wyoming scenery as a juxtaposition of “isolated coves with trophy houses protected by electronic gates,” on the one hand, and “slanted trailers on waste ground,” on the other. Hers is no country for small entrepreneurs. Climate change, sliding economy, failing welfare state, ineffective legislation, and Wolfscale’s own ineptitude as a Westerner (an uneducated would-be Vietnam conscript, short on economic, social, and cultural capital) all combine to prevent him from breaking out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Wolfscale’s grim economic prospects are no exception to the rule. His wife ends up charged with the embezzlement of tax money, his mother falls victim to mail fraud, while his two sons work dead-end jobs in a Japanese restaurant in Denver and a local video rental, respectively. Each of these characters is a byproduct of technological progress and economic rationalization or, in Zygmunt Bauman’s terms, their “wasted lives” represent the collateral damage of “liquid modernity” marked by an excess of goods and a surplus of work force that seems readily disposable in the increasingly deregulated global market (Życie na przemiał 153). In political terms, Wolfscale is a quintessential example of millions of Anglo-American males who have fallen prey to the fusion of neoliberal economic policies with neoconservative social values that helped solidify deregulated capitalism as a globally dominant axiom, “not just the default model, but the only available option in our political vocabulary” (Hassler-Forest 9). The roots of this fusion date back to the 1960s, when the rise of the New Left initiated the gradual retreat of the Democratic Party from welfare state issues in favor of civil rights policies and the empowerment of minorities. The successive uncoupling of these two strands resulted in a radical shift in the political base of the Democratic Party, which began losing its traditional blue
collar voters as the public discourse moved from class to race and gender issues while tacitly overlooking the brewing neoliberal reforms that eventually bumped economic inequalities to unprecedented heights, and facilitated the coagulation of plutocratic structures of privilege. Meanwhile, the Republicans used the rise of “soft-core” cultural left—which brought about a sense of abandonment among the traditional Democratic electorate, i.e. the socially conservative Anglo-American working class—to draw them to political programs combining market deregulation (which the Democratic Party no longer seemed to oppose) with conservative social values (which the Republican Party cynically championed, using them as disguise for its libertarian economic agenda (Judt and Snyder 346-353)).

The separation of the issues of social parity and civil liberties within the Democratic Party, and the bipartisan turn from economic to moral issues pushed numerous former Democratic voters towards the Republican Party, while also bringing about a political consensus on the matters of market non-interference and trickle-down economics, promulgated under the cloak of meritocratic narratives. Over time, the meritocratic discourse that stipulated professional diligence and entrepreneurial spirit as prerequisites for economic advancement in a post-class, post-racial society of equals turned out to be a dud check. The growing disconnect between the political and business establishment, on the one hand, and the experience of the lower- and middle-class Americans, on the other, engendered widespread discontent among those who, like Gilbert Wolfscale, saw their living standards steadily decline despite subscribing to neoliberal ethics.

On the immediate level, Proulx’s “What Kind of Furniture Would Jesus Pick?” may be read as a case study of the intergenerational effects of what social psychologist John Ehrenreich dubbed Third Wave Capitalism, defined as “a new
phase in the history of American capitalism” (5) marked by growing wealth disparities, increasing military spending, mass incarceration of African American males, an inadequate educational system, and declining health indicators compared with the majority of the developed countries. This period, argues Ehrenreich, has given rise to “distinctive forms of economic enterprise, new technologies, a dramatic expansion of markets, new modes for the accumulation of wealth, a changed relationship between the public and private sectors, new patterns of social conflicts, and shifts in ideology,” resulting in the “apotheosis of individual freedom and the paralysis of democracy” (5-6).

The interlinks between governments and corporations within Third Wave Capitalism, and the resulting disorientation among its subjects, are palpable throughout Proulx’s story. A hard-line Republican and a firm believer in non-renewable energy as an economic stimulus for rural areas, Gilbert Wolfscale experiences cognitive dissonance when he is immediately affected by its environmental impact. Wolfscale’s incomprehension of his times is deepened by his sons’ reluctance to inherit the family business and build on what little capital the family has accumulated. Last but not least, after he bumps into a rodeo parade sponsored by the fracking company and realizes “that there had been no ranchers in the parade—it was all pioneers, outlaws, Indians, and gas” (Proulx, Bad Dirt 86), Wolfscale feels excluded on a discursive level, which only adds to his sense of disempowerment. Reminiscing on his late mother’s Bible club discussion, in which local seniors debated the applicability of Christian teachings to modern-day Wyoming, Wolfscale angrily concludes that no matter what kind of furniture Jesus would pick for his rural home, “he wouldn’t get himself tangled up with no ranch” (86).
On a generational plane, Proulx’s short story presents two noteworthy models of heteronormative masculinity that can be observed in contemporary Anglo-Americans. Gilbert Wolfscale is a paragon of neoconservative, heteronormative maturity. Declared unfit for military service due to a minor physical defect, he missed out on the formative experience of his generation, and now compensates for this imaginary fault by swallowing books on the Vietnam War and trying to live up to the values of “old masculinity”\(^1\) he learned from his father and Wyoming lore. Unable to keep up with the economic transformations, frustrated with his shortcomings as a self-made man, and repressing his awareness of changing social mores (unlike Jack Twist and Ennis Delmar in “Brokeback Mountain,” his gay son is able to come out and lead a regular life without putting his life at risk), Wolfscale is an “angry white man”—an aging, once-privileged and now near-destitute Anglo-American male, one of millions “who thought they could invent themselves, reinvent themselves, be even more successful than their fathers” (Kimmel 14). Men who, against their best interests, and misguided by “the faux populism of hate radio, border patrols, Tea Parties, and others groups” (Kimmel 12) bought into the ideologies of military intervention and economic deregulation only to learn that, contrary to the entities at fault, they were deemed little enough to fail as the country

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\(^1\) In *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity*, cultural historian Gary Cross uses this notion to characterize the model of heteronormative masculinity promoted by the television culture of the Cold War era, which idealized “the man who squarely faced responsibility and served as a model for growing up and being a grown-up in the 1950s” (33). Recollecting his own childhood, Cross argues this model male maturity was personified by such characters and personas as “Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry, Sky King and Matt Dillon… men like Cary Grant, Humphrey Bogart, and Spencer Tracy, middle-aged men in our childhoods who seemed to accept graciously their graying hair, widening girths, and adult roles even after exciting youths” (13). Importantly for my argument in this dissertation, and in a manner evocative of Jane Tompkins’s genealogy of the Western as a genre reactionary to the sentimental novel, Cross notices a discursive duality of the “classical” (in the sense proposed by Will Wright) Westerns of the 1950s which, on the one hand, provided “escape from the humdrum and feminized world… a fantasy of rugged individualism, courage, and grit in an emerging world of station wagons full of kids” (33), while also perpetuating a largely unattainable, neo-Victorian model of patriarchal masculinity that helped the suburban alpha male sedate those escapist tendencies and subject themselves to the rigors of “five days a week in an office… church on Sunday, and… Little League games and dancing classes on Saturdays” (25).
plunged into recession. Their frustration, along with the out-of-touchness of political elites, who continued to disseminate their respective (unamended) narratives, helped populism balloon into presidential proportions, while also nourishing nostalgia for an idealized past and longings “to restore, to retrieve, to reclaim something that is perceived to have been lost” (Kimmel 21).

If one can characterize Gilbert Wolfscale as an “angry white man,” it is possible to see his sons and their peers as exemplary of Gary Cross’s notion of “boy-men.” Dissociating themselves from their fathers’ lifestyles, they have given up on ranching and moved to urban areas in search of better career prospects. Their cultural heritage (or rather, the pulp imagery that has long outweighed the historical realities) boils down to carnivalesque entertainment and occasional Western cosplay, as vividly depicted by Proulx in the rodeo parade scene in which “Sheridan car mechanics slouched along in buckskin suits and fur hats, carrying antique flintlocks. One had a demi-john, which he lifted to his lips every thirty seconds, crying ‘Yee-haw!’ and the other had a few shiny No. 2 traps over his shoulder. Gilbert could see the hardware store price tags on them. Gilbert despaired. He knew he was going to get the whole hokey Wild West treatment before he could move” (Proulx, *Bad Dirt* 85). Dressed up as stock figures from Western sagas, the men in the parade blissfully indulge in the masquerade, sparing no effort to add to their “authentic” looks by equipping themselves with expensive trapping gear and Frontier paraphernalia.

2 A complementary social diagnosis has been offered by Arlie Russell Hochschild, who ventured into rural Louisiana to conduct field studies among disenfranchised blue-collar Anglo-Americans shortly before the 2016 presidential elections. The group of Hochschild’s respondents was primarily made up of lower- and lower-middle class white males who, due to a strong sense of economic and cultural disenfranchisement, gravitated towards the populist libertarianism of the Tea Party and the facile protectionism embodied by Donald Trump. Hochschild dubbed these males “strangers in their own land,” attributing their disgruntlement to the global outsourcing of the industrial sector, the disintegration of trade unions and welfare structures, the transfer of political emphasis on the left from economic issues to identity politics, and the resulting sense of discursive alienation in Anglo-American males who—abandoned by their historical Democratic advocates—paradoxically turned to the Republican Party (and its Tea Party offshoot) as “the only holdout for the better aspects of the past” (158).
“Finding anchor in habits of adolescence to shut themselves off from the rushing reality” (Cross, *Men to Boys* 6), they appear awkwardly out-of-place in a crowd dominated by “teenage boys dressed as Indians, breechclouts over swim trunks, a load of beads around their necks, black wigs with braids and feathers” (Proulx, *Bad Dirt* 85). Their refusal to toil away at reviving the arid pastures of their fathers does not prevent them from participating in Wild West festivities. And while such behavior might seem at odds with the code of somber patriarchy embodied by Wolfscale, it is perfectly in line with the “culture of cynicism and thrill seeking” stemming from the fact that the outdated “markers of maturity have not been replaced by new ones more appropriate for our times” (Cross 20). Apart from the rejection of suburban bourgeois values, Cross attributes the emergence of “boy-men” to the booming entertainment industry. Powered by the rejection of the outdated models of masculine maturity, he argues, programmers of consumer culture celebrate puerile narcissism and “stuff multiplexes with endlessly repetitious action films” (6), thus rendering youth a “permanent and highly desirable lifestyle” (18) accessible at will through a plethora of escapist entertainments that help mitigate young men’s fears and anxieties resulting from the absence of clearly defined and culturally adequate modes of adult masculinity.

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The above literary prelude has a threefold bearing on the thematic scope of this dissertation. Firstly, Proulx’s story outlines the economic deprivation and political disenfranchisement of heartland America at the turn of the century. Secondly, it captures the crisis of the once-dominant model of Anglo-American masculinity, and the nostalgic longing to restore it. Thirdly, it may serve as a meta-commentary on the
condition of the Western at the brink of the War on Terror or, more specifically, the
dual role of the Western as a fallen grand narrative and a platform for escapist
entertainment. The intertexture of these three areas provides a vital context for this
dissertation, in which I analyze the continuous use of Western topoi in American
television commercials after 9/11, as well as the ideological ramifications behind
such Western-themed narratives. In the course of this dissertation, I focus my
attention on television commercials as a particular manifestation of the dominant
political (neoconservative) and economic (neoliberal) discourses in reaction to the
two traumatic events that marked America in the first decade of this century, i.e. the
terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the years of recession resulting from the 2007 financial
crisis. I argue that the cowboy rhetoric adopted by the Bush administration in the
wake of 9/11 (and paralleled by a moderate revival of the genre) found its reflection
in the discourse of television commercials that pandered to, and was nourished by,
reactionary tendencies epitomized by classical Western formulas, which the
neoconservative discourse used to promote the policies of national security and
military intervention. I also discuss the use of the Western topoi in the ad campaigns
which strove to salvage the neoliberal notion of economic deregulation in the
aftermath of the financial crisis, and the reification of the Western archetypes in post-
recession commercials of consumer goods. My goal is to demonstrate how, despite
its dethronement as America’s grand narrative, the Western continues to be
envisioned as a potent ideological platform—a tool for manufacturing consent in
politics, and a selling pitch in marketing commodities.

To better illustrate the thematic and aesthetical borrowings from the Western in
contemporary commercials, I have adopted a comparative perspective, examining
television commercials against the backdrop of a number of neoconservative
Westerns released after the 9/11 caesura. It is my hope that such a selection proves to be of assistance in illuminating the ways in which ad campaigns released at times of crisis distill classical formulas to appeal to the audience’s nostalgia for unchallenged patriarchal authority, on the one hand, and to project advertised products as fetishes of puerile escapism, on the other. It is in order, first, to elucidate the provisional category of the post-9/11 and post-crisis neoconservative Western which I use in this dissertation, and to account for my choice of a comparative perspective for the analysis of two different audiovisual mediums.

Historically regarded as America’s ur-narrative, it felt at the turn of the century that the Western was an outdated genre. Resented for its “outmoded form of cultural expressions… its ideological Manicheism and unworldly rurality” (Holtz, American Cinema 476), the Western was seen as unfit for the role of a symbolic unifier which once brought together culturally and ethnically diverse society of immigrants under the common denominator of meritocracy (Włodek 159). And yet, in the wake of 9/11 and George W. Bush’s War on Terror, the genre has found new, sometimes unexpected, outlets and proved to be a potent tool of ideological critique (and political endorsement) in the US, while also refashioning itself into a global genre that transcended its traditional habitat. Valid arguments have been made that the Western is currently at its most potent outside of America, as proven by a host of transnational productions in the past dozen-or-so years that have utilized its

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3 Film-wise, my preoccupation in this dissertation is chiefly with nostalgic and elegiac Westerns released since 9/11. In ideological terms, these films perform a similar mythopoeic function to that of television commercials, as the latter, too, rely on proven formulas in their interpellations. The formulaic quality of the post-9/11 neoconservative Westerns renders them fitting comparative models for an analysis of commercials as distillations of essentialist Western plots that use the same Frontier archetypes to “lure audiences into accepting deceptive non-solutions, while all the time serving governmental or industry purpose” (Altman Film/Genre 27).
universally recognizable precepts to address issues idiosyncratic to regional contexts.\(^4\)

On their home turf, Western films released in the new millennium have manifested similar tendencies. While the genre has clearly lost its status of as America’s grand narrative, it has not completely died out as predicted, either, morphing—above all—into a prize genre, or “a story form that individual artists may draw upon to grapple with contemporary issues” (Nelson, “Revisionism 2.0” xvii).\(^5\)

At the same time, the two caesuras in the recent American (and global) history, i.e. 9/11 and the War on Terror, on the one hand, and the 2007 financial crisis along with

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\(^4\) As a transnational form, the Western has broken out of its formulaic and geographical confines, becoming a critical tool of reflection on the very notions of “Westness” and borderlands as global concepts that help interrogate the “connections, trails, traces, pathways and echoes” of “various complex forms of mobility… resting in certain forms, mutating into other, and disrupting still more” (Campbell *The Rhizomatic West* 37). As Monika Siebert points out, Neil Campbell’s Deleuzian reconceptualization of the West(ern) as a rhizomatic notion/genre accurately reflects the multitude of its cross-border outgrowths, supplanting cohesive, evolutionary narratives and traditional tropes with a more inclusive and less orthodox theory of “rhizomatic ‘leakages’” as Campbell terms them, that sprout out of the genre’s horizontally expanding core (Siebert 18). Contemporary Westerns can thus be thought of as a mutable form that “transcends a particular place, and even a particular historical time” (Hamilton “Such is the Western” 31), using instantly discernible iconography and archetypes to both contemplate (past and present) site-specific problems and—at a meta-level—ponder over the ideological assumptions behind Western formulas (Campbell *The Rhizomatic West* 3). See Marek Paryż and Stanisław Bobowski, eds. *Contemporary Transnational Westerns: Themes and Variations*, special issue of *Studia Filmoznawcze*, vol. 38, 2017; MaryEllen Higgins, Rita Keresztesi, and Dayna Oscherwitz, eds. *The Western in the Global South*. New York and London: Routledge, 2015; Marek Paryż and John Leo, eds. *The Post-2000 Film Western: Contexts, Transnationality, Hybridity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, eds. *International Westerns: Re-locating the Frontier*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2014.

\(^5\) Some critics, such as Elisa Bordin, have enthusiastically interpreted the modest revival of the Western at the turn of the millennium as a “mushroom growth” (221), arguing that the proliferation of the genre in the past two decades has once more validated its privileged status as a space for defining, interrogating, representing, and regenerating (Anglo-American) masculinity in the face of shifting social norms and economic change. Bordin’s study of contemporary Westerns demonstrates the protean capacity of the genre to simultaneously serve as a critical platform for exposing masculinity as “a culturally constructed and performed position, which can be occupied by subjects usually not invested with agency in Westerns,” on the one hand, and mediate “a resistance to changes of paradigms of masculinity,” on the other (221). In her assessment of the present-day condition of the Western, Bordin contends that, despite critically acclaimed forays into subversive territories, the genre continues to gravitate towards “safely securing” the “protocols of traditional manhood” (222). While I am inclined to disagree that it is the reactionary narratives that constitute the bulk of contemporary Westerns (a considerable body of American and transnational pictures released in the past eighteen years suggests that the rejuvenation of the genre has been driven precisely by its potential to interrogate such established notions), the reactionary tendency within the Western cannot be overlooked. In my analysis of contemporary television commercials, I hope to add to the discussion of the ways in which traditional Western formulas have been reified in the service of dominant social and economic ideologies over the course of this millennium.
the subsequent recession, on the other, helped spark a resurgence of more traditional formulas that have been ideologically akin to the deregulatory prescriptions of the Washington Consensus adopted by the George W. Bush administration (and reinforced both in official governmental narratives and the Murdoch-owned News Corporation media channels). Post-9/11 and post-crisis productions such as John Lee Hancock’s *The Alamo*, Ron Howard’s *The Missing*, Kevin Costner’s *Open Range*, Clint Eastwood’s *Gran Torino*, Michael Berry’s *Frontera* or Emilio Aragón’s *A Night in Old Mexico* may serve as cases in point.6

The neoconservative strand of post-9/11 Westerns has been typified by a Manichean restitution of classical Western themes including “the establishment of civilization in the wilderness, war, race, and outlawry… presented in a distinctly classical fashion” (Holtz, *American Cinema* 352). The contemporary neoconservative Westerns reject self-reflexivity and irony in favor of a return to proven formulas, emotional appeal, and a sense of “authenticity” that typified the pre-revisionist Western (Włodek 171). Their political and economic agendas tend to be veiled by self-proclaimed revisionism that appropriates narratives of the liberal New Left as a cover-up for neoconservative ideology intended to galvanize the audience around such notions as interventionist foreign policies, libertarian

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6 The return of classical formulas in contemporary neoconservative Hollywood Westerns also seems to validate the claims of those critics who argue against an evolutionary development of the genre, proposing to interpret it as a continually “divided and contested form that has the ability to articulate ideas across the political spectrum” (Kollin *Captivating Westerns* 1). Recent publications by Andrew Patrick Nelson, Martin Holtz or Matthew Carter, among others, convincingly expound on Tag Gallagher’s notion of the Western’s circular (rather than linear) development, arguing for a “mosaic approach” that construes the genre as a set of varied narratives that have reflected ideological tendencies both across different eras and “within any given time” (Carter *Myth of the Western* 6). Against the grain of evolutionary criticism, it is thus possible to see the historical development of the Western (and its reformulations in the past decade and a half) as an example of Jamesonian “restructuring” (rather than a “radical break between periods”) in which, once more, “features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary” (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 1965), amounting to an interlacing of dissimilar trends, ranging from artistically innovative encounters with traditional formulas to autotelic parodies, nostalgic restorations, and post-ironic (de)mystifications. In their own way, each of these tendencies points to the ideological diversity within the Hollywood Western after 9/11.
meritocracy, and backlash patriarchy. Post-ironic films such as *The Alamo, Open Range* or *Gran Torino* circumnavigate lingering problems by offering narratives that defend the socio-economic status quo through ostensible inclusion of minorities in the origin myth while also appealing to the Anglo-American majority through nostalgic escapism. Building on the classical formulas and topoi, these films dilute a largely compromised agenda through “revisionist concessions… facilitating a smoother inoculation” (Holtz, *American Cinema* 353), with the hope that such “revisionist” ameliorations lend them with an air of historical verisimilitude, and enable them to pose as “true stories” that recount history “like it was.”

Such pseudo-historical qualities of the neoconservative Hollywood Westerns produced since 9/11 are in line with the logic of late capitalism as described by Fredric Jameson. Hegemony in the discussed films is perpetuated by means other than “massive and uniform cultural homogeneity” but rather through a professed recognition of that homogeneity’s “coexistence with other resistant and heterogenous forces which it has a vocation to subdue and incorporate” (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic* 159). The apparent de-centering of the dominant historical narrative (Westward expansion as a tale of individual industriousness and cultural

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7 Joe Johnston’s 2003 *Hidalgo* may serve as a case in point. Billed as “an incredible true story,” this neocolonial Western purports to depict the story of a supposed long-distance rider Frank Hopkins. Set in the Arabian Peninsula shortly after the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, Johnston’s film is equally sympathetic to the plight of Native Americans, on the one hand, and Arab women under patriarchal Islam, on the other. *Hidalgo* uses a “revisionist” (i.e. historically credible) retelling of the story of territorial expansion (with Lakotas conveniently confined to the past) to engender support for post-9/11 interventions in the Middle East. Thanks to its convergence with the necessities of political correctness, *Hidalgo* generated an air of plausibility that was perforce extended over the completely hoax story of its protagonist. Another, more recent example for this “artificial reconstruction of the voice” (Jameson “The Political Unconscious” 1297) can be found in Gore Verbinsky’s 2013 *The Lone Ranger*, which refurbishes the anachronistic (and racially charged) duo of the Lone Ranger and Tonto under the guise of retelling the story of the Wild West from a Native American perspective. Adapting its themes to modern-day superhero aesthetics in the hope of establishing another successful Disney franchise that would appeal to its projected male (middle- and working class) audience, the film unwittingly perpetuates the stereotypical practice of casting an Anglo-American actor as its lead (Johnny Depp, whose alibi was that he was reportedly partly Native American himself), hiring a number of Comanche actors as cameos and stunts (a move that may have been seen as progressive back in the days of John Ford and his Navajo extras, but seems anachronistically awkward for a supposedly inclusive retelling of history).
exceptionalism) validates its disputable claims and transforms these films into carriers of nostalgia as a symptom of progress in the dual sense proposed by Katharina Niemeyer, i.e. as a reaction to progress in which latest technologies are used (against their original intention) to produce media images that, on the one hand, satisfy the desire to slow down and “escape from this crisis into a state of wanderlust” (2), while encouraging consumption as a cure to that ailment, on the other, thus hampering potential anamnesis and nurturing the ideological status quo. In Jamesonian terms, the facile rebranding of conservative post-ironic Westerns in the post-9/11, post-recession era endows them with pastiche qualities, because—contrary to their self-reflexive, “rhizomatic” counterparts—their re-creation of the genre is a mere mimicry, exposed by the lack of the ironic impulse and “left… to imitate dead style, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the style in the imaginary museum” (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 1959).

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The ideologies of neoconservative security policies and neoliberal deregulation disseminated by the post-ironic brand of conservative twenty-first-century Westerns have been mimicked by a range of nostalgia-driven commercials spanning a wide spectrum of market sectors. And though Martin Holtz finds Western formulas reluctant to “lend themselves to synergistic exploitation and high concept marketing” (American Cinema 477), a close examination of the parallels between these two ideologically-charged media seems to prove otherwise, as demonstrated by conscription ads, presidential video messages, automotive industry campaigns, and consumable goods commercials. In a series of comparative analyses tracing various
modes of application of Western topoi in contemporary television commercials, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which advertisers continue to rely on Western archetypes to increase the appeal of various products to their (mostly “angry white men” and “boy-men”) target groups by investing those products with higher-order meaning. This mythicization is attained, on the one hand, by means of nostalgic evocations of patriarchal masculinity derived from the classical Western formulas (and their translations into contemporary contexts), and/or through their Disneyfication which renders the “legacy of conquest” (to use Patricia Nelson Limerick’s phrase) akin to a gaming culture-infused theme park designed for the celebration of puerile fantasies.

What I am specifically interested in this dissertation is the use of Western formulas as a pacifier for a restorative discourse that has used pop-culture as a means to attenuate political and economic anxieties through the development of reassuring, nostalgic narratives that superimpose doxas of continuity and tradition on the elusive present to help structure the accelerating sense of disorientation embedded in “liquid modernity,” to use Bauman’s phrase.\(^8\) I argue that the modest yet noticeable continuity of the neoconservative Western since 9/11, and the persistent recurrence of Western topoi in commercials across various market sectors, attest to the genre’s unceasing role as a medium of capitalist ideology that helps promote its tenets through a consistent de-contextualization of current political and financial contingencies (9/11, Iraq War, recession and government bailouts), which it embeds in mythical narratives that help “conceal the fact that operations of capital do not depend on any sort of subjectively held belief” (Fisher 13). I do not, by any means, claim the Western plays a dominant role in the process, given that the role of the

primary agent of neoliberal capitalism, as persuasively argued by Dan Hassler-Forest,\(^9\) has been successfully delegated to superhero films (along with the infusion of Western formulas into that genre, which likewise promotes vigilantism, entrepreneurship, and grassroots self-help as economically unburdensome token solutions to the structural quandaries of Third Wave Capitalism). Still, while not unambiguously successful in their pitches,\(^{10}\) it is nonetheless easy to see the cinematic and commercial neoconservative narratives discussed in this dissertation as distillations of the nostalgic longings and chronic anxieties congenital to global capitalism after 9/11, on the one hand, and as attempts to keep in check those whom such longings and anxieties affect, on the other. My goal is thus to reflect on television commercials as ideologically charged narratives that both mirror and strive to manufacture consent among their target audiences through mythical connotations that refer to the notion of self-reliant masculinity promoted in the latest reformulations of the age-old Rooseveltian inflection of the Frontier myth.

My intention is not so much to argue for the effectiveness of such ideological interpellations. As William Fletcher notices in his outline of contemporary advertising, the days when advertising moguls were capable of successfully targeting entire populations are long gone due to the ongoing diversification of media channels, and as a result, ads these days are directed to relatively narrow audience groups (9)—which would, to an extent, account for the continuous reliance on the topoi of the Western in certain marketing sectors despite the generally diminished cultural impact of the genre. My goal, then is to consider the perseverance of


\(^{10}\) Most of the post-9/11 neoconservative Westerns (*Open Range* was notable exception) failed miserably at the box office, on the other hand, the employment of Western revenge narratives in George W. Bush’s *A Safer World* campaign bolstered his 2004 re-election bid, while Fiat Chrysler’s decision to cast Sam Elliott in the post-recession *Guts Glory Ram* ad campaign turned Dodge Ram into America’s second best-selling pickup truck.
Western-themed interpellations, and their capacity to adapt to the changing prerequisites of the era. I am interested in the dynamic of the pitch itself in the attempt to refurbish (and monetize on) what has commonly been considered as a tired genre, and in the proliferation of neoconservative modulations of Western topoi that serve to “naturalize material conditions and the relationships of everyday life” (McGovern 19) by revamping compromised notions in line with the tenets of political correctness, offering facile inclusion while buttressing neoliberal market structures that buttress neoconservative, Anglo-centric patriarchy.\textsuperscript{11}

For the purpose of my argument, I propose to tentatively approach the contemporary neoconservative Westerns and the Western-infused commercial plots on equal terms, as audiovisual narratives which convey ideology in order to “justify and organize a virtually timeless society” and constitute a “method of assuring its unity and envisioning its future” (Altman, \textit{Film/Genre} 27). Harnessing the nostalgic appeal of instantly recognizable iconography, sentential parlance, and familiar topoi, the strings of commercials analyzed in this dissertation simulate Western traits to narrate ideas and commodities in ways that prove strikingly similar to their cinematic contemporaries.

My functional equalization of commercials and Westerns in this dissertation has both theoretical and historical grounds. Although advertising theory has traditionally defined commercials as a paid form of communication, designed by a sponsor and transmitted using mass media to pitch ideas, policies, and brands to the target audience (Thorson and Rodgers 4); messages promoting goods or services for

\textsuperscript{11} In this respect, my analysis largely overlaps with the assumptions of Hassler-Forest’s examination of post-9/11 superhero franchises. The author of \textit{Capitalist Superheroes}... sees the discourses of economic neoliberalism and social neoconservativism as mutually invigorative, and traces the origins of their simultaneousness to the presidency of Richard Nixon. According to Hassler-Forest, the singular focus of neoliberal theory on the policies of economic deregulation and globalization rendered it compatible with the socially-oriented neoconservative ideologies, creating a model that has since been adopted and implemented worldwide (49).
sale through impersonal media (Cook 9); or marketing communication intended to inform and/or persuade people (Fletcher 2). And yet, in ideological terms, audiovisual ads often operate using narrative strategies to build brands, generate needs, and thus change life behaviors. Apart from direct, argumentative interpellations (hard-pitch ads), commercials also interpellate indirectly (soft-pitch ads), employing stories about brands, in the hope that such stories will resonate with consumers’ desires, anxieties, identities, and lifestyles; thus, when deciding to purchase a product/subscribe to an advertised idea/service, consumers are by extension concerned with the narratives that are associated with the advertised items (Chang 243). Such narratives, as Judith Williamson pointed out in her structuralist study of commercials, operate “not on the level of the overt signified but via the signifiers” (24), i.e. through connotations encoded using a recognizable referent system (in the case of this dissertation: the Western). As such, and to an extent much like the contemporary neoconservative Western, the Western-themed commercials analyzed in this dissertation rely on the themes and formulas of the Western as intertexts that amount to a higher-order meaning. It is precisely through the use of the Western as the referent system that vital ideological points of contact are created between commercials and films (Cook 12), such as their purpose (sustainment of dominant political and economic ideologies), structure (based on Frontier themes), style (nostalgic, restorative), content (masculine rites of passage, outdoor episodes, encounters with the Other), and intended audience (mostly, but not only, heartland Anglo-American males).

Although categorizing typical advertising messages as narratives may seem somewhat doubtful, I have decided to classify the analyzed commercials as such since they meet the three criteria of narrativity proposed by Rick Altman. They are
constructed of narrative material (“the minimal textual characteristics necessary to produce narrative”), propelled by narrational activity (“the presence of a narrating instance capable of presenting and organizing the narrative material”), and subject to narrative drive (“a reading practice required for narrative material and narrational activity to surface in the interpretive”) (A Theory of Narrative 10). Most of the interrogated clips present a protagonist entangled in a sequence of activities, which are introduced by the presence of a narrating entity (be it in the form of voiceover/subtitles/point-of-view narrator and/or the camera that follows/contextualizes their actions and helps perceive them as “non-randomly selected events” (Altman, A Theory of Narrative 11)). The narrative material and narrative activity are signified through connotations activated within the text (through the presence of Western props and landscapes, employment of exceptionalist rhetoric, casting of movie icons, etc.), and outside of its confines (through the appeal to the viewer’s familiarity with the formal and thematic characteristics of the Western genre).

Activated by films and commercials alike, the connotations generated by the references to the topoi of the Western entail the process of intertextual mapping (i.e. the recognition of transformations of familiar situations in unfamiliar (contemporized) setting which refers the viewer to “notice relationships of a specific type that allow us to identify individual texts with one narrative type or another” (Altman, A Theory of Narrative 292)—in this case, the topical references to, and borrowings from, the Western genre—and thus enable them to identify characters and actions and characters introduced in ads as “transformations of characters and actions presented earlier” (Altman, A Theory of Narrative 308), whether in prototypical Westerns of the Cold War or their neo-conservative reinterpretations.
Aside from their affinity as narratives, my decision to treat commercials and films on a par is also motivated by historical reasons. In historical terms, mass consumerism and the Western coincidentally date back to the last days of the Frontier, and may be said to have been equally constitutive of America as an “imagined community” (in the sense proposed by Benedict Anderson), i.e. as activities involving simultaneous mass participation across the continent (one can fathom that while a certain number of citizens was being engaged in reading a newly published Western dime novel, another significant fraction were strolling the country’s thoroughfares, calling on various stores in search of consumable goods). As the Western went on to become America’s quintessential cinematic genre and one of the country’s primary cultural exports, so did weekend consumption of goods (advertised on small screens in between reruns of the country’s mass-produced oaters) morphed into America’s (and the world’s) signature form of entertainment. Each of these cultural activities could thus be conceived of as a ritualistic expression of citizenship and a platform for the socialization of dominant ideas, cultural icons and traditions—channeled in ways which have displayed a similar protean nature, a knack for adaptability, and a capacity to incorporate outsiders without disrupting hegemonic narratives—each of the two pointing to what Charles F. McGovern refers to as a “fusion of consumption, nationalism, and citizenship” (9).

McGovern’s chief claim in Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945 is that the coupling of consumerism and Manichean patriotism has been inherent in America since the closing of the Frontier, and that it has reemerged ever

12 William O’Barr persuasively locates the rise of advertising in America in the Gilded Age. According to O’Barr, the era saw the establishment of advertising agencies in the modern sense, resulting in the transfer of advertisements from commercial outposts to newspapers, coupled with the reassignment of advertising services from manufacturers/sellers to paid professionals. O’Barr also notices that the aforementioned changes coincided with the qualitative makeover of advertisements—which evolved from lengthy descriptions towards catchy slogans—and the emergence of brands that “imbued commodities with specific meanings” (“A Brief History of Advertising” 10).
since as an economic stimulus at times of war and financial crises. Although the book focuses on the first half of the twentieth century, McGovern also addresses the resurfacing of consumerism-as-patriotism after 9/11. He points out that, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington,

President George W. Bush and his cabinet called for Americans to attend life as normal—to shop, spend money, and consume for the good of the nation. Soon after, numerous marketing campaigns appeared trumpeting patriotic themes. While such pleas met mixed success at best in a recession economy, few questioned the idea that increased consumption benefited the nation. The president’s political message also was clear: the citizen’s duty was not mandatory military service to combat terrorism (although the rate of volunteers rose), or civic engagement to strengthen social bonds in the wake of national disaster and shock… The president urged everyone to resume business as usual: individual, atomized consumption was best for the nation as a whole.

(2)

McGovern’s sentiments have been echoed, among others, by Dan Hassler-Forest—who saw 9/11 as a pretext for the radical intensification of the economic system of neoliberalism in combination with efforts to “reinvigorate older notions of national identity that revolve around a strict duality of good and evil (9)—and by Dawn Spring, who points to the historical convergence between American imperialism and the global proliferation of deregulation policies during the Cold War through such forms of soft power as films (most prominently Westerns) and targeted advertising, employed in the hope of persuading the developing countries to subscribe to American leadership and embrace the values of free enterprise consumerism (2).
Given the similar roles of patriarchal nationalism of the classical Western formulas, on the one hand, and “patriotic” consumerism, on the other, for the shaping of America’s consumption-based nationalism, it should come as no surprise that conservative, textbook variants of the Western—itself a commercial formula centered around rituals performed in a timeless world, to paraphrase Philip French (Westerns 5)—have long served as commercial signifiers in publicity campaigns for commodities and ideas that have (primarily) targeted (neo)conservative Anglo-American males, from the iconic Marlboro Man, through presidential endorsements featuring such Western icons as Ronald Reagan, John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, or John Voight. Despite the Western’s demise as America’s primary cinematic genre (and the migration of its trademark themes into more modern genres), the topical affinities between formulaic Western films and commercial videos are as persistent as ever, to mention such examples as Pepsi’s 2003 OK Corral clip featuring soccer players David Beckham and Iker Casillas,13 Budweiser’s 2015 Super Bowl Lost Dog commercial (set in a Western ranch), or Snickers’s 2017 Super Bowl meta-ad The Ruined Commercial starring Adam Driver as a Western actor getting ready for a shootout scene. Playfully nostalgic, each of these clips engages the notion of heteronormative masculinity epitomized by the Western genre, while also using its formulas to advertise the consumption of globally distributed American commodities. The renewed presence of such thematic and aesthetical borrowings in post-9/11 and post-recession America can be seen as a testament to the use of the

13 Released in the spring of 2003, this multi-million ad playfully referred to such silver screen productions as John Sturges’s Gunfight at the OK Corral and Sergio Leone’s The Dollars Trilogy (the ad was even shot on location of Leon’s Spaghetti Westerns in the Spanish province of Almeria), the OK Corral ad used Western conventions to allegorize a penalty shootout between two of Europe’s top soccer players. The application of Western props helped the advertisers appeal simultaneously to an intergenerational audience of middle-aged men and teenage boys. For detailed analyses of the ad, cf. Sarah Gee, “Bending the codes of masculinity: David Beckham and flexible masculinity in the new millennium.” Sport and Society, volume 17, issue 7 (September 2014). 884-900; Neil Campbell, Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press: 2008. 115.
topoi of the Western in the promotion of neoliberal patriotism-as-consumption and neoconservative masculinity to mitigate the fears and anxieties of those subjected to the stranglehold of Third Wave Capitalism.

The neoliberal (market) and neoconservative (social) ideologies mediated through Western formulas mitigate the fears embedded in these systems by endowing the disseminated narratives with mythical significance. Since this study focuses on television commercials as a medium for these ideologies, my understanding of myth is informed by the Barthesian analysis of the phenomenon. In line with Barthes, I approach myth as an ideologically motivated system of signs that determines a number of cultural messages behind purportedly neutral narratives, and mythology as a body of those narratives intended to validate culturally significant activities. In other words, my understanding of myth is that of “ideology expressed in stories… that are taken for granted” and “fill the empty containers of authority with information that appears to be natural, normal, and commonsensical” (Merskin Media, Minorities, Meaning 5-6). These stories are realized through readily-accepted archetypes that eternalize historical and cultural arrangements by presenting them as “natural” (i.e. outside of/transcending history or, in Barthes’s own words, “transforming history into nature” (Mythologies 129)). Naturalization enables myth to purport to be free of ideological implications, while also assisting hegemonic discourses in sustaining “the radically different social and economic conditions under which people are born, work, and die” (Culler 23). Informed by the Barthesian understanding of myth, I thus approach the post-9/11 Western-themed commercials as narratives that “purify” such aspects of life as army enlistment, international intervention, political and economic agendas of presidential candidates, struggles of
the automotive industry, corporate social responsibility and environmental impact of food companies, or cultural appropriation and ethnocentrism in tequila ad campaigns.

The use of the Frontier topoi—whether in post-ironic Westerns and commercial videos—conceals the ideologies of intervention and deregulation with an air of “a natural and eternal justification” and “a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact” (Barthes, *Mythologies* 143). Western mythology thus serves as a code of communication, a meta-language or second-order meaning that invests film plots and commodities with timeless qualities and solidifies the dominant political and economic discourses. When, say, John Lee Hancock fashions Sam Houston after George W. Bush (while also patterning General Santa Anna on Saddam Hussein in *The Alamo*), or when the spin doctors of Bush’s 2004 presidential campaign cast him as an avenger evocative of Ethan Edwards of *The Searchers*, and enhance the analogy by alluding to Ford’s iconic doorway shot in one of the presidential ads, then, regardless of the undeniable differences between these two modes of production, each of them similarly reverts to myth as the Barthesian “alibi” in framing the political decisions behind the War on Terror within the timeless narrative of the Indian Wars. In institutionalizing the dominant neoconservative ideology, each of the cited examples “obeys the law of myth in its attempt to present its [Western] conventions as natural facts” (Culler 62).

In a similar fashion, Clint Eastwood’s depiction of Walt Kowalski in *Gran Torino*, and his cameo in Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential ad *At Stake*, instantly evoke the actor’s silver screen persona to channel their deregulatory agendas through the familiar figures of entrepreneurship, resilience, and self-reliance that date back to *Pale Rider* (which in turn dates back to *Shane*, etc.). To once more borrow from Culler, each of these two texts is “woven of prior discourses,” and as such they
remain “ultimately related to all of culture” (103), since both signify through common Western tropes borrowed from the texts that preceded them. Seen from this angle, Western archetypes transcend the formal differences between these two audiovisual media, and assist in rendering the tenets of economic deregulation impregnable to changing temporal contexts.  

14 Acting as tokens of ideological investment for the symbolic systems reproduced by governments and industries (Altman, *Film/Genre* 26), commercials and films are ideologically similar in that confer mythical meaning on internationally and domestically disseminated doctrines and commodities. Apart from their primary role of pitching goods/services to potential customers, advertisements also play an important secondary role—one shared with genre films—in providing their makers with malleable discursive platforms, and serving as carriers for collective identity narratives.

Similar sentiments have been voiced by Jackson Lear's, whose *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* posits to interpret commercials as narratives which not only encourage people to buy goods but also validate ideologies behind particular lifestyles and “sanction... existing structures of economic and political power” through “words and pictures in commercial fables—stories that have been both fabulous and didactic, that have evoked fantasies and pointed morals,” and thus act as “perhaps the most dynamic and sensuous representations of cultural values in the world” (Lear's 1-2). For the sake of the critique of ideology offered in this dissertation, I propose to extend the transferability

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14 Paradoxically, both types of texts analyzed in this dissertation frequently resort to Western topoi typically attributed to the “populist” inflection of Frontier mythology (in the sense proposed by Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*, i.e. stories of anti-corporatist, agrarian, redistributive character (22)). In recycling their stereotypical distillations, the examined narratives (films and commercials) strip these topoi of their original significance and subsume them under ideologies whose financial rewards are collected by those at the helm of mass media corporations (who traditionally subscribed to the “progressive” (i.e. big ownership, Darwinian/Wisterian, elitist vision of the Frontier myth (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 22)), thus furthering the concentration of the existing ownership structures.
of Western narratives over the domain of television commercials. Such an inclusive stance seems to have particular validity in the case of Frontier lore, which has historically operated across a range of media and genres, from Cooper’s historical romances, through Whitman’s poetry, Beadle’s dime novels, Remington’s paintings, Hollywood Westerns, Levi’s jeans commercials, or computer and board games. Thus, to resume the points I have tried to establish above, while I do not argue against upholding the divisions between respective media and genres, I am also inclined to think that mythical formulas are perfectly capable of working across such demarcation lines, and hence consider it functionally valid to adopt a comparative approach to films and commercials throughout this dissertation, treating the Western as a translatable, inter-media narrative that may be equally embodied by film genre and political/commercial discourse.

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My discussion of Western-themed contemporary television advertising is comprised of four chapters. Each chapter is divided in two sections that correspond to two different Western topoi employed by advertisers to promote a given sector: from military recruitment ads in Chapter One, through presidential campaigns in Chapter Two, automotive industry advertising in Chapter Three, and food and beverage products in Chapter Four. In Chapter One, I interrogate the mobilization of the topoi of the cavalry rescue and the last stand in post-9/11 recruitment commercials for the United States Armed Forces and the United States Border Patrol, respectively. I approach these recruitment ads as ideological interpellations of state entities that bolster their appeal in the generation of soon-to-be boy-men through direct and
indirect references to these tropes (which can be traced back to the cavalry Western formula mastered by John Ford, and to the neoconservative reinterpretation of John Wayne’s 1960 *The Alamo* in John Lee Hancock’s 2004 re-examination of the battle and its aftermath). I examine how the use of these two Western topoi dehistoricizes the War on Terror and projects it as the latest installment of the eternal (global) Frontier warfare. I also discuss the creative way in which advertisers engage these tropes, interlacing them with CGI visuals inspired by gaming culture, helps them pitch military service as an adventurous errand into the wilderness, while also casting USAF and USBP as meritocratic communities of equals.

Chapter Two investigates the presidential campaigns of two neo-conservative candidates in the context of their use of the formulas of the vengeance variation. In the first section of the chapter, I analyze the topical, narrative, and aesthetic links between George W. Bush’s 2004 re-election campaign clips and Ron Howard’s 2003 *The Missing*, tracing their origins back to John Ford’s *The Searchers* (whose complexity is lost in translation in both cases). I argue that a reactionary neo-conservative reinterpretation of Ford’s classic empowers the discourse of post-9/11 intervention by demarcating rigid racial boundaries between Anglo-American civilization (and its patriarchal champion) and dictatorial “savagery” (and its racialized villain), a dichotomy that serves to galvanize viewers behind the idea of restorative violence. In the second section of the chapter, I focus on the deployment of Clint Eastwood’s star persona as the archetypal mysterious stranger in Mitt Romney’s unsuccessful presidential bid in 2012. I contend that Eastwood’s endorsement of Romney, and the actor’s presence in the Republican candidate’s presidential ads (and campaign rallies) follows in the footsteps of Eastwood’s alpha male predecessors (most notably John Wayne and Ronald Reagan), as his aura of
conservative masculinity and economic self-reliance symbolically validates the non-violent, industrious presidential candidate (and his agenda of financial deregulation). I also examine how, in this regard, Eastwood’s cameos in the Romney clips overlap (thematically, ideologically, and aesthetically) with his post-crisis directorial project, the 2009 *Gran Torino*. In both instances, I argue that the use of the topos of the postindustrial, aging lone rider facilitates the neoliberal economic overtones of these narratives, and urges “angry white men” to subscribe to the values of grassroots entrepreneurship undermined by the years of recession.

In Chapter Three, my discussion shifts from explicitly ideological ad campaigns to advertisements of commodities. The chapter analyzes the employment of two variants of Frontier masculinity, epitomized by the cowboy and the farmer, in commercial narratives featuring the topos of the machine in the garden. My examination of two post-recession ad campaigns for the Dodge Ram pickup truck draws on the Rooseveltian and Jeffersonian/Turnerian inflections of the Frontier myth, which the advertisers apply to ideologize automotive consumption as conducive to the preservation of Anglo-America’s two quintessentially male professions, i.e. the cowboy/rancher and the farmer/homesteader. These two campaigns are interpreted in the light of two neoconservative Westerns that straddle the post-9/11 and post-crisis/pre-Trump eras—Kevin Costner’s 2003 *Open Range* and Charles Robert Carner’s 2016 *JL Family Ranch*—each of which rests on deregulatory, anti-establishment populism aimed to appease the resentment of Anglo-American working- and middle class.

Chapter Four interrogates the practices of cultural appropriation and Othering with respect to ethnic minorities (Native Americans and Mexicans) in post-recession food and beverage industry commercials, realized respectively through the tropes of
the Vanishing American and Mexican fiesta. Given the long history of ethnic stereotypes in American food and beverage advertising, my focus rests with how these clichéd representations of Native Americans and Mexicans have changed in the era of self-advocacy and political correctness, and how Hollywood films and television commercials adapted their strategies of Othering to circumvent political pressures from these two minorities in order to maintain their appeal among intergenerational target groups. By comparing the use of the topoi of noble savagery/Native American absence and the Mexican paja in food and beverage ad campaigns, on the one hand, and in covertly neoconservative contemporary Westerns such as Gore Verbinsky’s The Lone Ranger (2013), Emilio Aragón’s A Night in Old Mexico (2013) and Michael Berry’s Frontera (2014), on the other, I aim to demonstrate that the analyzed films and commercials depend on the same mode of facile inclusiveness that helps perpetuate received notions of Otherness in politically correct ways. Last but not least, the goal of Chapter Four is to explore how Western-infused reifications of Native Americans and Mexicans (in particular Mexican males) invite nostalgically charged consumerism by commodifying the Other into tokens of consumable authenticity, thus unwittingly buttressing essentialist discourses that continue to divide present-day America.
Chapter 1: The War on Terror as Frontier Warfare: Figurations of the Old West in Post-9/11 (Para)military Recruitment Commercials

A third of a century has passed since John Wayne rode off into the sunset one last time, yet the Duke’s legacy is alive and well. Annually featured around the top of Harris Interactive’s America’s Favorite Movie Star rating and still the reigning number one among old timers, Wayne’s status as an American icon seems solidified (Harris Interactive Poll, 2013). His apparition still strides across TV screens in American heartland, though it has also acquired a life of its own as a point of reference in various fields of cultural production. A paragon of neoconservative masculinity, Wayne’s persona has been critically engaged by filmmakers, writers, and musicians, becoming part and parcel of American popular culture, including television advertising. The Western hyper-male as epitomized by the Duke (and scores of his successors) has been reified to market all sorts of goods, from cigarettes through jeans. One sector in which the myth of Waynesque masculinity is often revisited is that of (para)military services, where Frontier rhetoric has been used for over a century, from Michael P. Whelan’s iconic Men Wanted in the Army posters to the not so distant appropriation of the tagline from Clint Eastwood’s The Outlaw Josey Wales movie billboards in the U.S. Army’s pre-9/11 An Army of One ad

15 The list of examples in ways in which culture has engaged the patriarchal legacy of the Duke seems infinite; notable examples include, among many others, the Waynesque drill sergeant in Stanley Kubrick’s Full Metal Jacket (1987); Sherman Alexie’s comic conspiracy theory in “Dear John Wayne” (2000), which presents the actor as a closet feminist and advocate of Native American rights, who romances with a Navajo woman on the set of The Searchers; or Lady Gaga’s half-joking, half-nostalgic ode to heteronormative masculinity in the song “John Wayne” (2016).
campaign.\footnote{Though it was first used as a tagline in Eastwood’s revisionist western (www.filmposters.com/movie-poster.asp?ProdID=15865), the “An Army of One” slogan has since served as a title line for such neoconservative projects as Vic Armstrong’s action flick (www.imdb.com/title/tt0106309), Zev Chafets’s bestselling biography of Rush Limbaugh (www.nytimes.com/2010/05/24/books/24book.html?_r=0), and the U.S. Army’s pre-9/11 recruitment campaign (http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/10/us/ads-now-seek-recruits-for-an-army-of-one.html).}

Steady at a time of peace, the demand for military recruitment commercials in the USA tends to skyrocket in wartime conditions, as was the case in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which intensified the USAF efforts to procure human resources in the era of the War on Terror. Its own expansion largely undisrupted for decades, the ominous military and industrial complex became the sole sector of the U.S. economy which had enjoyed unwavering financial support of the federal authorities and, in spite of many fluctuations in the White House, continued to flourish at the turn of the century. Even though the Gulf War concluded a good few years earlier, the Clinton administration failed to curb military expenditure, instead launching a five-year $1 trillion subsidization plan followed by subsequent financial buildup of the military sector, providing assistance which eventually amounted to roughly $300 billion annually. Upon his election, President George W. Bush unsurprisingly stayed the course, further ballooning the military budget and using 9/11 as a “rationale” for his controversial decisions (Zinn 652-678). The bloated budget of the military sector, coupled with the renewal of neoconservative narratives, enabled a spectacular re-launch of the recruitment campaign. Calibrated to fit the cowboy rhetoric of the War on Terror, the recruitment commercials discussed in this chapter often harnessed Frontier imagery to advertise service in the Armed Forces and the Border Patrol as a reenactment of formulas typically employed in the Western genre.
Ruminating on the cultural influence of 9/11 on American public discourse, Susan Faludi contends that the fateful terrorist attacks paved the way for the reprise of the mythological figurations of America’s foreign relations as Frontier warfare. According to Faludi, the uncompromising cowboy style adopted by President Bush provided a fertile ground for nostalgically atavistic interpretations of the hijacker bombings and the successive military operations and political reforms implemented by the Republican decision-makers (which were largely sustained during Barrack Obama’s two terms in office). Political re-enactments of the Waynesque masculinity, along with the imposition of the Indian War paradigm on the coverage of the War on Terror (and the frequent reruns of movies featuring the Duke) were niftily labeled by Faludi as “our retreat to the fifties.” According to Faludi, this phenomenon “belonged to a long-standing American pattern of response to threat, a response that we’ve been perfecting since our original wilderness experience” (13). The reframing of the U.S. military operations in the Middle East after 9/11 as the latest figuration of the Indian Wars seems to echo Richard Slotkin’s reading of the formative years of American national identity as a process of regeneration through violence. According to the scholar, the figure of regenerative violence became “the structuring metaphor of the American experience,” in which the genteel founding fathers succumbed to their Frontiersmen counterparts who “tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness” (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 4). From Faludi’s perspective, the attacks of 9/11 represented another reprise of the “day of infamy” figure (3), i.e. a traumatic event of mythical proportions capable of reinvigorating a Frontier-like sense of social cohesion and collective sacrifice, enabling comprehensive support of the country’s war effort, and investing it with symbolic significance. The media narratives created in the aftermath of 9/11 recast the event as an avatar of the Alamo and Peal Harbor,
as if in expectation of a sweeping turn of events that would match the scale of its predecessors in helping to galvanize the country around a universally appealing idea. In this chapter, I propose to explore the formulaic plots offered in two series of (para)military recruitment commercials as ideologized products manufactured to encourage subscription to the War on Terror and assert a simplistic sense of national unity. In particular, this chapter examines how the Manichean narratives brought alongside the “new John Wayne masculinity” helped the Bush administration to portray both the events themselves and the conflicts triggered by those events through a Frontier rearview mirror. My focus rests with the texts scripted by the copywriters of the U.S. Armed Forces and the U.S. Border Patrol, which I interpret as fixations of popular Western formulas achieved through their respective use of familiar formulas deriving from the pre-revisionist variations of the genre, specifically the cavalry Western (as best pronounced in John Ford’s cavalry trilogy) and the last stand epic, whose latest incarnation in the spirit of the classical Western was proffered in John Lee Hancock’s The Alamo (2004).

The familiar, mythical modes of representation used in the (para)military recruitment commercials are consequently and inescapably related to the ideology behind formulaic Westerns, which in turn originated from Frontier-themed dime novels published on a mass scale in the late nineteenth century, and from popular genre novels such as Owen Wister’s The Virginian. The readership of these works was mostly comprised of (young, uneducated) males, and as such the genre attuned itself to popular, low-brow sentiments, thus helping solidify the budding corporate
capitalism and the expansive nationalism in twentieth-century America. In *The Superman of the Masses: Rhetoric and Ideology in the Popular Novel*, Umberto Eco analyzes nineteenth-century popular novels as texts whose distinctive goal is to reassure beliefs professed to be universal, while at the same time preventing the reader from questioning the ruling ideology. In buttressing dominant sentiments, popular novels and mass media texts analogously resort to clichéd themes. In line with Gramsci, Eco contends that the petrification of dominant ideology is made possible because popular novels may, and did, serve as a carrier and stimulant of populist fantasies such as retaliation for suffering inflicted on the reader (5-11), as was the case with nationwide outrage sparked by the attacks of 9/11. To Eco, the popular novel acts as a means of appeasement in fulfilling the expectations of the mass audience by turning to demagogic prefabricates. In popular genres, combinations of topoi and archetypes (for example archetypes rooted in the formulaic combat Westerns of the 1950s) are coupled with commonsensical values, offering self-assurance instead of self-questioning. These values are normative and determined in accordance with prevalent morals and ideologies (18-20). Mass culture reassures its consumers by means of hackneyed resolutions, both within single literary pieces and across interconnected, cyclical works (101). Thus, instead of ambiguous problematizations, one is provided with unequivocal, Manichean

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17 In his analysis of the role of modern-day Hollywood superheroes as heralds of global, neocorporate capitalism after 9/11, Dan Hassler-Forest traces the rise of the superhero figure back to the earliest forms of American genre fiction, most notably the nineteenth-century Western dime novels and the pulp novels of the 1920s and 30s. The author of *Capitalist Superheroes* proposes to approach the category of the superhero as a “flexible and adaptable figure who serves to unite a diverse group of texts… which… demonstrate certain common tendencies that allow us to group them roughly together” (10). Such an approach, it seems, enables one to see the evolution of the superhero genre in a broader historical context, and realize that, underneath the cloak of high-end technology, the superhero and the gunslinger have often connoted the same political and economic ideologies. For a critique of the deregulatory ideology underlying *The Virginian* as the prototypical literary expression of the Rooseveltian inflection of the Frontier myth (with the gunslinger as the carrier of its elitist sentiments), see Agata Preis-Smith, “Ideologie mitu pogranicza w Wirginicyku Owena Wistera.” *Amerykański western literacki w XX wieku: między historią, fantazją a ideologią*. Ed. Agata Preis-Smith and Marek Paryż. Warszawa: Czuly Barbarzyńca, 2013. 15-35.
narratives, in which the original balance is violently disrupted by agents of evil, only to be restored by agents of justice (as conceived of by the mass audience). All conflicts, whether personal or global, are eventually resolved within the utilized formulas, offering what Eco refers to as commercialized “optimistic catharsis” (117).

The device of optimistic catharsis employed in dime novels would typically resurface in formulaic Westerns. The classical variation of this film genre, along with its upbeat resolutions, has repeatedly proven to be in great demand as a tool of contingent ideologies, which may in turn have contributed to the back-and-forth manner in which the Western has developed. Referring to the “cult of the Indian subgenre,” Angela Aleiss notices that the evolution of representations of Native Americans in these movies has been historically inconsistent. It has proceeded in tides rather than in a linear pattern, depending on current political circumstances (xvii). It is conceivable to extrapolate that, since the arrival of the sympathetic Indian Westerns of the early 1950s (such as Anthony Mann’s The Devil’s Doorway or Delmer Daves’s Broken Arrow), the revisionist Western has helped to reflect the social moods accompanying political and economic transformations, while the classic variation never ceased to resurface at times of imminent (or imagined) threats to the country’s integrity. The ways in which the (para)military recruitment commercials stir the sediments of the classical cavalry Western and the epic last stand / border cinema scenario following 9/11 may serve as a case in point.

Perhaps best epitomized by John Ford’s trilogy of Fort Apache (1948), She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949) and Rio Grande (1950), the cavalry subgenre came a long way before plunging into dormancy in the late 1990s. Having taken his stance

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18 Examining Kevin Costner’s Dances with Wolves (1990) and Clint Eastwood’s Unforgiven (1992), Alexandra Keller considers their revisionism as “coincidental with the seismic shifts in American culture that were the Reagan-Bush I years,” and a “momentary and not unusual fatigue” with those presidencies (240).
as a Cold War liberal in the cavalry trilogy, Ford later redefined the formula and crossed it over with other (sub)genres, delivering films which combined the qualities of the noir and courtroom drama genres (*Sergeant Rutledge*, 1960), or meshing the cavalry subgenre and the cult of the Indian Western (*Cheyenne Autumn*, 1964). Proto-revisionist in content, these pictures anticipated the arrival of the anti-war productions of the late 1960s, such as Ralph Nelson’s *Soldier Blue* and Arthur Penn’s *Little Big Man*. Excessively violent and rich in mock-heroic undertones, these two films inverted widely accepted myths (captivity narratives, genocide euphemized as the Indian Wars) and questioned the hypocrisy of mainstream America, extolling its hippie counter-culture which “rejected respectable bourgeois society for a walk on the wild side,” as put by Michael Valdez Moses (274). The swan song of the cavalry subgenre saw it split along the lines of political sympathies of its directors and producers. On the one hand, the 1990s saw the coming of drearily humanist and mildly revisionist Kevin Costner’s *Dances With Wolves* (1990) and Walter Hill’s *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993), the former of which may appear today as an amended version of white liberal representations of Native Americans with strong ties to Ford’s *Cheyenne Autumn* and Delmer Daves’s *Broken Arrow* (1950). On the other hand, the decade also witnessed far more conservative, if not reactionary television productions released by TNT, such as Charles Haid’s *Buffalo Soldiers* and John Milius’s *Rough Riders* (both 1997). Celebrating the centennial of the Spanish-American War, Milius’s film “took Teddy Roosevelt’s account at face value and proceeded to make *Rough Riders* a rousing cinematic celebration of masculinity, esprit de corps, militarism and Manifest Destiny writ large” (Niemi 40). It seems ironic that the last “true” cavalry Western tellingly backtracked on its revisionist predecessor when it reinstated “Gary Owen” as a feel good song, as if in flat denial
of the bloodcurdling associations with the Washita Massacre, which the tune no doubt triggers in anyone who has seen Penn’s *Little Big Man*.19

Another set of formulas present in the commercials examined in this chapter may be derived from a crossover of a group of films which Noël Carroll classifies as “professional Westerns south of the border” (46), on the one hand, and from the master myth of Texas, i.e. that of the Alamo and its avengers, on the other. Departing from Will Wright’s canonical definition of the professional variation of the Western (a celebration of occupational ethos, overclass managerialism veiled as gunslinger expertise, and rigidly planned modes of operation), Carroll focuses on the social aspect of the subgenre in examining the triangular relations of American professionals with their Mexican adversaries and civilian population. Instead of emphasizing the skill of gringo protagonists and their knack for violence, Carroll discusses the social backdrop as essential to the dynamics of the professionals’ ideological involvement with their clients in four iconic professional Westerns set in Mexico: *Vera Cruz* (1954), *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *The Professionals* (1966), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Carroll interprets these films as expressions of widespread attitudes towards international affairs under *Pax Americana*, which ultimately reveals the mythical framework of military interventions as premised on their liberating potential (60-61). The United States Border Patrol commercials discussed in the last section of this chapter reproduce the financial pitch behind the professional formula in promising prospective recruits good money in return for their professionalism, or in presenting the services provided by the members of the Border Patrol as beneficial to the community that hires them. Still, in stark opposition to “professional Westerns south of the border,” the clips in question appeal first and

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19 As of 2018, the cavalry plot is set for another return with the January premiere of Scott Cooper’s film *Hostiles*, in which a U.S. Cavalry captain is ordered with escorting a Cheyenne family to their home in Montana. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hostiles_(film).
foreground to the budding post-9/11 jingoism (a sentiment essentially absent from all of the aforementioned films), calling for the implementation of the War on Terror and aggressive protection of exclusively American (rather than "Third World") interests in a vein not dissimilar to the myth of the Alamo. They plea solely for, and on behalf of, America, which they envision as a tightly sealed territory. In doing so, the USBP commercials commit themselves to an unabashedly self-assertive neoconservative vision dating back to John Wayne’s wildly patriotic 1960 epic (and returning in the subtler refashioning of the Alamo story in Hancock’s 2004 picture).

Sediment from the cavalry and Alamo formulas may be found in the narratives of the post-9/11 military recruitment commercials. In the grain of Susan Kollin’s analysis of the cowboy rhetoric adopted by the Bush administration, the recruitment clips present themselves as symptomatic of consolatory attempts to provide the traumatized nation with a sense of comfort and collective inspiration. At the same time, they replicate the fluctuations within the Western genre by partaking in the backlash against the critical attitudes spelled out in the previous decades, in which the genre “seemed to be undergoing a revisionist turn” (*Postwestern Cultures* xiv). Consonant with Faludi’s claims, the use of the pre-revisionist cowboy rhetoric in the rallying calls of the Bush administration in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks evokes the unwavering toughness of Wayne’s screen persona, reassuring the public that the government remains in firm control of the situation, that adequate measures will be undertaken, and that trained professionals will bring those responsible to justice. The eagerness with which the conservative policy-makers and media picked up the unambiguous rhetoric of the early Cold War days after 9/11 can hence be seen as a means to comfort the nation alarmed by the attacks, restore its sense of security, designate its enemies, and assure the people of instant and efficient retribution,
provided that we were indeed to believe that, as Jean Baudrillard put it, “the fifties were the real high spot for the U.S. (‘when things were going on’)” (103), and that, in the aftermath of 9/11, one “could still feel the nostalgia for those years, for the ecstasy of power” (103).

What follows below is a textual analysis of a series of recruitment video clips aired on American television and/or posted on the official website of the U.S. Army, U.S. Marines and the U.S. Border Patrol in the years following the attacks of 9/11, which I approach as distillates of the classic Western formulas. As mentioned above, these alleviative, reinvigorating re-inscriptions of the War on Terror within the framework of Frontier warfare are analyzed as a restructuring and readjustment of the 1950s Western, justifying latest American interventions and immigration policy through practices employed in formulaic Westerns: the mythicization of history and space, the idolization of military and paramilitary service, the promotion of the current progressive social order under the veil of meritocracy, the branding of terrorists as modern-day “Injuns,” and the demonization of things southwest of the border. I analyze the ways in which the right-wing ideology reified the myths surrounding the popular images of the cavalry, on the one hand, and the defense of the Alamo and Sam Houston’s subsequent campaign against Santa Anna, on the other, in order to manufacture consent (and active subscription) to the military interventions in the Middle East and the tightening of national security measures at home. The examined USAF and USBP commercials military present the two formations as “natural” (in the Barthesian understanding of the term) heirs to, and embodiments of, the collective sacrifice of Frontier heroes for greater good, refurbished to fit the needs of the contemporary conservative discourse, in keeping
with Joseph Campbell’s notion of the continuous evolution of the hero that accompanies, and responds to, the evolution of the culture he represents (155).

1.1. “They’re There, Now and Fifty Years From Now”: The Myth of the Cavalry in Post-9/11 USAF Recruitment Ads

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, advertisers turned to merchandising military service in several series of commercials evocative of the cult of the cavalry and the Manichean rhetoric of the Cold War Westerns. A seemingly equivocal representation of the Armed Forces that purportedly dispelled romantic notions of potential recruits yet at the same time glamorized the hardships of military career, invested the ideology behind these video clips with mythical significance and helped vindicate the rhetoric of the War on Terror waged by the George W. Bush administration (and continued by that of his successor). While the chief means utilized by the creators of post-9/11 military recruitment commercials were steeped in the video gaming culture, likening the military experience to a first-person-perspective shootout game so as to appeal to a core enlistment group for the USAF (i.e. young, likely impoverished boy-men living with their parents and stuck in dead-end jobs), an aberrant reading of these commercials may trace their many thematic and rhetorical origins back to the cavalry Western perfected by John Ford in his trilogy (Fort Apache, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, Rio Grande). I will argue that the recruitment commercials of the past decade use the myth of the cavalry to articulate narratives which are at the same time nostalgic in their monumental iconography and anxious in their desire to maintain the crumbling foundations of Pax Americana. Informed by cultural historians Richard Slotkin and Stanley Corkin, who have seen
the Cold War Western as a manifestation of developments in the country’s international relations, my approach is to read the military ads as concise metaphors of the neoconservative ideology revived by the War on Terror. The narratives disseminated in the examined commercials utilize the fundamental thematic, visual and textual components of the cavalry Western, updating those formulas in an attempt to reproduce the myth of American exceptionalism that sanctions its role as the global policing entity.

In analyzing the traits and formulas of the cavalry Western resurfacing in contemporary military advertising as a post-9/11 expression of America’s ongoing armed interventions, I propose to approach Ford’s trilogy holistically, its protagonists molded into a single, multifaceted archetype in the grain of Emanuel Levy’s interpretation of Nathan Brittles (John Wayne), in whom the critic does not merely see “Brittles, the individual hero, but Brittles as member of the larger collective he stands for” ("She Wore a Yellow Ribbon"). Though they are temporally remote from Ford’s films, one may derive the foundations of the discussed recruitment commercials from the cavalry Western—a subgenre that combined the conventions of the war film and the Western to produce consistently reassuring plots, whether caused by the anticipated global expansion of Communism or by the projected infiltration of the country by Islamist terrorists. In his examination of the affective power of the silver screen industry early into the Cold War, Stanley Corkin considers the Western and the war film as unrivaled in helping shape the collective national identity through an amalgamation of history and myth (6). Robert Burgoyne likewise sees them as “the narrative forms that have molded national identity most

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20 Temporal detachment of Ford from the subject of his movies was far smaller, since the first part of the trilogy (Fort Apache, 1948) was released a mere six years after the last U.S. Cavalry charge took place. On January 16, 1942, in an instantly mythologized feat Lt. Edwin P. Ramsey led 27 members of his platoon to charge into a detachment of Japanese troops during the campaign of the Bataan peninsula (Rottman 19).
profoundly” within “a privileged discursive site in which anxiety, ambivalence, and expectation about the nation, its history, and its future are played out in narrative form” (8, 11). In simultaneously problematizing the engagement in the Korean conflict and solidifying the burgeoning identity of America as a global guardian of peace, the merger of the two genres allowed Ford’s trilogy “to cross-pollinate thematic and narrative devices” (Foley 4). Engaging the Frontier mythology to vindicate the War on Terror, the discussed commercials surreptitiously contemporize the iconography and language of the cavalry Western, revealing how collective mythology helps to ideologize the political contingencies of the present.

As mentioned above, it appears that the main ideological premise of the military commercials is to foster national solidarity in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and procure endorsement for the reproduction of a progressive, militaristic vision of America. This is achieved through a nostalgic account of the nation’s history and a curious implementation of a practice which Svetlana Boym terms restorative nostalgia. The collages of the past and the present produced in the commercials undertake a transhistorical reconstruction which misrepresents ideological sentiments as truth and tradition (xvi). Dead-serious about itself, “restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and specialize time” (xviii). Importantly for our consideration of Frontier myths in the context of the War on Terror, Boym points out that while they are mostly retrospective, nostalgic narratives can also turn prospective, utilizing phantoms of the past to influence present actions which mold the future (xvii). In this respect, the use of the myth of the Frontier not only evokes the memories of the U.S. as a global superpower but also supplements them with a strong mythical imperative which “supersedes government regulations and is far
more appealing as a basis of action than realpolitik” (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 261). Frontier mythology thus restores the communal sense of security by locating a traumatic, hardly intelligible phenomenon within a familiar framework of reference (i.e. America as an outpost in the terrorist territory).

As pointed out by Slotkin, since the closure of the Frontier the American public discourse has continued to seek for new metaphors that would efficiently account for, and justify, the oft violent development of the post-agrarian, industrial (and post-industrial) society and its relations with the external world (*Gunfighter Nation* 3). Subsequent political programs usually followed two distinct patterns set by what Slotkin terms the “progressive” and the “populist” versions of the Frontier myth. While the progressive interpretation supported the ideological premises of the budding corporate economy and read American history through the lens of Social Darwinism, the populist vision commenced as a backlash to the emergence of transcontinental corporations, combining the features of agrarian Jeffersonianism and economic individualism and stressing the need for dissipation of property and political power, equal opportunities for upward mobility and decentralization of capital (*Regeneration* 22). Interestingly, in using the myth of the Frontier to substantiate their policies, successive American governments would sometimes appropriate typically “populist” archetypes to promote distinctly “progressive” interests, as can be seen in the commercials discussed below. The clips in question feed the prospective recruits with grand, meritocratic narrations which solidify their imaginary relationship to their existence, driving them to stabilize exclusivist cultural and economic models. As part of such narrations, army service in the era of pre-emptive war is invested with mythical significance, just as Ford’s trilogy enveloped the Cold War in the aura of the Indian Wars, eternalizing the army as the enforcer of
Anti-communism and a metonymy of democracy. Where the 1950s cavalry Western “looks back upon the glory days of western settlement as it looks ahead to the expression of U.S. centrality in the postwar world” (Corkin 9), the post-9/11 Army Strong and The Few, the Proud, the Marines clips utilize much of that idiom to advertise the doctrine of pre-emption implemented by the Bush administration. They are both nostalgic and prophetic in asserting the validity of U.S. military engagements after 9/11, romanticizing the “history” of the Armed Forces and the popular longing for global hegemony, and anxious to maintain the increasingly fragile conditions of Pax Americana.

As works which sustain the ideologies of their respective periods, the cavalry Westerns and the modern military commercials seemingly present themselves as narratives set in distinct moments of history (Ford’s trilogy spans the period of the post-bellum Indian Wars, up until “fifteen years after the Shenandoah,” while Army Strong and The Few, the Proud, the Marines feature a range of historical figures and events, from George Washington to general Ann E. Dunwoody, and from the War of Independence to the War on Terror). And yet, the historicity of these productions, instead of rendering them more complex, paradoxically creates a world devoid of depth and specificity, essentializing history into a fixed and repetitive pattern. In expressing the ideologies of their respective periods, both groups of films operate with a metalanguage which petrifies the present conditions and immobilizes the world (Barthes, Mythologies 143). History is reduced to myth, stripped of the social and political circumstances that define it, and consequently liquidated as a concept or “naturalized,” with the mythological archetypes stabilizing the ideological outlook of the ruling discourse. In line with modern mythologizing practices described in Barthes’s Mythologies (and necessitated by exorbitant airtime fees), the sequences of
popular myths proposed by the USAF advertisers amount to consistent reductionism, in which the diachronic development of the army is substituted for a synchronic synthesis (Weinrich 192).

As a timeless notion, the myth of the cavalry helps the dominant ideology rationalize incomprehensible phenomena as manifestations of indefinite interdependencies. Thus, the framework of “naturalized” history fosters the allegorization of the Korean War as a contemporary figuration of “eternal” Frontier conflicts in Ford’s cavalry trilogy, while also facilitating the appropriation of the Manichean imagery of the Indian Wars by the metalanguage of the War on Terror.

In *Interventions*, Noam Chomsky points out America’s long-standing inclination to misrepresent its military actions by continually refashioning its enemies and victimizing itself, in the hope of upholding its exceptional status and validating its imposition of economic and political control on entities stigmatized as its enemies. Perhaps best described by Huntington as the activity of “selling intervention in such a way as to create the misimpression that it is the Soviet Union that you are fighting” (qtd. in Chomsky 78), the right-wing discourse of the Cold War resurfaced in the aftermath of 9/11, initially garnering high public approval rates for the armed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. It did so thanks to the misimpression that the country went to war to quash terrorists in their harbors and to provide humanitarian relief efforts to those affected by terrorist rule. In the analyzed clips [Towards the Sound of Chaos], the neoconservative logic after 9/11 is best exemplified by the recurring images of army trucks and choppers carrying aid boxes labeled with the

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21 In *Occidentalism: the West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit point to the persistence of Manichean thinking in the rhetoric of Republican politicians, citing the discursive parallels between Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush as a case in point (“When Ronald spoke of the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” and George W. Bush lumped North Korea, Iran and Iraq together as the “axis of evil,” they were speaking in Manichean terms” (106)).

Star-Spangled Banner). In a fashion akin to George Kennan’s X Article published during Truman’s presidency—in which the author referred to Turner’s Frontier thesis to help dramatize the Cold War in terms of the binary oppositions of the Indian Wars (McVeigh, The American Western 77)—the metalanguage of the War on Terror sees in Islamist terrorists the latest incarnation of “bad Indians” who replace the Soviets as antagonists in the collective imagination, and assist in the implementation of the otherwise controversial policies. The “terrorist scare”—a construct of paranoid imagination not dissimilar to the settlers’ perception of Native Americans as bloodthirsty savages—thus validates the timeless rhetoric of a savage menace. As argued by Benjamin Barber in Fear’s Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy, the fear of terrorism allows America to wage preventive war under the guise of preventive democracy (21). His observation has been reiterated by Tzvetan Todorov, who sees fear as the motor of America’s paranoid discourse of national security which aids excessive reactions to threats of physical violence and economic competition from what he dubs the “countries of resentment,” i.e. postcolonial states continually exploited by former metropolises (6). Purportedly aiming to establish durable peace founded on commonly adopted values (identified by default with the sweeping wave of consumerist lifestyle), unilateral interventionism also successfully constructs terrorists as “Injuns” to present military operations in Iraq as liberation of its oppressed natives from tyranny.

The immobilization of history in the myth of the cavalry is accompanied by the fixation of the landscape within which that myth is located. The landscape of the latest Armed Forces recruitment commercials possesses “the simplicity of the essence” (Barthes Mythologies 143) typical of Ford’s cavalry Westerns, most notably Monument Valley, whose discovery for American cinema and popular culture is
widely attributed to the director of *Fort Apache*. As one of the most distinct locations in the mythology of the American West, Monument Valley is so imposing it “creates a vacuum demanding men to become legends” (Ebert). In the cavalry trilogy, Monument Valley is a host to numerous rites of passage—it is here that young cavalrymen, such as Jeff Yorke (Claude Jarman Jr.) in *Rio Grande*, shed their recruit skins and undergo the baptism of fire. It is also against the background of Monument Valley that the epic fights with Indians are staged, from Lt. Col. Thursday’s charge in *Fort Apache* through the surgical strike performed on a band of Apache prowlers by the cavalry in *Rio Grande*. The Valley is likewise prominently featured in a U.S. Marine Corps video clip *The Climb* which depicts a recruit successfully climbing one of the forbidding rock formations, receiving moral guidance from the apparitions of other Marines who descend upon the rock to assist him in earning his stripes. In the clip’s finale, the recruit is seen exhaling triumphantly while on top of the rock, with the silhouette of Elephant Butte in the distance. Rephrasing Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, we may argue that the commercial recontextualizes the significance of the iconic formation, whose meticulously staged ambivalence (i.e. that of Nathan Brittles as both a tired old man and rock-solid veteran (163)) is re-forged into a celebration of both arcade-like agility and elite tradition. Significant chunks of other post-9/11 military recruitment commercials are also set in desert

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23 That the notion of surgical strikes constitutes an important token of wishful thinking in manufacturing consent to military interventions has been demonstrated by such post-9/11 Hollywood productions as Ron Howard’s *The Missing* (2003), Jon Favreau’s *Iron Man* (2008), Marvel’s *The Avengers* franchise (2012-), or Justin Kurzel’s *Assassin’s Creed* (2016). These films present the tactics of surgical strike as an efficient (and reasonably humanitarian) way of waging war, perhaps most patently so in Favreau’s film, in which the superhero is equipped with an unfailing identification technology that enables him to save an entire Afghan village, whose inhabitants have been taken hostage by the Taliban. The software embedded in Iron Man’s costume allows Tony Stark to instantly sieve out the perpetrators and kill them all without collateral damage. The surgical strike fantasy thus tacitly aids the perception of modern military intervention in terms of a “just war,” according to Hassler-Forest, who notices that “in spite of the film’s surface rejection of the military-industrial complex, Iron Man’s ideal soldier is presented as a cyborg figure who has incorporated this military technology into his outfit and made it into an essential, even natural part of his physique” (91).
locations, helping to sell the War on Terror as a Frontier conflict. Other-worldly desert ravines and rock formations flown over by choppers heading towards the setting sun, alongside the dolly shots of tanks speeding across the dusty plain (*For Country*) are highly suggestive of the unreal scenery of Monument Valley, naturalizing an alien land and ascribing to the Middle-Eastern theater of war the heroic aura of the Four Corners. It does not seem unreasonable, then, to argue against John Cawelti’s claim that “a Western that does not take place in the West, near the Frontier, at a point in history when social order and anarchy are in tension, and that does not involve some form of pursuit, is simply not a Western” (qtd. in Parks 19).

While the discussed videos are dislocated from the American Wild West to the tangents of the global “axis of evil,” it is easy to follow their authors in lending the Frontier aura to the contemporary theaters of U.S. military interventions, where social order is scarce and anarchy abounds. Moreover, the pursuit of the amorphous terrorists by the armored vehicles draws amply from the image of a cavalry squadron dispatched on patrol in the Indian Country. Thus, the Western’s ever-expanding mythological potential avoids clear-cut labeling, while its spatial plasticity helps buttress the political discourse that covertly dehumanizes the Other by removing them from sight (and simultaneously implying that the invisible, modern-day savage lurks in the impenetrable desert space).

The concept of space in the commercials is further informed by a bipolar imagery which interweaves visions of war zones with those of home, a trait highly evocative of the cavalry Western. Ford’s *Rio Grande* opens with an image in which these two spheres are intertwined, as we witness a regiment returning to the fort from a foray into the Indian Country. Once inside, the cavalrymen are attended to by their families. Ford’s film portrays the desert station as a military stronghold and civilian
refuge, a secluded “microcosm of embattled American values” (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 365), its hostile counterpart being the dusty wilderness. The theme of the returning patrol recurs in a number of the Armed Forces commercials (*For Us All, For Country*), where a band of soldiers are seen entering the base in the midst of a dusty desert. In the revamped version of the cavalry myth, the presence of the fort fittingly extends worldwide, along with the relocation of the Frontier outside the continent. Where the cavalry Western demarcates the space inside the fort as a safe haven in the immediate vicinity of the Indian Territory, in the recruitment commercials the inside of the fort spans nationwide, its stockades moved deep into the Terrorist Territory, courtesy of the U.S. Armed Forces overseas efforts. Like the “dog-faced soldiers … riding the outposts of a nation” in the cavalry Western (*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*), the modern troopers “take a stand for our nation” (*For Us All*), holding the fort and securing the possibility of Arcadia signified by the blissful stills of a Rocky Mountain farm and an inside of a small-town diner. Featured as paradigmatic Frontier outposts, the army bases in the desert outland render the inside of the fort impenetrable to the roaming bands of terrorists-as-Indians, whose implied presence intensifies the depiction of America as a beleaguered fortress.  

Russell Campbell sees the representation of the fort in Ford’s cavalry cycle as a result of “devoted attempt to realize an ideal: an organic community” (qtd. in McBride 452) in the fashion of early religious settlements, surrounded by the hostile wilderness. In Ford’s movies, it is militaristic ideology that substitutes for Puritan dogmatism, while the army acts as the agent of civilization and peacemaker between the civilian

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24 Corkin highlights the way in which Ford continuously emphasizes the contrast between the domestic enclosure of the fort and the menacing space of the desert, e.g. in the scenes of courtship between Lt. Michael O’Rourke (John Agar) and Philadelphia Thursday (Shirley Temple) during their carefree outing to Indian Country. “A crane shot finds them amidst the expanse of desert, as the film’s music provides a light backdrop to their cavorting. This tone shifts, however, when they encounter a smoldering wagon with dead settlers inside” (90).
population and the indigenous tribes. Likewise, in the USAF clips the idyll within “fear’s empire” is predicated upon its continuous surveillance by soldiers-liminal mediators between the desert wilderness and heartland America. 

Perhaps the most spectacular among the representations of soldiers as guardians of the American pastoral, America’s Marines features drills of U.S. Marines in parade uniforms staged in the foreground of America’s landmarks, among others Point Judith Lighthouse, Independence Hall, Gateway Arch, the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, as well as the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam and the Golden Gate Bridge, the soldiers’ eyes “inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound” (Whitman 104) as if in fulfillment of the seer’s prophecy of America’s global expansion. The sequence distills the history of America’s continental expansion, with the featured sites hinting at the dynamic repositioning of the Frontier in popular imagination. It also foresees new directions in America’s development, such as the conquest of the Frontiers of global domination and technological exploration.

In his reading of Rio Grande, Slotkin argues that on the brink of the Korean War, the military ideology appropriated the discourse of egalitarianism, identifying army values with those of democracy and dissolving the oppositions that separated them. According to Slotkin, the cavalry in Ford’s trilogy acts as a metonymy of America’s policy and a metaphoric carrier of its values, thus subsuming the notions of democracy and nationhood under the idea of the military (Gunfighter Nation 359). Such oppositions are likewise resolved in She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, where the news of Custer’s defeat in the Battle of Little Big Horn rallies the local community around the reliable Capt. Nathan Brittles. Bearing in mind Camilla Fojas’s argument about the post-Civil War setting of a number of 1950s Westerns as a tailor-made

25 The liminal qualities of members of the military and paramilitary organizations are discussed in the subsequent section of this chapter.
frame for narratives of national regeneration and cohesion—one which used the collective trauma of the Civil War as a trampoline to reintegrate the nation “into true and redemptive faith” (30)—it is easy to see how, in the aftermath of the terrorist assault on American citizens, a number of U.S. military commercials have employed a similar strategy, idealizing the military community as a metonymical representation of American democracy. This metonymy revolves around the notion of the army as an impartial, meritocratic system providing equal opportunities to its members, based on the recognition of their contributions to the community, and regardless of their background (as long as they internalize its tenets). The presentation of the army as a meritocratic community provides the otherwise deregulated public sphere with an alibi, acting as a rare entity that continues to guarantee comprehensive welfare and attractive prospects of social advancement in the deregulation era. Thanks to its financial and patriotic appeal, the meritocratic structure of the army sustains the hegemonic status quo by successfully integrating its subordinates in the reproduction of the dominant ideologies, and it does so without direct compulsion, but, above all, as Stuart Hall notices, “by means of winning consent of those classes and groups who were subordinated within it” (85). At the same time, however, the military operations conducted by this community of equals assist in petrifying the existing structures of ownership, and sanction the unequal distribution of revenue generated in the course of interventions, as was the case with the Iraq War (Judt and Snyder 405).

Starring in the clip entitled Where I’m From, Capt. John Williams of the U.S. Marine Corps best exemplifies the myth of the cavalryman as a virtuous beneficiary of meritocracy. Provided with “all the opportunities” by the Corps, he is a diligent student of American-style capitalism, and in that he embodies the archetypal
underprivileged recruit from the cavalry Westerns, an exemplar of which can be found in Sgt. Tyree (Ben Johnson) in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. Ford and the USMC copywriters script similar stories in which a hearty subscription to the myth is rewarded with opportunities for social advancement. Ford’s Tyree hails from a deprived Irish immigrant family, but his conscientious effort eventually allows him to benefit from the military system. *Where I’m From* stages Williams proudly parading the streets of Detroit, where he comes back in a sentimental journey which reminds him of the grueling struggle to get out of the urban ghetto. Since, according to the army’s ideology, “race and class are irrelevant in the face of merit” (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 339), the system deservedly recognizes and promotes individuals of all ranks and backgrounds as per their credits. A common denominator in the community of equals, meritocracy alleges to afford all interested parties an equal opportunity to become the people’s supermen. Joining the military does not merely make one a soldier, but endows one with the aptitude for joining the rank of the nation’s heroes, as embodied by the string of legendary figures: Washington crossing the Potomac, T. Roosevelt leading his rough riders in Cuba, D. Eisenhower saluting a group of cheering MPs, D. McArthur fulfilling his pledge to return to the Philippines, N. Schwarzkopf conducting a field inspection, and A. Dunwoody accepting her fourth general star as the first woman in the history of the U.S. military. If the cavalry trilogy celebrates Capt. Kirby York (*Fort Apache*), Nathan Brittiles (*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*), and Lt. Col. Kirby Yorke (spelled with a twist in *Rio Grande*) as epitomes of Frontier leadership, the U.S. Army commercials glorify America’s military pantheon, transforming historical individuals “into near-gods and their sagas into myths” (Segal 53). Providing military careers with the epic context of Frontier warfare, the montages presented in the commercials ascend to mythical
heights, associating service in the armed forces with civic virtue and honorable sacrifice.

In *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, Tyree’s (and other troopers’) Irish roots stand for the cavalry’s indifference to the ethnic and racial background of the recruits. The military is unprejudiced in offering everyone equal career opportunities, potato-famine survivors and disempowered people of color among others, for its soldiers “come from big cities and towns so small you can’t find them on a map. They hail from all walks of life, all races, all creeds” (*Become an Officer*). The cited commercial argues for the U.S. Army’s inclusiveness with regard to race, class, and gender differences. And yet, rather than recognizing these difference, the Army nullifies it by molding recruits into uniform endorsement of the military ideology and turning them into “pliant, obedient citizens who practice dominant values” (Althusser 1477). The determinants of identities of particular groups and individuals are quietly extracted from these narratives – the insertion of women and people of color in the commercials is shown as ever-present, devoid of its historical context or counter-narratives characteristic of respective minorities. As such, the ostensible reinterpretations of national myths merely provide “a populist gloss to a structure of ideas whose basic principles remained progressive” (*Gunfighter Nation* 282). There is no place for dissidence among the ethnics in the army ranks, whose diversity is appreciated only inasmuch as it bends them into obedience to the ruling doctrine, the way it bends Navajo scout Son of Many Mules of *Rio Grande* to assist the U.S. Army in fighting the Apaches.

The inclusiveness of the military commercials does not herald a redistribution of cultural or economic power. Rather, it invests them with an air of natural and inherent racial and gender innocence—the editing of the clips is such as to suggest
the military’s current inclusivity was not historically acquired but innate to the institution. The contemporary USAF commercials extend the all-embracing dialectic of the cavalry trilogy onto the women in the military. Rather uniquely to the classic Western formulas, the cavalry plot significantly modifies the role of women, who no longer impede men’s liberty, but complement it. It is precisely the strength of their wives that empowers Ford’s cavalrmen to act outside of the fort. Ford’s films portrayed the military community as a world inhabited by both men and women who “married into the regiment” (McDonough 107), with both groups essential to the community’s functioning and treated as equal, yet meant to fulfill different tasks and do so separately. The narratives fed by the commercials resolve this tension in a picture of ostensible inclusivity. When Nathan Brittes courteously refers to Major Allshard’s wife a “soldier” in She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, he does so symbolically. On the other hand, the “soldierliness” of contemporary female recruits as presented in the USAF commercials is beyond doubt literal yet fails to convey the cultural character (and ramifications) of their gradual inclusion in military structures. One significant instance of the subscription of minorities to the military ideology can be found in the video featuring the footage of gen. Ann Dunwoody’s promotion to the rank of four-star general (Officiership Anthem), inserted among a string of images of white male military icons. Interviewed on her promotion, gen. Dunwoody stated she “never… even heard of the word ‘glass ceilings,’” adding enigmatically, “the glass was always half-full. You could always be anything you wanted to be” (Tyson). In gen. Dunwoody’s statement, the military ideology has pervaded the language of its subscriber and nullified the historicity of a watershed moment (promotion of a

26 Referring to Wendy Peek Chapman’s study of John Ford’s masculine persona in the Westerns of the 1940s and 50s, Christopher Garbowski notices that what renders sergeant York so effective as a field officer in Fort Apache is his reliance on horizontal strategies inspired by the “feminine” modes of action represented by the women in the fort. “Acting as a model for success, the full role of the ‘waiting women’ is thus not so passive as it seems,” argues Garbowski (95).
female officer to an unprecedented rank). Reduced to a couple of clichéd comments, one of them echoing Earl Carter’s “Be all you can be” slogan used by the U.S. Army in its commercials for nearly two decades, gen. Dunwoody’s achievement serves the dominant narratives and presents itself as something self-evident. In this sense, the military machine does indeed level all differences, but it also purifies and exonerates itself, “suppressing the weight of history” (Barthes Mythologies 101).

Another token of the cavalry Western indicative of meritocratic patriotism and featured prominently in the present-day recruitment clips is the Star-Spangled Banner. Ford’s trilogy is a patent carnival of standards, flags and banners, from the daily ritual of raising and lowering of the colors through the draping of the fort’s dining room in red, white and blue for ceremonious dances in Fort Apache and She Wore a Yellow Ribbon. These movies established the flag as a staple emblem in Ford’s “civil rights” Westerns of the 1960s, i.e. Sergeant Rutledge and Cheyenne Autumn, in which army colors become fetishes of constitutional liberties largely inaccessible to ethnic minorities. In his condemnations of long-standing racist mistreatment of African-Americans and injustice done to Native Americans, Ford exonerates and glorifies the military as a substitute for what the society is not. While Sergeant Rutledge and Cheyenne Autumn belong among the pioneers of the revisionist Western, they nonetheless use the cavalry as an alibi for the otherwise unjust society. In a manner reminiscent of the manifestation of French imperialist discourse on the iconic cover of “Paris Match” famously analyzed by Barthes in Mythologies, Ford celebrates army colors as the signifier of quintessentially American values.27 The society may scapegoat African-American Braxton Rutledge

27 In an intriguing reiteration of the “Paris Match” cover (and one which sheds its subtly implicative rhetoric), the 1997 television cavalry Western Buffalo Soldiers features Danny Glover on a mount, sporting the Star Spangled banner: http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3801061888/tt0118790?ref_=tt_pv_md_1.
(Woody Strode) or the Cheyenne tribe based on racial prejudice, yet a fair army trial acquits Rutledge of unfounded accusations, and a sympathetic cavalry captain Thomas Archer (Richard Widmark) deeply commiserates with the Cheyenne band led by Dull Knife (Gilbert Roland) and Little Wolf (Ricardo Montalban). In both films the cavalry foresees the imminent vindication of minorities without shifting the foundations of the myth of America-as-meritocracy eulogized through the cult of the blue jacket and the flag. Such eulogies are often put in the mouths of ethnic protagonists, as is the case with Rutledge who fully embraces the meritocratic myth when he exclaims, “It was because the Ninth Cavalry was my home, my real freedom, and my self-respect, and the way I was desertin’ it, I wasn’t nuthin’ worse than a swamp-runnin’ nigger, and I ain’t that! Do you hear me? I’m a man!” (Sergeant Rutledge). Rutledge’s dramatic appeal exemplifies the capacity of the meritocratic system to incorporate difference and its manifestations, including the potentially destabilizing mimicry. Although Rutledge’s reproduction of the army’s discourse may seem to undermine the racial bias of Anglo-America of the Civil Rights era—an accomplished soldier, Rutledge is “almost the same but not quite, almost the same but not white” (Bhabha 86)—the eventual vindication of the protagonist in court neither destabilizes the meritocratic myth nor questions the army’s authority as the arbiter of social justice. Acquitted by his peers, Rutledge is given his due spotlight in the final shot of the film, as he leads his men on a reconnaissance mission in the desert to the tune of Jerry Livingston’s “Captain Buffalo.”

28 Ford’s cavalry films consistently idealize the military as a community capable of cleansing itself of racial and class prejudice which plagued the “melting pot” America, as if in echo of John Joseph Pershing who, while posted at Fort Assiniboine, Montana in 1896, praised his African-American subordinates for embracing the army values: “Most men, of whatever race, creed, or color, want to do the proper thing and they respect the man above them whose motive is the same” (Taylor 167).
Throughout the cavalry trilogy, not only does the internalization of the dominant ideology manifest itself through verbal declarations of the soldiers’ loyalty to a shared code of conduct but also through their allegiance to regimental banners (and, by extension, the American flag). Regimental banners mostly appear in close-up shots of cavalry standard bearers, often overshadowing the cavalrymen themselves. “I can’t see him. All I can see is the flags,” exclaims an officer’s wife in *Fort Apache* as she watches the regiment approach the band of Cochise (Miguel Inclán) to negotiate peace conditions. A similar use of the American flag may be found in the post-9/11 recruitment commercials: The Star-Spangled Banner can be seen overlooking the encampment of Roosevelt’s Rough Riders, erected on the Moon (no doubt signifying Kennedy’s New Frontier Thesis), crowning the skyline of Prague (a likely evocation of the demise of the Soviet reign in Central and Eastern Europe and American victory in the Star Wars era, especially when paired with the image of the flag flying over U.S. Marines’ outpost in the Middle-Eastern desert, perhaps foreshadowing the imminent terrorist defeat), or planted on an oversize cast of Joe Rosenthal’s *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* at the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial in Washington. The latter image keeps coming back throughout *The Few, the Proud, the Marines* series as if sticking the label of the Good War on all successive U.S. military engagements (*For Us All*)²⁹.

The use of the flag in the commercial narratives ascertains the viewer in their beliefs and fossilizes their sensibilities through a cyclical reiteration of a familiar archetype. The repeated evocations of the cult of the flag in the commercials cement the television audience’s sense of national solidarity in the face of terrorist menace,

²⁹ Rooted in the rhetoric of World War II, the practice of ennobling current U.S. military operations as humanitarian undertakings has most recently resurfaced in Barrack Obama’s Nobel Prize for Peace acceptance speech, in which he implicitly and conditionally revamped interventionism as a “just war,” i.e. one which is waged as a last resort or in self defense, proportional in the use of force and minimizing collateral damage among civilians (Todorov 209).
while at the same time deliberately misrepresenting post-9/11 interventions as mere avatars of a perpetual ideological conflict. Revered by soldiers and civilians alike, the flag unifies all social factions and provides an alibi to the ideology of anti-terrorist interventions and enhanced domestic security measures. A call for the espousal of the post-9/11 security policies creates a semblance of patriotic sincerity; if everybody subscribes to the cult of the flag, then the concepts epitomized by that flag cannot possibly be exclusive or unjust.

Symbolized by the flag salute, the myth of the army as a meritocratic structure not only entails the possibility for social advancement of the otherwise repressed minorities but also secures a level playing field for their progress, as it deprives their Anglo-American colleagues of the privileges available to white civilians. When confronted with his son Jeff, a West Point dropout who enlisted to serve under and prove himself to his father, Lt. Col. Kirby Yorke (John Wayne) advises the youth to “put out of your mind any romantic ideas that it’s a way of glory. It’s a life of suffering and hardship, an uncompromising devotion to your oath and your duty.”

Yorke Sr.’s statement is characteristic of what we may term the dialectic of army mystique that permeates Ford’s trilogy, intermingling tough-mindedness with sentimentalism. This two-dimensional dialectic, which equally reveres utter professionalism and patriotic devotion, has had a long tradition in subsequent combat movies and is also featured in a number of recruitment commercials. The soldiers showcased in the clips identify themselves through the lens of “Soldier’s Creed,” as “experts and professionals” devoted to the performance of their daily duties, while also stressing their role as “guardians of freedom and American way of life” and those who “serve the people of the United States” and “live the army values.” The recent recruitment campaigns thus remain firmly anchored in the rhetoric of the
cavalry movies, promoting a business-like mindset and yet celebrating the sentimental value of the uniform. Thus, despite Yorke’s declarations, suffering and hardship do become romantic ideas, as they dignify military service and add to it an air of brusque heroism. In the course of their professional training and well coordinated engagements, the recruits also acquire superhuman prowess. “Each of you will have to do the work of ten men,” Yorke instructs the newly arrived greenhorns in *Rio Grande*. Yorke’s speech foreshadows the ordain to which the new arrivals will have to subject themselves in order to gain the skills necessary to defend the civilians who live in the fort. Echoes of such superhuman expectations—rendered through CGI graphics to appeal to young men steeped in video game culture—resurface in the post-9/11 clips, which forewarn potential recruits of the numerous boot camp hardships and depict army training as a rite of passage. Like the Indian Wars, the War on Terror calls for an extra effort, and such can be provided by the select few, “forged in the crucible of training” (*Toward the Sound of Chaos*), for “there’s strong and then there’s army strong,” as the current U.S. Army slogan contends.

Aside from the extraordinary strength of character, the myth of the cavalry also implies unwavering submission to the ideology, sometimes on the brink of outright cynicism, as is the case with Capt. York in *Fort Apache*. Confronted by journalists-mythmakers, York covers for his dead superior, well aware of the mythopoeic potential of Lt. Col. Thursday’s (Henry Fonda) ill-fated attack on Cochise’s Apaches. After all, though it does disclose the workings of an ideology exploiting the myth of the last stand, *Fort Apache* is far from its radical condemnation. Reflecting on the American involvement in Vietnam, Ford reportedly stated in a letter to his friend, “I haven’t the slightest idea what we’re doing there,” and yet in spite of his
conflicted private opinions the director of the cavalry trilogy and veteran of the U.S. Navy continued to support the war effort (McBride). As put by Thursday, “the uniform, gentlemen, is not a subject for individual, whimsical expression” (Fort Apache), a sentiment reinstated in a video clip promoting the U.S. Marines through the slogan, “We don’t make compromises. We make the marines” (No Compromises). For all of his inner doubt, York publicly misrepresents Thursday’s dogmatism as charisma, feeding the American public a heartwarming story of a military unit who fought and died driven by mutual loyalty. He thus becomes complicit in the Army’s efforts to patch up a massacre brought about single-handedly by a man obsessed about his own career. York’s interview with the newspapermen is an interesting instance of the appropriation of populist archetypes (solidarity in the face of death) by the progressive narrative. Lending his veteran credibility to an incipient myth, York cynically “confirms the sacredness and superiority of the military as a whole over its individual members” (Levy), enabling the dissemination of a narrative which will inspire the enlistment of prospective recruits. In the words of Richard Slotkin, he knows that for the military ideology to succeed, “we are to continue to believe in our myths despite our knowledge that they are untrue” (Gunfighter Nation 342).

The commercials continue to use the myth of the cavalry as a foundation for the ideology of the day, calling for popular support of interventions in the aftermath of 9/11. Where Fort Apache, the first and the least unambiguous piece of Ford’s trilogy, exposes the cynicism of the militaristic ideology, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon

30 In his discussion of John Wayne’s The Alamo, Slotkin (Gunfighter Nation 517) notices a degree of mythopoetic parallelism between the master (Ford) and his pupil (Wayne). In his film, Wayne borrows from Fort Apache to endow his Davy Crockett with Kirby York’s aptitude for mythmaking. Both consciously fabricate myths to persuade their fellow countrymen to embrace particular political visions. Where York does so to legitimize the myth of Thursday’s last stand, Crockett presents his fellow Tennesseans with an offensive letter allegedly written by General Santa Anna. In both cases, special means are employed to do away with potential public skepticism when swift action is required.
and Rio Grande do not go this far and are less self-conscious, nourished by the myth. To a mythologist reading the commercials the way Ford reads the myth of the last stand in For Apache, the military copywriters resemble the reporters concocting the heroic story of Thursday’s charge. Their video clips are founded on archetypes and feats extrapolated from the context of the moment and trimmed to catchy slogans, as in Officership Anthem, which superimposes images of the American past on the present to advertise Army officers as those who “lead across frozen rivers. They lead from island to island. They lead to higher ground, to build hope, to break through barriers, to free a continent, to explore new worlds and carry out the ideas of a nation.” This superimposition urges the viewer to recognize America’s latest preemptive interventions as something “natural,” ever-present. Like the painting of Thursday’s charge these juxtaposed collages freeze time, petrifying the mythic images with voice-over captions written and read out in the present tense. Such a use of presens historicum, as noticed by Wolf-Dieter Stempel, helps to manufacture iconic effects by imposing constructs based on the absent and the bygone onto the present, and thus eternalizes the past (190-191).

The aforementioned evocations of the myth of the cavalry conserve and totalize the world, helping maintain the conditions required for submission to the popular narrative. Such an essentialist structuring further helps to render these narratives omni-historical, and thus non-historical, “in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present throughout history” (Althusser 1497). Also, in parallel with the stories to be written by the journalists who gather around York upon Thursday’s death, modern-day military advertising continues to interpellate its audience, instilling the dominant vision in the prospective recruits and inviting them to respond to the call of ideology (understood as a set of signifying
practices that constitute individuals as social subjects and govern the relations which bind those subjects to the dominant relations of political and economic production (Eagleton 18)). Although it has been critizied for the assumptions of its sweeping omnipotence and the audience’s supposed uncritical receptivity to it, from a discursive perspective the concept of interpellation embedded in Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses can help illuminate the narratives behind those commercials, especially since the focus of this study rests with their textual analysis rather than their actual reception. Often direct, the interpellations made in the commercials procure quasi-patriotic challenges to be taken up by military prospects, rooted in the ideologized parlance of national security and cavalry-like solidarity. These calls for action are often superimposed on the faces of non-Anglo-American and female recruits, as if in an attempt to adapt the underlying ideology to the multicultural conditions of the present by means of a token inclusion of minorities, whose presence validates the all-pervasive narrative of retaliation. One example of a direct interpellation is featured at the end of Officership Anthem, where a stark male voiceover concludes the commercial by stating that “they [officers of the U.S. Army] have learned to bring out the best in others, and themselves. Can you?”

It is precisely the low pitch of the voiceover that amplifies the affective appeal of the cited interpellation. In his analysis of the voice as a frequently overlooked yet key feature of films, Marcel Chion argues that the presence of synch sound and human voice in sound films structures and hierarchizes both their visual and sonic space. They may pass unnoticed, “swallowed by the fiction,” but “if you alter or remove these sounds, the image is no longer the same” (3-4). Chion likens the seemingly minute impact of voice to a graffiti painted onto a gargantuan edifice of the newly erected Forum des Halles, which subjected a previously blank structure to
the commentary of an anonymous street artist. Likewise, the hypermasculine movie trailer-like voiceover in the cited commercial provides it with a very particular perspective (unwavering confidence, calm leadership), while sound generates affects that spur acts of patriotism (enlistment in the U.S. Army). At the peak of the Western’s power, Ford’s trilogy boosted the appeal of the military through clanking cavalry gear, snorting horses, beating hoofs, and blasting bugles. Waged in the age of video games, the War on Terror conversely employs hooting missiles, revving chopper engines, and radio-transmitted orders to cater to modern-day sensitivities while continuing to interpret American interventionism as Frontier warfare. The question posed in Become an Officer challenges the addressee of the message much like Uncle Sam’s finger pointing at volunteers for the army in World War I (and ever since), not only recruiting subjects as individuals willing to pursue professional military careers but also demanding that they sanction the imaginary relation to the conditions in which those careers are to be enacted. The reformulation of Uncle Sam’s plea, along with the endowment of the U.S. Armed Forces with the mythical qualities of the cavalry bodes well for the longevity of those myths within militaristic ideologies of the future. Protean and indomitable (Culler 29), even in the face of the apparent demise of the cavalry subgenre, its mythology continues to advocate the changing political doctrines of tomorrow.

1.2. Defenders, Avengers: Shades of the Alamo in Post-9/11 Border Patrol Recruitment Videos

Whereas the narratives of the post-9/11 USAF commercials turn to the cavalry Western to rekindle the rhetoric of the Indian Wars, the U.S. Border Patrol recruiters have resorted to the Anglo-American mythology of the southwestern borderland, in
particular the legendary of the Alamo. The ideological significance of the thirteen-day siege of the fortified mission, its destruction by the Mexican forces led by Santa Anna, and his consecutive defeat at the hands of the Texan army commanded by Sam Houston, argues Richard R. Flores in his *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol*, was not instantaneous. Flores suggests it should rather be traced back to the socio-economic modernization of Texas at the turn of the century, when a transition from open range cattle-breeding towards organized agriculture, accompanied by intense industrialization, took place. These transformations, which the scholar refers to as the “Texas Modern,” involved major changes in ownership and resolved land-centered conflicts in favor of Anglo-Americans, contributing to the renewal of ethnic tensions and sparking local nationalism, whose ultimate result was “the production of difference and the reification of identity achieved through the making of the Alamo” (18). Flores sees the objectification of the historical events of 1836 as a major factor contributing to the creation of a symbol which helped to institutionalize the ascendant socio-economic model. Decontextualized and sanctified, the Texas Revolution became for Anglos “a sign of rebirth, the coming-of-age for a state and, eventually, a nation in the modern period” (11-12). The refashioned tale of the Alamo, he contends, continued to be contemporized, moving on to encompass the ongoing changes in the national identity. In the course of this process, which Flores refers to as “disembedding,” the signifier was separated from its initial signified, and was thus enabled to embody ideas nonexistent at the time of its origin. The rise of the Alamo as a nationwide symbol of the modern order, Flores concludes, thus implied its disconnection from the past events and harnessing to the demands of contemporary ideology (154-159).
Flores’s study of the growing importance of the Alamo for the making of American modernity largely overlaps with James McEnteer’s analysis of the superior significance of Texas in the country’s political culture throughout the twentieth century. In his *Deep in the Heart: The Texas Tendency in American Politics*, McEnteer explores how what he calls the “warrior culture” came to play a prevalent role in American political life, from Lyndon B. Johnson to the Bush dynasty. Inspecting the increasing cultural, economic and political impact of Texas in the twentieth century (buttressed by the symbolic influence of the Alamo as a national symbol, examined by Flores), McEnteer finds Texas to be a present-day equivalent of Virginia of the American Revolution era, and a catalyst for decisions resolving historically ambiguous entanglements, from the early Cold War through the second intervention in the Persian Gulf. Interestingly for the study of the evidently Texan rhetoric of the post-9/11 U.S. Border Patrol commercials, McEnteer proposes to approach the Bush Doctrine as “the logical extension of changes over decades as Texas values came to exert increasing influence over our national politics” (1-2).

Extending McEnteer’s argument onto latest paramilitary advertising, and drawing from Flores’s analysis of the Alamo as a major myth of contemporary American culture, I would like to consider three post-9/11 Border Patrol recruitment commercials as exemplary “warrior culture” narratives, designed to reinvigorate the national community through yet another revitalization of the ultimate Texan archetype.

Transformed into an all-American symbol, the Alamo was frequently re-envisioned on the silver screen as a metaphor of America’s political entanglements, from silent movies (*The Immortal Alamo* (1911)), through the frenzy of the fifties triggered by Walt Disney’s *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier* (1955) and
capped by John Wayne’s epic (1960), to the latest unveiling of the myth in John Lee Hancock’s *The Alamo* (2004). Intended for children and early-teen audience, Disney’s television series immortalized Fess Parker as coon hat swashbuckler, but remained ideologically simplistic. On the contrary, its concurrent release date caused Frank Lloyd’s *The Last Command* (1955) to pass largely unnoticed despite respectable budget and solid cast.\(^{31}\) John Wayne’s three-hour film seems the least removed from Hancock’s picture in terms of its humongous expenditure, overlong runtime, and ideological implications. Both productions drastically exceeded their planned budgets and grossed below their exorbitant box office expectations. Both span significantly more than two hours (the director’s cut of Wayne’s film amounting to a 203 minutes-long drag). Both intended to solidify the nation’s morale as the country was about to plunge into decade-long military conflicts. My decision to discuss Hancock’s film rather than Wayne’s epic stems from three major premises. First, contrary to the dormant cavalry subgenre, post-9/11 Hollywood productions continue to engage borderland plots in addressing contemporary political issues (*Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *Blackthorn* (2011), *A Night in Old Mexico* (2013), *Frontera* (2014)). Second, and more importantly, where Ford’s cavalry trilogy sets lasting and directly transferable standards for (supposedly) inclusive representations of the military, Wayne’s *The Alamo* follows a far starker agenda of unapologetic imperialism and lacks the ideological subtlety displayed by Ford. While Wayne lends the borderland quest an air of gallantry and purity, along with his “commitment to the values of the nation—

\(^{31}\) That Disney’s series cast a long shadow over Lloyd’s picture has also been evident in the discrepancy between the two films’ current availability online. One may purchase a complete DVD edition of *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier* for as little as three dollars, but will have to pay a fistful for the VHS (sic!) edition of *The Last Command*. For a discussion of Disney’s series as a cultural phenomenon, See Paul Anderson, *The Davy Crockett Craze: A Look at the 1950s Phenomenon and Davy Crockett Collectibles*. Hillside: R&G Productions, 1996; Mark Derr, *The Frontiersman: The real Life and Many Legends of Davy Crockett*. New York: Morrow, 1993.
freedom and justice” (Corkin 194), the rightist purism of this openly racialist film has long been dropped in favor of more nuanced rhetorical structures, many of which have been articulated in Hancock’s rendition of borderland mythology. Last but not least, rather than re-energizing an ideologically stagnant society of the post-Eisenhower era—as is the case with Wayne’s *The Alamo*—Hancock’s film focuses on reassuring the viewer about the prospects of post-traumatic recovery by dropping the last stand emplotment in favor of the revenge archetype which finds its fulfillment in Sam Houston’s victory over Santa Anna at San Jacinto.

Advertised by Hancock as a work of revisionist complexity (“I'm thinking what is the very absolute best version of this movie so they'll never have to do it again” (Garcia)), the post-9/11 version inadvertently duplicated the heavy feel of the classics. Paraphrasing Slotkin, the picture was another pitch to “sell America” to the American public in the aftermath of the 2001 bombings, although its patriotism was essentially safe from going flabby at the time (*Gunfighter Nation* 516). This section traces how the myths derived from the events of 1836—as most recently exemplified by Hancock’s telling of the story—resurfaced in the commercials released since 9/11, adding mystique to the career of a Border Patrol officer and promoting the tightening of domestic security measures. In keeping with the previous section, I will examine how the narratives developed in the commercials collate the past with the present to substantiate neoconservative Realpolitik; how they use spatial imagery of the southern border the way the cavalry Westerns availed themselves of the Frontier; how they structure the Border Patrol as a liminal community of equals; and how they fuse the figures of illegal alien and terrorist in a sweeping dialectic of Othering facilitated by the intensification of anti-immigration sentiments following the terrorist attacks of 2001.
Before analyzing the Border Patrol narratives as works inspired by the revival of Manichean imagination after 9/11, I shall briefly discuss how the dualistic discourse of cowboy diplomacy resurfaced in a major post-9/11 Western production, i.e. *The Alamo*. While no cinematic picture picked up on the cavalry trail following the terrorist attacks (the patriotic roll was boosted by films referencing the events in a direct way, such as Paul Greengrass’ *United 93*, Peter Markle’s *Flight 93* or Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center*), the Anglo-American tale of the Alamo seemed like a readily available parable of the tragedy, even more so given the uplifting climax Hancock’s film provides. Similarly to John Wayne’s 1960 version of the story, Hancock’s *The Alamo* turned out to be a massive box office bust, although for slightly different reasons. Contrary to the consistently “hawkish” agenda of Wayne’s film, the post-9/11 retelling of the founding event of the Texan Revolution purported to address its historical complexities while also acting as a metaphor of 9/11. The producers of *The Alamo* promised a comprehensive historical picture that would not “ally itself with either Mexicans or Texans” and yet, somehow, “capture the post-September 11th surge in patriotism” (Barra). Thus, as pointed out by Robert Niemi, the studio revealed that a “politically correct” revisionist remake was in the making, which was doomed to fail due to a number of converging factors (such as its historiographic ambitions, through its desire to account for the Hispanic minority, its intention to rally the audience around a major symbol of hegemonic ideology, to the strictly financial aspects (14-15)). Were *The Alamo* to meet all of these highly conflicted goals, it seemed destined to come up short in the box office. The ultimate outcome of these mutually conflicted efforts was a slightly ameliorated epic buried by the weight of the symbol which overpowered the noble intentions of the director the way Santa Anna’s troops overrun the scant defenses of the mission. While
shielding itself from criticism behind politically correct grandiloquence, Hancock’s picture filters the War on Terror through the lens of the Texan Revolution, hence unwittingly reaffirming the Anglo-American myth of the Alamo. Thus, contrary to the dominant tendency in present-day Hollywood to engage the Mexican-American relations in ambiguous, self-reflexive ways (as exemplified by Tommy Lee Jones’s *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005) or Cary Fukunaga’s *Sin Nombre* (2009), among many others), Hancock’s film seems more akin to the ranks of conservative Hollywood border movies that consolidated Anglo-American historical discourse, as observed by Camilla Fojas (16).

In her book, Fojas recounts the history of the misrepresentation of Hispanics in mainstream American motion pictures, marveling at Hollywood’s ability to reinterpret the Alamo—a crushing military defeat—into a symbol of triumphant nationalism in the process of “cultural resignification of failure” (63), a fine example of which she finds in Howard Hawks’s 1959 classic, *Rio Bravo*. Hawks’s metaphorical retelling of the siege reverses the course of history, as the handful of

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32 Similar observations on the (neo)conservative variation of Hollywood border movies have been made by such scholars of the Western as Matthew Carter, Juan José Alonzo, and Danilo H. Figueredo. In his discussion of racist representations of the US-Mexican borderlands in twentieth-century Hollywood, Carter points out that “throughout the twentieth century, the US-attitude to the border has generally been one of paranoid defense: typically (if tacitly) understood in terms of race, of safeguarding Anglo-American civilization from the Latin American other” (“‘Crossing the Beast’” 89). The historical (mis)representations of Mexico and Mexicans, argues Carter, were traditionally self-oriented, thus focusing on Anglo-American anxieties and concerns, and consequently overlooking the experience of, and contributions from, incoming migrants (95). On the other hand, Alonzo discusses reactionary representations of “Mexicanness” in traditional borderlands Westerns in the light of cultural appropriation (and subsequent vilification) of Hispanic masculinity. While admitting that the Mexican stereotype within the Western has been a malleable construct informed by “deep ideological contradictions” and far from “monolithic vocality” (64), Alonzo notices a historical tendency to use the “interplay with the modes of masculinity”—epitomized by Spanish *vaqueros* and Anglo cowboys—to “declare the moral preeminence of its [the Western’s] hero, the white Anglo male” by transferring onto the cowboy “a set of values and iconography that are isomorphic with one of its principle Others, the Mexican male (64). Such a discursive superimposition, argues Alonzo, helped conventional Hollywood films to establish the cowboy as the “the West’s ‘American Adam’” (67), while relegating the Mexican male to the role of the “final antagonist” in a struggle over colonial aspirations (68). This, in turn, paved the way for the representation of the Mexican male as an “exotic foreigner,” and set “an easy trajectory in the public’s imagination to locate Mexicans in the realm of the ‘other’” (Figueredo 5), conditioning their acceptance by the Anglo-American community upon the internalization of the U.S. cultural and economic supremacy (“We all wanted to be American cowboys,” recollects Figueredo (9)).
lawmen stand their ground until the enemy who vastly outnumbers them admits defeat. Hancock’s film achieves a similar effect through a reversal of chronology and redistribution of its dominants, as do the Border Patrol commercials under discussion. *The Alamo* opens with a flash forward to the sight of the battlefield following the massacre of the mission’s defenders, then flashes back in a detailed report of the siege, and concludes with the feel-good coda of the Battle of San Jacinto. Inspired by Sam Houston’s pep speech, his troops rout the enemy, derailing Santa Anna’s plans to retain possession of Texas. The filmmakers additionally amplify the significance of Houston’s victory by reminding the viewers in writing that “Santa Anna’s army was defeated in eighteen minutes” and that “nine years after the fall of the Alamo, Texas became the 28th state of the US.” As *The Alamo* was being shot in the early phase of American deployment in Iraq, the swiftness of the Texan triumph cannot but ring with what promised to be an end to a blitzkrieg campaign, foretokening ultimate victory in the War on Terror. Hancock’s film resignifies the disaster of 9/11 as an Alamo-like failure capable of mobilizing the country around a common grand narrative, and hence becomes a feeble attempt at addressing the nationwide shock. Despite its moments of subtlety, *The Alamo* largely follows Hollywood’s habitual pattern of decontextualizing/sanitizing national traumas of the past, from the little Big Horn, through Pearl Harbor, Vietnam, and 9/11.33 One critic sees Hancock’s “tampering with history” as an effort to undermine

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33 Contemplating the cultural legacy of the Alamo, Martin Holtz recognizes the Alamo as one among several romanticized depictions of “heroic resistance despite certain doom” such as “Custer’s Last Stand and Pearl Harbor,” which function “as collective national traumata of the unjust and dreadful attack on fellow (white) Americans that necessitates retaliation” (*American Cinema in Transition* 354). Holtz points out that, in their own way, each of these three events was de-historicized to provide affective images aimed at galvanizing society behind the idea of retaliation. One important strategy used in augmenting the appeal of such eternalizing narratives has involved a shift in narrative accents that would account for “the more complex depiction of different ethnicities” (354), as was the case with Hancock’s film, where the defenders of the mission include Anglo-Americans, Mexicans, and African-Americans, and thus help “redefine the frontier for multicultural modernity without disturbing its fundamental racist implications” (356).
Hollywood’s quest-story narrative which “affirms the national civil religion and supports [the redefined] Manifest Destiny”—its ultimate outcome, however, is the reproduction of this familiar emplotment, since the film does provide “a coherent dramatic structure, clarifying heroic character motivation, and delivering a happy ending” (Ramirez 5).

Narration-wise, the Border Patrol videos strike a similar note, supplying tales of present-day service with pictorial footage of times past. The clip *Men and Women in Green* begins with a flashing medley of images presenting USBP field officers answering various calls of duty, the voiceover reminding the viewer that “we are currently waging a war on terror, and now, more than ever, this border must be guarded.” The current operations are then traced back to the times following the Texas Revolution, as we learn that “mounted watchmen stood entry along our border with Mexico for over one hundred years,” and that “early agents were recruited from the ranks of Texas Rangers, and local sheriffs and deputies,” while also being reassured that “in the wake of terrorist attacks on American soil … the Border Patrol naturally became a part of that mission” (emphasis mine). The “back-to-the-future” narrative structure used in the clip and likewise recycled in *The Alamo* dechronologizes the past and re-introduces a mythical sense of time, in which current events are read as figurations of recognizable archetypes. Neither *The Alamo* nor the cited commercial make significant mention of the long-range political factors contributing to their respective traumas, thus placing America in the position of a violated victim forced to respond to atrocities it unjustly suffered, which allows these narratives to act respectively as metaphors and naturalizations of the neoconservative ideology rekindled in the guise of patriotism after 9/11. The use of dechronologization in the commercial bears some resemblance to the way in which
ancient historians used “explicit signs of the uttering” to confer on their writing to affect the flow of time, as recounted by Roland Barthes in "The Discourse of History." These signs of transition, argues Barthes, enabled historians to achieve “the effect of temporal immobility” (2). Barthes adds that

The presence in historical narration of explicit signs of uttering would represent an attempt to ‘dechronologize’ the ‘thread’ of history and to restore, even though it may merely be a matter of reminiscence or nostalgia, a form of time that is complex, parametric and not in the least linear; a form of time whose spatial depths recall the mythic time of ancient cosmogonies, which was also linked in its essence to the words of the poet and the soothsayer. (3)

In line with this elucidation, the Alamo (appended by the victorious Texan Revolution) lends itself to the advertisers as a nostalgic parameter in a mythological syntax, suggestive of the ancient cosmogony of Texas-in-the-making, convenient in grasping the complexity of contemporary upheavals and soothingly poetic when envisioning the possibility of their ultimate resolution. As in the histories debated by Barthes, the Anglo-American poetics of border history promulgated in the USBP commercials is formed of “lists that are to a certain extent closed, and therefore accessible to comprehension … collections, whose units end up by repeating themselves, in combinations, that are obviously subject to variation,” and hence amounts to a uniformly affirmative discourse (5-6). A history written in a lexicon of war (local warlords, illegal aliens, drug cartels, human traffickers, terrorists, etc.) cannot help but “naturalize” the War on Terror as another permutation of a “timeless” conflict determining the current perception of the Southwestern border. Consequently, the USBP clips nullify the historicity of the past events by projecting current sensibilities on historically specific circumstances, thus blurring them with
the present. Transposed “beyond real historical time,” history in the post-9/11 cowboy rhetoric amounts to little more than “the pastiche of the stereotypical past,” reduced to a filter that may be superimposed on the present to endow it “with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 21).

Although influenced by an ideology prone to eternalize the familiar archetypes, both *The Alamo* and the USBP commercials strive to represent the myth as authentically as possible. The makers of *The Alamo* aspire to recount the actual story with minute details, having its protagonists sport meticulously crafted period costumes and venturing their own full-scale replica of the mission and the adjoining settlement. Hancock also tries to vividly depict the rather unspectacular manner in which the siege proceeded as he extends the defenders’ wait for the final assault into an hour-long drag. As a result, the viewer’s experience is that of an unmediated insight into the carnage, evocative of the live coverage of the Twin Towers collapse. Still, for all their arduous reconstruction of the “real thing” the movie makers eventually surrender to the magniloquence of the myth and the pressures of the post-9/11 moment. Inadvertently repainting the Texan Revolution as a Manichean metaphor of the War on Terror, the G.W. Bush-like Houston deals a devastating blow to the Saddamesque Santa Anna. A master ideological symbol, the Alamo in *The Alamo* irresistibly looks at itself through mythical spectacles, its gaze extended onto the monumental present. The myths surrounding the Texan Revolution likewise supplant history in *Protected by U.S. Border Patrol*. A reprise of the Alamo, the atrocities of 9/11 are but hinted at in an aerial view of Ground Zero long after it was cleared of the debris. The uplifting narrative focuses on the “Houstonian” chunk of the story, promising to drive out and seal the country from “terrorists, illegal immigrants, drug traffickers and their weapons, and all those who seek to do us
harm,” and enforce the re-defined security policy with Texan determination. Where The Alamo used history to metaphorize the present, the USBP video turns to historical photographic footage to reinforce its own timelessness. For, as Barthes argues in Image, Music, Text,

In the photograph—at least at the level of the literal message—the relationship of signifieds to signifiers is no one of ‘transformation’ but of ‘recording’, and the absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic ‘naturalness’: the scene is there, captured mechanically, not humanly (the mechanical here is a guarantee of objectivity … What we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the here-then (44).

In the light of the above remarks, the USBP clip seems to but faithfully record the past “as it was,” as certified by the mechanical veracity of the camera. The sequence of photographs appears to be a mere chronicle of the force: sepia images of men in chaps and Stetson hats. But then these images come captioned by the voiceover which anchors them in the desired mode of perception. “The principal function of anchorage is ideological,” adds Barthes, since “the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others” (Image, Music, Text 40). Supplying the archival footage with voiceover captions (“Guardians of our border 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we protect our

34 Alexandra Keller discusses the ways in which a sum total of diverse media (photography, film, sound recordings) may render the aura of technological “objectivity” available to dominant discourse, thus aiding the construction of apparently veritable narratives (245). On the other hand, in the light of Patrycja Włodek’s perceptive remarks on twenty-first century post-ironic Westerns one may argue that the use of sepia photographs in the USBP commercials transports the servicemen (and women) onto a mythological plane, inhabited by their predecessors immortalized in the pictures which captured them at their prime as young, attractive and courageous defenders of the Texas Republic (160). Last but not least, it is possible to conceive of the use of sepia photographs as an instance of Jamesonian intertextuality, i.e. “a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect, and as the operator of a new connotation of ‘pastness’ and pseudo-historical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real’ history” (Postmodernism 20), reducing it to clichéd images.
freedom and our way of life. We vigilantly scan the horizon for signs of trouble”), the copywriters ideologize the photographs by imposing the imagery of the Old West onto present-day South-West, thus resolving the “illogical conjunction” of space and time. “Here” is further distilled through “then” in a barrage of video sequences in which modern military technologies interweave with archetypal modes of engagement (speeding quads—galloping mounted patrols; images of GPS screens—field officers reading tracks, etc.).

The disposal of multifarious aspects of the history of the Southwestern border carries over into the spatial representation of the region. If the delineation of space in the USAF commercials is underpinned by the ideology of counter-insurgency interventions along the global Frontier (refashioned as the “axis of evil”), the conceptualization of space in the USBP is pervaded by the more hermetic notion of the border as an Alamo-like rampart requiring refortification to protect the American heartland from the overflow of its newly redefined enemies. Such a representation of the border distills the tradition of the Hollywood border cinema which branded the region as “a cinematic space through which viewers can manage traumatic and undesirable histories and ultimately reaffirm core ‘American’ values,” as argued by Fojas, who examines the border movie genre as a consistently readjusted effort to perpetuate the perception of the border as a barrier to undesired and unregulated mobility, a divide separating the inland from “all things illegal” (e.g. cheap labor force, drug and human trafficking, terrorism) (2). Fojas contends that the major connotations of the Southern Borderland in conservative productions include limited movement, circumscribed liberties, and a sense of spatial closure (25), since what lay South-West of the border was as a region inhabited by Euro-Americans rather than Frontier wilderness, and as such it prohibited morally “justified” land claims.
overlooking the local population. Throughout a larger part of the twentieth century, the mainstream Anglo-American film industry refused to envision the borderland as a state of fluid in-betweenness envisaged by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (24), instead sustaining the “Tortilla Curtain” which split the region along arbitrarily outlined political lines. Rather than re-establishing the idea of the West along the lines proposed by Neil Campbell who defines it in Deleuzian terms as “a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding simultaneously” and thus furthers Anzaldúa’s concept of Nepantla (i.e. a liquid space in between two worlds), American pop culture representations of the borderland has tended to resort to undisrupted, “compartmentalized knowledge.” Discussing borderland counter-cultures, Campbell compares the official myth to an arborescent structure, a “national unifier” challenged by counter-cultural rhizomatic “lines of light” which produce radically incongruous, grass-like “leakages” in the officially sanctioned body of knowledge (4-9). Ignoring these leakages—which have slowly but steadily penetrated its very heart, as best manifested by the recent success of such “rhizomatic” movies as *No Country for Old Men* (2007) or *Machete* (2010)—Hollywood has historically depicted the borderland through the sensitivity of the Texan warrior culture. This tendency seems to have briefly resurfaced again in the aftermath of 9/11, when the Bush administration delineated the borderland as a war zone of embattled American values and reused its symbols when drafting the 2006 Secure Fence Act. The imprint of this long-standing tendency described by Fojas is traceable in Hancock’s portrayal of the Alamo, and pervades the representation of the Southwestern border in the post-9/11 USBP commercials. Ostensibly revisionist, *The Alamo* does not venture to abolish the notion of borderland as a space defined through rigid demarcations and
linear oppositions, settling for lightweight amendments which he introduces through the recognition (in passing) of previously marginalized entities. As Campbell points out, such an arborescent strategy ultimately vindicates the authority of sacrosanct myths and invisibly cements them due to its inverted orientation, which fails to grow rhizomatically and probe beyond such fixities (153).

Similarly to the USAF commercials, the representation of space in the USBP clips is founded on mythical dichotomies, in particular the Anglo-American imagery of the South-West as a garden of opulence on the verge of barren wasteland. This dichotomy reverberates with the rhetoric of aggrandizement which has informed the cinematic ideologization of Texas as the *uberstate*. As David Crockett (Billy Bob Thornton) encourages Sam Houston (Dennis Quaid) to join him in Texas, he employs restorative nostalgia to aggrandize the country: “David, you remember what Tennessee was. You come to Texas: timber, water, game, cattle, more land than you can possibly imagine. You take the oath of militia duty and you will receive 640 acres of your own choosing.” In his own words, Houston is “selling Texas,” trying to appeal to Crockett by evoking memories of the by-now-romanticized past. And yet, the spatial opulence of Texas is not for Crockett to enjoy. Sworn as a militia man and bound by his larger-than-life reputation, the bear hunter-turned-guardian of the Republic must leave the Texan cornucopia behind and sacrifice his private prosperity for greater good, winding up in the dusty borderland. Crockett eventually embraces his own legend,35 as do his partners in patriotic martyrdom, Jim Bowie (Jason Patric) and William Travis (Patrick Wilson). To all of them, the border outpost provides a chance to salvage their reputations through heroic service (crowned by warrior

35 Facing near-certain death at the hands of Mexicans, Crockett confesses to Bowie, “If it was just me, simple old David from Tennessee, I might drop over that wall some night and take my chances. But that Davy Crockett feller, they’re all watching him…” (*The Alamo*), following in the footsteps of Cpt. York in *Fort Apache* by grudgingly agreeing to sustain a folk legend for ideological purposes.
deaths which immortalizes them as the most adequate icons of the ascending Texan culture) and find a home, albeit rudimentary and devoid of fancy pastimes. Rugged, desolate and deprived, Hancock’s Alamo nonetheless enchants the viewer with a sense of elementary equilibrium and ennobling asceticism. In concord with Jane Tompkins (71), we may see it as an environment inimical to people, a land defined by absence: of timber, water, game or cattle (augured by Houston). But then, paradoxically, that landscape also functions as a reminder of what it cushions, a safeguard of the new order and its emblem (“As goes the Alamo, so goes Texas,” says Lt. Col. James C. Neil (Brandon Smith), instructing Travis about the mission’s paramount importance to the budding Republic).

The contrast between the mirages of the unattainable land of abundance and the rewarding harshness of the southern border also features in the USBP commercials. Potential recruits are encouraged to enlist in the Border Patrol by the prospect of good pay and relocation to the northern border, following the mandatory service in the South. Purporting to veritably depict the location of the recruits’ future service, the clips ideologize the southern border by turning to the same romantic sternness that the myth of the Alamo used to dignify the inhospitable landscape of the southwestern tip of the Texas triangle. If the USAF commercials redefine Frontier experience in the context of global interventionism, the USBP videos transpose it onto the US-Mexican border. The southwestern landscape is harsh, “basically like Mexico… the heat sets right in… the vast terrain… the sparsity out there of civilization remote… nowhere to go out, nowhere to hand out…” (Real Life in the Border Patrol). Interspersed with this harshness is the blissful garden of inner America, as represented by the images of a little boy on a tricycle, a rocking horse on a porch, a mother and a daughter playing the piano, and a teenager on a tire swing on
an archetypal Texan ranch (*Protected by U.S. Border Patrol*). Despite continuous reinforcement still vastly outnumbered by millions of undocumented immigrants, the task of the “men and women in green” remains to protect the “vulnerable miles” of the border, and to wage the War on Terror. To that end, the clip uses flashes of Lower Manhattan sans the World Trade Center, as if to remind prospective recruits of their generation’s paradigm of the Alamo.

The rhetoric of promise and reassurance employing border archetypes is also discernible in the promotion of the USBP as a merit based entity. While the USAF advertising filters that rhetoric through the cult of the cavalry consolidated by the Fordian Westerns, the Border Patrol commercials catalyze it through the cult of post-9/11 Texan patriotism, sparked by filmmakers and politicians alike. Hancock’s movie molds its Texan microcosm as an environment capable of bringing out the best in people. As the southernmost outpost of the newly proclaimed Republic, to Lt. Col. Travis the Alamo mission presents “a chance to be a different man, and I hope a better one.” A dignifying aura boosts the politically correct refurbishment of the myth in *The Alamo*, which seemingly recognizes the sociopolitical shortcomings of the era but at the same time presents the besieged community in stark opposition to the outside world, thus involuntarily whitewashing the very myths it attempts to debunk. For instance, as one critic notices, in showing glimpses of preparations for the siege from the point of view of Bowie’s and Travis’s black slaves, Sam (Afemo Omilani) and Joe (Edwin Hodge), Hancock makes “an almost-acknowledgement that, among other things, the Texans were fighting for the right to keep their slaves”

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36 Intended to soothe the viewer, the visual utopia projected by the commercials is unwittingly symptomatic of the unsettling vision embedded in the post-9/11 internal security regulations. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman, it is a vision which hopelessly struggles to fully monitor, control, administer, and manage the world, without pausing to contemplate the unfeasibility of such a task. Prevalent among “societies under siege,” argues Bauman, is the nostalgic desire for a rigidly established order capable of withstanding earth-shattering calamities such as 9/11 (*Społeczeństwo* 265).
(Hoberman). And yet, having the white commanders free their slaves proves their moral superiority over the rest of Texas and eventually hedges Hancock’s revisionism, amounting to a delusion that the community of equals ultimately overrides the issues of race. Sam and Joe may have been oppressed elsewhere, but as members of the Alamo’s happy few everyone ultimately receives fair treatment. Ethnic differences are likewise quashed by the defenders’ undivided loyalty to the Republic in a narrative of conditional inclusion extended on the underclass, provided that its representatives subscribe to the official ideology, as does Juan Seguin (Jordi Mollà). This subscription validates them as “true” Texans, pursuant to the creed of Hollywood border classics where “the only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants of the region are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites” (Fojas 26). That the ideology of patriotic militarism is also capable of transcending class divisions under external threat is exemplified by the settlement of disputes between a curt Frontiersman (Bowie) and a verbose disciplinarian (Travis), respectively embodying the clashing discourses of actions and legalism. When it eventually dawns on Travis that special circumstances call for special laws, he cedes partial command of the garrison to Bowie. It is only once Travis has lead his troops by example that he gains the ear of Bowie’s volunteers. Impressed by Travis’s valor in combat, Bowie in turn sees that they are essentially similar, albeit discursively incompatible (“Sometimes it’s just the way you say things, Travis, that’s all, I swear to God”). The necessity to suspend some of the principles of democratic state in favor of ensuring public security of the Republic likewise becomes a point of contention north of the Alamo, where fellow Texans initially resist relinquishing joint command of the military in favor of Sam Houston, denouncing him as
“dictator” and, less matter-of-factly, “a son of a bitch,” as if mirroring those skeptical of the post-9/11 course of action taken up by the Bush administration.

The dissolution of differences within a sweeping ideology of militaristic patriotism pervades the USBP commercials which echo their USAF counterparts in advertising the Border Patrol as a community of peers in which one’s status is dictated solely by one’s merits. The USBP clips seemingly subvert traditional clichés, advertising the organization as progressively inclusive and blind to the differences that determine the living conditions of minorities in the oft-prejudiced civilian society. USBP considers everyone worthy of service, provided they are fit enough to “defend our freedom, our liberty, and our way of life” and have duly internalized its credo (“this to us hits very, very close to home”) (Protected by U.S. Border Patrol). Carefully interlaced in each clip are male and female officers of all ethnic backgrounds, united by devotion to their mission: some of them step into their parents’ shoes, others have barely been introduced to the USBP way, yet to all of them the organization provides a chance to advance their lives (Real Life in the Border Patrol) and earn respect of fellow citizens for “doing a fine job in difficult circumstances” (G.W. Bush, “Immigration Reform Address”).

One inherent attendant of the cult of meritocracy promoted in the post-9/11 recruitment videos of (para)military entities is the idolization of the collective, a practice which typifies the cavalry Western and the Alamo films alike. In an article comparing the cavalry Western and the so-called pre-war British Empire genre, Kathleen A. McDonough finds the crucial difference between the cavalry subgenre

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37 A series of pre-war Hollywood movies released from mid-1930s to 1942, offering more or less formulaic plots featuring colonial military outposts of the British Empire at odds with native insurgences or engaged in conflicts with competing colonial superpowers. In idealizing the military as protectors of white civilian communities, these movies celebrated the code of masculine loyalty, honor and camaraderie. Notable examples included John Ford’s Wee Willie Winkie (1937) and Michael Curtiz’s The Charge of the Light Brigade (McDonagh 99).
mastered by Ford and the classic Western to be the shift of focus from an individual to a collective. Significantly, the members of this collective remain firmly attached to the community they serve: “The men who protect the community are part of that community and fulfill their obligations as integral members of the group” (102). Instead of glorifying the individual who single-handedly delivers the town from impending trouble, the cavalry Western promotes the cult of the collective (retaining the option to distinguish its members for their individual qualities). As pointed out by such scholars as Corkin and Slotkin (see previous section of this chapter), this quality of the cavalry sub-genre seems to have derived from combat movies, along with the commitment to establishing the rule of (American) law, whether throughout the West or in the theaters of intervention (McDonough 102). The principal quality of Hollywood border movies, on the other hand, has been to allow the viewer to “identify with a singular and exceptional moral hero who might register anywhere from maverick to vigilante” (Fojas 2). In the grain of its most famous predecessors, Hancock’s film conflates the principles governing the cavalry Western and the border genre, delivering a collective hero comprised of mavericks and vigilantes turned straight in a patriotic metamorphosis, clearly mirroring American popular culture in “turning our designated guardians of national security into superheroes” (Faludi 47). In consonance with this tendency, the USBP commercials idolize the collective by casting its representatives in the roles of modern-day guardians of inner space deployed along its borders, and at the same time ruggedly romanticize the service itself.

As a merger of the cavalry Western and the border movie, The Alamo tells a twofold heroic tale of 200 Texans who died defending the mission, and their avengers led by Sam Houston. They are portrayed as ordinary people who try to go
about their lives before getting trapped in the machinery of history, as if mirroring the ordinary heroes of 9/11, “moms and dads, friends and neighbors” (Bush, “Address to the Nation”) who rushed to the rescue of those harmed by the terrorists. They are regular folks who flock to the Alamo to fulfill their sworn duty—however grim its prospects—and receive their pay in return. In representing both these collectives, Hancock does what he can to demythologize their members and leaders alike. In the eyes of James Berardinelli (“The Alamo”), Hancock’s depiction of the Alamo few is that of men ruefully acknowledging that they come up short of their myth, perhaps most visibly so in the case of Crockett. And yet both their contemporaries in the film and (so it seems) Hancock behind the camera remain spellbound by that myth: the former by forcing Crockett to enact his swashbuckling alter ego (“I’ve seen you on stage… Davy Crockett, the lion of the west”), the latter by having Crockett stop Santa Anna’s (Emilio Echevarría) army in its tracks. Crockett personally admonishes the general for his carelessness when he shoots off one of Santa Anna’s shoulder straps as the general orders his gunners dangerously close to the mission. Crockett repeats the feat when he fiddles an impending Mexican attack to a halt with a virtuoso improvisation to the ominous tune of “El Deguello,” in a scene filmed against a stunning Texas sunset.38

Fostered by film industry, the post-9/11 construction of ordinary heroism also informs the USBP commercials, amounting to what we may provisionally refer to as “reified liminality.” The recruitment videos operate with contrasts, setting themes of peril against those of tranquility: Protected by U.S. Border Patrol unfolds them in the following sequence: an off-road USBP vehicle driving through desert country, a boy

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38 The myth of Houston’s leadership fares equally well in The Alamo, as his “resiliency to overcome all obstacles—whether fellow Texans, Santa Anna, even his own heavy drinking—ultimately proved his worth as a great man” (Andreychuk 172). Resolutely battling his addiction, jaw habitually clenched, the uncompromising Texan reads like the wishful vision of tough commander the American media projected on G.B. Bush in the wake of 9/11.
pedaling a tricycle, a mounted patrol trotting along a forest path, led by a Tom Selleck look-alike, a low-angle-shot of a column of rider silhouettes against the sunset, a white and yellow porch of a suburban house, capped by an officer returning home from his shift late at night, welcomed by his daughter. These juxtapositions are enhanced by a sonorous voiceover (“for every morning on the job, there’s a child to protect. For every mission, a family”). Analogically, Protecting the Homeland has images of “men and women in green” on duty (two galloping horsemen, a unit of speeding quads, sentry towers, officer inspecting the brush on the river in search of illegal immigrants who cross it, etc.) intertwined with bird’s eye shots of various points of entry to America and landmarks of the southwestern landscape. Combining the stark sublime with frail beauty, these narratives situate the USBP officers on the verge of two orders, portraying them in quasi-pastoral categories. If the Frontier imagery envisioned the outdoorsman as the American equivalent of the ancient shepherd ensuring peaceful coexistence of the natural and the cultural (Marx, “Pastoralism in America” 42-44), the Bush-era pastoral propagated in the clips conceives of the USBP officers as liminal figures bridging the world of heartland America with that of (and beyond) its borders. Where the “original” American pastoral involved the assuagement of tensions between nature and civilization, its post-9/11 counterpart assuages the tensions along the “vast Frontier” of the War on Terror and—contrary to its predecessors—refuses to discredit this vision as an illusion, but merely readjusts its formula. Reified liminality also disregards the fundamental conflict on which the literary pastoral was founded, i.e. the split between the individual and the collective (Marx 107), when it preaches conformism instead of disobedience. Its heroes are no misfits at odds with their community or rebels contesting the dominant ideology, but progressives endorsing the values and
lifestyle which the pastoralist opposes. The post-9/11 pastoralist may spend long
hours “out there,” but their motivation is not that of a Thoreauvian solitudinarian.
Their “liking for outdoors” revitalizes their “calling to serve the country,” and their
bond with nature is driven by a sense of adventure (“it’s hours of mind-numbing
boredom interrupted by thirty seconds of sheer terror… you’re kind of alone there for
a while”) and civic duty (“a calling to serve their country” (Real Life in the Border
Patrol)), mirroring those who blazed the trail of the Texas warrior culture “in the
name of Liberty, of patriotism and everything dear to the American character”
(Travis), and challenged by their heritage (as evidenced in the line “The Border
Patrol: We Protect America. Are you up to the challenge?” which precedes the Ol’
Texas slide show in Protecting the Homeland). Although living at its outskirts, the
USBP officers are firmly established in and appreciated by the community they
pledge to protect: “my kids look at me as if I were a superhero, out catching bad
guys, working at night. They seem to be proud of what I do” (Real Life in the Border
Patrol). The reconciliation of the pastoral conflict in the figure of ordinary
superhuman, whose resilient individualism combines with devotion for the
community, resounds with what Marek Paryż refers to as “oxymoronic logic” in his
discussion of Jack Schaefer’s Shane. Shane is an imperceptibly superhuman
character, a man who takes radical steps when necessary, and yet subjects himself
harmoniously to the plain lifestyle at the Starrett farm (72-75). The ability to
recognize and adjust to the expectations of the community, while also being able to
shield them from external threats, likewise defines the post-9/11 pastoral
(“knowing that you help somebody, or that somebody is gonna be able to sleep

39 See George W. Bush. “Remarks to Federal Bureau of Investigation Employees on September 25,
2001.” Referring to the appointment of Robert Mueller as the head of the FBI a week before 9/11,
President Bush described the Bureau’s Director in similar terms, evoking the archetype of low-profile
hero, “a good, solid American, a man who has been under fire before and who doesn’t flinch under
fire this time around.”
tonight because I actually did my job… That’s something you could feel proud of” \((Real \ Life \ in \ the \ Border \ Patrol)\), as if in soothing reassurance that discreet vigilance is maintained among the “men and women in green.”

That such vigilance is required seems self-evident to the USBP copywriters, since it merely extends the return of the Bush administration to the rhetoric of “Old West-style ‘Frontier justice’” \((Kollin, \ Postwestern \ Cultures\)\). As observed by Rothe and Muzatti in their analysis of media manifestations of post-9/11 moral panic, the discourse of cowboy diplomacy developed in the wake of the terrorist attacks was to a large extent fueled by the media representations of terrorists as folk devils,\(^{40}\) enhanced (and largely absolved) by the unprecedented viciousness of these attacks. On the basis of a number of media texts produced in the wake of the attacks, the scholars notice how the gradual inflation of their seriousness facilitated “the gradient process of constructing and enlarging the folk devils” and contributed to the enemy being “increasingly broadly defined” \((333)\), spurring the development of brachylogies which eventually equate all Muslims with Islam, all followers of Islam with Islamism, and all Islamists with terrorism \((Todorov \ 197)\). As pointed out in the previous section of this chapter, this habit was no novelty to the discourse of American politics, since the terrorist merely slipped into the shoes of its predecessors (commies, hippies, beatniks, wetbacks, etc., all the way back to the “Injun”), reflecting the tendency to demonize the other and laying foundation for the

\(^{40}\) Drawing from Stanley Cohen, Rothe and Muzatti define folk devils as “the individuals responsible for the deviant or criminal behavior. Unlike normal deviants or criminals, these folks are “unambiguously unfavorable symbols”: the embodiment of evil” \((329)\). In accordance with Cohen’s terminology, moral panic is understood here as “a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people” \((1)\).
polarizing practice of what Slotkin memorably termed regenerative violence.\textsuperscript{41} Significant residue of this long-standing tendency, championed in the classic Western, can also be spotted in Hancock’s post-9/11 epic and, far more implicitly, in the USBP commercials.

Although *The Alamo’s* attempt to revise the representations of Mexicans prevalent in Anglo-American mythology does have an upside (e.g. when it humanizes a couple of rank and file soldiers in Santa Anna’s army and glorifies the Tejanos who died in the battle), this upside is hampered by the inclusion of audial tokens of “Injun”-like Mexicanness, and the depiction of the Mexican general clearly dictated by America’s post-9/11 entanglements in the Middle East, in particular its invasion of Iraq. Despite the few exemptions granted by the film makers, Santa Anna’s army takes after the savage hordes of the classic Western—the viewer is mostly confronted with Mexicans as a homogenous mass of men sporting shiny uniforms and moustaches, who march northwards to the accompaniment of menacing guitars and skittish woodwinds interlaced with hoarse commands and hurrying yells.

In line with this rhetoric, the film’s depiction of Santa Anna is that of a “flat evil,” megalomaniac villain channeling his inner Saddam Hussein. On the surface level, the figure of Hancock’s Santa Anna seems inspired by its villain predecessors such as Calvera (Eli Wallach) of *The Magnificent Seven* or general Mapache (Emilio Fernandez) of *The Wild Bunch*. And yet, captured and stripped of sybaritic mannerisms, Santa Anna lacks the complexity of Peckinpah’s villain. A dictator

\textsuperscript{41} One illustrative and concise example of this practice can be found in President Bush’s “Remarks to Federal Bureau of Investigation Employees on September 25, 2001” (“They don’t represent an ideology; they don’t represent a legitimate political group of people. They’re flat evil”). This and many other quotes are suggestive of the historically unprecedented scale of moral panic in the aftermath of 9/11, far more vehement than its Cold War antecedent, for—as Edward Buscombe recalls in *Injuns! Native Americans in the Movies*—when Ford was shooting *Rio Grande* at the brink of the Korean War, lines such as “These Apaches are the only Indians who kill and torture for the sheer lust of it” were struck out from the script by Hollywood’s Production Code (97).
unaffiliated to his people, Santa Anna’s subordinates follow him out of sheer terror and look away in disgust upon his capture. No-one rushes to alleviate the pain of his humiliation, very much unlike in *The Wild Bunch* where Mapache’s death triggers the ultimate carnage. As Wheeler Dixon reminds us, there is a degree of support for Mapache’s course of action in the community he leads, e.g. in the grotesquely democratic festivities in which the general partakes with his henchmen following the purchase of weapons from the bunch (173). In the grain of militant interventionism which Peckinpah’s film criticizes, Hancock succumbs to what Slotkin dubs “inadequate imagination” (*Gunfighter Nation* 610). Mirroring Pike (William Holden) of *The Wild Bunch*, who fails to recognize the significance of Mapache to the people of Agua Verde, the director of *The Alamo* brushes aside the ambiguities entailed in the figure of Santa Anna within the cultural history of Mexico. A shell of a villain, Santa Anna seems one-dimensional to the point of caricature. A pompous authoritarian, he intimidates the local population by mass executions, defiles local beauties, ignores the good counsel of his subordinates, and ultimately turns to sneak attack in place of honorable warfare. Paradoxically, such a representation of the Mexican general in Hancock’s film is more of a throwback to racialist stereotypes than the rendition of Santa Anna as a disengaged, “expressionless observer” in John Wayne’s 1960 film (Berumen 138). Hancock’s Santa Anna is anything but a historical revision—he is, in fact, de-historicized into a terrorist *piñata*, stuffed with America’s post-9/11 anxieties.

In contrast with *The Alamo*, the USBP videos address the terrorist folk devil in more restrained terms, operating with suspense which Hancock’s film uses to render the grueling wait for the enemy’s attack. Like the defenders of the Alamo (and their avengers at San Jacinto), the Border Patrol officers are “out there,” expecting the
enemy to sneak in “in the twilight hours, when most of the country is sleeping”
\textit{(Protecting the Homeland)}. The videos are pervaded with a sense of imminent
menace which may only be countered by the duly trained select few. Although
physically absent, the terrorists are grim enough as a mere possibility, leaving their
trail on desert pathways, hiding among the masses huddled at border crossings,
pressing towards the country’s southwestern gateways in vast numbers \textit{(Protecting the Homeland)}. Conflated in that possibility are illegal migrants, drug cartels, human
traffickers and, not least among them, terrorists. The sweeping potentiality of terror
serves as a Barthesian alibi for the myth of the Texan stronghold, warranting militant
tactics under the guise of patriotic service, and absolving abuse of law in the name of
national safety (\textquote{Our main job is terrorism and weapons of mass destruction—how
many times can you be wrong?} \textit{(Real Life in the Border Patrol)}). A self-
rejuvenating formula of primeval conflict, the myth of Texan warfare keeps coming
back to inform America’s contemporary entanglements, “more persistent in the
public’s imagination than are the facts of the matter” (Thompson 69).
Chapter 2: Liminal Mediation in Times of Crisis: The Presidential Campaigns of George W. Bush and Mitt Romney

Aside from John Lee Hancock’s *The Alamo*, the early phase of the War on Terror witnessed the premieres of four other neoconservative Hollywood Westerns, with storylines centered on protagonists traumatized by war or loss of their kin. In *Open Range*, Kevin Costner cast himself as a Civil War veteran avenging the murder of a fellow cowboy and finding solace in the arms of a Big Sky Country spinster; Edward Zwick’s *The Last Samurai* slotted 7th Cavalry captain Nelson Algren (Tom Cruise) into the all-too-familiar captivity plot set in the pre-Meiji Restoration Japan; in Joe Johnstone’s *Hidalgo*, Viggo Mortensen played the larger-than-life Frank Hopkins, a self-lauded horse racing champion and witness to the Wounded Knee massacre, who takes his mustang on a spin to the Persian Gulf, preaching cowboy democracy on his way to self-redemption. Finally, there was Ron Howard’s *The Missing*. Likely the most reactionary of the bunch, Howard’s film borrowed the worst from the best in a propagandist retelling of Ford’s *The Searchers*, with Kate Blanchett and Tommy Lee Jones cast as estranged daughter and father in a pursuit of a bunch of Apache human traffickers led by an Apache brujo (Erich Schweig).

The four films were representative of the wave of revenge-driven Westerns which swept Hollywood at the dawn of America’s War on Terror, offering, with slight revisionist modifications, “a throwback to the classical form” (Holtz, “You Must Pay for Everything” 36) founded on a clear-cut dichotomy of wilderness and civilization, and an elevation of the attendant violence. Among others, such a brief outburst of reductively conventional Westerns may be attributed to the knee-jerk, utilitarian applicability of vengeance plots in the post-9/11 political conditions, when
revanchist heroism reigned supreme. Under the circumstances, the revenge narrative may have seemed tailor-made for rendering the dominant social mood at the time, as it offered “contextual flexibility, historical significance, political usefulness and affective charge” (Paryż, “Introduction” 10). Detailed in the first section of this chapter, The Missing can serve as an exemplar of a group of “productions about 9/11 and terrorism [released] during wartime itself” (Kollin, Captivating Westerns 159), whose affirmation of retributive violence resulted from a relatively short temporal distance between the event and its cinematic renditions. The neoconservative vengeance Westerns released after 9/11, argues Kollin, offered formulaic narratives which “control[led] speech and language, constrain[ed] public discourse, and limit[ed] the possible meanings ascribed to these events [9/11]” (145). Kollin’s and Paryż’s assessments overlap with that of Walter Metz, who finds The Missing to be a prime exemplar of the retreat of the post-9/11 Hollywood Western into its classical shell as if in suggestion that retributive violence is the sole mode of preservation of America’s position as a global superpower (“From Plato’s Cave to Bin Laden’s” 132). Characteristically, the post-9/11 “throwback” Westerns strove to achieve this goal in the cloak of revisionism. On the one hand, the resurfacing classical themes brought comfort in a time of uncertainty, while on the other the use of ostensible inclusion of minorities within the recognizable framework additionally buttressed the hegemonic agenda of the post-9/11 neoconservative Westerns (Campbell, Post-Westerns 15).

The first wave of post-9/11 Westerns signaled yet another swing in the decades-long bout for the bragging rights to the Frontier waged between academics and revisionist artists, on the one hand, and agents of popular imagination who continually dust off Frontier imagery to promote neoconservative policies, on the
other. Firmly established in the early rounds of the Cold War as an ideological barometer and a litmus paper for political sentiments, the classical Western returned after 9/11, when it similarly helped underscore what was (and continues to be) projected as an omnipresent terrorist threat. As noticed by Zygmunt Bauman, the collapse of the Twin Towers thwarted the safety entailed in the notion of the domestic space: no place is safe, no matter how strongly it is fortified. Security matters became trans-territorial, engendering a global fear of terrorism, and manufacturing consent to the tightening of (trans)national security policies. To Bauman, the notion of global space as the Frontier has not only benefitted terrorists but it has also, and perhaps equally importantly, facilitated those who wage war against them, as it has enabled America to implement imperialist goals along with increasingly intensified surveillance measures (Społeczeństwo 104-107).

The apologetic narratives promulgated in the group of post-9/11 “throwback” Westerns, which overlapped with George W. Bush’s re-election campaign, were informed by a similar sense of righteousness that permeated the symbolic politics implemented by the Bush administration. The films analyzed in the first part of this chapter reify evil, cast vengeance as self-defence, demonize adversaries and naturalize warfare, all in the air of sanctimonious political correctness. In doing so, the string of neoconservative Westerns produced in the early stage of the War on Terror relied on the traditional inflection of the genre that resurfaced after 9/11 to aid the discourse of military interventionism. The first section of this chapter examines the thematic references to the refurbished revenge formula (exemplified by Ron Howard’s The Missing) in the video messages of the 2004 George W. Bush re-election campaign.
Adding to the study of the model of relentless leadership in the 2004 Republican presidential commercials, the second section of this chapter is devoted to the more recent invocation of Western masculinity in the videos released during Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign. While my interpretation of Bush’s campaign pertains to international matters, which were understandably at the core of the 2004 presidential race, the analysis of Romney’s commercials shifts focus from the War on Terror to the more immediate economic matters, which dictated the content in the 2012 debates. Equally nostalgic as the messages supporting Bush’s candidacy, Romney’s clips likewise dwell on the promise of restoration of the ideal social order founded on near-libertarian values. Much in the fashion of anti-revisionist historians cited by Limerick (and with memories of the financial crisis still vivid in 2012, given the lackadaisical pace of economic recovery), the Republican nominee’s commercials pronounced a “nostalgia for an imagined era of unity,” downplaying the burning race- and class-related issues that “divided Americans into contesting units and interests” (94). In this respect, the clips of both Republican presidential candidates subscribed to restorative nostalgia, promising “to rebuild the ideal home” and “tempting [voters] to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding,” an effort whose end-result amounted to the creation of “phantom homeland” (Boym xv).

Boym’s concept of restorative nostalgia, used in the previous chapter’s examination of military commercials, may be of help when analyzing the presence of Western tropes in presidential elections clips. Emphasizing the possibility of “a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home,” one that lacks in self-reflection, perceives itself as “truth and tradition,” and “protects the absolute truth,” restorative

nostalgia lends itself to revival projects anchored in coherent plots of national identity (xviii). Boym also points out how, in order to garner public support, neoconservative political discourses reify nostalgic tendencies themselves through such institutions as museums, memorials, historical policies (it is conceivable to add electoral campaigns to the list) (14-15). One may add that, in commodifying nostalgia, such narratives have also instrumentalized themes originally developed by their liberal counterparts, as was the case with Ron Howard’s simplistic spin on the racial undercurrent of *The Searchers*, and with Clint Eastwood’s intricate take on the *Shane* scenario in his 2009 *Gran Torino*, rehashed in high-profile commercials aired during Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign.

The two strings of nostalgic commercials discussed in this chapter resort to different modes of operation to bolster their respective agendas. The Bush campaign relied on what Boym designates as “quasi conspiracy theory” narrative, i.e. one based on a transhistorical Manichean struggle between good and evil, the instilment of paranoid fears, the scapegoating of the mythical adversary, and an eschatological storyline in which a violent conflict solidifies the society (a variant of this narrative resurfaces in *The Missing*). The more sophisticated Romney clips, on the other hand, reveal a longing for the “restoration of origins” based on an economic intimacy established between representatives of divergent classes and ethnic groups (an example of such a narrative can be found in Clint Eastwood’s *Gran Torino*). I examine Eastwood’s post-crisis drama as the most recent bend in the ongoing transformation of the mysterious gunslinger who dates back to Alan Ladd’s rendition of Shane in George Stevens’s adaptation of Jack Schaeffer’s novel. I approach Eastwood’s picture as a notable representative of “muted revisionism” that separates many post-2000 productions from their 1990s predecessors (Paryż 4). I argue that, in
problematizing the passing of the American Rust Belt, *Gran Torino* essentially reconstitutes the traditional, Anglo-American model of masculinity, transferred between members of different generations and ethnic groups. A token solution to the problems resulting from minimized state intervention and increased market deregulation professed by the so-called Washington Consensus, Eastwood’s endorsement of free market and the promotion of grassroots entrepreneurship within the framework of a “mysterious gunslinger” narrative in *Gran Torino* demarcates the area of its convergence with the type of laissez-fair economics that underlay Mitt Romney’s 2012 campaign. Analyzed in the context of Eastwood’s most recent reinterpretation of *Shane*, I propose to interpret the Romney commercials as evocations of the lone gunslinger theme, with Eastwood and Romney vaguely replicating the relationship between the mysterious gunfighter and the community leader.

Investigating the alignment of George W. Bush’s and Mitt Romney’s presidential commercials with the contemporary derivatives of Ford’s and Stevens’s films, this chapter is most notably informed by, and takes issue with, the work of such historians of the genre as Matthew Carter, Stanley Corkin, Susan Kollin, Walter Metz, Stephen McVeigh, Andrew Patrick Nelson, and Will Wright. Drawing on their insights, I try to demonstrate the links between the Western and the neconservative presidential candidates’ public relations, with tropes of the genre re-emerging during the War on Terror and the financial crisis. I approach the 2004 and 2012 presidential commercials holistically as what Lee Clark Mitchell would refer to as “a series of random gestures that remind us vaguely of the genre yet fail to contribute to a coherent narrative,” whose components include “nostalgia for a simpler past…”

investment in the triumph of law and order… contemplation of the redemptive power
of violence… [and] (most importantly) attention to appropriate forms of masculine
behavior” (“Is There Actually Any Jimenez?” 21).

2.1. “She Must Be Scared – and So Do You”: The Specter of Ethan Edwards
and the 2004 George W. Bush Presidential Adds

As signaled in Chapter One, in the aftermath of 9/11, neoconservative opinion-
forming circles used the imagery of the Western as a vehicle for political reforms
that buttressed the prerogatives of the state, authorized its interventions abroad, and
preserved the existing economic divides. The early years of the War on Terror
yielded a series of films that strove to recuperate patriarchal masculinity as a model
of political leadership, as epitomized by such films as The Last Samurai, Hidalgo
and The Missing. Set in different international locations, these films can be read as
allegories of “the figure of the transnational cowboy fighting the war on terror across
a new global frontier” (Kollin, Captivating Westerns 5), with the world acting as a
global “Indian Country.” Enacting vengeance scenarios and displacing them abroad,
the first wave of the post-9/11 Westerns efface their critical function, instead
pandering to the exigencies of the situation. In emphasizing the savagery of the
enemy, disguising military interventions as humanitarian missions, and framing
imperialism as a promotion of American values, the post-9/11 neoconservative
Westerns echo the policies of the Bush administration implemented in the wake of
9/11, suggesting that retaliation is both justifiable and indispensable. Conceptualizing
the U.S. response to 9/11 through gunslinger parlance, the American president
invoked the quintessential revenge narrative in which the hero, repeatedly
agonized by the villain, is eventually forced to answer violence with violence. As eloquently put by Matthew Carter, the public was made to feel as if “not to transgress the interdict against violence would be the transgression” (38). Employed by Bush to galvanize the nation behind the War on Terror, the superficial evocations of John Wayne and captivity narratives (in particular *The Searchers*) were also used in the 2004 presidential campaign ads, serving as what Kollin dubs the “ur-text for understanding American power and identity” (*Captivating Westerns* 148) and a vindication of the country’s monomaniacal foreign policy.

The conceptualization of foreign policy and security matters within the framework of a “savage war” by the Bush administration, and its adoption as a campaign strategy, was no novelty. In fact, the revenge narrative had been exploited in presidential campaigns ever since the advent of television campaigning—some scholars even argue that skillful employment of Western themes helped a number of candidates in their presidential bids, despite the steady decline in the popularity of the genre itself. The use of the Western theme of the liminal mediator between America-as-civilization and its-foes-as-wilderness has resurfaced during times of crisis as one among many image-building strategies employed by Republican

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45 Historian Stephen Aron points out that “even as Wayne’s star waned and Westerns faded on American screens, westerners, some playing up their cowboy credentials, raised their profile on the national political scene. Of the twenty-two men nominated by the Democratic and Republican parties for the presidency in the elections from 1952 and 2012, eleven hailed from or were primarily affiliated with one of the nineteen western states (whose ranks, after a forty-seven-year break following the admission of New Mexico and Arizona, expanded in 1959 to include Alaska and Hawaii). That westerners made up half of the major party candidates reflected the tilt of the American population to those western states. That Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, in the tradition of Theodore Roosevelt, often dressed and talked as if they came straight from the range to the stump suggested that the mythic cowboy hero still resonated with American voters, even if a shrinking percentage lived in the still wide-open spaces of the rural West or had seen many Westerns” (113).
In what David Hoogland Noon dubs “presidential violence,” candidates to the White House often relied on “traits including ‘toughness,’ ‘strength,’ and the ‘will’ to overcome adversaries. To give substance to these traits, presidents and their supporters often invoke their experience with organized violence—especially military experience—as having forged their political character” (224). A textbook example for the application of “presidential violence” can be found in Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1956 *Football/Peace* campaign commercial. The ad was based on the binary opposition of footage featuring a spectator watching a Saturday football game using a pair of binoculars, and a transformation of that very actor into a soldier scanning enemy terrain in what seems to be a recollection of the Korean War. Supplemented with voiceover commentary, the clip advertised the incumbent president as a person who “knows first-hand the terror and misery of war” and warned against change “with war simmering all around the world” (*Football/Peace*). In the context of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Suez Canal conflict in which Israel (aided by Great Britain and France) faced Egypt in a strife over the strategic waterway, the ad was successful in rallying the voters behind Eisenhower, who assured the public that America would stay out of such contests, and at the same time saved his face as a wartime leader by promising to retain the military draft and hydrogen bomb-testing policies.

A similar evocation of “savage war” came eight years later with the presidential bid of Barry Goldwater. The campaign began a few months after the

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46 The reliance on the notion of Western masculinity was noticeable in several presidential campaigns throughout the Cold War, as demonstrated by the cornucopia of Western-themed campaign paraphernalia that accompanied a number of presidential campaigns, such as the Goldwater bolo tie in the 1964 campaign; the cutout “Indian” feather hat in Nixon’s 1968 campaign; Ronald Reagan’s 1984 poster “America: Reagan Country,” which presented the president in a denim shirt and cowboy hat, in a fashion reminiscent of the Marlboro Man billboards; the Reagan-Bush sheriff badge pin used in the same campaign. Similar memorabilia were issued during George W. Bush’s 2004 campaign, including Western-themed pins “It’s the Cowboy Way” and “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys.” See Jordan M. Wright, *Campaigning for President.* New York: HarperCollins, 2008.
assassination of president Kennedy in Dallas, and picked up steam along with the escalation of the Vietnam War and the African Americans’ struggle for civil rights. A radical rightist, Goldwater was hailed as an advocate of extreme measures in defense of liberty, as expressed in the speech he delivered upon accepting the Republican nomination, which included the oft-quoted line, “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue” (Grossman). Denounced by the Democrat opponents as ‘trigger-happy’ in light of his poor taste jokes on nuking the Kremlin and pelting Southeast Asia with nuclear missiles (Noon 232), the radicalism of the senator from Arizona was underscored by a series of television clips that channeled his fear-mongering tactics. *We Will Bury You* features a parallel structure comprising alternating shots of two motifs. The first was Nikita Khrushchev’s “My vas pokhoronim!” speech, delivered at a 1956 Moscow reception for Władysław Gomułka, the leader of Polish communists. Mistranslated as “We will bury you!” by Viktor Sukhodrev, the speech played right into the hands of the Goldwater campaigners, who juxtaposed the pomposity of the Ukrainian leader of the Soviet Union with the second motif: the footage of the pledge of allegiance at an American elementary school. The confrontation of the menacing figure of Khrushchev with the pious naivety of American pupils was bolstered by Goldwater’s voice which implored the audience to “have the guts to make our intentions clear” and presented the U.S. as a “country prepared as no country in history ever was” (*We Will Bury You*).

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47 In his analysis of Sukhodrev’s fateful misinterpretation of the speech, Stuart J. Birkby argues Khrushchev’s original wording envisioned the historical inevitability of communism, which was to “outlast” capitalism rather than suggest the imminence of a Soviet nuclear assault (92).

The Goldwater campaign aired two more ads that were intended to lend credibility to the Republican candidate’s resolute stance on foreign policy, and helped frame it in the familiar terms of “Indian Wars.” In *John Wayne: Symbols*, the Duke’s iconic voice narrates a semantic riddle in which everyday objects acquire a metaphorical meaning to signify Cold War concepts (“An umbrella: just that, or the symbol of appeasement? A table: just that, or a sellout abroad? A wall: just that, unless it helps you remember... what can happen to you and your children”).

Evoking Wayne’s screen persona as the prototypical epitome of “cowboy justice,” the ad offers a dichotomous, monomaniacal narrative that firmly asserts America’s exceptional position as a guardian of peace. On the other hand, the *Ronald Reagan* clip starred the future U.S. president, known at the time as the two-time president of the actors’ guild, and a star of silver screen and television Westerns (*Santa Fe Trail* (1940), *Law and Order* (1953), *Queen of Montana* (1954), *Death Valley Days* (1965-66)). Sporting an impeccable suit, Reagan assured viewers that “when Barry talks about the way to keep the peace, when he says that only the strong can remain free, he knows what he’s talking about,” and urged voters to “get a real leader, and not a parlor politician in the White House.” Watching Reagan, one cannot but be reminded of Jane Tompkins’s analysis of the “language of men” in Westerns. According to the critic, the Western language is typically distrustful towards elaborate rhetoric, along with the falsity and inefficiency it entails, and opts instead for the cool composure of the silent hero, whose actions speak louder than words (51). Such was the case with the Wayne and Reagan clips, in which Western alpha males vouched for, and spoke on behalf of, the implied hero of the two messages.

While Reagan’s endorsement did not help Goldwater in his presidential bid, it transformed Reagan into a pop-cultural persona and paved the way for his
subsequent election as the governor of California in 1966. Fourteen years later, Reagan beat his Democratic rival and incumbent president Jimmy Carter in a landslide that signaled a re-opening of the Cold War with the Soviets. With the American “cowboy” president determined to deal a decisive blow to the “savage” antagonist, the 1980s saw the launching of the Star Wars missile defense program and a massive upsurge in the volume of interventions in Central America and the Caribbean, vilified as beachheads of communism, (coupled with increased cuts in public expenditure and social services, more tax breaks for the upper class resulting in “a skyrocketing gap between the rich and the poor by the end of Reagan’s presidency” (Zinn 581), and a revamping of the federal court system through appointments of conservative federal judges). The humongous federal expenditure entailed in the development and maintenance of weapons around the world was justified by the “Soviet threat,” of which television audiences were most memorably reminded in the 1984 presidential race between Reagan and Walter Mondale. Reagan’s re-election bid featured the famous Bear commercial, which ranks among the best presidential copywriting to-date. Narrated by the soothing voice of Hal Riney, the clip was one of the few negative ads in an otherwise upbeat Morning in America campaign. The thirty-second clip featured a bear roaming a dense, dark forest on a prowl, juxtaposed with Riney’s voiceover. Riney’s lines read, “there is a bear in the woods. For some people, the bear is easy to see. Others don’t see it at all. Some people say the Bear is tame. Others say it’s vicious and dangerous. Since no one can really be sure who’s right, isn’t it smart to be as strong as the bear? If there’s a bear” (Bear). As pointed out by Marta Rzepecka, the use of the bear metaphor enabled Reagan’s campaigners to present the U.S. president as an efficient defender and protector of the country’s interests in the face of a possible confrontation with
the Soviet Union. Represented by the figure of a hunter who eyes the “Soviet” bear in the final scene of the clip, Reagan was cast as a tough-minded leader and a staunch anti-communist, cautious of, but not unfavorable to, violent solutions, depending on the circumstances (123). The “standoff” between the bear and the hunter, adds Rzepecka, also helped solidify “an understanding of U.S.-Soviet relations as confrontation, keeping the periods of peaceful co-existence, negotiation, or cooperation hidden” (120). At the same time, Bear shielded Reagan from possible accusations of warmongering by adding a shade of ambiguity to the narrative (“If there’s a bear”), and casting the U.S.-Soviet conflict in a metaphorical light (and thus expressing Realpolitik at an abstract level that helped the campaign avoid unambiguous labeling (122).

Bear was aired a year after Reagan’s address to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida (the so-called “Evil Empire” speech), in which the president, inspired by an excerpt from Whittaker Chambers, resorted to Manichean rhetoric, likening Marxism-Leninism to Satan in the Garden of Eden and cautioning Americans against removing themselves “from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil” (Reagan, “Address”). Interpreted along the lines of Reagan’s near-eschatological speech, the woods no doubt acquired a transcendent quality of “totalitarian darkness,” a dark domain of the eponymous bear, while the bear itself (a commonly recognizable symbol of Russia) turned into a totem animal of the “Evil Empire.” Having verbalized its numerous implications, the commercial concluded with a reassuring image of Reagan and a tagline of “President Reagan: Prepared for Peace,” casting him as the liminal “cowboy” whose task is to mediate between the Millenarian community and the wilderness that they believe surrounds them.
As demonstrated in the aforementioned commercials, the practice of narrating Republican presidential candidates as “men who know Indians’ (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 16) ebbed and flowed throughout the Cold War, resurfacing whenever the diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and its satellites strained. Defined in terms of simplified, binary oppositions, invocations of Frontier mythology in presidential commercials helped transmit transparent messages and galvanize society around recognizable values. Much like the conservative inflections of the Western throughout the Cold War era, the Manichean disseminated in these clips “reinforce[d] rather than challenge[d] social understanding” (Wright 23), offering comfort through a familiar language, clichéd images, and endorsements of iconic actors. With the decline of the Western towards the end of the 1980s, accompanied by the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, and followed by the overly-enthusiastic “end of history” 1990s, the Frontier mythos ceased to act as a valid ideological vehicle.

It was only with the fateful events of 9/11, and the rejuvenation of “cowboy diplomacy,” that the genre was picked up as a ready-made frame of reference by George W. Bush. Outlining the world as a global Frontier, the War on Terror as a “savage war,” and the president as an “Indian fighter,” the 2004 Bush campaign drew the Republican candidate as a guarantor of “steady leadership in times of change” (as per campaign slogan), and a relentless hunter of terrorists, his liminal mediation between America and the “Indian Country” essential to the country’s security. Proponents of an aggressive international stance framed political decision-making after 9/11 as a captivity narrative, and the president himself seemed to add to the John Wayne aura exuded by his media image, consistently striking a patriotic chord with the public. Such a strategy found its reflection in several video messages aired in the course of the 2004 presidential race, offering a simplistic and rather
unequivocal take on the captivity narrative. A similar practice can be observed in the neoconservative Westerns produced after 9/11, most notably Ron Howard’s *The Missing*. A post-9/11 take on Ford’s *The Searchers*, Howard’s film refurbishes the captivity narrative to project the Iraq War as a revenge scenario, yet in allegorizing the War on Terror as a Western, *The Missing* corresponds with the conceptualization of foreign policy in the 2004 Bush re-election campaign in that it uses national trauma to vindicate interventionism in the Middle East.

As a revenge Western, *The Missing* displays a number of structural functions specified by Will Wright in his typology of Western plots (including the presence of the hero as a social outcast, a number of acts of violence inflicted against the hero and the society, the inability of the society to punish the villain responsible for that violence, the hero’s quest for vengeance and their subsequent departure from the society, the hero’s unique ability to administer retributive violence and their subsequent clash with the villain, as well as the hero’s eventual renunciation of his special status along with his reintegration with the society (69)). On the one hand, Wright’s categorization may seem too arbitrary to provide a readily applicable model for the analysis of *The Missing* as the quintessential post-9/11 neoconservative Western and the ways in which the vengeance plot was utilized in the 2004 Bush campaign commercials. Still, given the formulaic character of the film, and the schematic structure of the 2004 Bush commercials, Wright’s delineation of the revenge formula might prove useful in examining the anachronistic return to the notion of tough leadership in post-9/11 neoconservative foreign policy narratives. Examining the use of the vengeance formula in *The Missing* and the 2004 presidential commercials, I hope to demonstrate that the two were informed by the same antiquated logic that strove to naturalize political radicalism at the time by
casting the American President as a liminal avenger in a modern-day captivity narrative.

To an extent, *The Missing* exemplifies the “logic of anachronism,” attributed by Marek Paryż to *Jonah Hex*, another post-9/11 Western establishing rhetorical links between America’s past military conflict and its present-day overseas interventions. If in Jimmy Hayward’s picture this elliptical rhetoric makes a case for a “historical, and even causal connection between the Civil War, and the War on Terror,” Ron Howard’s Western binds America’s crackdown on terrorism with the past struggle between settlers and Native Americans. In each case, “the War on Terror marks a new event in a series of challenges that the American nation has successfully faced in the course of its history, and it is the nation’s past achievement that sustains the belief in the final defeat of terrorism” (Paryż 216). Importantly, *The Missing* is also anachronistic at the meta-level, since the film is essentially a remake of Ford’s *The Searchers* that is far more regressive than its prototype. *The Missing* upholds an interventionist message under the pretense of revisionism. Marketed by its distributors as a combination of a revisionist western and a thriller, the film has garnered mixed reviews among critics and viewers. Somewhat unexpectedly, representatives of the Mescalero and Chiricahua communities praised the film on the basis of its language accuracy (Benke), a fact that, coupled by *The Missing*’s inclusion of a female character as the protagonist led such eminent critics as Philip French to concur with the film’s revisionist classification (“New lessons”). My contention significantly diverges from French’s, since apart from the faithful rendition of the Apache language, Howard’s film backtracks on revisionist Westerns, hammering away at regenerative violence to a degree that outdistances *The Searchers*. I propose to examine *The Missing* as a cinematic extension of the Bush
administration’s “folksy response” to terrorism (McVeigh, *The American Western* 215), and a manifestation of a wish to re-establish America on the post-9/11 global arena through a familiar mythical paradigm, one which Bush’s copywriters continued to exploit in the 2004 presidential race.

Set in 1885, a year before Geronimo’s ultimate surrender to General George Crook, the action of Howard’s retelling of *The Searchers* begins on a ranch in a New Mexico mountain valley (its temporal backdrop immediately implies the readily available end of the conflict, while the locale heightens the air of menace, since the place is exposed to the dual threat of an Apache raid and the vicinity of the Mexican border). Maggie Gilkeson (Kate Blanchett) is a lone mother and homesteader who makes a steady living as a full-time cattle breeder and part-time healer until visited by her estranged father Samuel Jones (Tommy Lee Jones). Treating the sick locals and romancing with her handsome farm hand Brake Baldwin (Aaron Eckhart), Maggie raises her two daughters, Dot (Jenna Boyd) and Lilly (Evan Rachel Wood) in the wilderness, much to the dislike of the latter sister, who coaxes Maggie to let them attend a local town fair. On their way to town, the girls are ambushed by the Apache who brutally kill Brake and his associate Emiliano (Sergio Calderón), kidnapping Lilly with the intention to sell her to a Mexican brothel. Traumatized by the sight of the mutilated corpse of her lover and the loss of her elder daughter, Maggie becomes reconciled with Samuel, who has lived among the Apache for years and thus remains her only chance to salvage Lilly from their hands. In a melodramatic intensification of Ethan Edwards’s quest in *The Searchers*, the pursuit of the assailants becomes a family affair, as Maggie’s younger daughter Dot joins the two in their mission to exact revenge. The posse is also assisted by two Apache warriors whose female relative has been kidnapped by the renegade band lead by a hideous *brujo* Pesh-
Chidin (Eric Schweig). Maggie eventually recovers her daughter from captivity, while the malignant antagonist is killed by Samuel, who also dies from the wounds inflicted by the brujo.

*The Missing* tries hard to evoke the spirit of Ford’s masterpiece from start to finish, with Maggie embracing her daughters and uttering Wayne’s memorable line “Let’s go home.” Sadly, contrary to *The Searchers*, in which Ford explores the myth of Frontier warfare and “exposes its informing structures, especially the complex thought and feeling that constitutes racialist hatreds” along with the resulting logic that “traps us in cycles of violence and retribution without limit and beyond limit” (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 461-462), Howard’s picture uses surface revisionism as an alibi to reinforce and purify that very logic.49 *The Missing* ostensibly presents the viewer with the “good and bad aspects of both [Native American and settler] cultures” (French “New Lessons from the Old West”) by throwing in the two Apache helpers and a cynical cavalry troop who mistreat their Native American prisoners and loot settler property. And yet, one cannot help thinking that *The Missing*’s “realism” masks a dehumanizing representation of the antagonist, while also amplifying the sense of self-righteousness that accompanies the protagonists in their retributive quest.50 Whereas Ford’s classic points to the dark undertones of the imperialist myth, such aspects “are frequently overlooked or disregarded in post-9/11 arts. While Edwards is the classical Western hero who brings order to the mythic Frontier, he is

49 Philip French argues to the contrary, finding Howard’s picture “his finest to date,” one that avoids the “sanctimonious treatment of native Americans in the liberal Westerns of the fifties” and reportedly addresses matters repressed within the logic of the genre, as evidenced by the fact that the film shows Maggie “having a difficult period, the first time, I believe, that this condition has been mentioned in a Western” (“New lessons from the Old West”).

50 In his penetrating critique of *The Missing*, Walter Metz observes that as a post-9/11 Western, Howard’s picture is much more explicitly racist and obsessive in its treatment of the vengeance theme than most pre-9/11 Westerns (“From Plato’s Cave to Bin Laden’s” 130). The decisive subscription to the vengeance scenario disguised as a rescue mission thus effectively sets *The Missing* apart from its Fordian precursor which carries the subliminal “question of whether in Ethan’s hate for his adversaries he has become their moral equivalent” (Corkin 149).
also a man with a shadowy, savage past, a figure of violence whose brutal acts prevent his successful return home,” as Susan Kollin points out (Captivating Westerns 179). As a post-9/11 improvisation on the theme of The Searchers, The Missing seems mostly free of such ambivalence, choosing to consolidate conventional norms and racial prejudice, perhaps most acutely expressed by the family’s patriarchal leader. Samuel urges his family into moral panic, stressing that the success of the mission depends on recognizing the scale of the threat (“She needs to be scared—And so do you!”). Such a paranoid atmosphere induces Maggie to submit herself to Samuel’s leadership.

The validation of Samuel’s maniacal suspicions in The Missing contains numerous allusions to the cowboy rhetoric utilized by the Bush administration in its conceptualization of the War on Terror as a conflict between the forces of civilization and the wilderness. Samuel’s depiction of the brujo as a “snake” that “digs hearts out and buries them in the ground” seems like a near-verbatim evocation of Bush’s remarks from the September 17, 2001 press conference in which the U.S. President described terrorists as those who prefer “to hide and burrow in,” who are “barbaric” and have “no rules,” who “slit throats… like to hit, and then they like to hide out” (qtd. in McVeigh, The American Western vii-viii). To Maggie’s dismay, Samuel’s gut instincts are soon validated, and so is his emotional argumentation, which prays on his daughter’s maternal feelings (“The Apaches sell a lot of girls there. Top dollar”). The film thus seems to vindicate the conjectural logic which drove America into the Iraq War against the better judgment of its critics (“That’s likely not what you want to hear,” says Samuel about the atrocities plotted by the brujo, “but it’s the truth”). At the same time, consistent with its exoneration of violence, the film appears to absolve the Bush administration’s post-9/11 retaliatory
engagements within a deceptively similar logic which fuses vengeance with a rescue mission.

Such a fusion is achieved through the figures of the two Apache warriors, Kayitah (Jay Tavare) and Honesco (Simon R. Baker), whom Maggie nearly shoots, blinded by misguided hatred, until Samuel reveals they belong to another band. The qualitative difference between Kayitah/Honesco and Pesh-Chidin stems from the latter’s choice to “live by a code different from that of his peers” (Williams 234). Like the terrorist, Pesh-Chidin is an exception to an otherwise commendable community who distorts its general perception. As the paradigmatic “man who knows Indians,” Samuel does not despise them in principle, recognizing the distinction between “good” and “bad” Apaches, where the former rid themselves of the latter, assisted by the technologically and culturally superior Anglo-American hero. Such a narrative figuration appears congruent with George W. Bush’s remarks on the sweeping alignment of Islam with terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, in which the president urged his compatriots to remember that

The faith of terror is not the true faith of Islam. Islam is peace… The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself… I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims around the world. We respect your faith. It’s practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful. And those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. (qtd. in West)

The introduction of the “good” Apaches who surrender to Samuel’s leadership thus ultimately mandates the Gilkesons’ redemptive posse. Not only is a violent resolution justified by a Pesh-Chidin’s “terrorist” deeds but it is also necessitated by
the prospects of amelioration of the “good” Apache’s livelihood. This combination reinstates violence as a virtue in the spirit of Cold War vengeance narratives, in which the hero resorts to violent actions for greater good, “a necessary attitude in the Cold War[-like] climate of threat and stand-off” (McVeigh, *The American Western* 100). As a celebration of post-9/11 warrior culture, *The Missing* reduces the figure of the antagonist to a token of barbaric violence that precipitates the retaliatory quest. Pesh-Chidin personifies the reductive epistemology of terror that informed Bush’s international policy and secured his re-election to the White House. With a face disfigured by burns and pock-marks, and a set of crooked teeth and jagged fingernails, the *brujo* resuscitates the crude imagery of the ignoble savage, who kidnaps women and children; lives off the misery of the settlers (and his own people); extracts venom from rattlesnake fangs and uses poisonous herbs to cause agonizing suffering to those who stand in his way; Howard even endows the *brujo* with the capacity to control the forces of nature and use owls as his reconnoiterers.

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51 Due to its reductive presentation of the antagonist, *The Missing* once more fails to live up to its famed predecessor. In *The Searchers*, Ethan’s adversary, Comanche chief Scar, is complex despite the film’s racial overtones. Although, as Edward Buscombe notices in a monograph essay on *The Searchers*, Scar’s raid on the Edwards homestead entitles Ethan to assume “the role of justified avenger,” mete out the punishment the chief rightly deserves, and “assume the high moral ground,” Scar also represents Ethan’s violent unconscious by perversely fulfilling Edwards’s adulterous attraction towards his brother’s wife (Buscombe, *The Searchers* 21). In taking Debbie as one of his wife, Scar not only breaches the miscegenation taboo but also prompts Edwards to violate another in the latter’s resolution to kill his own niece.

52 Pesh-Chidin’s warlock qualities mirror the moral panic sweeping through the country in the early stages of the War on Terror, from the scare of biological warfare (rattlesnake venom and poisonous herbs as a metaphor of the anthrax panic) through the fear of Al-Qaeda attacks orchestrated from Bin Laden’s cave in the Afghani mountains (Pesh-Chidin hides out in a cave near the Mexican-American border). His kidnappings and killings have a clearly terrorist undertone, with Pesh-Chidin leaving the corpses of mutilated victims to haunt the local population. Not only does he kill but has others to witness the suffering of their near and dear, as evident in Dot’s account of Brake’s death (“I wanted him to stop! He was screaming so loud”), a thinly veiled metaphor of the unwitting live broadcast of the 9/11 attacks. Whereas the atrocities committed by Scar’s Comanche are hinted at, Howard gives an unmitigated rendition of violence perpetrated by Pesh-Chidin’s Apache, which requires that he be pushed off a cliff in what Walter Metz sees as “a model for post-9/11 America’s wish to see Osama bin Laden, not lecturing them from a cave, but dead” and a particularly vicious manifestation of the revival of anti-revisionist mythology aiding the promotion of Bush’s domestic and international agenda (“From Plato’s Cave to Bin Laden’s” 137).
The anxiety which underpins *The Missing* resurfaces in the conceptualization of presidential leadership in the 2004 campaign videos of George W. Bush. Launched on March 3, 2004, the campaign was mostly negative, its main objective to portray Democratic candidate John Kerry as a fickle liberal and fiscal hardliner ready to subdue national defense by proposing reckless cuts in defense financing. Another vital strand in the campaign was its near-obsessive focus on foreign affairs, with the War on Terror in the very center of voters’ attention. The stress on the matters of terrorism, national security and intervention resulted in the marginalization of such issues as economy or health care which were prominent in the previous elections. Fashioning the incumbent president within a Manichean logic inspired by the discourse of the Cold War era, whose cinematic manifestations were resurrected in post-9/11 Westerns, the Republican campaigners strove to deliver an image of Bush as a steady (and sturdy) leader for dangerous times. This logic was founded on the cowboy rhetoric used by the Bush administration to legitimize the War on Terror as another avatar of Frontier warfare, a rhetoric that was “unspecific, sweeping, conflational, othering, dehumanizing, racist, devoid of descriptions, mechanistic” (Carney and Stuckey 181). Informed by this totalizing discourse and saturated with images of the 9/11 attacks, Bush’s clips stressed the importance of America’s anti-terrorist engagement in ways strikingly similar to those postulated in post-9/11 retribution-as-intervention Westerns. Much like *The Missing*, the 2004 Bush campaign saw the harnessing of myth in the service of a compelling narrative aimed at energizing society behind radical political decisions “which would otherwise be morally compromised” (Carter 199). Analyzing several Bush commercials as myths, I seek to demonstrate that their deep-seated logic is firmly anchored in the key archetypes of post-9/11 neoconservative Westerns, including the misrepresentation
of retaliation as justice, the saving of the white maiden, the celebration of the avenger figure, the dichotomous landscape which the avenger protects and from which he remains estranged, and the dehumanization of the enemy.

Some of the clearest references to retributive Western plots in Bush’s campaign videos are made in the clip entitled *Finish It*. This thirty-second video advertises Bush as the avenger of terrorist atrocities, and the War on Terror as a measure of justice. A montage of photographs is presented which reminds the viewer of the tragedies of 9/11 (we see a picture of firefighters in Ground Zero), the 2004 Madrid train bombings (a photograph of a blown up train wreck), and the Beslan school siege (an image of a Russian civilian carrying an injured child hostage who survived the infamous shootout), as well as those who stood behind the first two (Osama bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed). This is followed by pictures of a puzzled John Kerry, and a confident-looking George W. Bush speaking to U.S. Army troops, intermingled with a photograph of what seems like a group of Islamist terrorists in balaclavas. The montage is accompanied by solemn piano music and a voiceover message:

> These people want to kill us. They killed hundreds innocent children in Russia, two hundred innocent commuters in Spain, and three thousand innocent Americans. John Kerry has a thirty-year record of supporting cuts in defense and intelligence and endlessly changing positions on Iraq. Would you trust Kerry up against these fanatic killers? President Bush didn’t start this war, but he will finish it. (*Finish It*)

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33 The exploitation of images of the victims of the New York, Madrid and Beslan attacks reminds one of Susan Sontag’s memorable remark that media images of suffering civilians—frequently projected as a deterrent—may just as well be used to animate belligerence and militarism (*Widok cudzego cierpienia* 15).
Addressing the matters of national security and foreign affairs, the commercial immediately stages the U.S. international policy in Manichean terms, requiring unwavering resolve from the leader in the face of a continuous threat. The ad blends local inflections of terrorism, neutralizing the intricate differences between the War in Chechnya and the War on Terror through a collage of gruesome images. The only common denominator for these images is the attribution of “evil” as an immanent quality of terrorists worldwide. Ignoring the local contexts, the ad echoes the U.S. foreign policy of the era which, in the words of Rob Kroes, “turned ‘evil’ into a facile sound bite and used it as a sufficient explanation of what moves the terrorists of this world” (“The Power of Rhetoric” 6). Following this vague rhetoric enables the ad to present terrorism in essentialist terms that mirror the reductive rhetoric of nineteenth century Indian Wars, in a fashion akin to the covert reanimation of the “bad Indian”/“good Indian” dichotomy in The Missing. As a fear-mongering clip, Finish It does not involve itself with the reasons behind twenty-first century terrorism. It is content with stressing the fact that terrorists want to kill, and often do. Violence cannot go unpunished, therefore a strong leader is called for to administer justice and to answer “fanaticism” with resolve of his own. An implication is made that the American presence in Iraq is inherent in this task, and that any attendant acts of violence are necessary for the restoration of peace. Such a pattern, to a large extent, overlaps with the model of retaliatory sequence examined by Jane Tompkins with reference to Cold War Westerns. Discussing the cycle of insult-violence, Tompkins states that:

The structure of this sequence reproduces itself in a thousand Western novels and movies. Its pattern never varies. The hero, provoked by insults, first verbal, then physical, resists the urge to retaliate, proving his moral superiority to those who are
taunting him... The villains, whoever they may be, finally commit an act so atrocious that the hero must retaliate in kind. He wants to, and we want him to, and, if there’s a crowd of innocent bystanders, they want him, too. At this juncture, the point where provocation had gone too far, retaliatory violence becomes not simply justifiable but imperative... Not to transgress the interdict against violence would be the transgression.

(228)

*Finish It* recreates the sequence of retaliation delineated in the above passage. Pre-emptive interventions, such as the invasion of Iraq, are remodeled to fit the paradigm of violence which obliges the attacked to respond swiftly and in a manner befitting the scale of aggression. To ruminate on whether such a reaction is justified is both frowned upon and offensive to both the living and the dead, as emphasized in the clip’s critique of extensive deliberation processes (personified by Kerry). The commercial stresses that a timely and adequate reaction is of the essence (“These people want to kill us”), echoing Samuel Jones’s reasoning in *The Missing* (“Once they reach Mexico, the girl is gone”). The leader should act according to his instinctive judgment instead of engaging in cautious calculations—another quality evocative of Western avengers (“There’s no more time for praying,” says Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* to the futility of ritual gestures). The War on Terror, the commercial implies, is not to be won in the course of lengthy deliberations. It is won through resolve, persistence and relentlessness required to “finish the job,” in Ethan Edward’s words. Still, the implication that it is indeed feasible to win the War on Terror, as the ad seems to promise (and as is the case in *The Missing*), deprives the clip of the dark undertones which characterized *The Searchers*. Stripped of such self-critical qualities, the contemplation of post-9/11 interventions in *Finish It* transforms the national quest for “cowboy justice” into a readily accessible goal rather than a
“single-minded, monomaniacal project of violence and retribution” (Kollin, *Captivating Westerns* 165) hinted at in Ford’s masterpiece.

The distinctive representation of retribution as justice that characterizes post-9/11 neoconservative Westerns requires the concomitance of the punishment of misdeeds with the deliverance of the oppressed (as signified by the Anglo-American maiden in *The Missing*). The retributive logic which naturalizes War on Terror by decontextualizing terrorism and inscribing it into a mythical narrative that pits terrorists, with their “cowardly acts born of hatred, jealousy, and evil rather than politics” (Takacs 488), against the justified avenger also informs the analyzed commercials.54 In *Ashley’s Story*, the figure of the heartland virgin likewise enhances the presentation of George W. Bush as an agent of “cowboy justice” avenging civilian suffering, which mirrors the classic rescue paradigm re-established by *The Missing* (and the coverage of private Jessica Lynch’s captivity among Iraqi insurgents, which Susan Kollin dubs “a modern replay of Ethan Edwards’s efforts to get Debbie back from the Indians in *The Searchers*” (*Captivating Westerns* 5).55

*Ashley’s Story* recounts the story of Ashley Faulkner, a teenager from Mason, Ohio, whose mother Wendy died in the 9/11 attacks. Traumatized by the loss, “Ashley closed up emotionally. But when President George W. Bush came to

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54 That neocolonial paternalism was a valid trope in the 2004 Bush clips is evidence in the *Victory* video. Released shortly before the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, the message showed swimmers competing with medals interlaced with the Afghan and Iraqi flags, and archival images of the fateful 1972 Olympic Games in Munich (infamous due to the massacre of Israeli athletes and coaches by members of Palestine’s Black September organization). The ad contended that, since “in 1972 there were 40 democracies in the world,” as opposed to “120 today,” including “two more free nations, and two fewer terrorist regimes” (i.e. Afghanistan and Iraq), a re-election of George W. Bush into the White House would enable the global triumph of democracy, with freedom “spreading throughout the world like a sunrise” (http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/2004/victory#4284).

55 The resurgence of *The Searchers*’s formula in post-9/11 media stories has been analyzed by Stacy Takacs in a survey of a series of documentaries about the capture of private Jessica Lynch by the Iraqi insurgents following an ambush in Nasariyah in March 2003. Takacs notices that the documentaries recounted Lynch’s story in a mode that resembled Frontier captivity/rescue narratives, conflating militaristic ideology with patriarchal models of masculinity, and endorsing national security reforms implemented in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Takacs argues that “this fusion has [also] helped legitimate the Bush administration’s foreign policy” which conceived of the nation as a “patriarchal family whose security depends on military strength” applied to extend the U.S. hegemony (489).
Lebanon, Ohio, she went to see him, as she had with her mother four years before.” One learns that, although preoccupied with his administration’s hunt for terrorists (and with running his re-election campaign), the president paused to recognize Ashley’s misery. “He turned around and he came back and said ‘I know that’s hard, are you alright?’,” says Ashley in the clip. Family friend Linda Prince then recalls how “our president took Ashley in his arms and just embraced her. And it was at that moment that we saw Ashley’s eyes fill up with tears.” As the commercial cuts back to Ashley, the visibly moved girl attests to Prince’s testimony, stating that “he [the president] is the most powerful man in the world, and all he wants to do is to make sure that I’m ok.”

Watching the commercial, supplemented with a gorgeous panorama of Lebanon’s historic center and its picturesque main street, one cannot fail to notice the numerous references to the rhetoric and imagery of classical Westerns. The narrative utilized by the copywriters bears more than a superficial resemblance to the scenarios structuring such vengeance variation classics as *The Searchers*. Bearing in mind Jane Tompkins’ remarks on Ford’s masterwork, it is easy to identify the reification of the distressed woman archetype in *Ashley’s Story*, in which “women are the motive for male activity (it’s women who are being avenged, it’s a woman that the men are trying to rescue)” (41). As an act of violence, the War on Terror is necessitated by the imperative to avenge the woman killed by the savage enemy, and to rescue her female relative. *Ashley’s Story* constructs the public image of George W. Bush as a benevolent variation of Ethan Edwards (analogically to Samuel Jones in *The Missing*). Although consumed by the retributive quest, Bush transcends the role of avenger and through a fatherly embrace rouses the ailing young woman back out of her stupor, delivering her back to the community. The use of defenseless femininity
in Ashley’s Story casts Bush as an avenger much the way Martha’s and Lucy’s deaths bring Ethan to pursue Scar in The Searchers (or similar to the manner in which the kidnapping of Lilly Gilkeson drives Samuel to kill Pesh-Chidin in The Missing). Thus, to paraphrase Tompkins, women’s discourse, or some sign of it, appears a necessary and enabling condition of the patriarchal narrative entrenched in Ashley’s Story, defining the male code of violent heroism by means of opposition (41), and mythologizing the avenger hero as a guarantor of security in a community shielded by his protection. Putting Bush in John Wayne’s shoes, Ashley’s Story transforms him into an allegory, distilling him to the idea represented by his action, much the way the real-life Marion Mitchell Morrison gave way to the Duke. In his analysis of Wayne’s star persona, Paweł Kuligowski attributes its power to a reversal of the Jungian process of individuation—an allegorization based on a universally recognizable model of the self. In the course of this process, argues Kuligowski, Wayne’s individual personality (along with its empirical constituents) was superseded by a far more potent silver screen archetype (along with the universal ideas it signified) (51-53). Ashley’s Story adopts a similar image-building strategy, attempting to lend credence to a morally compromised leader and his political shortsightedness by casting his person within the frame of a recognizable grand narrative.

Advertised as a narrative of retribution, the 2004 Bush campaign formulated internal security policies using the parable of the homestead and extending it on territorial, economic and social grounds. Given Bush’s infatuation with cowboy

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In a recollection of her meeting with John Wayne in Mexico City, where the actor was shooting The Sons of Katie Elder, Joan Didion offers perhaps the most quotable verbalization of such nostalgic sentiments, confessing that “when John Wayne rode through my childhood, and perhaps through yours, he determined forever the shape of certain of our dreams,” with Ford’s movies transforming him into a vessel into which “might be poured the inarticulate longings of a nation wondering at just what pass the trail had been lost” (Slouching Towards Bethlehem 30-31).
rhetoric, this should come as no surprise since, as Edward Buscombe points out in his essay on *The Searchers*, Ford’s film is essentially about home, “finding it, building it, losing it” (64). Although the hero’s quest may be questioned (which it is not in early post-9/11 retellings of the vengeance plot), and ultimately positions the avenger outside of the community, the adamant pursuit of retribution is essential for the safety of the homesteaders. If, in the years following the terrorist attacks, the image of the avenger-guardsman was used to conceptualize U.S. interventions in the Middle East, Waynesque masculinity turned out to provide a channel for the expression of the ideological undertones of the Bush administration’s Middle-Eastern policy. Although the president would eventually express his regret for having turned to the Western as an ideological vessel,\(^{57}\) the 2004 campaign clips continued in the grain of the early post-9/11 narration,\(^{58}\) as formulated in *First Choice*, which features Senator John McCain’s endorsement of Bush’s candidacy. The video shows footage of McCain’s speech intersected with a montage of clips from the Iraq War, including a statue of Saddam Hussein being taken down, an excerpt from one of Osama bin Laden’s video messages, pictures of masked terrorists, and several U.S. soldiers on a desert patrol. Praising the incumbent president, McCain acknowledges his dedication and resolve in fighting terrorism throughout a significant chunk of Bush’s first term of office.

It’s a big thing, this war. It’s a fight between right and wrong, good and evil, and should our enemies acquire further arsenal, the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons they seek., this war will become an even bigger thing. It will become a fight

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\(^{58}\) One example of George W. Bush’s rhetorical strategy in the early stages of the War on Terror can be found in the president’s remarks voiced in Camp David on 15 September 2001 (“We will find those who did it. We will smoke them out of their holes. We will get them running, and we’ll bring them to justice’; “They run to the hills. They find holes to get in, and we will do whatever it takes to smoke them out and get them running, and we’ll get them” (qtd. in Coe et al 43).
for our survival. America is under attack by depraved enemies who oppose our every
interest and hate every value we hold dear. It is the great test of our generation, and he
has lead with great clarity and firm resolve. He has not wavered, he has not flinched
from the hard choices, he was determined and remains determined to make this world
a better, safer, freer place. He deserves not only our support but our admiration. (First
Choice)

The endorsement of Bush’s policies expressed by McCain in First Choice both
naturalizes the War on Terror as a Manichean conflict of eschatological dimensions
and sanctions violence as a necessary means to defeat the absolute evil represented
by terrorists. The invasion of Iraq is once more referred to as a defensive operation
(“America is under attack”), yet another emanation of the founding event, i.e. the
conflict between “civilization” and “wilderness” (“a fight for our survival,” “a great
test of our generation,” the transformation of the global Frontier into a peaceful
dwelling). Terrorists are bestowed with typically “savage” traits. Depraved, hateful
and deceitful, their features are derivatives of “bad Indians,” requiring unprecedented
determination form the one who fights them. Standing up to such enemies is
rendered worthy of admiration and support. At this point, post-9/11 culture divorces
from its Fordian predecessor, as embodied by the attitude of the community towards
the avenger—while Ethan Edwards is ultimately cast away from the Jorgensens’
ranch, Samuel Jones is accepted by his daughter and granddaughter, who fully
subscribe to, and partake in, the retribution. With its numerous references to savage
warfare, McCain’s speech can be seen as an example of the mutual involvement of
patriotic rhetoric and “Texas warrior culture” in conceptualizing political issues.59

59 See Marek Paryż, “The War on Terror and Intersecting Film Genres in Jonah Hex.” The Post-2000
Film Western. Contexts, Transnationality, Hybridity. Ed. Marek Paryż and John Leo. Houndmills:
Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. 207-224; James McEnteer, Deep in the Heart: The Texas Tendency in
Immobilizing the War on Terror within the framework of a mythical conflict, *First Choice* rids the Iraq War of its dubious context and helps the patriotic discourse sustain itself through familiar clichés and stories that keep “hammering away at the same meaning which we have peacefully acquired upon reading [watching] the first work of the series” (Eco 939). As an evocation of popular vengeance narratives revamped to envisage present contingencies, the presidential persona advertised in the 2004 Bush messages resembles their protagonists. He is an archetype which embodies a sum total of his voters’ anxieties and aspirations, easily recognizable and developed through a range of stock situations, which “multiplies like a tapeworm” (Eco 931).

In keeping with his Western predecessors, the archetypal leader as fashioned in the series of Bush commercials inhabits a liminal landscape, mediating between the domestic and the Frontier orders, which enlace in the subsequent clips. Bush’s supervision of the homestead requires that he constantly switch between these two spaces, as is vividly represented in the *Changing World* video. The clip interweaves implicit images of 9/11 and the Iraq War (exemplified by the photographs of a firefighting brigade, Afghan president Hamid Karzai, a shootout in a Middle Eastern city, soldiers returning from a tour abroad) with those of domestic Arcadia (represented by the photographs of the president on the porch of his Texan ranch, a school bus delivering children to school, and a little girl prancing in the prairie). The video is supplied with a voiceover informing the viewer that “the world is changing.

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To this extent, the discussed clips function as cultural myths in that they are not lies but rather act as projections helpful in naturalizing history and making it tolerable, while also providing a common and easily understandable framework of intelligibility (Boym 44). On the other hand, as noticed by Žižek, this very quality of such messages is particularly disturbing in that it often elevates lie (in this case: Saddam Hussein’s possession of weapons of mass destruction, oppression of women and minorities, ties to Islamist terrorism) to a principle which governs social and political life, “as if our societies can remains stable… only if based on a lie, as if telling the truth… means destruction, disintegration of the social order… the idea that truth is too strong, that the politician should be a cynic telling a noble lie” (*The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*).
Sometimes in ways that astound, and others that terrify. We depend more than ever on our values: family, faith, the freedom we celebrate. In today’s changing world, the answers aren’t easy. We need a sense of purpose, a vision for the future, the conviction to do what is right” (Changing World).

In the clip, the footage of the “savage war” and the images of the “garden” are linked through the figure of the U.S. president. This is done through a sequence edited in a way that seems inspired by the opening and closing shots of The Searchers. The clip opens and closes with the image of a little boy standing in the doorway, holding a teddy bear and peeking outside, as if gazing into the liminal landscape from which the hero and his terrorist antagonists emerge as the frame flares up and the video fixes on Bush’s thoughtful face. Edward Buscombe reads Ford’s trademark shots as a peculiar type of isolation of the figure in the frame which positions the camera in “a place of refuge, a dark womb-like space which offers a secure view to the world outside,” or at least seemingly so, since even these places (Martha’s ranch, the cave in which Ethan and Martin hold off Scar’s charge in The Searchers / the Gilkeson homestead and the deserted adobe in The Missing, in which Maggie fights off a disease incited by Pesh-Chidin’s incantations / American heartland in Changing World) are vulnerable to infiltration (The Searchers 64). The world outside the porch is in a state of constant flux, a fact that “terrifies” and begs comforting assurance. The commercial promises to deliver such comfort in advertising Bush as the post-9/11 incarnation of the Texan warrior. The interlacing of images in the commercial is suggestive of what Christian Metz termed “parallel syntagma” (qtd. in Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 42), i.e. achronological,

61 In its own homage to Ford, Howard’s 2003 remake of The Searchers features several “porch” and “cave” frames of its own, with Maggie Gilkeson looking out for the return of her daughters from the town fair and then standing in the doorway when approached by Samuel who emerges from the wilderness to offer his help, and with Pesh-Chidin’s female prisoners looking out from the cave awaiting their fate.
alteration-based film sequences comprised of more than one shot and interweaving two motifs without a clear spatial or temporal link between them, in a way that suggests a symbolic or thematic parallel between these images. Examining the structure of parallel syntagma, Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis classify it as “a trait correlatable, perhaps, with the dualistic, often Manichean thinking” (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 43). Juxtaposing the image of the boy in pajamas peeking out of the house, on the one hand, and the images that imply the immediate proximity of the War on Terror, on the other, Changing World depicts matters of national security in dualistic terms, rendering the boy’s home a potential terrorist target.

This is evocative of the Fordian rendition of the Frontier homestead in The Searchers. The house which overlooks the liminal landscape in Ford’s Western, argues Stanley Corkin, is full of ambivalence, at once a stronghold and a trap. It “defines settlement, a space of enclosure… in the unsettled West,” while at the same time suggesting its own “precariousness and beleaguered state,” as it “becomes the prison of the Edwards family and then its tomb” (137). This ambivalent circularity also informs the concept of space in the discussed Westerns and presidential commercials. The geographical vagueness in early post-9/11 Westerns (The Last Samurai—somewhere in rural Japan; Hidalgo—somewhere in the Arabian Desert; The Missing—somewhere in New Mexico) amplifies the sense of vastness which defines the challenge posed to the hero(ine). In The Searchers, Ethan and Martin roam the Southern Plains, covering a distance of roughly two thousand miles. The Bush commercials adequately suggest that the arena of the “savage war” spans the entire globe, as implicated in the footage of terrorist attacks in North America, Europe and Eurasia. In a manner acutely reminiscent of Ford’s grand Western,
Changing World instills a sense of fear in the homestead, as represented by the images of the WTC debris—a signifier of triumph turned into an embodiment of tragedy.\(^\text{62}\) The clip neutralizes this fear through what could provisionally be termed as a heartland aesthetic, i.e. the distinct landscape of the suburban and rural pastoral, providing the commercials with a dichotomous genius loci, as if echoing the way in which Ford’s “desert aesthetic” of the Southwest equipped his Westerns with a “distinct topography” of their own, with prosperous settler islets surrounded by the barren soil of Monument Valley (Buscombe, *The Searchers* 14). This clichéd landscape is a manifestation of familiarity and intimacy; it counterbalances the alienating qualities of the “savage” scenery represented by the ruins of the Twin Towers and the arid Middle Eastern deserts, and creates an illusory safe haven which the liminal avenger protects from danger.

Still, rehashing Walter Benjamin, one may argue that if Ford’s masterpiece contemplated the elusive sense of such a conventional binary structure, its replicas, either by a pupil of Ford’s craft (*The Missing*) or a third party in the pursuit of political gain (2004 campaign videos), seem like its uninspired mechanical reproductions. As utilitarian narratives, the commercials are dead serious and finite, devoid of the implied question marks that loomed large over *The Searchers*. Their vision combines the sentimental longing for an imaginary idyll with an unabashed admiration for heroic leadership, and the sublimation of war. A nostalgic relapse into a depreciated, sugar-coated post-Romantic sensibility which had traditionally

\(^{\text{62}}\) Reviewing American architectural landmarks, architecture critic Donald Langmead traces the development of the symbolism of the Twin Towers as a “populist icon,” examining it as a metonymy of American popular culture, a symbol of U.S. imperialism and financial speculation, a signifier of “things that have ceased to be” , and a commodity reproduced as a “Graceland-style kitsch souvenir” (541-566).
sustained America’s “progressive” myths, the Bush campaign clips ritualize the notion of presidency within a “faintly sacramental aura” (Tomkins 25) that surrounds the Frontiersman in “pre-revisionist” Westerns. That, given their coarse mechanics, these video messages contributed to Bush’s re-election to the White House defies Leslie Fiedler’s notion that a past artificially contrived for utilitarian purposes can only amount to a “poor man’s Gene Autry” (18).

Embedded within the presidential videos, the two strands of pictures signifying the idyll and the horror amalgamate into photographic frescos, or meta-photographs, which transmit subsequent campaign messages. Approached as individual photographic units, such conflations acquire meaning precisely as juxtapositions of two elements which Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* defines as the *studium* (“a consequence of my knowledge, my culture [which]… derives from an average affect, almost from a certain training” (26)) and the *punctum* (an element which “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” and which “will disturb the *studium*” (27)). The co-presence of these two elements in a photograph, writes Barthes, provides it with a particular affective power as the familiarity of the *studium* (the cultural intimacy of the suburban Arcadia) collides with the acuity of the *punctum* (the fearsome poignancy of the War on Terror which renders that Arcadia vulnerable to savage raids). The continuous interlacing of these two components in the clips encapsulates the moment within a Manichean paradigm that naturalizes the specificity of the present so that, despite their modern setting, the photographs used in the clip are indeed attributed with “an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an arrest” (91) that immobilizes them as affective manifestations of a mythical paradigm.

63 Consistently with Chapter One, when put in quotation marks, I use the terms “progressive” and “populist” as delineated by Slotkin (*Gunfighter Nation* 22-26).
In some instances the *studium* transmits the message on its own, as evident in the *Wolves* commercial, which interpellates the viewer by employing a traditional token of the wilderness to garner support for an aggressive model of foreign policy and metaphorize the terrorist threat before the forthcoming elections. The ad features an aerial view of a dense mountain forest on a misty day, gradually closing in on a pack of prowling wolves, with a voiceover punch line, “Weakness attracts those who are waiting to do America harm.” The wolves are restless, growling and sniffing for prey, and rush towards the camera before the picture fades out. Attacking John Kerry for his reported intentions to “slash American intelligence operations” that would have “weakened America’s defences,” the commercial reutilizes “Frontier” animals as a graphic allegory of an outside threat in a manner reminiscent of Ronald Reagan’s 1984 campaign message *The Bear*, which featured a grizzly bear (a symbol of the Soviet Union) pacing the woods. 

A signifier of terrorism, the wolves in the Bush commercial helped frame the security policy debate much in the fashion that the “Soviet” bear helped ideologize the Arms Race at the dawn of Reagan’s second term of office (Borger). If the bear was a totem animal of Soviet militarism, the pack of wolves in the Bush commercial analogically personify the predatory nature of terrorist cells. Such an animalistic

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64 Eleven years after the George W. Bush re-election campaign, Reagan’s *Bear* commercial was unearthed in the 2015/16 Republican primaries by Ted Cruz, adding to the cultural legacy of the 1984 clip. As part of Cruz’s *Leadership You Can Trust to Protect America* campaign, his advertisers allegorized international affairs by exploiting public anxiety over the so-called “Islamic State,” a wahabbi terrorist organization based in the Syrian-Iraqi borderlands. An offshoot of Al-Qaeda, the IS gradually intercepted its status as the primary signifier of moral panic in European and American media. In an attempt to metaphorize terrorism, Cruz’s campaigners transcribed Reagan’s commercial, replacing the bear with a scorpion. An example of uninspired intertextuality, Cruz’s *Scorpion* ad rehashed Reagan’s clip, appropriating its concept and script. Set to images of a tiny black scorpion crawling through a patch of desert land until its path is crossed by a man wearing neat chinos and a pair of leather loafers (sic!), the voiceover informs viewers that “there is a scorpion in the desert. For most of us, its venom is a clear and deadly threat, but others refuse to even speak its name. Since the scorpion seeks our destruction, isn’t it time we recognized the scorpion for what it is, before it strikes again?” (Trip). The ad proved to be unsuccessful (as did Cruz’s presidential bid), and was quickly spoofed by comedian Stephen Colbert on his late night talk show, in which the host ridiculed the Republican candidate’s radicalism (Colbert “GOP Candidates Have Gone Full Reagan”).
analogy buttressed the tough-minded discourse on terrorism, to a large extent substantiating Will Wright’s observations on analogical conceptualizations. “In explanations based on analogical thought,” argues Wright, “the next event is reflected by the explaining sequence; that is, the future is the same as the past… In mythical thought, culture is conceived as a timeless and repeating cycle of events, and nature both explains and describes the events” (207-208). This analogical mode of clarification helps one imagine terrorists in mythical terms, or, in Barthes’ words, as a “fictive nation” (*Empire of Signs* 3). Conceptualized as an animalistic metaphor, terrorism does not compromise any real country or religion, in congruence with Bush’s superficial acknowledgement of Islam as a religion whose “teachings are good and peaceful” (West). At the same time, it reinforces paranoid thinking (the wolves lurking in the woods), justifies increased defense expenditure and implies a vilification of the Middle East as a “den” of terrorism.

The vilification of the elusive and somewhat fictive enemy in *Wolves* is a trope which is easily traceable in post-9/11 neoconservative Westerns, perhaps most acutely in Howard’s *The Missing*. Although the audience may at first take Pesh-Chidin for an Apache, his Spanish designation (*el brujo*) transforms the character into a paranoid fantasy (a combination of an ignoble savage, a Latino sexual predator, and a terrorist). Accounting for such screenplay decisions, the producers of *The Missing* explained that “the brujo is not intended to be Apache” (Benke), even though he is their medicine man, wears Apache clothes, speaks their language and

65 According to Rob Kroes, as of 2012 the U.S. defense budget was nearing the combined defense spending of all other countries. “U.S. defense outlays now consume roughly half of all federal discretionary dollars. The U.S. now has between seven hundred and a thousand military bases all over the globe. It can project military power in ever new technological ways” (“The Power of Rhetoric” 23).

66 In this regard, *Wolves* once more plays a similar role to Reagan’s *Bear* commercial in that it strives to mobilize the U.S. culture behind a Manichean construct of the world through the use of a metaphor that justifies military expansionism by suggesting the presence of an imminent “threat,” thus enabling the U.S. to “simultaneously deny imperialism and enact it” (Ryan 56).
leads a pack of Apache warriors in their “terrorist” ventures. Scripting the leader of hostile mercenaries as a conglomerate of Anglo-American fantasies exonerates Howard and provides him with an alibi for what could be seen as an outright vilification of an actual Native American tribe. Similarly, casting terrorists as forest predators in Wolves allows the Republican campaigners to allegorize Islamist extremism without directly stigmatizing the Muslim community, while also legitimizing the increase in security spending. Reducing terrorists to predatory animals also fits the post-9/11 syllogism of retaliatory violence which governed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Predicated on the “progressive” idea of cultural paternalism as expressed by technological advancement, this syllogism (or the “vehicle of technology,” as dubbed by Zoe Hess Carney and Mary E. Stuckey) is founded on a chain of imperialist assumptions, implying that those who lack technology “are presumed to lack civilization; lacking civilization, they are presumed to lack morality; lacking morality, they lack humanity. Lacking humanity, they are capable of unspeakable things, and any measures taken against them are taken to prevent their evil ends” (176). The syllogism of retaliatory violence authorizes a posse, and the 2004 Bush campaign videos project the U.S. President as a man fit to lead it.

2.2. “A Good Man With(out) a Gun”: Mitt Romney’s Presidential Bid and the Legacy of Shane

The 2004 Bush commercials demonstrate that, in the course of the War on Terror, the Western became an efficient and successful medium of electoral persuasion. Despite the war fatigue that had set in by late 2004, the use of vengeance
scenario in the negative campaign run by Bush’s advisers secured his re-election to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Once more, the neoconservative candidate turned to fear tactics at a time of crisis, and pressed voters to concede their civil liberties in return for promises to ensure national safety through “cowboy diplomacy.” In that respect, the 2004 Bush campaign can serve as another instance in which the Western “has functioned as a discursive weapon for the United States in its war on terror” (Kollin, *Captivating Westerns* 27). Still, although the resurfacing of the Western in U.S. political discourse after 9/11 is usually attributed and narrowed to the Bush presidency, the following years saw another instance in which the genre served as a vehicle for a neoconservative agenda. If 9/11 enabled the political “hawks” to implement militarist policies in a direct fashion and in consonance with the (initial) expectations of the public, the financial crisis of 2008 and the years of economic stagnation that followed lay ground for another presidential campaign whose rhetoric echoed the conservative strand of the classical Western. Approaching the financial crisis as another instance of collective trauma, I interpret the video clips aired during Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential bid as a nostalgic reiteration of the economic tenets of the “progressive” variant of the Frontier myth. Since two of analyzed videos feature Clint Eastwood, who also volunteered to address the public at the 2012 Republican National Convention, the context for my examination of the Romney videos is provided by Eastwood’s then-latest film, *Gran Torino*, which he both starred in and directed.

Interpreting *Gran Torino* as a quasi-Western that follows in the footsteps of Eastwood’s previous renditions of George Stevens’s *Shane* (and the most direct one since *Pale Rider*), I delineate the main themes present in Eastwood’s nostalgic urban drama, and examine how they resurfaced in the 2012 Romney campaign.
commercials. In my take on the clips aired during Romney’s 2012 campaign, I am particularly interested in the utilization of Clint Eastwood’s screen persona in the campaign’s narratives, and how his presence implies a validation of Romney’s leadership along the lines of a recognizable pattern established in *Shane* and transcribed for the times of financial crisis in *Gran Torino*. The scenario embedded in the analyzed clips utilizes Eastwood’s recognizable gunslinger image, with political endorsement granted to Romney through an implied transfer of authority between the liminal mediator and the leader of a Frontier community.

That the affirmation of Republican presidential candidates by Western celebrities has something of a history was demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter on the basis of the Goldwater campaign. Still, Eastwood’s approval of Romney’s candidacy suggests a somewhat different character of the relationship between the star and the politician. As opposed to the Wayne and Reagan clips, which advertised Goldwater as their peer, a “man who knows Indians” and a person of relentless political resolve, the Romney videos suggest a more vertical structure of the bond between the celebrity and the political leader. Here, the candidate is presented as a benevolent member of a community which he leads by example—a Joe Starret figure—while the celebrity appears in a brief cameo to commend the politician’s dedication and “anoint” him as a peaceful leader. Romney’s clips tout him as a successful entrepreneur, a “one of us” candidate, and a morally upright person.\(^{67}\)

\(^{67}\) Such a structure of the relationship between the gunslinger and his benign counterpart has figured prominently in the Western over the years (its most vivid example likely provided by *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, with Jimmy Stewart playing the staunch East Coast moralist Ransom Stoddard, and John Wayne cast as the gunslinger Tom Doniphon, who dirties his hands on Stoddard’s behalf); it also seems to have migrated to the genre’s successors (one recent instance of the bond between the “cowboy” and the “community leader” can be found in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*, with Aaron Eckhart cast as the morally upright Gotham politician Harvey Dent, and Christian Bale as the vigilante *par excellence*, Batman/Bruce Wayne).
The presentation of presidential candidates as wholesome Americans has been used by the Republicans and the Democrats alike ever since 1952, when television commercials became part and parcel of presidential campaigns. The first Republican candidate featured in a presidential ad was Dwight D. Eisenhower, running for his first term of office at the time. Apart from highlighting Eisenhower’s expertise as a decorated World War II general, his inaugural video introduced him as a man “out of the heartland of America, out of the small frame house of Abilene, Kansas” (The Man from Abilene). The simplistic visuals included a map of the US, out of which popped a small frame house, in which the future president was raised. Adding to Eisenhower’s folksy image were other commercials, which staged conversations with ordinary Americans, in which the general answered various queries in an easily graspable fashion. Such a strategy, in which the already popular veteran was presented as a person sympathetic to the sensibility of plain citizens, no doubt helped Eisenhower’s cause. The tactic was also successfully implemented by the Democrats, perhaps most notably so in Jimmy Carter’s 1976 presidential campaign. Racing again the unpopular Gerald Ford, whom the public saw as morally compromised after his pardon of president Nixon, Carter was marketed as an outsider from the heartland, a man of integrity who promised he would “never tell a lie to the American people” (Walker). A peanut tycoon, Carter’s Bio commercial showed him as a humble, hardworking farmer from the South, a man “whose roots are founded in the American tradition.” A mini-biopic filled with carefully selected facts on the future president’s background, the ad was interlaced with excerpts from a tour of Plains, Georgia, in which Carter told voters, “my folks have been farmers in Georgia for more than two hundred years.” Carter’s links to ordinary people were underscored by the juxtaposition of the images of farmland America (signifying “the simple decency
of its people”) and the footage of the Watergate Hotel at night (a symbol of “scandal and corruption” of the Nixon administration).

With American economy still in the doldrums in 2012, the commercials aired during Romney’s presidential campaign addressed economic issues in mythical terms. Employing the archetypal figure of the self-made made man / “pilgrim” politician, with Eastwood lending credence to the promises of economic rejuvenation, the Romney ads can be read as a transposition of the Shane scenario, with the gunslinger laying down his guns in favor of rhetorical skills (echoing the choice made by Eastwood’s protagonist in Gran Torino). This transformation—while not usually associated with the Western archetype of male silence—is indeed deeply ingrained in the genre, as Lee Clark Mitchell points out in his interpretation of Owen Wister’s The Virginian. In the text commonly recognized as the cornerstone of the cinematic Western, argues Mitchell, the protagonist employs his rhetorical talents more often than he resorts to violence, since “quick wit” proves just as efficient as “quick draws” in resolving conflicts (Westerns 98). In the light of Mitchell’s remarks, one may conceptualize Eastwood’s endorsement of Romney in similar terms, with the actor metaphorically lending his “gun” to the Republican candidate. One such instance occurred at the 2012 Republican National Convention. In what came to be known as the “empty chair speech,” Clint Eastwood spoke on behalf of Mitt Romney to a make-believe Barack Obama represented by an empty chair standing next to the pulpit. Eastwood engaged in a several minutes-long monologue, which concluded in a call for the changing of the guard in the White House.

See, I never thought it was a good idea for attorneys to be president. I think attorneys are so busy—you know they’re always taught to argue everything, always weigh everything—weigh both sides. They are always devil’s advocating this and bifurcating
this and bifurcating that. You know all that stuff. But, I think it is maybe time—what do you think—for maybe a businessman. How about that?... I would just like to say something, ladies and gentlemen. Something that I think is very important. It is that, you, we—we own this country. We—we own it. It is not you [Obama] owning it, and not politicians owning it. Politicians are employees of ours... And we should not ever forget that. And when somebody does not do the job, we got to let them go... But OK. You want to make my day? I started, you finish it. Go ahead. [Audience: Make my day!]. (qtd. in Abdullah)

While the actor’s semi-improvised speech featured overt references to what has arguably been his most recognizable silver screen character in the figure of Inspector “Dirty Harry” Callahan, Eastwood’s appearance at the convention endorsed Romney’s presidential bid by linking the Oscar-winning director to the Republican candidate within an archetypal bond between a dedicated community leader and a strong-willed stranger. In such a scenario, the stranger commits acts of violence on behalf of the community—personified by an industrious but non-violent leader—in order to relieve them from political and/or economic oppression. The violent resolution of the conflict between the community and the oppressive villain empowers the community to peacefully implement a new social contract based on libertarian entrepreneurship, epitomized by the non-violent leader. Having disposed of the villain, the stranger departs towards the setting sun—an arrangement which typically underlies the “vengeance variation” as defined by Will Wright.

The genre’s aversion to legal eagles is well documented, perhaps most vocally by Tom Doniphon (John Wayne) in The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, where one learns that the West is no place for bookish “pilgrims” such as Ransom Stoddard (Jimmy Stewart), whose law books do not amount to much at a place where “a man settles his own problems.” Free-thinking pioneers, on the contrary, are a completely
different story. They may lack a penchant for violence but make tangible contributions to the community and blaze the trail for its future prosperity. Pioneers need a helping hand, and the Western oftentimes extends it in the form of a gunslinger friend. Ever since *Shane*, the gunslinger has come to the pioneers’ rescue, rewarding their entrepreneurial spirit. One could contend convincingly that a chunk of Eastwood’s own films amounts to a continuous reprise of George Stevens’s classic, from the perverted Shane of *High Plains Drifter*, through the family man in *Outlaw Josey Wales*, the apocalyptic horseman in *Pale Rider*, and the suburban retiree in *Gran Torino*, each adding a new spin to the story.68

The gunslinger-mediator archetype provides a useful model for the examination of Mitt Romney’s 2012 campaign videos as narratives of economic non-interventionism given that not only did Eastwood advocate Romney’s bid by speaking at the Tampa convention but he also starred in a Romney commercial, and a memorable Chrysler ad which I propose to analyze as a crypto-appendix to Eastwood’s endorsement of the Republican candidate in the 2012 election. All three appearances featured the pioneer-gunslinger dynamics so often employed by Eastwood in his libertarian pictures, casting Romney as a Joe Starrett type, and Eastwood as his charismatic gunslinger messenger. Each helped conceptualize Romney’s laissez-faire economic program in mythical terms, utilizing Eastwood’s screen persona as a triggerman of change, and once more appropriating what had originally been a “populist” story to promote pro-corporation reforms. This section offers a close reading of Eastwood’s involvement with Romney’s presidential

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campaign (as seen in the *At Stake* and *Halftime in America* videos) as an emanation of the director’s latest take on the man-with-no-name archetype in *Gran Torino*, where territorial conflict once more helps formulate burning economic, social and political issues.

Analyzing the legacy of *Shane* in Clint Eastwood’s oeuvre, Stephen McVeigh outlines the continuous redefinition of the gunslinger figure which acts as a prism for the ongoing subversion and reworking of the prototype. The subsequent disruptions of George Stevens’s narrative reflected the fluctuations of political realities in successive eras, beginning with *High Plains Drifter* in the Nixon era, through *The Outlaw Josey Wales* as a metaphor of the Vietnam War fatigue, or *Pale Rider* and the booming Reaganomics (“Subverting Shane” 136). One may supplement McVeigh’s catalogue with Eastwood’s 2008 *Gran Torino* as an articulation of issues tied to the raging financial crisis in post-9/11 America. Although it is not strictly a representative of the genre, I interpret *Gran Torino* as a contemporary Western disguised as an urban drama, as its narrative utilizes the functions of the vengeance variation. *Gran Torino* is a picture which eventually provides a safe haven fashioned as “premodern community governed by specific values and ideologies” (Campbell, *Post-Westerns* 6)—in this case, the socially neoconservative and economically neoliberal sentiments of its director. In interacting, overlapping and interrelating with the Westerns of the past, *Gran Torino* eventually fails to disengage from their fundamental ideological implications. Although its protagonist seems to reject active violence as his mode of operation, *Gran Torino* nonetheless offers a definitive closure by means of passive violence. Thus, in the grain of Frontier mythology, violence remains the essential regenerative factor which, along with the code of self-
reliance materialized in the hero’s relation with his pupil, solidifies and naturalizes “the origin story of the United States” (Campbell 11).

One important aspect of *Gran Torino* is its adamanacy in critiquing the inefficiency of the public sector, combined with the idealization of entrepreneurship as a factor which galvanizes otherwise divergent communities. The picture presents an ameliorative narrative, stressing the value of self-reliance and the sanctity of uninhibited market ventures—the pillars of economic libertarianism, an ideology central to the socio-economic transformations in America in the past several decades, as concisely put by Tony Judt in *Ill Fares the Land*.

If we ask who exercised the greatest influence over contemporary Anglophone economic thought, five foreign-born thinkers spring to mind: Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Joseph Schumpeter, Karl Popper, and Peter Drucker. … Von Mises and Hayek were the outstanding ‘grandfathers’ of the Chicago School of free-market macroeconomics. Schumpeter is best known for his enthusiastic description of the ‘creative, destructive’ powers of capitalism, Popper for his defense of the ‘open society’ and his theory of totalitarianism. As for Drucker, his writings on management exercised enormous influence over the theory and practice of business in the prosperous decades of the postwar boom. … [All] were forced into exile by these events [Nazism] and all—Hayek in particular—were to cast their writings and teachings in the shadow of the central question of their lifetime: Why had liberal society collapsed and given way—at least in the Austrian case—to fascism? Their answer: the unsuccessful attempts of the (Marxist) left to introduce into post-1918 Austria state-directed planning, municipally owned services, and collectivized economic activity had not only proven delusionary, but had led directly to a counterreaction. (97-99)

In his analysis of the ongoing withdrawal of welfare state structures in America, Judt attributes the revival of non-interventionism to the implantation of
libertarian philosophy in the hotbeds of U.S. economic thought, and its subsequent transfer into politics. America’s late-twentieth-century propensity to stigmatize welfare state as a symptom of demanding attitudes, and the commonplace identification of social democracy with orthodox socialism, proved to be hugely conducive to the dismantling of social reforms of the New Deal in favor of a self-regulating free market. That the Western as a genre inherently tied to the issues of property and individual liberties provides the exponents of deregulation with a tailor-made vessel for its promotion has been evident since Ronald Reagan used his cowboy movie image to blaze his trail to the White House. Following a period of hiatus, the alliance between the Western rhetoric and neoconservative politics reemerged after 9/11. Western formulas infused the discourse of the War on Terror and, as I hope to demonstrate in my analysis of the Romney commercials, reinvigorated the narrative of economic non-interventionism after the recession, using an endorsement from Hollywood’s most famous libertarian. More specifically, my analysis focuses on the ways in which the analyzed campaign clips made use of Clint Eastwood’s star persona as redefined in *Gran Torino*, i.e. as a post-industrial good man with(out) a gun.69

*Gran Torino* translocates the gunslinger narrative to present-day (sub)urban surroundings. Set in the once prosperous industrial Detroit, the film recounts the story of the final days in the life of Walt Kowalski (played by Eastwood himself), a Polish American Korean War veteran who spent half a century working at the nearby 69 Interpreting *Gran Torino* as a variation on the theme of *Shane* in the context of the 2012 presidential elections, I hope to add to Stephen McVeigh’s reading of *Shane* as a cornerstone for the model of presidential leadership in John F. Kennedy’s campaign, and his illuminations on the links between Ronald Reagan’s public image and *Pale Rider*’s role as “an articulation of the intention, the mission” (McVeigh, “Subverting *Shane*” 147). Examining the transformation of the gunslinger stranger in subsequent Westerns, McVeigh observes that *Shane*’s lasting impact “lies in its reworking over the next four decades, each version of the Shane-myth acting as an excellent barometer of and window on social, cultural and political feeling in the United States” (McVeigh, *The American Western* 125). If one were to approach *Gran Torino* as yet another, most recent offshoot of *Shane*, then it is possible to argue that the film’s legacy has extended over two more decades.
Ford plant, and his short but meaningful friendship with a family of Vietnamese immigrants who have recently moved to the house next door. Walt is a lapsed Catholic widower who has just buried his wife and is not very far removed from the grave himself, suffering from a terminal disease. Estranged from his two sons and his grandchildren, he wishes for nothing more than to live out his days unmolested by others, sipping cold lager and chewing tobacco on his porch. Embittered by his loneliness and disgruntled at the changing social and economic outlook of the neighborhood, of which he appears to be the last white resident, Walt is forced into a situation which quickly transforms both him and the community from which he so resolutely tries to distance himself when his Vietnamese neighbor Thao Vang Lor (Bee Vang) attempts to steal his mint condition 1972 Ford Gran Torino as part of a gang initiation ritual. Catching Thao red-handed, Walt grudgingly supervises the teenager in a series of Herculean labors ordered by Thao’s mother as penance, and the two eventually strike up an intergenerational and interethnic friendship thanks to the mediation of Thao’s sister Sue (Ahney Her). Disenchanted with the lack of economic prospects in the post-industrial Detroit wasteland, Walt assists Thao in becoming a master handyman and lands him a job as a construction worker. In the meantime, the Vietnamese thugs continue to disturb the Lor family, beating up Thao and gang-rape Sue, thus forcing the final showdown with Walt who, although initially contemplating regenerative violence, sacrifices himself by reaching for his cigarette lighter in front of the gang, who mistake his gesture for a draw and shoot him dead. Walt’s decision to put himself at the receiving end of violence restores order in the neighborhood, leading to the gang’s arrest and establishing Thao as his surrogate heir as the youngster inherits Walt’s vintage car. Importantly, it also entails a promise of definitive closure by casting Walt as a post-Christian scapegoat who
deliberately sacrifices himself to permanently disestablish violence as a means of resolution.\textsuperscript{70}

Eastwood’s film exudes a distinctly elegiac aura. Its main character represents the growing group of “angry white men,” their economic independence in decline, “as they are downsized, outsourced, and foreclosed into service-sector jobs” (Kimmel 22-23). A threnody for blue collar America, \textit{Gran Torino} casts its white males as grumpy, aging patriarchs, “equally adept at the traditional male rituals of domestic home life and the warrior rituals of violence” (Gourlie and Engel 269), confined to their own inner circle gushing with anxiety and racial prejudice. As a veteran soldier, self-reliant geezer and patriotic buyer who grinds his teeth at his son’s automotive purchase (“does it kill you to buy America?”), Walt is indeed a Cold War cowboy, to paraphrase the title of Stanley Corkin’s study of the era’s Westerns. He is “still living in the Fifties,” as put by his son (and as symbolized by his lighter with a 1\textsuperscript{st} Cavalry emblem), obstinately trying to make it on his own well into his retirement. Paradoxically, Kowalski—a beneficiary of Keynesian economics—misplaces his class and racial resentment and directs it towards state institutions (whose prerogatives have been suppressed in the course of deregulation), internalizing the very logic that permeated Romney’s presidential commercials.

Within the scope of Will Wright’s narratological model, Walt could also be delineated as a former “professional”: a beneficiary of the industrial era and the state-controlled corporate economy, whose gradual collapse left him and his peers stranded, forcing him to become “the individualistic, self-reliant entrepreneur” (178) in an act of nostalgic reinvention. A long-time blue collar worker, Walt refuses to

\textsuperscript{70}See Rene Girard, \textit{Kozioł ofiarny}. Tr. Mirosława Goszczyńska. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1987. 147-162. Walt’s Christ-like quality is expressed covertly in his conversation with Father Janovich (Christopher Carley) when Kowalski states that “Tao and Sue are never going to find peace in this world as long as that gang’s around. Until they go away, you know, forever,” and revisits in the film’s finale when Walt falls dead to the ground, his arms spread out as if to mirror crucifixion.
accept postindustrial disintegration and the concomitant economic collapse of industrial communities such as Detroit. Kowalski nostalgically turns towards self-reliance as a foundation for self-restoration. He works as a handyman and winds up unwittingly as the protector of the multicultural community that scrambles for survival in the dilapidated inner city. With Detroit outlined as a postindustrial urban Frontier, *Gran Torino* can be seen allegorically as a depiction of an economic free-for-all, with Walt cast as a liminal mediator and his Vietnamese neighbors as a settler community. Such a scenario points towards Wright’s “classical” plot and its “vengeance” variation, where the hero achieves “such human rewards as friendship, respect and dignity” (Wright 186) through a separation from others and individual autonomy. Wright analyzes the golden age of the Western in social terms, approaching them as myths affirming the ideals of market economy,\(^7\) in which individual members of society retain their economic agency through independent business ventures, at the same time committing themselves to grassroots initiatives which solidify their communities. In this respect, Eastwood’s film can be seen as a restorative response to “the demise of the nation-state during the post-Cold War era along with the beginning of a powerful reign of hypercapitalism” (Kollin Captivating Westerns 12).

Still, to see *Gran Torino* as an elegy would be reductive, since the changing of the guard personified by Thao does not entail a reevaluation of ideals, but rather their extension onto the young generation of ethnic Americans. Walt’s friendship with Thao is a vehicle for the reconstruction and redemption of the suburb in line with

\(^7\)Echoing Karl Polanyi, Wright defines market economy as “an economic system controlled, regulated, and directed by markets alone; order in the production and distribution of goods is entrusted to this self-regulating mechanism” (132). This model is inherent in libertarian utopias, where strong, industrious individuals form a community based on a shared belief in personal and economic independence and a minimalization of state control mechanisms. Under such circumstances, “the individual must see himself as self-reliant and independent of the wills of others, except through the establishment of economic contracts” (Wright 136).
libertarian values transferred between generations. It is precisely through a code of cultural intimacy founded on the shared understanding of labor that the two form their bond, leading the stunned Walt to conclude that he has “more in common with these gooks than with my own rotten family.” The intensive course in libertarian economics and heteronormative manhood which Walt has in store for Thao (among others manifested by Walt buying Thao a tool kit in a hardware store, fixing the youngster with the jaw-dropping Ford Gran Torino for his first date or instructing him in trash talk as a working class male code for expressing affection).

Scoffing Thao for washing the dishes and weeding out the garden, and nicknaming him “toad,” enables Walt to establish a relationship of paternalistic sympathy. On the one hand, the character of their relationship exposes Thao to the mechanisms of gender conformity and intergenerational compliance. On the other, as pointed out by Susan Kollin in her ruminations on Michael Kimmel’s “angry white men” thesis, such a relationship “comes with certain rewards,” since it enables young men “to eventually gain entry into established circles of male power and privilege” (Captivating Westerns 155).

The code of male camaraderie that informs their relationship is used by Walt to instill economic self-sufficiency amidst the ruins of industrial America. Walt’s mission is thus indeed to “fix things,” not merely in a literal sense as when he repairs the Lors’ washing machine, but more importantly in a figurative sense as a savior

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72 The friendship between Walt and Thao strengthens once the boy internalizes Walt’s social and economic outlooks, which act as a platform of understanding despite many differences between them, mirroring Svetlana Boym’s remarks on cultural intimacy which, she observes, “is based on common social context, not on national or ethnic homogeneity” (43). Libertarianism in Gran Torino thus works as what Boym refers to as “invented tradition,” drawing from Eric Hobsbawm’s understanding of the term as an act which “builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing” (42) originating from radically different sources (Walt’s longing stems from a sense of dwindling agency, old age and disintegrating industrial environment; Thao’s—from his family’s difficulties in integrating with the U.S. society upon leaving Vietnam, and his own difficulties to adapt in a new neighborhood).

73 Examining Gran Torino, John M. Gourlie and Leonard Engel notice that “the language of ethnic insult disguises the friendship and its emotions which cannot be openly acknowledged” (270).
figure who redeems the community he rode into by living what he preaches. If, as argued by Gourlie and Engel, Walt is indeed “a summation of his [Eastwood’s] heroic, cinematic past” (275), his affinity with those figures lies first and foremost in the outcome heralded by his arrival at the site of conflict. Pale Rider’s preacher and Gran Torino’s Walt may differ in terms of their methods, but the end result of their stint with the “homesteader” figures recapitulates that of Shane, with each hero acting to foster economic progress and political democracy of their respective communities (Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation 396).74

The positivistic symbolism of Motor City, whose rebirth Gran Torino envisions within its ameliorative logic, and which fittingly corresponds with Detroit’s motto, Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus, returns to inform the two pro-Romney commercials examined in this section. The city’s downfall has divided its analysts as to its causes which—as Thomas Sugrue argues in a study of Detroit as a qualitative exemplar of the crisis plaguing the former industrial hubs of America—are complex and interwoven. Sugrue points out that while leftist writers tend to blame “two of the most important, interrelated, and unresolved problems in American history: that capitalism generates economic inequality and that African Americans have disproportionately borne the impact of that inequality,” conservative critics are far from attributing the decline of the American Rust Belt and the resulting hyperplasia of the underclass to economic restructuring implemented within the

74 Gran Torino is particularly optimistic in this regard, although its libertarian sensibility may be seen to obfuscate and simplify the film’s perception of social and economic issues. In designating the Vietnamese gang as the root of the problem, Gran Torino calls upon the familiar conservative rhetoric which mistakes symptoms of social disenchantment for its causes and uses gang violence as a smoke screen for the widening economic inequality. Zygmunt Bauman provides an extensive analysis of this rhetoric in his study of the notion of post-9/11 security state contrasted with the historical welfare state: “In the political formula of the personal safety state, the specter of an uncertain future and social degradation against which the then social state swore to insure its citizens not so long ago is being gradually yet consistently replaced by the threat of a pedophile let loose, a serial killer, an obtrusive beggar, mugger, stalk, prowler, poisoner of water and food, terrorist: or better yet by all such threats rolled into one in the virtually interchangeable figures of the native ‘underclass’.. against whom the security state promises to defend its subjects tooth and nail” (Liquid Fear 149).
policies of continuous deregulation, linking these problems to persistence in sticking
to outdated economic models, the inherent dynamics of postindustrial capitalism, and
the “culture of joblessness and dependencies in the inner cities” (38-39) reportedly
induced by the inordinately generous welfare state (some of the latter sentiments are
evident in Gran Torino). In presenting the symptoms of its urban decay,
Eastwood’s portrayal of Detroit seems detailed and realistic, presenting the city as a
“huge necropolis” (McMahon, “Desperate Times” 234) and acutely rendering its
dilapidated architecture (the film was shot on location, with the final showdown
taking place in Highland Park, of which Charlie LeDuff wrote that “the saying goes
that suburbanites don’t go to Detroit and Detroiter don’t go to Highland Park” (53)).
And yet, one may find its analysis and solution of the postindustrial crisis superficial,
even if the vision of grassroots entrepreneurship within an unorthodox community of
equals seems enticing.

Detroit’s prominence as a metaphor of America’s social and economic
struggles in Gran Torino heralds its utilization in the 2012 presidential campaign
videos of Mitt Romney. As opposed to the 2004 elections, dominated by the
discourse of the War on Terror, the 2012 campaign focused on economic matters.
The videos provided by Obama’s and Romney’s copywriters once more turned to
opponent denigration as a measure to procure voters’ support. Romney’s videos

75 Although towards the end of the 1950, i.e. at its most prosperous, the city of Detroit “was seen as
the Promised Land” of blue-collar workers, enabling them to purchase property, offering stable
employment and providing its citizens with “health care, fuel, and rent and gave $10 every week to
adults for food; $5 to children” (LeDuff 33, 71), attributing its downfall to what some see as
overblown welfare expenditure is a gross simplification that fails to account for the consistent
reduction of trade union leverage, outsourcing of labor, abolition of minimal wage, growing salary
gap, etc., which altogether contributed to Detroit’s bankruptcy and drove a quarter million people out
of the city in the first decade of this century, “bringing its population to less than 700,000 – a hundred-
year old” (LeDuff 283).

76 In this regard, one May find Gourlie and Engel’s interpretation of Gran Torino as Eastwood’s
proposal of a “new mythology to replace the outmoded ones of the cinematic past” (274)
unconvincing except perhaps for Walt’s renunciation of active violence. I prefer to see it as a major
revamping of Eastwood’s consistently libertarian mythology, very much in line with the
commendation of self-reliance in his previous films, from The Outlaw Josey Wales through Million
Dollar Baby.
attempted to depict Obama’s presidency as a failure, holding him accountable for growing unemployment, rising gas prices and public deficit. Romney’s campaigners also cast the incumbent president as unfriendly to private enterprise, and vilified him for “socialist” outlooks, expressed by Obama’s continuation of corporate bailouts (ironically, these were originally passed by George W. Bush). Although over three quarters of all presidential ads were negative, my focus rests with the affirmative messages, particularly because the “progressive” spin on the mysterious avenger narrative provided by Eastwood in Gran Torino’s largely overlaps with the optimistic tone of the two commercials he starred in during Mitt Romney’s campaign.

The few positive video messages produced to promote Romney’s presidential bid presented him as a resolute, entrepreneur-friendly leader, and an experienced businessman whose main goal would be to provide what the commercials depicted as morally upright, heartland communities with opportunities for a prosperous future in a deregulated market. Fetishizing economic deregulation as a panacea to all worries, Romney’s copywriters persisted in misrepresenting increasingly divided America—whose rulers (Republican and Democratic alike) had been passing legislation repressive towards “simple folk” for over four decades—as a meritocratic community awarding hardworking citizens with unlimited possibilities of social mobility. The recurring catchphrases included promises to “get America’s middle class working again,” “keep America strong” by sustaining its humongous military budget, provide “good and decent Americans” with “a better chance, a fighting chance,” and “put our faith in the American people” (Promise of America, We Can’t Afford Four More Years) in intensive canvassing for the support of America’s
(predominantly white) middle class.\textsuperscript{77} Romney’s campaigners built his image based on a combination of neoconservative morals and laissez-faire economics, arriving at a “progressive” narrative which did not diverge from images and slogans naturalizing America’s past and immobilizing the present as its emanation. Where George W. Bush’s clips turned towards the vengeance plot to conceptualize the immanent challenges of the War on Terror, Mitt Romney’s videos utilized the Jeffersonian pastoral to promote deregulation as a solution to the raging financial crisis, much in the spirit of \textit{Gran Torino}’s ideological agenda. In doing so, Romney’s videos appealed to stereotypical patriotism, as the commercials abound in shots of rural households, close-ups of wooden porches, mullioned windows adorned with American flags, generic country barns covered with siding, Midwestern cornfields and South-Western windmills, Texan sunsets (\textit{The Best of America}; \textit{Clear Eyes, Full Hearts}; \textit{The Promise of America}). These signifiers of rural and suburban bliss were supplemented with nostalgic emblems of America’s imperialist ambitions, from raising the flag on Iwo Jima, through a space shuttle take off at Cape Canaveral, images of firefighters rushing to the rescue on 9/11, and the footage of the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team captain Mike Eruzione endorsing Romney’s candidacy based on the GOP candidate’s success as the CEO of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee in 2002) captioned with a quote from coach Herb Brooks (“Great moments are born from great opportunities” (\textit{Introduction}), who led the U.S. to Olympic gold in Lake Placid, beating the heavily favored Soviets in the semi-final game known as the “Miracle on Ice.”

\textsuperscript{77} Romney’s orientation towards white middle class worked against him, with his ratings plummeting following the release of a leaked video recording from GOP campaigners’ council in which the Republican candidate expressed his disdain for what he considered 47% of the population which reportedly benefited from welfare and would not vote Republican anyway, thus inducing Romney to canvass for the remaining 53%. See Chris Cilizza, “Why Mitt Romney’s ‘47 Percent’ Comment Was So Bad.” \textit{The Washington Post} (4 March 2013). 10 January 2016 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/03/04/why-mitt-romneys-47-percent-comment-was-so-bad/).
The conceptualization of Romney’s presidential vision in the context of America’s sluggish recovery from the crisis seems oddly correspondent with Eastwood’s libertarianism in *Gran Torino*. Blaming the increasingly impotent public sector (rather than the unmitigated exploits of Wall Street financiers) for the stagnation which ensued in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse, the Romney ads continued to convince Main Street of the benefits of anti-statism. One example of such a practice can be observed in *These Hands*. Driving around Sidney, Ohio, with a local entrepreneur Denny Sollmann (with nostalgic vistas of Mid-Western flatland edited into the clip), the ad featured a de-contextualized quote from Obama, in which he questioned the myth of the self-made man. An excerpt from Obama’s speech that was used as voiceover, with the president deconstructing the simplistic logic of anti-statism (“If you've been successful, you didn't get there on your own. You didn't get there on your own. I'm always struck by people who think, well, it must be because I was just so smart... It must be because I worked harder than everybody else”).

Building on an emotional reaction of Denny Sollmann (“He was trying to say, you didn’t build that business on your own—the government helped you build it—and that really ticked me off more than anything”), the clip uses the resentment of small business people to rationalize the ongoing dismantling of welfare, and to criticize market interventionism in the context of the expensive bailout packages implemented in the opening passages of the so-called “You didn’t build that” speech, Obama stressed the importance of community and state support to individual pursuit of happiness, stating that “there are a lot of wealthy, successful Americans who agree with me -- because they want to give something back. They know they didn’t—look, if you've been successful, you didn’t get there on your own. You didn't get there on your own. I'm always struck by people who think, well, it must be because I was just so smart... There are a lot of smart people out there. It must be because I worked harder than everybody else. Let me tell you something—there are a whole bunch of hardworking people out there. If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business—you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen” (emphasis mine). For the full transcript of the speech, see Andrew Cline, “What ‘You Didn’t Build That’ Really Means—and Why Romney Can’t Explain It.” *The Atlantic* (10 August 2012). 15 August 2016. 
by the Bush and Obama administrations (“Not only my business, but other small businesses around here, they’re all scared to death that the path that we’re headed with the current administration is not the path for America,” admits Sollmann). Obama’s speech is then juxtaposed with Romney’s retort, as the ad shows the republican candidate speaking at a campaign rally. Sporting a semi-casual checked shirt, and surrounded with blue collar business people of the American Rust Belt, Romney condemns Obama in a scene reminiscent of the galvanizing speeches by Joe Starrett in *Shane* / Hull Barret in *Pale Rider* (“To say something like that is not just foolishness, it’s insulting to every entrepreneur, every innovator in America, and it’s wrong”). The clip concludes with a slogan, “In Ohio, we built it,” as if rehashing the sentiments of Walt Kowalski in *Gran Torino*. With malfunctioning state policies (“I prayed for them [the police], but they didn’t come,” says Walt to father Janovich), the American male is once more advised to turn to individual initiative in a wishful reinstatement of the ideology of just exchange. Restoratively nostalgic, *These Hands* refurbishes the long-compromised implication of “equality and opportunity… and freedom from domination” (Wright 134), along with the belief that “successful acts are individual acts” (148), for which one reaps profits adequate to the effort invested in an enterprise.

The illusion of equality and opportunity created by the Romney commercials suggests that voters and their representatives share common economic interests which transcend the notions of class, gender and race. The meritocratic rhetoric vilifies the excluded for failing to succeed economically, and helps the commercials gloss over differences such as the glaring gap between the rich and the poor. This is achieved by construing these problems in simplistic terms, and by appealing to voters’ emotions through easily recognizable cultural symbols, such as the Ohio
sunset and the roadside garage in These Hands, which validate Denny Sollmann’s “country” background, and extend the heartland aura onto Romney. Such use of archetypal American landscapes and architectural artifacts was no doubt motivated by their affective power, particularly bearing in mind that the clips were calculated to resonate with white middle class citizens. Citing Bruce Allsopp’s and Amos Rapaport’s definition of “folk or vernacular architecture—the home-grown product” as a form of architecture “that is loved, because it signifies the heart values of its builders,” Donald Langmead argues that true architectural icons “point, not to themselves, but to ideas beyond and bigger than themselves” (xvii-xviii). In the view of Langmead’s remark, one cannot but see the collage of vernacular architecture offered in Romney’s commercial as a nostalgic carrier of the Republican candidate’s promise to restore Frontier-style economics, and an effort to render himself more affable as its bearer. Romney’s main presidential ad, The Promise of America, consolidates its nostalgic strategy by presenting the footage from the announcement of his decision to run for president, staged with meticulous care at a farm in New Hampshire. Standing in a field adjacent to the farm, Romney gazes West, envisioning “America driven by freedom, where free people pursue happiness in their own unique ways” in a foreshadowing of yet another new beginning. Romney’s address is illustrated with flashing images of the heartland: a white barn with an American flag hanging on the door; a wooden house with a Star-Spangled Banner displayed in the window; a harvester reaping wheat; a little girl on a tire swing, etc. And yet, to paraphrase Roland Barthes, the proliferation of hackneyed images in Romney’s video messages eventually tames their power on account of the banality of evoked photographs that amounts to nothing but a generalized, consumable image-repertoire (Camera Lucida 118).
Into this landscape rides Clint Eastwood (*At Stake*), fashioned as a benign version of the lone drifter, his wrinkled face like a palimpsest of all his screen incarnations, his plain shirt suggestive of Walt Kowalski rather than William Munny. No longer is he the man of “atavistic regression” (Carter 51), choosing instead to “seek restitution: the restoration of something lost or stolen to its original state” (Nelson, “Revisionism 2.0,” 25). Echoing the reestablishment of the traditional hero in his urban Western, Eastwood appears as a pivotal figure in the narrative, which employs his extra-textual appeal to transmit a political message. Evocative of Walt Kowalski’s vivid mimic and brusque oratory talents, Eastwood’s role is that of an inspiring motivator whose mystique inspires the community to follow a leader he discreetly endorses. In the clip, Eastwood’s lines read as follows:

In the last few years, America’s been knocked down. Twenty three million people can’t find full-time work, and we borrow four billion dollars every day, much of it from China. If someone doesn’t get the job done, you gotta hold them accountable. Obama’s second term would be a rebound of the first, and our country just couldn’t survive that. We need someone who could turn it around fast, and that man is Mitt Romney. There’s not much time left if the future of our country is at stake. (*At Stake*)

Shot against a gleaming, hazy background, his aura is that of *Pale Rider*’s preacher who descends into town in a mysterious manner. Though he bears no gunshot scars on his chest, the glittering light surrounds Eastwood like a halo, hinting at his mission as the quasi-supernatural messenger of change. The translucence of Eastwood’s face in the clip is particularly striking in the light of Edward Rielly’s inquiry into the ambiguous nature of the preacher in *Pale Rider*, which the director described as deliberately angelic. In Eastwood’s own words, the preacher is an archangel who “inspires them [the miners] with the courage to resist and defend their
rights.” Rielly aptly points out that the dual nature of the preacher is not unprecedented, citing the depiction of angelic entities as “formerly human” in Mormon beliefs (84)—an observation which, though purely conjectural, proves particularly illuminating in the context of Romney’s own Mormon affiliation. In view of Rielly’s remarks on the preacher’s provenance, the unbearable brightness enveloping Eastwood in At Stake attributes the scene with the weight of an annunciation scene, in which the actor enacts the role of the archangel foreshadowing the coming of the Mormon messiah, who will square off against the one that “doesn’t get the job done” and “hold them accountable.” Upon delivering his message, Eastwood disappears in a preacher-like fashion, as the camera cuts from the actor to a panorama of a Midwestern small town shot from a linear perspective.

Apart from its opening and closing shots, At Stake is narrated from a point-of-view perspective, with Eastwood disappearing from the screen, replaced by the signifiers of the stumbling U.S. economy (an empty goods depot; men standing in line at a job center; Chinese cargo unloaded at an American shipyard; a smiling Obama boarding Air Force One). In their discussion of the point-of-view as a narrative choice, Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis notice its potential in eliciting imaginary responses from the spectator. The point-of-view perspective, they argue, helps “fashion a very tight bond between spectator and text,” enabling the text to “interpellate the spectator into the fictional world so that its values, and its ideology, become one with the viewing subject” (86). The combination of Eastwood’s iconic persona and his gruff voiceover is an efficient blend of a frame narrator (i.e. a character narrator who commences their narration simultaneously with the first images of a film, but whose act of narrating is not visually represented) and an embedded narrator (i.e. a narrator who “joins” the story following its beginning,
and whose narration is visualized). Such a merger enables the authors of the ad to combine the “greater degree of believability” (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 99) of the omniscient, invisible frame narrator with the visual accessibility of a first-person embedded narrator. Although Lubomir Dolezal points out that embedded narrators possess a lesser degree of “authentication authority,” i.e. the capacity to establish and verify facts, and thus have to “earn it” with the audience (99), Eastwood’s case is different. The actor’s interpellation is readily graspable, authenticated by his cultural impact and cinematic output, or, as termed by Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, his “celebrity intertextuality,” which immediately refers viewers to “a genre or cultural milieu” (207)—in this case, the Western genre and its transpositions onto contemporary, urban grounds.

Structurally, At Stake is a carbon copy of another commercial featuring Clint Eastwood’s charismatic stranger persona, aired on national television a month before Romney launched his media campaign. Although the commercial in question was not strictly a political ad, its nostalgic undertones, ideological charge, implied references to the upcoming elections, and thinly disguised allusions to Gran Torino, along with Eastwood’s concurrent involvement in Romney’s campaign, encourage its inclusion as an appendix to this discussion. The aforesaid clip is Chrysler’s Halftime in America commercial aired in the intermission of Super Bowl XLVI. Shot in several locations intended to imitate the fallen city of Detroit, the ad has Eastwood emerge from the dark locker room tunnel at the Angeles Memorial Coliseum. He is wearing a fitted suit evocative of Walt Kowalski’s funeral outfit in Gran Torino (“I

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79 The commercial was actually filmed across the country, its locations including Los Angeles, New Orleans and North California, although the footage of Chrysler workers was shot in the company’s plant in Detroit (Remizowski). Also notable in the context of Romney’s ill-fated “47% remarks” was the release date of the clip. Aired in early February of 2012, midway through the Super Bowl game, the commercial’s natural target were most likely middle class (52%) white (83%) males (64%), registered Republicans (21% more likely to be NFL fans than registered Democrats, with the fan bases of 23 out of 32 teams prone to vote more Republican than they officially admit (Chemi and Green).
never had a fitted suit before,” confesses Walt when visiting a local tailor shortly before sacrificing himself for the common good of the Vietnamese neighborhood). In the first shot of the commercial, Eastwood’s face is hidden in the dark—one can only recognize the actor by his hoarse voice. His silhouette casts a vast shadow on the concrete wall of the tunnel, immediately connoting his silver screen alter ego and lending weight to his message.

It's halftime. Both teams are in their locker room discussing what they can do to win this game in the second half. It's halftime in America, too. People are out of work and they're hurting. And they're all wondering what they're going to do to make a comeback. And we're all scared, because this isn't a game.

The people of Detroit know a little something about this. They almost lost everything. But we all pulled together, now Motor City is fighting again. I've seen a lot of tough eras, a lot of downturns in my life. And, times when we didn't understand each other. It seems like we've lost our heart at times. When the fog of division, discord, and blame made it hard to see what lies ahead. But after those trials, we all rallied around what was right, and acted as one. Because that's what we do. We find a way through tough times, and if we can't find a way, then we'll make one.

All that matters now is what's ahead. How do we come from behind? How do we come together? And, how do we win? Detroit's showing us it can be done. And, what's true about them is true about all of us. This country can't be knocked out with one punch. We get right back up again, and when we do, the world is going to hear the roar of our engines. Yeah, it's halftime America. And, our second half is about to begin.

As in At Stake, the commercial introduces Eastwood as a loner stumbling upon the television community in a fashion reminiscent of his cinematic incarnations. Although he is no longer the “aristocrat of violence,” but a messenger of consumerism, Eastwood’s endorsement of Chrysler is Shane-like in that his motives
for advertising the company “appear to be expressions of his [silver screen] nature” (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 400). The ad sparked a heated debate about its political undertones, with both the Democrats and the Republicans divagating as to the actor’s covert endorsement of their presidential candidate. Eastwood himself denied there was a political spin in the ad, although some speculated that Eastwood’s implied support of the automotive bailout packages suggested his future endorsement of Obama, in spite of the fact that the bailouts had been initiated by Bush, and despite Eastwood’s outspoken disavowal of his alleged Democratic sympathies, not to mention the actor’s outspoken critique of the said bailouts. Others, including *The Huffington Post*’s Lincoln Mitchell, preferred to “think of another president when seeing that commercial,” seeing the Chrysler ad as “right out of the playbook of another California neoconservative who was optimistic about America, Ronald Reagan” (“The Republican Tale”)—an opinion I am inclined to agree with considering the aforementioned factors.

Naturally, whether *Halftime in America* is indeed a crypto-endorsement of Romney cannot be determined unequivocally. Still, in the view of the numerous premises suggesting such an association, one may analyze it as more than simply a clip encouraging the Super Bowl audience to “buy America,” in Walt Kowalski’s words. The clip’s possible political undertones can be interpreted as a concise exposition of the economic agenda which underlies *Gran Torino*, and the themes present in the film. Analogically to Eastwood’s movie, the clip features the celebrated actor in the role of the liminal mediator—while in *Gran Torino* Walt Kowalski acted as the agent of the Vietnamese community in the post-crisis Detroit (and Thao’s personal coach), in *Halftime in America* Eastwood enacts a variation of

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the role, symbolically empowering fellow Americans through an inspiring halftime speech. As in *At Stake*, his role replicates that of the mysterious stranger from Eastwood’s Westerns, who stumbles upon a town, stops by in Main Street to fulfill his ameliorative quest, and departs towards the setting sun. In *Halftime in America*, the community addressed by Eastwood is every bit as “multicultural” as the dilapidated Detroit neighborhood in *Gran Torino*, featuring a Latino male sitting on the edge of his bed in visible distress, in an image implicating financial problems; a solemn African American man knotting his tie before going to work; an elderly Anglo-American wearing shades, gazing past the cameraman. These images are juxtaposed with shots of sights signifying Detroit (an abandoned red brick project block; the insides of a steel mill; an assembly line at an automobile factory; a street in a run-down suburb).

In a manner akin to *Gran Torino*, the ad markets America as a multicultural community bound together by a set of shared ideas. One is wary of its inclusivity, though, since it entails a subjugation of difference through the common denominator of market values. In this regard, *Gran Torino* and *Halftime in America* both seem to ignore a range complex class-, gender-, and race-related issues, using multicultural imagery to cover-up fundamental inequalities within the post-crisis society. The superficial inclusion of minorities resulting from the use of multiculturalism in the age of multinational capitalism enables the ruling class to retain its privilege thanks to the adoption of interethnic egalitarianism as a token of gesture politics, or an “empty point of universality from which one is able to appreciate… properly other particular cultures” without rescinding “one’s own superiority” (Žižek 44).

One could also interpret the facile inclusion of the Other in the dominant narrative as a manifestation of Fredric Jameson’s concept of the “artificial
reconstruction of the voice,” which Matthew Carter applies to his refreshing analysis of Eastwood’s *Unforgiven*. Carter interprets Eastwood’s masterwork as a film which seemingly includes “narratives typically repressed by the ideology of the dominant class” (*Myth of the Western* 138) only to re-appropriate them within its gunslinger grand narrative—in the case of *Unforgiven*, these narratives include women (Strawberry Alice (Frances Fisher), Delilah Fitzgerald (Anna Levine)) and African Americans (Will Munny’s sidekick Ned Logan (Morgan Freeman). *Halftime in America* follows a similar pattern, acknowledging the economic divide represented by those who are “out of work” and “hurting… wondering what they’re going to do to make a comeback.” And yet, in suggesting a platitudinous resolution (“We find a way through tough times, and if we can’t find a way, then we’ll make one… We get right back again, and when we do, the world is going to hear the roar of our engines”), the clip supplants its initial debunking of the myth with its restoration, offering relief through consumerist patriotism. Perhaps it is so because *Halftime in America* is indeed a mere auto commercial, its end goal restricted to pitch a new car to a record prime time audience? Or should one stick to their guns and, heeding Žižek’s advice, approach consumerist commodities as objects of invisible transcendence, seeing in *Halftime in America* a work of an ideology that is at its strongest, because is works covertly? (*The Pervert’s Guide*). If the latter is true, it is conceivable to interpret the politically charged excess of Chrysler’s commercial as an emanation of American exceptionalism, and its mixture of pep talk and Western implications as a measure of advertising political change through the clichés of patriotism, self-reliance, grassroots positivism, and economic triumphalism, all of which converge in the public image of Mitt Romney. He is the new Joe Starrett, and Clint Eastwood is his messenger. He may have renounced the gun and removed his
buckskin jacket but—to borrow from Barthes one final time—his face remains forever a gunslinger citation (Empire of Signs 90).
Chapter 3: Automobiles in the Garden: Cowboys, Homesteaders, and the Pastoral Tendency in Contemporary Car Advertising

In an early chapter of Khaled Hosseini’s best-selling novel The Kite Runner, the Afghan-American narrator recalls how he and his half-brother bonded over Farsi-dubbed American Westerns screened in pre-Soviet era Afghanistan. Immersing themselves in the movie-going experience enables Amir (heir to a small fortune accumulated by his affluent Pashtun father) and Hassan (born out of wedlock to a Hazara mother) to overcome their class differences, much in the meritocratic spirit of their favorite picture, John Sturges’s The Magnificent Seven.

We saw our first Western together, Rio Bravo with John Wayne, at the Cinema Park, across the street from my favorite bookstore. I remember begging Baba to take us to Iran so we could meet John Wayne. Baba burst out in gales of his deep-throated laughter—a sound not unlike a truck engine revving up—and, when he could talk again, explained to us the concept of voice dubbing. Hassan and I were stunned. Dazed. John Wayne didn’t really speak Farsi and he wasn’t Iranian! He was American, just like the friendly, longhaired men and women we always saw hanging around in Kabul, dressed in their tattered, brightly colored shirts. We saw Rio Bravo three times, but we saw our favorite Western, The Magnificent Seven, thirteen times. With each viewing, we cried at the end when the Mexican kids buried Charles Bronson—who, as it turned out, wasn’t Iranian either.

We took strolls in the musty-smelling bazaars of the Shar-e-Nau section of Kabul, or the new city, west of the Wazir Akbar Khan district. We talked about whatever film we had just seen and walked amid the bustling crowds of bazarris… Baba gave us each a weekly allowance of ten Afghanis and we spent it on warm Coca-Cola and rosewater ice cream topped with crushed pistachios. (26-27)
Aside from bringing the two half-brothers together, Howard Hawks’s “cult-of-the-gunfighter” Western and Sturges’s “counterinsurgency” narrative (to stick to Slotkin’s typology) act as vessels of U.S. soft power. On the one hand, the love of Westerns and Coca-Cola grooms Hosseini’s narrator to embrace American lifestyle, as represented by his bizarre association of the Duke with hippie expats indulging in Afghani opiates. On the other hand, Amir’s avid identification with Bronson’s Irish-Mexican character in *The Magnificent Seven* suggests his internalization of the film’s interventionist undertones. Just as importantly, his repeated exposure to the code of cowboy loyalty epitomized by Bronson’s on-screen persona leads the boy to measure himself against rigid moral standards which he soon fails to sustain.

Reading *The Kite Runner* was a thoroughly embarrassing experience. I was embarrassed to find myself devour a post-9/11 book club tearjerker, a piece so successful it encouraged Hosseini to commit two progressively more opportunistic and exploitative sequels. I was embarrassed to have teased my girlfriend about reading *The Kite Runner* as I snuck the book from her desk to gorge on it when she was not around. Most of all, I was embarrassed by reading *The Kite Runner* in a room lined with a full-scale Marlboro cigarettes street ad, which the landlord had used for lack of a proper wallpaper. (In fact, in what seemed as a token of the utmost brand loyalty, the landlord had papered each room in the apartment with a different Marlboro Man banner, enticing its tenants to “come to where the flavor was”). So there I was, guilt-ridden, cringing before Darrell Winfield and his supersized moustache, failing to live up to my readership standards, all to the tune of Elmer Bernstein’s theme from *The Magnificent Seven*. I was Amir, dwarfed by the unassailable apotheosis of cowboy virtue.

At the time *The Kite Runner* was published, the Marlboro Man was drawing his last breath, marking the ultimate demise of tobacco advertising. The year 2003 saw the release of the last Marlboro Country television commercial, *One Man, One Land*, directed by Tony Scott. Devoid of Bernstein’s signature music theme, the unusually bleak clip saw the Winfield-led wild bunch of cowboys descend from a snowy high ground to the frosty plain of Monument Valley, suppressing one last cattle stampede in a manner reminiscent of the celebrated sequence in Hawks’s *Red River*. The feat was accompanied by Winfield’s solemn voiceover, eulogizing the cowboy way of life (“I guess I’m lucky, because I’ve always been where I wanted to be”), its outdoorsy appeal (“Every house I’ve ever lived in had a front porch. Otherwise you’d have to sit inside”), and the land itself: “wild,” “rugged” and “majestic.”\(^{82}\) Having delivered his final lines, the Marlboro Man vanished into desert air for good, while Winfield—the longest-tenured among all Philip Morris cowboys, and the sole real-life cowboy in the pack—headed back for Wyoming to live his days on the range.\(^{83}\) The icon of the world’s top-selling cigarette brand was officially ousted from television.\(^{84}\)

And yet, while the cowboy is no longer the quintessential tobacco symbol he once was, he is far from dead as a marketing icon. Banned from the Marlboro Country, the archetypal wrangler continues to capture the minds of consumers across another market sector, namely the automotive industry. The reinvigoration of patriarchal masculinity sparked by the cowboy narratives taken up by the Bush administration after 9/11, along with the increasingly vindictive nostalgia among

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America’s economically disempowered working class males facilitated the revalidation of such figures as the cowboy and the homesteader (and the attendant Western tropes) in car advertising. Writing about the cultural impact of the Marlboro Man, Stephen Aron saw it as a reinforcement of the message of Westerns (106). Given the extensive use of the cowboy and the homesteader in twenty-first-century car advertising one could reverse Aron’s argument and contend that it is actually the Western that buttresses the messages addressed predominantly to Anglo-American male consumers. How the refurbishment of cowboy / homesteader myths has helped advertisers sell pickup trucks in the recent years—the list is long and includes such car lines as Chevy Silverado, GMC Sierra, Jeep Wrangler and, above all, Dodge Ram—will be the subject of analysis in this chapter.

The two sections below discuss how the advertisers of one of the aforementioned car lines, Dodge Ram manufactured by Fiat Chrysler, have constructed its brand image based on Western tropes to appeal to its potential target market, i.e. (mostly) white working- and middle class males. I will understand brand image in accordance with the definitions proposed by Debra Merskin, Winston Fletcher, and Zygmunt Bauman, respectively. Drawing from Grant McCracken, Merskin approaches brands as “bundles or containers of meaning” which provide a framework for the understanding of the cultural significance of brands in society, and boost the value of commodities by referring to socially and culturally resonant

85 In her essay “Pure Country—Pure Strait, Pure Myth: The Myth of the Texas Cowboy,” Melynda Seaton points out how advertisements target male consumers by “creating a sense of nostalgia regarding the American West” by “evok[ing] but also reinforce[ing] the myth of the West… While the West has changed, cowboys, their images, and the ideology associated with the do in fact still exist in contemporary times. Indeed, the act of placing a sense of nostalgia to the images is one aspect that permits them to connote mythologically.” (140). Similarly, noticing the consumerist appeal of the Marlboro Man, Handley and Lewis point to the paradox entailed in the figure: “The image of the Marlboro Man seems to suggest individualism and freedom, but this is not the case with regard to what it means in reality to work as a cowboy in a difficult environment or what it means in reality to smoke and to acquire an addiction. By virtue of its distance from reality, this ‘authentic’ Western image takes on a life of its own, preserved in a static realm beyond experience, beckoning us and leading us in circles that feed and thwart desire, into tautologies of identity and difference” (7).
images. “These images are loaded with established ideological assumptions that, when attached to a commodity, create the commodity sign” (“Winnebagos” 323).

Fletcher’s definition complements Merskin’s understanding of a brand image, conceptualizing it as “the halo of feelings and emotions that brands inspire,” aimed at convincing potential purchasers to buy a given product by devising a series of tangible and intangible “brand image benefits” which are “crucial to their buying choices” (12). These benefits result in the transformation of commodities into “symbols of some higher and more holy good” (Lohof 442). In the case of the Ram pickup truck, the transubstantiation is achieved through a nostalgic appeal to heteronormative masculinity in a series of narratives that evoke two archetypal figures associated with the Western genre: the cowboy and the homesteader, who denote self-reliance, manly restraint, moral integrity, and ecological consciousness.

If Fletcher is right when he claims that the brand and its buyers are indeed “inextricably entwined” (8), then it could perhaps be argued that the Ram—dubbed “the hardest-working pickup truck on Earth” in the 2017 ranking compiled by the Car and Driver magazine (and boasting the highest score among all trucks evaluated in the U.S. News and World Report pickup rating)—constitutes a perfect pitch to the target market. Not only does it get ahead of its competitors in terms of its supreme technical qualities but it also trumps their symbolic appeal by striking the familiar Western note in video messages which cast the Ram as a modern-day horse and a vital component of professional success of the working class male. The Ram advertisers also target more affluent middle class Anglo-American men—to whom urban life and corporate culture, in the words of Richard White, “had become

overcivilized, sterile, and unreal” (623)—by means of escapist scenarios grounded in sentimental pastoralism.\textsuperscript{87}

It is through the marketing strategies which involve copywriting evocative of the grand (if compromised) Rooseveltian and Turnesian narratives that, in the words of Bauman, the brand image of the Ram truck allows the producer to immediately connect with its target group. The Ram fulfills every producer’s dream of “no longer dissolving and staying dissolved in the grey, faceless and insipid mass of commodities, a dream of turning into a notable, noticed and coveted commodity, a talked-about commodity, a commodity impossible to overlook, to deride, to be dismissed” (\textit{Consuming Life} 13). In promising the consumer the much-coveted squareness, in pandering to masculine nostalgia, Bauman argues that the commodity thus acts as a “token deployed in the construction of identity—the allegedly public expression of the ‘self’ which is in fact Jean Baudrillard’s ‘simulacrum,’ substituting ‘representation’ for what it is assumed to represent—to be effaced from the appearance of the final product” (\textit{Consuming Life} 14-15). In the “cyber-pastoral” created by the Fiat Chrysler advertisers, the car \textit{is} the horse, and the driver \textit{is} the cowboy.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Such a marketing strategy mirrors Clint Eastwood’s observations on the roots of the popularity of the Western genre in America. Eastwood traces it back to the allure of simplicity. “Now everything’s so complicated, so mired down in bureaucracy that people can’t fathom a way of sorting it out. In the West, even though you could be killed, it seems more manageable, like a lone individual might be able to work things out some way” (Mary Lee Bandy 1).

\textsuperscript{88} See Svetlana Boym, \textit{The Future of Nostalgia}. New York: Basic Books, 2001. Boym construes the “cyber-pastoral” as “the sheer overabundance of nostalgic artifacts marketed by the entertainment industry… a quick fix and sugarcoated palliatives” (xvi-xvii). Although Boym’s concept refers chiefly to the movie industry, I extend it over advertising which likewise endows commodities with the qualities of nostalgic artifacts.

\textsuperscript{89} Such mythical approximations are evocative of Marlboro cigarettes ads. “The Marlboro Man is not simply a cowboy. He is a symbol of… that illimitable wilderness wherein, as Emerson said, one might have been “plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world” (449). One could also be referred to Jane Tompkins’s memorable discussion of horses in the Westerns in \textit{West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns}. Tompkins analyzes the twofold representation of the horse, on the one hand reified as a tacit work tool, on the other depicted as the vital intermediary “between the human being and the earth,” one which connotes “a need for connection to nature, to the wild” through “power, motion, size, strength, brought under human control and in touch with the human body” (93).
The commercials analyzed in this chapter apply a similar narrative strategy to the “restoration of origins” plot utilized in the Romney campaign: they interpellate potential customers by conjuring an “ache of temporal distance and displacement,” and then alleviating it through the promise of an “intimate experience and the availability of the desired object” (Boym 44). Aimed at conservative white males, the Ram commercials are nurtured by the fears arising from the disintegration of a false sense of security, the dissatisfaction with increasing economic inequalities, and male helplessness in the face of continuously diminishing patriarchal culture. Ram symbolically addresses those fears: “fear of change, fear of decline, fear of strangers and unfamiliar world” (Judt 8) picturing nostalgic escapism into self-reliance and a return to heartland values as a cure for corroding Anglo-American male identities. I will approach two thematic strands of the analyzed clips—one featuring the cowboy, the other centered around the homesteader/farmer—as a “distillation of the Western genre” (Mitchell, Westerns 193), which nostalgically glorifies Anglo-American males as conceived in the stories of the Old West, regenerating their tarnished identities through “symbolic parables about national identity, masculinity, race relations, power, and anxiety, or what the actor-director Tommy Lee Jones calls ‘big hats, horses, and dust,’” as put by Neil Campbell (Post-Westerns 11).

Exploring the regenerative potential of the Guts. Glory. Ram ad campaign by Fiat Chrysler (2011-2016), I will be particularly interested in several aspects of the presentation of the cowboy and homesteader figures as a cultural symbol. The two will be analyzed foremost in the light of the concept of “sentimental pastoralism” proposed by Leo Marx, given that the Fiat Chrysler copywriters cast them as liminal characters set firmly within a broadly conceived “middle landscape.” I will also try to trace the clichéd renditions of the cowboy/farmer characters in the Ram
commercials back to the Rooseveltian and Jeffersonian exploratory and settlement narrative formulas. I will argue that the examined clips belong to a larger body of cultural products, one that neoconservative America continues to manufacture whenever crises force her into a reactionary shell, as exemplified by a group of formulaic Westerns released in the past fifteen years (three of them—Kevin Costner’s *Open Range*, David L. Cunningham’s *Little House on the Prairie*, and Charles Robert Carner’s *JL Family Ranch*—will be discussed as points of reference to the analyzed commercials). Using Umberto Eco’s notions of intertextual frames and stereotyped iconographical units, as well as Roland Barthes’s and Francois Soulages’s insights into the aesthetics of photography, I will read the two groups of commercials as textual and visual distillations of Western tropes channeled to ideologize automobile commodities. My goal is to examine the higher meaning of the Dodge Ram pickup truck in the context of the wave of restorative nostalgia that has swept America in the past few years and helped harness its “angry white men” to vindicate an unabashed form of patriarchy which dates back all the way to Western formulas (Lee Clark Mitchell’s and Jane Tompkins’s seminal studies of Western constructions of masculinity will serve as points of reference in this respect).

3.1. “Forget There’s People and Things That Ain’t So Simple as This”: Dodge Ram and the Cult of the Cowboy

Although it marked the demise of the Marlboro Man, the year 2003 also saw a spark which breathed new life into the lungs of the mythical cowboy. Among the several neoconservative Westerns released after 9/11, Kevin Costner’s *Open Range* sticks out as the most accomplished picture execution-wise, and has rightfully been
ranked amidst the cream of twenty-first-century Westerns. Roger Ebert saw it as a film “elevated from a good cowboy story into the archetypal region where the best Westerns exist” (“Open Range”). Philip French shared Ebert’s enthusiasm, praising Costner for directing an elegiac epic in the grain of “the pre-spaghetti, pre-Peckinpah period of the Fifties and Sixties” (“Homeless on the Range”). The film features some of the finest cinematography the genre has ever delivered. In a series of stunning vistas of the Albertan landscape, its succulent pastures and stern mountain ranges emanate intense sublimity (Costner once more relied on the services of J. Michael Muro, with whom he had worked on Dances With Wolves). Open Range also boasts a brand new version of Laramie street, as a town was built from square one to meet Costner’s steep requirements, investing the film with the “mix of hope, yearning, and loss [that] is ultimately bound to the West and the Western as a type of haunting presence,” according to Neil Campbell (Post-Westerns 13). On top of it all, Open Range concludes with one of the most spectacular Western gunfights ever filmed, accompanied by a fitting score composed by Michael Kamen. Plus, Robert Duvall delivers a gem of a performance as Costner’s sidekick.90

The critical and commercial success of Open Range (with its budget estimated at $22 million, the film grossed over $68 million at the box office),91 rejuvenated the phenomenon of cowboy miniseries. The subsequent years saw the release of AMC’s Broken Trail, based on Alan Geoffrion’s eponymous novel and directed by Walter

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Hill, with Duvall portraying the lead character, aging cowboy Prentice “Prent” Ritter, a man whose actions live up to his chivalric surname (2006), and the premiere of CBS’s *Comanche Moon* (2008), directed by Simon Wincer and starring Steve Zahn and Val Kilmer (the series was a prequel to the critically acclaimed 1985 adaptation of Larry McMurtry’s *Lonesome Dove*, which featured memorable performances from Tommy Lee Jones and none other than Robert Duvall). Several years later, Duvall was also billed as an aging cowboy in Emilio Aragón’s feature *A Night in Old Mexico* (2013). All of these pictures devise scenarios in which the rejuvenated Anglo-American cowboy ventures into the wild, rushing to the rescue of the helpless (Chinese girls forced into prostitution in *Broken Trail*, Anglo-American settlers in *Comanche Moon*, a traveling singer in *A Night in Old Mexico*). Since none of these films matched the degree of success achieved by *Open Range*, and because Costner’s film appears the most rigid of the bunch in terms of mythologizing cowboy lifestyle, I will use it as a benchmark for the discussion of the “cowboy” commercials promoting the Ram truck.

In his luminous analysis of *Open Range* as a neoclassical Western headlining the group of reactionary films released in the years following 9/11, Walter Metz approaches *Open Range* as “an anachronistic return to the 1950s, Cold War variant of the Hollywood Western” that reinstates the values of conventional domesticity and ties “the geopolitical concerns of national security” to rigid domestic morality that pitches honorable men against a destabilizing force of terrorism (63). Concurring with this facet of Metz’s interpretation, I am nonetheless more intrigued by *Open Range*’s economic agenda which, as the critic points out, “redeems the free grazer, romanticizing his life, but ultimately sutures him into the traditional family life” (“Mother Needs You” 66). Metz argues that in returning the cowboy protagonists to
the bosom of a small town family, the film swerves towards supporting small, stationary enterprise (69-70). Still, *Open Range* does cast a monopolistic land baron and indolent state authorities as its main villains (while celebrating cowboy-style economics and free grazing). Such narrative choices turn the film into a nostalgic vindication of the neoconservative market model, on the one hand, and of pulp historiography, on the other, with the Anglo-American male as the centerpiece in wishful stories that fleetingly stabilize the liquefying reality (to borrow from Bauman’s terminology once more).92

On a number of planes, the idolization of libertarian patriarchy in *Open Range* is similar the cult of the cowboy in Dodge’s *Guts. Glory. Ram* advertising campaign, and can be traced back all the way to Theodore Roosevelt’s vision of the cowboy as he put it in *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail*: “the whole existence is patriarchal in character: it is the life of men who live in the open, who attend to their herds on horseback, who go armed and ready to guard their lives by their own prowess, whose wants are very simple, and who call no man master” (qtd. in Mitchell, *Westerns* 25).

Embracing patriarchal discourse, glorifying self-reliance, and promising to facilitate the boyish fantasy of lighting out for the Territory: all of these aspects can be found in the Western-themed Ram truck commercials, which transpose Roosevelt’s frontier myth to mitigate the anxieties of twenty-first-century Anglo-American males.93 In

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92 My reading of Costner’s film to a large extent overlaps with that proposed by Martin Holtz, to whom “the free grazers [in *Open Range*] are messengers of economic neoliberalism, the free traversal of goods across borders of any kind” (*American Cinema in Transition* 360). Holtz also argues that the demonization of grazing regulations in *Open Range* is consistent with the film’s explicitly neoconservative economic agenda (359-362).

93 In doing so, the post-crisis car commercials analyzed in this chapter can be seen as an extension of a long-time tradition that has fetishized vehicles as extensions of male egos that “played up to male fantasies of cowboy ruggedness, independence and adventure” (*Men to Boys* 35-36). Reminiscing on car commercials of his childhood days, Cross recollects “a commercial for the 1957 Ford Ranchero [that] called this half-ton car-truck a ‘pack horse,’” as well as a clip in which “a cowboy on a horse lassoed the Ford Fairlane because he wanted a ‘long lean car with lots of punch’” (36). The transference of Western imagery into modern-day car commercials can thus be seen as a manifestation of nostalgia for anachronistic masculinity and an appeal to the Anglo-American male’s “sense of serenity and order” (Cross, *Consumed Nostalgia* 200, 189).
Dodge’s campaign, as in Costner’s *Open Range*, the anachronistic cowboy returns as “a positive symbol of national identity in an age of rapid [post]industrialization, economic instability and growing social anxiety” (Carter, *Myth of the Western* 14), offering the insecure buyer a reassuringly familiar product, advertised alternately as a reliable working tool or a respite from the increasingly grueling daily toil.

To better grasp the parallels between the “workhorse” narrative employed in the *Guts. Glory. Ram* commercials, on the one hand, and the celebration of the cowboy in the string of post-9/11 neoconservative Westerns, on the other, let me first consider the plot of *Open Range* as the paramount example of the trend. Set in 1882 in the lush prairies at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, *Open Range* can be seen as a variation Howard Hawks’s *Red River*, albeit devoid of its dark undertones. Free grazers Boss Spearman (Duvall) and his partner Charley Waite (Costner) drive their cattle across the plains with hired hands Mose (Abraham Benrubi) and Button (Diego Luna). Running short of provisions, Spearman and Charley send Mose to nearby Harmonville to restock their supplies. A feud ensues between Spearman’s crew and the local land baron Denton Baxter (Michael Gambon), in league with the town’s marshal, Poole (James Russo), whose men engage in a tug of war with Spearman and company. Pranks and intimidation quickly escalate to violence as Baxter’s henchmen kill Mose and heavily wound Button, who is then treated by the local doctor (Dean McDermott) and his sister Sue (Annette Benning), “sweet, pretty, good as anybody, a real lady,” as Spearman advertises her to Charley. Sparks start flying between Sue and Charley from the moment they lay eyes on each other, setting up a patriarchal love fantasy which drives Spearman and Charley to rid the town of Baxter’s state-sanctioned monopoly (assisted by Harmonville’s folk who turn against Baxter
inspired by the cowboys’ charisma), following which they resume what they promise to be one last cattle drive, vowing to return upon its conclusion.

In a vague reminiscence of Hawks’s cowboy epic, Spearman (the “father” figure) and Charley (his “son”) run a joint cattle venture, and are both determined to cash in on their livestock when its value peaks. A benevolent version of John Wayne’s Tom Dunson, Duvall’s Spearman similarly regrets having failed as a husband and encourages his younger partner to settle down when given a chance. Unlike in Red River, though, the presence of the outsider antagonist unites the two cowboys against their mutual foe. Thus, rather than fist-fighting each other over their differences (which was the case between Montgomery Clift’s and John Wayne’s characters in Hawks’s film), Spearman and Charley resolve the marriage dispute in the course of a lengthy shootout with Baxter’s men, upon which it is implied Charley and Sue will settle down together, with the provision that, if he is to be domesticated, it will be done on his own terms (“How is this gonna work if you don’t listen to me?”).

The intergenerational narrative pattern immortalized in Hawks’s Red River and rehashed in Open Range (along with the attendant fear of domestication, the anxiety over losing patriarchal authority, as well as the pervasive sense of economic insecurity) features prominently in several Guts. Glory. Ram commercials. Real People, Real Trucks: Oklahoma (2011) was fashioned as a documercial chronicling the daily lives of a father-and-son cattle enterprise, with Dan Cody and his son, Steve, assuming their parts in what seems as an eternal enactment of the Dunson and

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94 A deadly accurate shooter, upright employer, and an unforgiving person, Duvall’s Spearman is still a far cry from Wayne’s psychotic Dunson. Mary Lee Bandy locates his portrayal of Spearman in Open Range in the long catalogue of characters, each of which “blends the folksy charm of [John Wayne’s] beloved sidekick played by Walter Brennan with the stoicism of a Copper, Wayne, Stewart or Fonda” (272).
Garth storyline. The camera follows the two men around the ranch, extracting first-hand opinions on the advertised truck:

**Dan:** My father’s been into beef industry, and his father before him. This ranch has been passed down through the generations.

**Steve:** Out of necessity I built my first feed-bin here. I saw the need for the product and started this company. … We’ve been driving Ram truck for ten years and the trucks take a real beating…

**Dan:** The Ram Trucks are tough. The truck’s surely tested here with the rough terrain and the mud.

**Steve:** We’ve grazed beef here on this ranch and we have had reliable equipment and, most of all, reliable vehicles.

**Dan:** The Ram Truck has great tow capacity, and the Cummins engine is a true workhorse. Our truck’s the office. A lot of times we’ll let it run eight hours a day, and the Cummins’s always been reliable, always starting out running.

**Steve:** They’ve improved the power without sacrificing fuel economy.

**Dan:** Out there, ranching, the truck that’s stood the test is the Ram. There’s nothing I’d rather have. Can’t ask for anything more reliable or any tougher. (*Real People, Real Trucks: Oklahoma*)

A close reading of the documercial cannot but evoke several parallels with the *Red River / Open Range* scenario. Similarly to Dunson and Garth / Spearman and Charley, Dan and Steve Cody operate a father and son company. Although their ranch “has been passed down through the generations,” the clip suggests it was Dan who has turned it into a successful venture by reinventing the business formula based on the lay of the land on which the family has grazed its cattle, and in compliance
with the specificity of the local beef market. In this respect, the documercial is ideologically closer to *Open Range* than *Red River*. Contrary to Stanley Corkin, who interprets Hawks’s epic as an apotheosis of prodemocratic, free-market ideology, Mary Lee Bandy contends that the moral ambivalence of Dunson transforms Red River into “a warning signal about the dangers involved for those who do not recognize the limits of such ideology,” particularly given that the film “emphasizes the consequences of an idealistic ambition that forsakes its roots in a common humanity” (137). *Real People, Real Trucks: Oklahoma* is more akin to *Open Range* in overlooking the inner contradictions of “natural democracy” and embracing free market ideology (in particular economic self-reliance) as a foundation of modern-day cowboy lifestyle. They work outdoors and appreciate the rough character of their job. Constantly on the move (“our truck’s the office”), seemingly uninhibited by corporate straitjacket, and oblivious of the society and its constraints. Looking at Steve Cody’s beaming face when he praises his Ram, one may be reminded of Spearman’s crew member Mose as eulogized by Charley in *Open Range*: “He sure as hell wasn’t one to complain. Woke with a smile, seemed like he could keep it there for years.”

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95 By coincidence, Dan and Steve Cody have been upgrading their ranch using the Ram truck for ten years, the same amount of time it took Tom Dunson to turn his *Red River* ranch into the most prosperous business in Texas. Delivering one of the most memorable quotes in Hawks’s film, and the best role in his acting career, the Duke vows, “Give me ten years, and I’ll have that brand on the gates of the greatest ranch in Texas. The big house will be down by the river, and the corrals and the barns behind it. It’ll be a good place to live in. Ten years and I’ll have the Red River ‘D’ on more cattle than you’ve looked at anywhere. I’ll have that brand on enough beef to feed the whole country. Good beef for hungry people. Beef to make’em strong, make’em grow. But it takes work, and it takes sweat, and it takes time, lots of time. It takes years.”


97 The celebration of outdoor cowboy work-as-pleasure in *Real People, Real Trucks*... (contrasted with the numbing routing of office and factory jobs) echoes Jan Tompkins’s insights into the practice of mythologizing the cowboy profession in Louis L’Amour’s serial novels, which transform the drudgery of physical work in scorching heat “from a necessity one wants to escape into the most desirable of human endeavors: action that totally saturates the present moment, totally absorbs the body and mind, and directs one’s life to the service of an unquestioned goal.” (12) The end result of the process, writes Tompkins, is “a sense of hard-won achievement” (12) stressed by the author in concluding paragraphs of each episode. *Real People, Real Trucks*... follows suit, selling the pickup truck as an integral part of a fantasy of a home on the range, although it never loses track of the fact that beyond the epic fantasy of the cattle drive lies the tangible effort to deliver cattle to market “in order to preserve a commercial enterprise” (Pippin 29).
all day.” The Codys’ cars are dependable and bring stability to their lives (“There’s nothing I’d rather have”), enabling them to spend their days in a cocoon of independence—an equally vital facet of cowboy nostalgia, likewise highlighted in *Open Range* (“Cows is one thing,” says Spearman, “but one man telling another man where he can go in this country is something else”).

Another aspect stressed in the father-and-son narrative in *Real People, Real Trucks: Oklahoma* is the intergenerational continuity that endows the cattle-breeding tradition with mythical gravity. Doing a job passed down from generation to generation, the Codys verge into the timeless territory, where, in the words of Richard White, “time brings no essential change. The past and the present are not only connected, they are also metaphorically identical” (616). Not unlike *Open Range*—which substantiates the Anglo-American history of the West and the tenets of libertarian commerce—the commercial naturalizes the two Anglo-American males as the heirs to the legacy of conquest (“We or our parents survived this place; we created whatever is good in this place” (618). It also conserves the ideal of the Frontier and the rugged male capable of subduing it, putting it to good use, and passing it down to his son, in accordance with a pattern involving “imitation, education, sons and fathers” (Mitchell, *Westerns* 10) which typifies a number of classical Westerns, and returns triumphantly in *Open Range*.

In the grain of *Red River*, *Open Range* is a film which perpetuates the appeal of Frontier landscapes. Discussing Hawks’s picture, Mary Lee Bandy notices that “there are but half a dozen interior scenes in the entire movie” (129). *Open Range* emulates Hawks’s strategy and, barring several scenes set inside Harmonville’s saloon, general store, and the Barlow family house, the majority of its dramatic scenes take place outside. And yet, where *Red River* visually exalts the West as an
arid, unrelenting landscape: bleak, merciless, tough and unforgiving (Tompkins 73), *Open Range* unfolds panoramas of juicy grassland, lavishly colorful and shot through with blooming wild flowers, punctuated by the big sky, palpable and sanitized. Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann point to the bucolic quality of *Open Range*’s opening which, along with the aestheticization of the Albertan scenery throughout the movie, contributes a distinctly pastoral quality to the film, as the “waving grass and pastoral music reinforce the peaceful scene[s], a serenity unbroken by thunderstorms or a cowboy cheating at cards” (25-26). Their remarks echo the reflections of Boss Spearman who, smoking a cigar while admiring a stunning, mutters, “It’s a beautiful country. A man can get lost out here. Forget there’s people and things that ain’t so simple as this.”

Potent with a sense of complete unity between the hero and the surrounding nature, the scene helps establish the pastoral mood of the film, sloting the cowboy into “a terrain of rural peace and happiness” (Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* 142). Prior to their conflict with Baxter, and following its resolution, the cowboys in *Open Range* spend their days attending to the cows, looking for river fords, breaking horses and looking for stray colts lost in the thunderstorm. In short, they are paradigmatic shepherds straddling the fine line between nature and civilization, and embodying the ancient ideal of the middle route between decadence and the wilderness, between over- and undercivilization (Marx, “Pastoralism” 38). In his seminal study on the literary reactions to the processes of industrialization in America, *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx’s defined two inflections of the of pastoralism: the high-brow, “imaginative” and “complex” pastoralism, which overcomes the naïve Arcadian impulse to provide what Marx saw as “a metaphoric design which recurs everywhere in our literature” (16); and the “sentimental” or
“popular” pastoralism which “manifests itself in our leisure-time activities, in the piety toward the out-of-doors expressed in the cult of the wilderness, and in our devotion to camping, hunting, picnicking, gardening, and so on” (5). The latter inflection is particularly enlightening in the view of my ruminations on the use of pastoral imagery in the Guts. Glory. Ram commercials, since it refers to the “primitive or rural felicity exemplified by TV westerns” and “assumes that Americans are most likely to the buy cigarettes, beer and automobiles they can associate with a rustic setting” (5). Also, contrary to imaginative pastoralism, sentimental pastoralism removes the retreat to Arcadian surroundings from its original literary context. Instead, sentimental pastoralism reifies this fantasy by employing “the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery” (25) to advertise goods marketed as cultural symbols (which Marx construes as “products of the collective imagination” and “images that convey a special meaning (thought and feeling) to a large number of those who share the culture” (4).98

One might object to the use of pastoralism in an analysis of commercials which advertise the products of latest technological developments. Yet, as Marx argues in a follow-up essay on the revival of pastoralism in American counter-cultures of the second half of the twentieth century, the pastoral tendency in the era of high-end technology constitutes a vital ideological response to the Anglo-American middle class (“Pastoralism” 39). Although Marx’s diagnosis referred predominantly to left-leaning, well educated baby-boomers, I am tempted to argue it has since been accommodated by Anglo-American middle class conservatives / dissatisfied working

98 I will mostly use the notion of “cultural symbol” as proposed by Marx in The Machine in the Garden, with the provision that the quantifier “large” will not be equivalent to “prevalent,” since the analyzed commercials target specific social minorities (i.e. the “angry white men” as termed by Kimmel, and “boy-men” as termed by Cross), quantitatively inferior but capable of galvanizing itself to the degree which may significantly impact the socio-economic reality, as evidence by the stunning results of the 2016 U.S. presidential election.
class. It may have been stripped of its original environmental and social-democratic inclinations, yet the right-wing pop-pastoralism serves a similar purpose—it romanticizes simple life (in patriarchal family units), takes refuge in sweeping economic doctrines (libertarianism, anti-statism), and retreats to the utopian “middle landscape.” 99 Thus, rather than a seemingly anachronistic literary genre, it may serve as a narrative model and allegorical structure (109), where the liminal figure of the shepherd (be it the cowboy, as demonstrated in this section, or the homesteader, as discussed in the second part of this chapter) plots out the “moral geography of American imagination” (The Machine in the Garden 72).

One of the centerpieces in the cowboy-oriented moral geography is the ranch. It enables the shepherd to settle while ensuring the proximity of nature (and a chance to build one’s private utopia in the “middle ground” stretched between the wilderness and society). The two cattle Westerns referred to in this section (i.e. Open Range, Red River) conclude with the cowboy ready to put down his roots, but in both cases such declarations are immediately followed by retreat into nature. In Open Range, Spearman and Charley ride off to complete their cattle drive (the last line spoken in the movie is “Let’s go get our cows”). In Red River, Dunson and Garth daydream about expanding Dunson’s beef empire and re-design the brand to include Garth as a rightful co-owner of the joint venture (“Red River D... and we’ll add an ‘M’ to it”)—neither of the two scenes hints at the cowboy’s future domestication. The ranch acts as a safety valve that separates the cowboy from the “corrupt” outer world and from an increasingly diversifying society intent on diminishing his sense of entitlement. The trope of ranch as a remote asylum/safe haven, distant but within driving reach from civilization, can be traced in another Guts. Glory. Ram

99 In the introduction to The Machine in the Garden, Marx aptly recognizes the use of pastoralism by conservatives, pointing out that the pastoral ideal frequently aids reactionary ideologies and helps “to mask the real problems of an industrial civilization” (7).
commercial titled *A Day at a Ranch* (2013). The clip features a roughrider named Seth, who has made a career of starting young horses under saddle. Shot analogously to *Real People, Real Trucks: Oklahoma*, the video features a series of vignettes presenting Seth’s daily routine. *A Day at a Ranch* is affixed with an inscription containing what the viewer is led to believe is an “Old Western proverb.” The dictum reads, “The best cure for the inside of a man is being outside on a horse,” immediately setting the stage for a regenerative “errand into the wilderness” (to use Perry Miller’s phrase). As the camera installed inside a Dodge Ram pickup follows Seth around his lusciously green estate, the cowboy initiates the viewer into the tricks of the trade.

Getting on a young horse for the first time is definitely unpredictable.

My name’s Seth, I start young horses for a living, been fortunate over the years to be around some really good horse hands and cowboys. I watched them from afar and got to work alongside a few, learning something different from everybody, learning something different from every horse. It’s about getting them confident, being consistent, building them up, and being a leader. And usually you get all that back in return.

I wanna build trust and confidence in the animal when he’s young. Once you build a relationship with them, it’s amazing how accepting they are. When you start them on their saddle and introduce putting things on their back, you have to get them to the point when they understand that you’re gonna take them where you need to go. When you ride them for the first time, it’s a huge transition for the horse and for the rider… When you wake up in the morning, and attack the day, and give it all you had, what you get in return is just a good, solid horse. (*A Day at a Ranch*)

Watching Seth drive around his ranch in a sparkling new Ram introduces the viewer into a miniaturized land of plenty (with lawn-like meadows, horse pen fences untouched by heavy rain or erosion, and a team of purebred colts joyfully prancing in
the paddock) and evokes memories of bucolic representations of cowboy life in Marlboro cigarettes commercials.\(^{100}\) For the clip is not so much about the cowboy as it is about the idea of the cowboy sold with, and inseparable from, the advertised car. In a similar fashion to the Marlboro Man, the cowboy in the Dodge Ram commercial reminds the viewer they do not need to venture into the wild to partake of the myth. Buying the commodity will do the trick, since the point is not working in the open (and dealing with the related responsibilities), but experiencing the open (and escaping from the daily frustrations), which the fetishized commodity renders the pastoral moment readily available. As for Seth, the reel of vignettes presented in *A Day at a Ranch* indeed molds him into a modern-day, nicotine-free Marlboro Man, whom the potential customer “jealously watches… facing down challenging but intelligible tasks. He sees this denizen of the wilderness living as Thoreau would have: ‘deliberately… front[ing] only the essential facts of life’” (Lohof 448), and living every libertarian’s dream. To those less lucky, trapped in between corporate cogwheels, who cannot “wake up in the morning, and attack the day, giving it all they have,” but who can afford a brand new Ram, the commercial promises a “good, solid horse.”

Unveiling a utopian vision of economic self-reliance in post-crisis America, *A Day at a Ranch* echoes the nostalgically ameliorative scenario of Costner’s project. Confronted by Baxter and enraged by the indolence of federal authorities, Spearman and Charley scorn the citizens of Harmonville for their excessive reliance on state authorities (“If he started riding today, he wouldn’t make it for a week. With the

\(^{100}\) In a similar vein to Umberto Eco’s *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, Bruce Lohof examines the sterility of Marlboro Country’s landscapes. “Here picnics are antless, summers are sweatless, and autumns are endless (which is to say winterless). Here one can find pleasant refuge from the responsibilities and encumbrances of civilization” (445). Still, despite their sanitization, the archetypal activities slotted in the Marlboro commercials—riding horseback, rounding up cattle, smoking cigarettes beside the campfire—nonetheless “hit a subconscious nerve in the public mind,” as they showed what America historically saw as “real men in a man’s world” (Sivulka 279).
storm coming, a week, maybe longer. We’re obliged to deal with the marshal and Baxter ourselves,” replies Charley when Sue implores him to wait for the arrival of the federal marshal instead of taking matters into his own hands). Spearman and Charley bash welfare state as an inefficient entity that has long lost its sense of purpose and become an impediment to its citizens’ pursuit of happiness. Personified by marshal Poole, the state Leviathan hurls obstacles in the way of small time business initiatives. Worse still, it is incompetent when called upon by the citizens who pay for its maintenance. “It’s a shame what this town has come to,” admits one of the residents when pressed by Spearman to hold the authorities accountable for the demise of the community. *Open Range* attributes Harmonville’s crisis to such factors as corrupt bureaucracy, the shortage of patriarchal masculinity (“You could do something about it. You’re men, aren’t you?”), and the existential insecurity inherent to “liquid times,” to borrow from Bauman’s vocabulary once more (“People get confused in this life about what they want, and what they’ve done, and what they think they should have because of it”).

Having identified Harmonville’s problems, Costner’s film addresses them by disestablishing the existing system and superseding the faulty social contract with a readily graspable truisms (“the man’s got a right to protect his property and his life and we ain’t letting no rancher and his lawman take either” or “if that marshal gets in the way, you best get your mind right about what’s got to be done, Charley”). Replaced by cowboy-style mercantilism, state intervention ceases to hinder individuals in their quest for social advancement, enabling them to aspire to what has been “sitting right here in front of you” like the exclusive bar of Swiss chocolate which the local storekeeper sells although he has “never even tried it.” As if oblivious to the drawbacks of deregulation, *Open Range* rejects the notion that the
surrender of political and juridical institutions capable of controlling the market is not devoid of devastating consequences such as “the ephemerality of communal loyalties and the brittleness and revocability of commitments and solidarities,” which are embedded within such reforms (Bauman, *Liquid Fear* 135). Instead, the film channels its makers’ restorative nostalgia, concocting a Rooseveltian pastoral with a laissez-faire twist.

Such a scenario restores the long-questioned notion of patriarchal masculinity, as implied in the celebration of the cowboy as the independent entrepreneur, the protector of the community, and the provider for the family. The narrative of the neo-con Western flashes back to the good old days in which “Westerns either push[ed] women out of the picture completely or assign[ed] them roles in which they exist only to serve the needs of men” (Tompkins 39-40). *Open Range* seems like a textbook example of the tendency, a sentimental counter-project which “answers” the culture of political inclusion that has, until recently, kept the white male in check.101 The lone heroine in the film is Sue Barlow (Annette Benning), the object of Charley’s interest and the sister of Doc Barlow, Harmonville’s physician. Benning’s character is an angel-in-the-house spinster waiting for her cowboy prince (“You know, I always hoped somebody gentle and caring might come along. Years pass. A Small town and all. And your hopes begin to fade a little every day until you hardly remember what they were”). In the meantime, she passes her time helping out her

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101 In this respect, one could argue that—with the group of post-9/11 Westerns—a century after its inception, the genre has come full circle and went back to its origins, which Tompkins ascribed to the reaction of Anglo-American writers/filmmakers to the dominance of popular women writers and the “cultural order” which “spoke to the deepest beliefs and highest ideals of middle-class America, … the real antagonist of the Western” (37-38). Similarly, the first decade of the 21st century, which saw the resurrection of cowboy rhetoric in the course of the War on Terror, as well the intensifying backlash of Anglo-American men against the culture of liberalism (and political correctness as a bridle helping regulate public discourse) that elevated Donald Trump into U.S. Presidency, helped rejuvenate a narrow yet relatively stable production of reactionary Westerns (a phenomenon largely overshadowed by the critically acclaimed and artistically superior revisionist Westerns and post-Westerns released in the past sixteen years).
brother and weeding out a perfectly kept garden. In a manner suggestive of Tompkins’s Western-as-a-response hypothesis, the film features a scene “answering” the iconic rose-pruning scene in Sam Mendes’s *American Beauty* (an anti-pastoral released towards the end of Bill Clinton’s second term in office), in which Benning gave her career-defining performance as Carolyn Burnham, an embittered, promiscuous wife of a dead beat husband. *Open Range* (premiering in the heat of the Iraq War and at the peak of George W. Bush’s popularity) “amends” Mendes’s thorough questioning of the suburban idyll by devising its own garden scene, where Sue is approached by Charley while pruning garden bushes, with the cowboy timidly confessing his love. A woman “that makes a man wanna set down roots,” as Spearman puts it, Sue’s relationship with Charley may imply that the cowboy will settle down, but is nonetheless followed by Charley’s departure with the cattle, as if suggesting a degree of leeway in adapting to a more sedentary life.

The notion of semi-nomadic life, with the patriarch coming and going (and thus retaining a degree of Peter-Panesque liberty) as referenced in the resolution of *Open Range* is distinctly pronounced in the 2015 *Waltz Across Texas with Ram* commercial. The title of the clip refers to a 1965 country hit ballad by the Texan singer and songwriter Ernest Tubb, whose contemporary rendition by Chris Stapleton accompanies the video.

> When we dance together my world’s in disguise it’s a fairyland tale that come true
> And when you look at me with those stars in your eyes

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102 Such a choice of incidental music seems very telling, given the symbolic status of country music in American pop culture. As one is reminded by Debra Merskin, “iconically located in the American South, country music espouses values that are quite similar to those of dominant society: patriotism, freedom, individualism, self sufficiency, and self-government. Country music addresses these beliefs indirectly and differently than other genres” (*Media, Minorities, and Meaning* 125). As a representative of a music genre that has long mediated heartland values, Tubb’s hit song no doubt enhances the affective appeal of *Waltz Across Texas with Ram* among the target audience of Anglo-American blue-collar entrepreneurs.
I could waltz across Texas with you

Waltz across Texas with you in my arms waltz across Texas with you

Like a storybook ending I'm lost in your charms

And I could waltz across Texas with you

My heartaches and troubles are just up and gone the moment that you come in view

And with your hand in mine dear I could dance on and on

And I could waltz across Texas with you

I could Waltz across Texas with you. (Tubb 1965)

Slow-paced to the tune of Tubb’s country waltz, the commercial poeticizes a man’s journey home across the state. Upon completion of his shift at an oil platform, the man—dressed in greasy overalls and a hooded sweatshirt—gets into a shiny white Dodge Ram and heads northwest, from Galveston through Houston, San Antonio, across the Brazos and into the Llano Estacado. With each scene, the landscape changes from industrial to pastoral, as the pipelines, oil derricks, and skyscrapers give way to dusty plains, abandoned saloons, and majestic buttes. Curiously, the man takes his time to get back with his family, becoming transformed from an urban blue collar worker to a full-fledged country man thanks to a range of handpicked cowboy attributes purchased on his way home, such as a Stetson hat, a checked shirt, a leather belt with a customized buckle, and a pair of fitted rattlesnake boots, all made from scratch by local craftsmen (whose economic self-reliance is accentuated by a shot of a Gadsden flag with the “Don’t tread on me” line). The clip’s mood is nostalgic and carefree, with the man stopping by a roadside diner, plunging into a highway motel swimming pool, and contemplating the stunning Texan sunsets. The ad concludes with the man reuniting with his family at a ranch
overlooking a river gorge, parking the truck next to his wife’s twin-like Dodge Ram.\textsuperscript{103}

The transformation of the man into a cowboy, his transition from the urban to the pastoral landscape, and his journey through the rough plains are intriguing for several reasons. Commending the idea of a morally square nuclear family, \textit{Waltz Across Texas with Ram} also exalts the breadwinning male as the unit’s centerpiece. At the same time, it glorifies a post-Western equivalent of cowboy experience, encompassed within a set of purchasable artifacts (the shirt, the hat, the boots, the belt and, most importantly, the car as the modern-day horse), evoking what Leslie Fiedler famously dubbed the “pseudo-Frontier,” i.e. the commodified idea of the past “artificially contrived for commercial purposes, the Frontier as bread and butter,” and involving “a not wholly unsympathetic boyish pleasure in dressing up” (15-16).\textsuperscript{104}

Working for an oil company in South Texas, the man in \textit{Waltz Across Texas with Ram} can be seen as a part-time cowboy, a cog in the corporate market machine, whose formation was so brilliantly covered in Hawks’s \textit{Red River}, where Dunson spared no efforts to coerce his subordinates into maximizing their productivity based on his superior experience and his thorough knowledge of the market (as Stanley Corkin puts it, the film contemplates the validity of Dunson’s conviction that “what is right becomes that which contributes to the formation of an integrated corporate

\textsuperscript{103} One may discard the insertion of the second, “female” pickup in the commercial as a marketing stunt which merely underscores the protagonist’s brand loyalty. On the mythological level, though, such a narrative solution implies a resolution of the male-female conflict, transforming the cowboy’s otherwise invisible wife into a Hawksian companion who, much like Tess Millay (Joanne Dru) in \textit{Red River}, “helps the central male character to discover his true feelings and resolve the psychological block” (Springer 116). Scripting the cowboy’s wife—unfazed by his long absence (and his protracted journey home)—into driving the advertised car, so laden with mythical significance, suggests her recognition of her partner’s “regressive wish fulfillment” (124).

\textsuperscript{104} In \textit{Sixguns and Society}, Will Wright comments on the reification of Western land in the tourist industry as a location for entertainment, which uses it as “a place for relaxation and a source of renewal. We go to it in order to clear our head, … restore our strength, … enjoy the simple pleasures.—in order to validate our values which are challenged and undermined by the demands of modern civilization” (188).
economic enterprise” (45)). Visibly exhausted, the offshoreman-turned-cowboy retreats from the industrial coast of South Texas towards the sparsely populated plateau in a journey which releases the fundamental tension posed by the Western: the tension between city life and life on the frontier. As noticed by Paul Varner, the city always looms large as a subtext of the Western and a threat to the outdoorsman, while the frontier serves as “an escape from squalid urbanity” (97).

The masquerade and the stopovers en route home help the man to find solace from daily toil, and to re-establish himself in the context of an affirmative narrative about the region and its men. The vast space traversed by the driver provides him with a visible sense of empowerment in the role of breadwinner, and the horsepower at his disposal puts him firmly in control of the surrounding world, overriding (if briefly) the sense of insecurity inherent to America’s dwindling middle-class. Assuming a cowboy identity, the man slips into the Frontier pastoral, playing his designated role in an outdoor fantasy (given the aestheticization of the desert as a kaleidoscope of sanitized images, and its taming by the cowboy’s family who live in a comfortable house in a secluded location, it is hard to think of the landscape in *Waltz Across Texas with Ram* as the post-Western wilderness on the same terms as, for instance, in the Coen brothers’ *No Country for Old Men*). Such a scenario fits into the frames of pastoral retreat as delineated by Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden*. As a pastoral figure, the cowboy embarks on a journey “in search of an alternative form of life ‘closer to nature,’” retreating from an “alienating situation to

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105 The cities included in the commercial (Galveston, Houston, San Antonio) are arranged in an order punctuating the gradation of the cowboy’s removal into the pastoral landscape, and the gradual release of the tension accumulated at work.

106 See Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything*: “When a lone horseman appears on the desert plain, he dominates it instantly, his view extends as far as the eye can see... The openness also provides infinite access. There is nothing to stop the horseman’s free movement across the terrain... The blankness of the plain implies—without ever stating—that this is a field where a certain kind of mastery is possible, where a person (of a certain kind) can remain alone and complete and in control of himself, while controlling the external world through physical strength and force of will” (74-75).
a terrain marked by fewer signs of human intervention” (378). Analyzing it in the context of “high” literature, Marx goes on to determine three “defining episodes” in the theme of pastoral retreat, namely the epiphany experience (“the protagonist enjoys transcendent harmony with his surroundings”), the encounter with wildness (“thrilling, tonic, yet often terrifying,” and at the same time pinpointing “some aspect, external or subjective, of unmodified, intractable, or hostile nature”), and the interjection of the machine in the natural landscape (an “intrusive artifact [which] figures forth the unprecedented power and dynamism of the oncoming order” and “exposes the illusory character of the retreat to nature as a way of coping with the ineluctable advance of modernity” (378).

Still, since it has been established that commercials such as *Waltz Across Texas with Ram* fall into the extra-literary, pop-cultural category of pastoralism, the second and third episode in its pastoral retreat undergo significant permutations. *Waltz Across Texas with Ram* is no “Ktaadn.” Mediated through the windshield of his truck, the cowboy’s errand into the wilderness transforms the unsettling epiphanies brought about by unmitigated contact with nature-as-the-Other into a pleasurable slide show that, rather than throwing the protagonist off balance, reassures him through the enactment of a familiar narrative. As for the machine: the idyll experienced by the cowboy in *Waltz Across Texas with Ram* is not interrupted by, but achieved through, the automobile. The commercial resolves the tension, superimposing its pastoral imagery onto technological framework. No longer dissonant with the brief sensation of harmony, the Ram augments it, enabling the cowboy to do away with the anxiety caused by the intrusion of the new order. Within the confines of restorative nostalgia, the pickup truck does not signal the coming of a new, but helps the instant recreation of the old. The sun, the dust, and the truck are
mutually consonant, resolving the conflict of “wandering, unsettled life with domestic, established life” (Wright 50).

The rejuvenation of the cowboy myth in the Ram commercials, however, does not conclude with a promise of reconciliation of the conflicting lifestyles, as evidenced by a string of ads distilling Western masculinity to its very essence. A follow-up clip to Waltz Across Texas with Ram, the 2016 State Fair of Texas video continues to showcase the offshoreman-cowboy following his return to the ranch. Geared up for hard work at the ranch (he wears the items purchased in the previous clip), the cowboy is shown in his “natural” environment, his body interchangeably exposed to unrelenting Texas heat and a beating taken in a rodeo contest. Switching between registers, professional and recreational, State Fair of Texas glorifies cowboy ethics: tough-mindedness, resolve, alpha-male determination and, not least of all, the pervasive fear of losing face. Fittingly, the clip is narrated by Sam Elliott, who has made a living of playing cowboys and villains, also lending his trademark voice to advertising quintessentially masculine products:

What do you do when you want something and there’s someone else who wants the exact same thing? When you want to separate yourself from the herd, are you willing to go places others won’t? Are you willing to do what’s right even when no-one else is looking? What do you do when your reputation is on the line and you have to deliver today? And then again tomorrow. And the next day. And the day after that. What do you do when you have to outlast blazing Panhandle heat, and outdrive the long hill country highways? What do you when you want something and there’s someone else who wants the exact same thing? You don’t make excuses. You don’t make room for

107 Over the years, Elliott’s persona has become synonymous with Western masculinity. Known for his depictions of honorable cowboys, adept gunslingers, and sinister land barons in cinema (starring as Virgil Earp in George Cosmatos’s Tombstone, brigadier general John Buford in Ronald F. Maxwell’s Gettysburg (both 1993), the Stranger in the Coens’ The Big Lebowski cancer-stricken Marlboro Man in Jason Reitman’s Thank You For Smoking (2005)) and on television (NBC’s The Sacketts (1979), CBS’s Buffalo Girls (1995) or FX’s Justified (2015)).
error. You don’t cry, ‘uncle!’ You keep going. RAM Trucks. Texas’s longest-lasting
pick-ups. (*State Fair of Texas*)

Elliott’s voiceover accompanies the visual narrative, as the commercial unfolds
the parallel field work and rodeo sequences, in which the cowboy is seen commuting
to work (and the rodeo) in his Ram pickup; wading in mud on the range; hooking up
a trailer; slouching nervously before his ride at the rodeo, taping his hands for better
grip and slapping his hands against the chaps; driving the Ram again on a hot day,
with the car materializing from the quivering desert air; stacking up hay bales on the
load bed of his truck; driving through a herd of longhorns accompanied by other
cowboys on horseback; struggling to keep his balance in a sandstorm; bull riding;
and driving into the sunset along a dirt road.

*State Fair of Texas* seemingly changes the campaign’s angle from pastoral to
naturalistic, going back to the bare essentials of the myth. Stripped of the shots of the
homestead, the surrounding environment is transformed into a barren land, a site of
ordeal, and a testing ground for the man’s true worth. In combination with the shots
of the yellowed Texas desert, the clip’s interpellation is stylistically evocative of the
curtness of formulaic Western fiction:

> It was hot. A few lost, cotton-ball bunches of cloud drifted in a brassy sky, leaving rare
islands of shadow upon the desert’s face.
Nothing moved. It was a far, lost land, a land of beige-gray silences and distance where
the eye reached out farther and farther to lose itself finally against the sky, and where
the only movement was the lazy swing of a remote buzzard. (L’Amour 2)

In the grain of L’Amour’s economical idiom, the commercial’s narrative
operates with worn clichés, accumulating them into a conglomerate of recognizable
intertextual frames and stereotyped icon graphical units. Such a stylistic solution dates back to formulaic literary Westerns in which the landscape functions at once “a site of ordeal, proving the man as nothing else can” and a place which reassures men’s identity through a series of trials (the sandstorm, the bull ride, the cattle drive) and “rewards them with food, water, shelter and, finally, rest,” as put by Tompkins (80). The end result of such writing is aphorism, a “special brand of the bon mot … recognizable anywhere” (49) as an affirmation of what Lee Clark Mitchell defined as “manly restraint,” i.e. a sense of masculinity based on physicality and performance under duress. Describing the worship of male bodies in the Western, Mitchell delineates it as a cycle in which “the body is celebrated, then physically punished, only to convalesce” (Westerns 155). In movie Westerns, the punishment taken by the male body is usually administered by fellow men; in State Fair of Texas, the role is conferred on austere South-Western nature, be it blazing Panhandle heat, a desert storm, or a raging bull in the rodeo arena. To paraphrase Tom Dunson in Red River, those who are not deemed to be quitters, those good enough to finish what they start, get to enjoy those views from the inside of the new Dodge Ram, detached at will from the scorching heat. And they keep going “the next day. And the day after that,” living by “an unspoken code—the code of the West,” as one learns from the flagship clip of the campaign, Guts. Glory. Ram (2011):

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108 I use the two terms in accordance with the definitions proposed by Umberto Eco, who defined intertextual frames as “stereotyped situations derived from preceding textual tradition and recorded by our encyclopedia, such as, for example, the standard duel between the sheriff and the bad guy or the narrative situation in which the hero fights the villain and wins” (200). Intertextual frames are sequences comprised of stereotypical iconographical units, a term coined by Eco to refer individual visual clichés, “for instance, the Evil Nazi” (200).

109 Analyzing the oeuvre of Owen Wister, Zane Grey and Louis L’Amour, Tompkins notices that the common denominator for the three writers is that they all “describe the same man, a man whose hardness is one with the hardness of nature” (73). Guts. Glory. Ram adopts the very same formula, interpellating the potential customer by means of an easily identifiable visual code, and wrapping its product in a cloak of mythical adventure, conveyed by means of strictly formulaic language.
In the days of the Old West cowboys lived by an unspoken code. The code of the West. Never try on another man’s hat. Always remove your firearms at the table. Talk less. Say more. Always do what has to be done. Some rules were easier to live by than others, and for some, one was just downright impossible to abide. Never covet another man’s horse. Built with honor, forged with pride. (Guts. Glory. Ram)

Narrated by Elliott, this high-budget clip recreates an entire Western town. Situated in a desert valley, the town bustles with life, its thoroughfare crowded with cowboys, cavalry soldiers, street vendors, and prostitutes. Filling out the picture are a man crushing ice, a lone Native American standing in a backstreet, and an Asian gunslinger gazing dismally towards the sheriff’s office. This series of intertextual frames is punctuated by short sentences, amounting to a-day-in-the life-of-a-Western-town narrative which celebrates the stereotypical “code of the West.” A man is flung through a saloon window and then dragged to the trough, about to be drowned by the one against whom he has just trespassed (“Never try on another man’s hat”); a musician freezes at the piano and silence breaks in a raucous brothel when a genteel Easterner accidentally shoots his pistol while playing cards (“Always remove your firearms at the table”); the gunslinger and the sheriff contemplate dueling each other, exchanging looks and uncovering their revolvers before they go their separate ways (“Talk less. Say more.”). As the camera rolls outside of town, following a Ram pickup rushing through the plain, it cuts to the shot of three rustlers led by Walton Goggins, his eyes fixed on the car, his face overcome with greed (“Some rules were easier to live by than others, and for some, one was just downright impossible to abide: never covet another man’s horse”). As the rustlers salivate over
the car, Goggins vows to get himself one (“I got a name for that thing down there. It’s mine”).

Watching *Guts. Glory. Ram*, the viewer is removed to a hyperreal location which blends the past with the future, as the Ram literally encroaches on mythical territory and becomes its integral part, substituting for its most prized commodity (and its quintessential fetish): the horse. In Eco’s words, the potential “customer finds himself participating in the fantasy because of his own authenticity as a consumer, in other words, he is in the role of the cowboy or the gold prospector who comes in to town to be fleeced of all he has accumulated while out in the wild” (42). Positioning the truck as the fetishized commodity, in which the customer vests his nostalgic longing, in the midst of a meticulously recreated myth renders the restoration fantasy readily accessible (while, at the same time, doing away with the perils of a Western town, which the clip painstakingly unfolds before the viewer). Thus, in Svetlana Boym’s words, “the consumer enjoys both the modern convenience and the primitive pleasure of fetish possession” (38). It also elevates the Ram’s status from a mere commodity to a symbol of traditional masculine virtues.

Premiering in 2011, the clip capitalized on Walton Goggins’s image as the likeable Kentucky villain in FX’s post-Western series *Justified*, in which Goggins teamed up with Timothy Olyphant (who broke out as Sheriff Seth Bullock in HBO’s revisionist Western series *Deadwood*); in the final season of *Justified*, the two were joined by Sam Elliott. Casting Goggins in Fiat Chrysler’s flagship commercial was a stroke of great marketing intuition, as the actor solidified his celebrity image playing in Quentin Tarantino’s *Django* and *The Hateful Eight*, enabling the company to successfully run the same commercial for an extended period of time.

In *The Myth of the Western*, Matthew Carter contemplates the analogy between the horse and the pickup truck famously proposed by Patricia Nelson Limerick in *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. Carter inquires if “one could ask whether or not a pick-up truck is any less Western-like in its signification than a horse? How exactly do we value such traditional visual signifiers against more deep-rooted generic themes? After all, both truck and horse symbolize the desire for unfettered freedom, be it on the road or on the range. Therefore, one could argue that both truck and horse adhere in this respect to the prevalent mythological tropes of the Western” (*Myth of the Western* 205).
the consumer purchases along with the Ram.\textsuperscript{112} The blend of the past and the present in \textit{Guts. Glory. Ram} can serve as a perfect example of America’s obsession with restorative nostalgia, as examined by Boym. In the microcosm of \textit{Guts. Glory. Ram} contrived to outdo the competition, one may indeed see how nostalgia is instilled in merchandise, how it manipulates consumers into a sense of loss, and how it “souvenirizes the past” to satisfy America’s “obsession with roots and identity” (38). Transformed into a movable, mythological theme park, the Ram “faithfully” recreates the feel of the past (as conceived of in the now-questioned narratives), and restores the Anglo-American male to self-righteousness, at least within the confines of the driver’s cab, where “matters of race and other ideologies do not enter the picture” (37). What dominates the commercial is the restoration of “honor” and “pride,” as epitomized by Sam Elliott and his rough-hewn voice.

While the majority of Ram commercials spotlighting Elliott as the ideal of old-timer masculinity rely on his iconic voice, in some clips the actor has also been featured in person, assuming the dual role of narrator and character. The reliance on Elliott’s star persona in commercials utilizing the appeal of Frontier myths is no novelty, since Hollywood actors have long lent their services to advertising (a phenomenon which I briefly discussed earlier, invoking the cases of John Wayne, Ronald Reagan, and Clint Eastwood). A case in point is the 2013 \textit{Road} commercial, which, similarly to the two Eastwood clips addressed in the previous chapter, bridges the gap between Western lore and reality, and eternalizes the car as a vessel of

\textsuperscript{112} The copywriting strategy adopted in the \textit{Guts. Glory. Ram} clip situates it within the advertising tradition mastered to perfection by Marlboro commercials, in which the contemporary product is displaced to, and integrated within, a simpler, morally superior mythical past, thus becoming an ethically charged symbol. Such nostalgia-based ads, observes Elliot West, “have hearkened back to an earlier imagined time when Americans supposedly lived by virtues—among others, an unswerving integrity [‘an unspoken code’], a spit-in-your-eye individualism [‘what do you do to separate yourself from the herd’?], and a simple and unsullied honesty with others and themselves [‘you don’t make excuses. You keep going’] that have disappeared in our modern age of soft living, conformity, dollar chasing, and moral drift” (qtd. in Seaton 140).
mythical proportions, “encouraging viewers to associate the roles played by featured performers with those that have defined their screen images” the way classical Westerns used to do (Corkin 27). Watching Elliott in *Road*, it is thus possible to envision him as the cowboy of the digital era, as he traverses the country all the way to its Western coast. The clip visualizes the journey in transcontinental terms, with a satellite navigating the narrator across computer-generated images of a shattering continent, from Chicago, through the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean bathed in the setting sun. Accompanying this series of images are Elliott’s directions to future Ram drivers, with the actor encouraging them “to take it all head on, channel the universe, shorten the distances, push beyond the possible, roar past convention, shift every course, defy the elements, and bring the world to its knees, it takes the new 2013 Ram 1500, engineered to move heaven and earth. The road doesn’t end here. This is only the beginning” (*Road*).

Spanning the humongous outdoor space stretching along Route 66, from the Great Lakes to California, *Road* encompasses the entire space of what popular imagination designates as the “West.” Inviting the target audience to a transcontinental drive, the ad has Elliott live out the ultimate escapist male fantasy of getting out of one’s apartment and communing with nature. A perfect way to vent off one’s frustrations, a Ram drive enables one to run off “from a mechanized existence, economic dead ends, social entanglements, unhappy personal relations, political injustice” (Tompkins 4). The ad’s exploratory idiom entails the transformation of the consumer into a Dunsonesque figure, a visionary who “pushes beyond the possible” and “defies the elements,” plotting his route through unchartered territories. The intensity of this getaway experience is such that the initially fragmented continent clasps itself back into form, compressed together under the wheels of the speeding
pickup that stitches together its gaping divides. Distilled to a “condensed ‘big bang’-style experience and grafted on to the moment” (Bauman *Consuming Life* 104), the drive obscures the frustrations of multiple jobs, overdue payments, dwindling purchasing power, ongoing mental strain, etc., which are temporarily overshadowed by the desirable prospect of an adventure in the wild. A venture outside of the society exposes the driver-cowboy to the primeval energy implicit in the pastoral space, signaling a transition from civilization to the wilderness, from a distressed employee to a carefree rough rider who acts on the escapist impulse and “retreat[s] from this alienating situation to a terrain marked by fewer signs of human intervention” (Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* 374). Given the number of high-tech gimmicks jammed into the Ram’s cockpit (SiriusXM satellite radio, improved fuel economy, active level air suspension, etc.), the car’s escapist potential seems limitless and defies the impossibility of recreating the past and its mindsets. “The past really is another country: we cannot go back,” wrote Tony Judt in his diagnosis of social anxieties in the twenty-first-century Transatlantic democracies, adding that “if we tell ourselves nostalgic stories, we shall never engage the problems that face us in the present” (41). Judt was most likely right, but Fiat Chrysler could not care less about him.

### 3.2. Towards a Techno-Pastoral: Dodge Ram and the Cult of the Homesteader

In advertising its trucks through nostalgic narratives which transport the buyer into the mythical past, Dodge also turns to the unsung Frontier hero: the farmer/homesteader figure. Although most Westerns relegate the homesteader to the role of a sidekick/prop in the landscape dominated by the exploits of cowboys and gunslingers (Joe Starrett in George Stevens’s *Shane* and Dan Evans in Delmer
Daves’s *3:10 to Yuma* may serve as cases in point), the homesteader has received his fair share of praise and joined the ranks of America’s heroes. The roots of the cult of the farmer date back to Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, where the founding father anointed “those who labour in the earth” as “the chosen people of God… whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue” (qtd. in Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* 122). In his letter to John Jay, written on 23 August 1785, Jefferson lauded settlers as the salt of the colonial earth, “the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous… tied to their country & wedded to its liberty and interest by the most lasting bonds” (qtd. in Hallock 2). To Jefferson, the farmer constituted the model citizen of what he envisioned as an agricultural Republic, a pastoral state demarcated within the confines of the middle landscape stretched between untamed nature and urban hubs. The farmer inhabiting this space would be a self-sufficient, modest and independent naturalist (“he may be said to live a good life in a rural retreat; he rests content with a few simple possessions, enjoys freedom from envying others … and, above all, he does what he likes to do” (Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* 98). Ideally, the Republic’s territorial expansion would open the West to settlement, with homesteaders “employing axe and plough to create a ‘natural democracy’” (Carter, *Myth of the Western* 11). And although, as Walter Metz points out in his analysis of *Open Range*, the Jeffersonian notion of small-size agricultural entrepreneurship ideals was soon subdued by the grim reality of land barons, with the West eventually becoming what Henry Nash Smith referred to as “a speculator’s dream” (199), the myth of the yeoman farmer persisted, rejuvenated in national historiography written predominantly by Anglo-American males, and in popular culture. In “The Significance of the Frontier in
American History,” Frederick Jackson Turner famously enumerated the qualities which typified the farmer figure, including

that coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. (9)

The apotheosis of the Anglo-American (male) farmer in Turner’s Frontier thesis was concomitant with the romanticization of the continent’s nature as a regenerative factor. Within this formula (subsequently developed by Smith in Virgin Land), white masculinity was founded on ideas of primeval strength and natural vitality. And although, as Carter notices, Turner acknowledged the finite character of the process, “mournfully consigning the frontier’s agrarian values to the past” (Myth of the Western 11), the powerful metaphor prevailed for a large part of the following century, providing a lasting frame of reference for the self-assertion of Anglo-Americans. Turner simultaneously pronounced its crisis and answered it by diagnosing it in mythical terms, naturalizing the Frontier into a timeless rather than historically specific notion (Pochmara 133). Developed in the course of Turner’s ruminations on the ubiquity of industrial capitalism, the cult of the homesteader retained much of its allure thanks to copious reproductions in popular culture, embodying a nostalgic escape valve for tensions generated by economic (and
identity) crises (or “overcivilization” as Marx has it).

To paraphrase Lee Clark Mitchell (Westerns 26), the appeal of a sentimental pastoral with the yeoman farmer as its centerpiece is not hard to imagine, particularly in an era of political fear-mongering, economic uncertainty, and a rabid transition from the culture of industrialism to an era of outsourced labor and click-and-mortar business. Paradoxically, despite the gaping incompatibility of the myth with today’s “liquid reality,” the cult of the homesteader continues to be utilized in wholesome television Westerns and advertising campaigns targeting those who feel increasingly at odds with the present, as I hope to demonstrate in a narratological analysis of two family Western productions (Disney’s Little House on the Prairie and Hallmark’s JL Family Ranch), and Fiat Chrysler’s Super Bowl Dodge Ram commercials.

One possible explanation for the continuous popularity of the archetype of Frontier homestead—and, more generally, of the idea of the untamed West—can be found in the processes of the rapid urbanization of the region, argues Michael Johnson in Hunger for the Wild. The conversion of empty Western hinterland into metropolitan areas, and the attendant transfer of population from country areas to large agglomerations, resulted in the production of (sub)urban communities that “were and are out of touch with anything like the natural wild” (280), ending up trapped in the suburban “city-country synthesis” (285) that, despite its promise, failed to reconcile the ideas of (post)industrial civilization and pristine nature.

This incompatibility was identified long ago, among others by Leo Marx who, writing The Machine in the Garden, observed that “when the Republic was founded, nine out of ten Americans were husbandmen; today not one in ten lives on a farm” (354). By the time Jimmy Carter, the ‘farmer’ President, was sworn into office in 1977, this number had dwindled to 4.5%. As of 2010, the agricultural sector comprised roughly 1.5% of all employment in America (See Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. “Percent of Employment in Agriculture in the United States” (https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/USAPEMANA). 5 January 2017). With regard to Chrysler Fiat’s Guts. Glory. Ram campaign, fraudulent mythicization of American farmland as Arcadia was exposed, among others, by Alexis C. Madrigal, who pointed out racial and corporate hypocrisy of its authors, who “left out the people [Latinos] who do much of the labor, particularly on the big farms that continue to power the food systems. You want to tell a grand story about the glories of working the land? You want to celebrate the people who grow food? You want to expound on the positive ‘merican qualities that agricultural work develops in people? Great! What a nice, nostalgic idea!” (http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/02/the-whitewashing-of-the-american-farmer-dodge-ram-super-bowl-ad-edition/272825/). But then again, if we trace the roots of the Guts. Glory. Ram campaign back to the reactionary strand of Westerns (which, in the words of A.P. Nelson, engage with well-established genre conventions, even if the perceived nature of that engagement differs from “classical” Westerns (23), it is only natural for Fiat Chrysler to uphold the long-standing praxeological practices of cultural appropriation characteristic of the “pre-revisionist” representatives of the genre. See Sławomir Bobowski, Western i Indianie. Filmowe wizerunki rdzennych Amerykanów w kinie amerykańskim do końca lat siedemdziesiątych XX wieku. Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT – Wrocławska Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2015; Tzvetan Todorov The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other. New York: Harper and Row, 1984.

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Released in 2004 as a remake of NBC’s 1974-1983 TV series produced by Michael Landon and Ed Friendly—itself an adaptation of the best-selling sentimental Western novels published by Laura Ingalls Wilder from 1932 through 1943—Disney’s *Little House on the Prairie* (dir. David L. Cunningham) is a six-part mini-series covering one of Wilder’s *Little House*... books. (The time of release of Wilder’s novels—1934, with America in the midst of the Great Depression—and its Disney remake—2004, with the War in Iraq spiraling out of control—are not without significance to my reading of Fiat Chrysler post-crisis commercials, which likewise turn to the myth of the homestead as a consolatory device and a reactionary retreat into Turnerian “coarseness and strength.”) The film sees the Ingalls family depart from poverty-stricken Wisconsin and head for Kansas, enticed by the vision of starting their life anew on the 160 acres of free land promised to them as per the Homestead Act (the rather clumsy script reiterates the Ingalls’ motivation in each episode, reminding the viewer and the Ingalls family of “a hundred and sixty acres. Pure, untouched land. Ours. No rocks or routes. Teeming with game” that awaits them in Kansas. Although it seemingly departs from the sugarcoated style of Landon and Friendly’s family series towards an adventure-oriented formula revolving around a series of clichéd intertextual frames, with the family overcoming numerous hurdles, from cold winter through muddy spring, the neighboring Osages, and the government (which goes back on its promises and evicts the Ingalls family from their Arcadian homestead under a legal pretext). With its ethnocentric plot “limited to the Ingalls’ severely limited vantage point,” Stuart Galbraith argues the film “accentuates the horrible isolation, anxiety and dependence upon one another pioneers really must have felt end experienced” (“Little House on the Prairie”). Given the rapid-fire speed at which the Ingalls come across, and do away with, various human and natural
obstacles, the movie seems more akin to an arcade PC game, in which the protagonists complete successive levels of difficulty in striving to implement a pastoral fantasy. Luke Bonnano aptly remarks that “the MTV style of filmmaking employed here does not make the most of Wilder’s intriguing recollections. Extensive cross-cutting, heavy reliance on a shaky handheld digital camera, and a constant search for catchy action sequences just does not suit the subject matter very well” (“Little House Review”).

A far cry from Laura Ingalls Wilder’s sentimental novels which, although confined to the triumphant Frontier narrative, described the Westward expansion in the last quarter of the nineteenth century from a woman’s point of view, even if they continued to fit within the patriarchal mindset, embracing “the conquest of the land, the triumph of civilization over wilderness, and, by implication at least, the defeat of ‘savagery,’” as Richard White observes (628). Disney’s Little House on the Prairie attests to the eventual appropriation of the feminine in Ingalls’s novels by the film industry, which has fetishized them into simulacra enabling the consumer to “experience the sublime majesty of a land that stretches to the sky, the freezing cold of a Dakota winter,” as promised in the trailer to a 2012 documentary on the life and times of Laura Ingalls Wilder. The gendered story of “the land before her,” to borrow from Annette Kolodny, is grossly overlooked, even though what made Ingalls’s novels magnetic to Anglo-American girls of the FDR era was mostly the narrator’s “discovery of the voice in which she may speak and, eventually, write” (Romines 4). Shot and released at the peak of the War on Terror era, Disney’s Little House

115 In her monograph on Laura Ingalls Wilder titled Constructing the Little House: Gender, Culture, and Laura Ingalls Wilder, Ann Romines argues that while Ingalls and her contemporaries to a large extent internalized the patriarchal tenets of their age (“they used their authorial successes to shore up the professional and personal failures of their actual fathers and to prop sagging patriarchal constructions” (8)), they also undertook to recalibrate the history of Westward expansion to convey the feminine experience of Frontier life within that culture.
on the Prairie does away with any such ambiguities, assuming the prescriptive perspective of the doxa (“Dogs don’t ride in wagons, Laura,” answers Charles Ingalls [Cameron Bancroft] implored by his daughters to let their dog Jack into the wagon before crossing a river; in a similar fashion, he coaxes Laura [Kyle Chavarria] and Mary [Danielle Chuchran] into obedience to the patriarchal order of the house, when he reminds them, “You girls remember this: you do as you’re told. You do as you’re told and no harm will come to you”).

The masculine inflection of common sense as the governing principle of the American Arcadia also figures in Hallmark’s JL Family Ranch (dir. Charles Robert Carner). In Eco’s terms, the film presents the story of a “degenerate utopia” (“ideology realized in the form of myth… at once absolutely realistic and absolutely fantastic,” where “the oscillation between a promise of uncontaminated nature and a guarantee of negotiated tranquility is constant” (51)). Set on a ranch not far removed from a Texan small town, this contemporary Western was shot and released in 2016, less than two months after Donald Trump’s nomination as the Presidential Candidate of the Republican Party. Ideologically, JL Family Ranch situates itself in the vicinity of political and economic outlooks of a proverbial Trump supporter, overly emphasizing the indolence of America’s public sector (and hinting at its diminishment as the panacea for the problems of small- and middle-sized enterprises). Without verging beyond platitudes and common resentment, the film vaguely promulgates a return to economic self-reliance and wholesome life in pastoral surroundings, organized around familial units coordinated by alpha males. The film’s half-baked plot pitches an old-time rancher and ex-sheriff John Landsburg
against his longtime antagonist, land baron Tap Peterson (James Caan), who is in cahoots with corrupt bureaucrats and Landsburg’s old flame and estate agent, Laura Lee Schafer (Melanie Griffith). Using legal loopholes, forged documents, and the naivety of Landsburg’s daughter, Regan Landsburg (Aby Brammell), the two intend to take over the JL Ranch, known for its fertile soil and ample water reserves, and divide the spoils between themselves and the local senator, whose plan is to divert Landsburg’s water to restore a salmon run, while also erecting a federally-subsidized solar power (JL Ranch kills two birds with one stone here, as it simultaneously demonizes environmentalism and private-public partnership).

Turning to communal solidarity, blackmail, and extortion, John Landsburg thwarts the villains and unites local farmers and ranchers in civil disobedience before the crucial documents arrive, preventing a shootout between rightful citizens and fraudulent government officials.  

The film’s resolution thus transfers power from Washington D.C. and gives it back to the people or, to be more specific, to its most outraged and most vocal fraction, as identified by Michael Kimmel: “that strata of independent farmers, small shopkeepers, craft and highly skilled workers, and small-scale entrepreneurs—that has been hit hardest by globalization,” displacing their rage outward “onto an impermeable and unfeeling government bureaucracy that didn’t offer help” and onto “soulless corporations that squeezed them mercilessly (245-46). JL Family Ranch

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116 That Jon Voight headlined a film so artistically flawed as JL Family Ranch may come across as surprising, but his participation in the enactment of a Trumpesque scenario seems consistent with the actor’s radical political outlooks, given his address at Donald Trump’s inauguration concert, in which Voight confessed he believed that, in the person of President-Elect, “God answered our prayers.” (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38684426).

117 Regardless of its artistic failure (the film has been largely (and justly) overlooked by critics—five months following its premiere, not a single review of the film has been posted on its Internet Movie Data Base website), given that the latest developments in the U.S. policy attest to the marketability of ameliorative reactionary scenarios, Hallmark has already announced that it will produce and release a sequel to JL Family Ranch in 2017. (“Hallmark Movies and Mysteries Announces Slate of 34 New Original World Premiere Movies for 2017.” http://awsprxdam.crownmediadev.com.s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/highRes/1961945.pdf).
alleviates their pain by contriving a wishful fantasy in which a modern-day Jeffersonian yeoman defies the government that, in his mind, ceased to govern least; a fantasy that restores the Anglo-American male his sense of entitlement (“Your great-grandma and grandpa, Nelly and Jeremiah, faced many challenges, passed this ranch down to us. But they were strong, they worked hard, and they never gave up, and we’re not about to, either,” vows JL Landsburg to his daughters and granddaughter, who has just returned from college to help out); and an anarcho-conservative idyll, regulated by the rigid tenets of rapacious capitalism and Evangelical piety (“Chores start at zero four thirty. No freeloaders here, darlin’, you know that. You gotta pull your weight. You get paid a fair wage like everyone else. Sunday’s off for church”).

Imprinted on _Little House on the Prairie_ and, more directly, _JL Family Ranch_, the dream of the dwindling, conservative working-class to shell itself in the cocoon of small-town American heartland, and to restore a sense of purpose to the American blue-collar male that shifted the pendulum in last year’s U.S. Presidential elections is on full display in three Dodge Ram commercials, of which the most flamboyant (_Farmer_) was aired during Super Bowl XLVII on 3 February 2013. Comprised of emotionally saturated pictures accompanied by Paul Harvey’s “So God Made a Farmer,” this gem of an advertisement appeals directly to those for whom pickups are staple work tools. Reconstructing the nostalgic notion of the farmer in the fashion of the Jeffersonian yeoman / Turnerian homesteader, the _Farmer_ clip is part of a series of _Guts. Glory. Ram_ commercials which laud agrarian Americans as the “chosen people of God,” extolling their “coarseness, strength, acuteness and inquisitiveness,” and projecting on them the pop-cultural idea of the farmer as the self-governing individual who still controls his labor, owns his own home, shop,
farm, supports his family and, most of all, serves his country, which in turn repays him with the fruit of freedom (Kimmel 255).

Unlike the cowboy commercials discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the Farmer commercial is devoid of incidental music or film/CGI animation footage, relying solely on the power of photographs and Paul Harvey’s mastery of the art of oratory. In its extended version, the commercial lasts nearly three minutes and includes the entirety of Harvey’s “So God Made a Farmer” speech. Harvey’s eulogy of the American farmer is accompanied by a litany of highly affective images, which include: a lone cow grazing on a snowy field; a wooden church standing in an austere plain; a solitary farm surrounded by ploughed fields; a portrait of a farmer wearing an indigo jacket and blue jeans and holding a pitchfork; a wooden fence, a portrait of an aging, mustached farmer sporting a jeans shirt, suede gloves and a Stetson hat; a South-Western farm after dusk, its porch illuminated by the glowing windows; a barn with the Rocky mountains in the background; grain silos in Hobson, Montana; a U.S. flag flying over a country house; a bearded man with a son; a blonde, curly-haired teenage girl feeding a cow; a Robert Duvall lookalike in a tan-colored Stetson hat, gazing into the distance through an open barn door; a thoughtful man in a baseball cap, crouched on the barn floor, likely crying; a cowboy kneeling in a church pew, with a black hat folded in his hands, his neck wrapped with a bandana; a close-up of worn hands of a middle-aged man dressed in a chamois leather jacket, his fingernails jagged, some of them crushed; a sweaty horse, perspiration vaporizing against the dark background; a man on a tractor driving through a field; a brand new, black Dodge Ram among a herd of cattle; a harvester reaping wheat; an orange grove in a California mountain valley; an African American youth returning from a field; a Latino farmer, sideburns, moustache,
stubble, hat; a man and a boy accompanied by their dog, walking through sage brush towards the setting sun on a snowy winter day; a little girl in a cowboy shirt (find a more suitable word) and jeans, posing against the setting sun in a field; a pile of corn cobs harvested on a tractor trailer; a newly hatched nestling chicken; a couple of Latino fruit and veggie vendors; riding boots lined up on a porch; a heartland family saying grace before a meal; and a young farmer with a dreamy look on his face. The lengthy slide show concludes with a photograph of a black Dodge Ram parked in front of two cattle barns, supplied with the slogan, “To the farmer in all of us.”

A showcase of masterly editing, the *Farmer* clip punctuates its catalogue of photographs by playing Harvey’s “So God Made a Farmer” speech:

And on the eighth day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, ‘I need a caretaker.’ So God made a farmer.

God said, ‘I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, milk cows, work all day in the field, milk cows again, eat supper, then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the township board.’ So God made a farmer.

‘I need somebody with arms strong enough to wrestle a calf and yet gentle enough to cradle his own grandchild. Somebody to call hogs, tame cantankerous machinery, come home hungry, have to wait for lunch until his wife’s done feeding visiting ladies, then tell the ladies to be sure to come back real soon and mean it.’ So God made a farmer.

God said, ‘I need somebody willing to sit up all night with a newborn colt and watch it die, then dry his eyes and say, ‘Maybe next year,’ I need somebody who can shape an ax handle from an ash tree, shoe a horse, who can fix a harness with hay wire, feed sacks and shoe scraps. Who, during planting time and harvest season will finish his 40-hour week by Tuesday noon and then, paining from tractor back, up in another 72 hours.’ So God made a farmer.
God had to have somebody willing to ride the ruts at double speed to get the hay in ahead of the rain clouds and yet stop in mid-field and race to help when he sees the first smoke from a neighbor’s place. So God made a farmer.

God said, ‘I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bales, yet gentle enough to help a newborn calf begin to suckle and tend the pink-comb pullets, who will stop his mower in an instant to avoid the nest of meadowlarks.’

It had to be somebody who’d plow deep and straight and not cut corners. Somebody to seed, weed, feed, breed, brake, disk, plow, plant, strain the milk, replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week’s work with an eight mile drive to church. Somebody who’d bale a family together with the soft, strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh, and then sigh and then reply with smiling eyes when his family says that they are proud of what Dad does. So God made a farmer. *(The Farmer)*

Originally written as an address for the 1978 Future Farmers of America convention, Harvey’s speech praises the modern-day yeoman as the American hero, anchored in the idiolect of Jefferson (the continued use of the “So God made the farmer” epistrophe) and Turner (the farmer as an ingenious jack-of-all-trades, “strong enough to clear trees and heave bales” and able to “seed, weed, feed, breed, feed, breed, brake, disk, plow, plant, strain the milk, replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week’s work with an eight mile drive to church. Somebody who’d bale a family together with the soft, strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh, and then sigh and then reply with smiling eyes when his family says that they are proud of what Dad does. So God made a farmer. *(The Farmer)*

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118 In an article for *The Atlantic*, Garance Franke-Ruta remarked that the speech was originally delivered “smack dab in the Middle of the Carter era,” commending the Ram clip for skillfully recycling Paul Harvey’s “folksy timbre and talk of God,” which separated the commercial from its unexceptional counterparts aired during Super Bowl XLVII (http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/02/paul-harveys-1978-so-god-made-a-farmer-speech/272816/). Franke-Ruta’s sentiments were echoed by Alexis C. Madrigal, who confessed that “the arresting images combined with the crackle of what everyone immediately recognizes as old audio made everyone at our Super Bowl party stop and watch.” (http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/02/the-whitewashing-of-the-american-farmer-dodge-ram-super-bowl-ad-edition/272825/) Madrigal also acknowledges the advertisers for a perfectly suited demographic analysis of the target audience (mostly middle-aged Anglo-American males, according to Eric Chemi and Joshua Green’s “The NFL’s Most Republican and Democratic Fan Bases.” *Bloomberg Politics* (27 October 2014)).

119 As depicted in Harvey’s monologue, the farmer hero also fits the more universal bill of “planetary mythology” as proposed by Joseph Campbell, who defined the hero as a person who lives for others, his actions benefitting the community (*Potęga mitu* 12). Also implied in the speech is an overpowering sense of pride derived from the mythical status of contemporary farmers as the inheritors of the West, the last Mohicans to stick to a noble but commonly disregarded lifestyle. As Richard White aptly points out in *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A History of the American West,* “some rural Westerners console themselves that amidst the explosive growth of the metropolitan areas, they alone are the last remnants of a real West, a true West” (632)
brake, disk, plow, plant” when needed). The video oozes “authenticity” as the aforementioned lines are delivered by an unabashed conservative who “personalized the radio news with his right-wing opinions, but laced them with his own trademarks: a hypnotic timbre, extended pauses for effect, hear-warming tales of Average Americans and folksy observations that evoked the heartland, family values of the old-fashioned plain talk one heard around the dinner table on Sunday” (Franke-Ruta). Targeting what is customarily the largest single television audience in the country, the Farmer commercial presents the farmer as America’s moral backbone, whose hard work, dedication, and piety no doubt come across as soothing (and empowering) to millions of disenchanted males sitting in front of their TV sets and pining for the good old days when, in Richard White’s words, “life was primitive but also simple, real, and basic… every action in this world mattered, and the fundamental decisions of everyday life supposedly involved clear moral choices” (621), as the Anglo-American male provided for his family and shielded it from the wilderness (while also enjoying the buzz of exploratory excitement), when all “was closer to common sense,” as JL Family Ranch’s John Landburg would say.

The powerful way in which Harvey delivers his monologue projects onto the farmer and his work a sense of intensity which, in combination with the never-ending list of homesteading chores enables the viewer to plunge head-on into a ready-made fantasia and allow themselves, if only for a while, to become oblivious to the steadily accelerating world that makes them feel sidelined and swindled out of self-worth by “pencil-pushing bureaucrats and liars,” as put by the dejected John Landsburg when faced with the rough reality of his situation in JL Family Ranch, of which Laura Lee is not shy to remind him (“They’ll kill you at court, take all your money, you’ll have nothing left”). Such a narrative choice, buttressed by the weighty photographs,
enhances the clips’ ameliorative potential, for, as Zygmunt Bauman reminds us in *Consuming Life*, “the more intense the action is, the more reliable its therapeutic potency. The deeper one sinks into the urgency of an immediate task, the further away the anguish stays—or at least it will feel less unbearable if the effort to keep it away fails” (96). Harkening back to the fundamental homesteader narrative, the *Farmer* ad reinstates the heartland male at the core of the nation-building process, occupied by “the simple biological facts of animal husbandry” (Springer 117).

Equally resonant as Harvey’s “So God made the Farmer” speech are *Farmer’s* photographs. A splendidly composed conglomerate of images, some of them in black and white, each portrait is a representation of an individual person, but since they are devoid of captions that would particularize them, these photographs point not so much to concrete people as to archetypal characters. To paraphrase Francois Soulages (78), this transition from the individual to the universal renders the portrayed objects signifiers of eternalized notions (the farmer, the farm hand, the settler woman, etc.). Interpreted this way, the rhetoric pandering to the disenchanted Anglo-American male (as represented by Harvey’s monologue), each photograph is endowed with the qualities of a defiant and dazzling image which enables the viewer to be concurrently in the present and the past (7). Thanks to the documentary character of the portraits utilized in the clip one may readily transport oneself into a location that is concrete (because of its intensity) and, at the same time, mythical (because of the thematic condensation of the photographs). In Soulages’s words, the photograph thus both is, and is not, a medium, and the juxtaposition of the two results in a magical illusion (16-17). As for the truck, it is smuggled into the slide show, as if in between the photographs of “real” people, becoming an integral part of
the landscape upon its transportation into their “reality.” More than an ephemeral image, the Ram assures the viewer it has always belonged in the picture.

Such a presentation of agrarian America in Farmer is representative of a larger tendency in American mainstream television, detailed in Victoria E. Johnson’s Heartland TV: Prime Time Television and the Struggle for U.S. Identity. In her book, Johnson argues that, in the years of the Cold War, U.S. media devised a populist image of the American province, which has since been utilized during times of crisis to galvanize society around fundamental “Heartland” values. At the centre of this media strategy has been the figure of the Midwesterner, “endearingly amateurish, ordinary, non-threatening, unswayed by fads an materialism, devout, hard working, simple, and at the center of U.S. culture both figuratively and geographically,” his moral squareness conceptualized as “mainstream, majoritarian, conservative, rural, old-fashioned, and rooted in past life and culture. Further, the square is characterized by a ‘straight’ heteronormativity (embodied, particularly, by the patriarchal, nuclear family ideal) and, crucially, imagined as ‘white’” (17-18). The television Midwest, notices Johnson, which traditionally overlapped with the U.S. region, has since extended to include parts of the historical West, from the Dakotas in the North towards Oklahoma in the South, at times stretching farther. Informed by pastoralism as “the trope through which the symbolic limits and expansiveness of the Midwest are conjoined and imagined as a unified mythology” (15), the notion of the Heartland has become a vital tool in the country’s habitual response to times of transition, in particular at moments of “perceived cultural threat or tension,” serving as a
structurally consistent and easily identifiable “site of desire and fantasy in American popular culture as seen on TV” (5-6), a site where the farmer still reigns supreme.\(^{120}\)

The heart-warming image of (mid)Western pastoral communities that permeates *Little House on the Prairie* and *JL Family Ranch* also inspires the Ram commercials which pose the archetypal homesteader at the centre of their appeal. Watching the group of agrarian commercials produced as part of the *Guts. Glory. Ram* campaign, one immediately notices a marked shift from ‘hardcore’ to sentimental Western. Absent in the “cowboy” clips, the “familiar signs encoded as somehow female—the pastures, fields, farms, and more obviously schoolyards, church steeples, and store window displays that signal the domestication of space” (Mitchell, *Westerns* 162) figure copiously in the “farmer” commercials, adding to the pastoral charm which these clips strive to generate. The feel of the middle landscape is imprinted perhaps most strongly in the 2014 *Next Crop* video. Returning to the documercial format, the commercial features excerpts from the lives of a group of farmers and their families, interspersed with images of rural tranquility: a sunrise on the prairie with mountains in the far back; a red and white barn; a potato field; cows grazing against the buttes; an orange grove and a rugged hand peeling an orange; cabbage patches; bearded, moustached farmers in indigo shirts and overalls (the viewer sees them in the midst of their daily activities: breaking ice, stacking hay, feeding animals, inspecting the crop, repairing machines, hoofing a horse, running through figures, posing in front of a combine, getting on a tractor, attending to their

\(^{120}\) In this respect, the Heartland myth which seems to have been embraced (albeit instinctively and transiently) by the U.S. society at traumatic moments (see Johnson’s discussion of Timothy McVeigh’s Oklahoma bombings in *Heartland TV* (174-199); Susan Faludi’s analysis of knee-jerk return of cowboy masculinity after 9/11 in *The Terror Dream* (21-45)). Thus, in the understanding of Terry Eagleton, the Heartland constitutes a powerful ideological tool: it encodes genuine needs and desires and imposes a “dehistoricizing thrust” on the region’s intricate history, meshing “empirical propositions” and “what we might roughly term a[n All-American] ‘world view,’ in which the latter has the edge over the former” (12, 22).
cattle). This stream of images is accompanied by a montage of heart-felt comments from the farmers themselves, who profess that

Farming is one of those things, either you love it or you hate it. You have to have respect for the land, you have to have passion for doing this kind of work. Every morning, when the sun comes up, you can see it come up, you know it’s gonna be a good day. Everybody has to eat. Farming is quite critical to the health of the United States.

I think a lot of people perceive it to just be a job, and it’s a lot more than just that. It’s a job, it’s a passion, it’s everything rolled into one. Good years, bad years, you take the good with the bad. It’s not easy by any means. You have nobody else, you don’t have a mechanic down the street to get your oil changed. You teach yourself how to become self-sufficient, you teach yourself those skills. If a farmer has something break, they’re gonna teach themselves how to be a better mechanic, how to be a better farmer. Farmers are one of the most intelligent people there are, because they can do anything when they are put in that spot to do it. No-one wants to dig out a combine when it’s floundered, and no-one wants to change sickle sections all day long.

Having a smile and just being happy doing it is why we do this. I mean, you don’t want to, but it’s not a big deal. You just kind of go do it. People around here are so welcoming and friendly, and everybody seems happy no matter how hard they work or how little they have. If it’s something you really like doing, it’s not really a job… Keep the passion generation after generation, it’s an honor to be able to do that. I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t farm. Everything to do with farming fulfills everything I ever wanted, everything I ever needed.

No matter how tough it gets, we’re very out of way to get to next year. It’s always been a next year country, as long as I can remember. Boy, next year, next year. Well, next year’s still coming. (Next Crop)
Containing what Johnson—citing a Kellog Foundation study of perceptions of rural America—delineates as “the three most common images of rural America” (farms and crops, pastures, and animals (207)), the clip perpetuates the myth of the farmer as the country’s hero, benefitting from latest technological advances to better serve his compatriots. Inducing nostalgia for the countryside, *Next Crop* simultaneously suggests agrarian America is right around the corner, engaged in the eternal, tough but hopeful struggle with the elements. “Boy, next year, next year. Well, next year’s still coming,” says an elderly farmer breaking into a cackle (Is he upbeat, or sardonic? is the whole farming affair hysterically funny, or just hysterical? Although hard data suggests the latter, Ram begs to differ. After all, as Boym noticed in *The Future of Nostalgia*, “American popular culture prefers a techno-pastoral or a techno-fairy tale to a mournful elegy” (34).

This upbeat tone may also be found in another “farmer” clip, titled *Tommy and the Ram* (2012), which reiterates the premises behind the entire campaign: to dream the Anglo-American blue-collar into his former glory without breaching the existing market structure that forces him into economic serfdom. The clip shows a day in the life of a man named Tommy. A prototypical hard-working manual laborer, he lives in the countryside with his wife, and they struggle to make ends meet with him as the sole bread winner. The two live on a farm, s suggested by several cows grazing in the

121 Complementing Madrigal’s observations on the petrification of racially-charged rural myths in the *Farmer* commercial, Johnson points out that the Kellog Foundation survey could not be further removed from the actual state of affairs, where “less than a quarter of all rural counties—primarily clustered in the red state region—depend on farming for their primary source of income and less than two percent of all rural residents earn their primary living from farming” (207). In a similar vein, Eric Schlosser argues that, while marketing campaigns perpetuate the stereotypical image of agriculture as a process whose end result is the production of wholesome food products, the grim reality of farmers entails ruthless elimination of food retailers and independent farming, continuous effacement of regional differences, stagnation in minimum wages, lowering of food control standards, diminishment of consumer protection mechanisms, with super-national corporations as the chief benefactor of the aforementioned changes (14-20).

122 In this regard, *Next Crop* rigidly follows the time-proven mythological strategy discussed by Will Wright in *Sixguns and Society*, “recasting life as cyclical” and encasing the present contingencies within “a recurring cycle of seasons and rituals” (187).
pen, a picket fence surrounding the property, and a country garden near the house. As the man keeps looking for his second job (the clip admittedly recognizes that farming is clearly not profitable enough to sustain a family in present-day America, but does not verge beyond this obvious statement—after all, the goal is to sell a car rather than arouse anxiety about the prospects of its long-term repayment), he discovers his wife has left him a pep letter on the kitchen table. Read out by the woman narrator, the letter says,

Tommy, I know you’re busy, but I’m leaving you this message. I just wanted to tell you that I know it’s been hard, and you never once complained or stayed home feeling sorry. You just said, where there’s a truck, there’s a job. You were so stubborn, you wouldn’t even let us take help from dad. And you were right. Have a good day today, babe. I know you’ll be late, but there’ll be supper in the oven, and I love you. (*Tommy and the Ram*)

The woman’s letter celebrates the male sense of pride and drive to retain one’s sense of self-worth (“you were so stubborn, you wouldn’t even let us take help from dad. And you were right”), the clip reinstates masculinity (as conceived of by Anglo-American, capitalist, patriarchal culture) as the ideal, establishing toughness, self-restraint, high-mindedness, strong character (Pochmara 12), and love of land as points of reference for a model male. Similarly to the “cowboy” commercials, the woman in the clip remolds her identity along the lines of heteronormative Western fantasies, subjecting herself to a phallo-centric house rule and assuming the role of the man’s devout companion. A stay-at-home wife (mother?), she lends a helpful hand to the glorification of backlash masculinity, where the domestic sphere is reserved for the narrator-turned-angel in the house, and rigidly separated from the
professional-outdoor space designated to her companion and provider. He, in turn—so at least we are told—never once complains, with the patriarchal order of things acting as an implicit compensation for the economic shortages resulting from the increasing obsolescence of his profession. *Tommy and the Ram* convincingly validates Judt’s assessment of the devastating effects of rampant post-Reagan capitalism. To paraphrase the author of *Postwar*, it does seem as if thirty years of growing inequality had convinced the American farmer that this is a natural condition of life about which he can do little (22). The commercial also attests to the longevity of the trope of the homesteader as a kernel of reactionary political and economic ideologies, and a stereotypical image of the past superimposed onto the present as a valid identity-shaping mechanism in yet another regenerative grand narrative based on compensatory fantasies.
Chapter 4: Consumable Others: Simulations of Ethnicity in Food Advertising in Post-recession America

Born and raised in Poland of the pre-broadband era, I was among the last of the breed to grow up as wannabe Indians. I was eight when my father took me to an exhibit titled “Indian America: The Meeting of Two Worlds,” which he curated as part of the quincentenary of Columbus’s arrival in the Antilles. And though the ethnographic formula of the exposition could be conveniently dismissed ex-post as a figment of the Euro-centric gaze, as an uninformed little brat I loved every bit of the show. A son of a museum custodian, I would often return to the building outside working hours to sneak inside the wigwams, crawl into the tipis, and run along the dioramas, whooping fake war cries I had picked up watching reruns of old Hollywood Westerns on Polish television.

An infant democracy that belatedly reveled in the culture of late capitalism, and a country whose new political elites idolized Ronald Raegan as their prophet, post-communist Poland unsurprisingly embraced the Western as a master genre that reigned supreme on the small screen throughout the early 1990s. With the launching of the first privately owned broadcasters, Polsat and TVN, film screenings became interrupted with strings of ever more annoying commercials for the cornucopia of imported (and ridiculously overpriced) goods. Most of those were licensed English-speaking clips, translated and aired with Polish voiceover.

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124 Aside from full-length feature films, TV schedules were filled with seemingly interminable evergreens such as Bonanza (1959-73, 430 episodes) or Little House on the Prairie (1974-82, 204 episodes), and more recent productions such as the animated Lucky Luke (1984-92, 26 episodes), Dr Quinn (1993-98, 150 episodes), and Renegade (1992-97, 110 episodes), among many others.
Among the most memorable commercials for me as a Western geek was a video for the Mars chocolate bar, in which the much coveted glucose bomb was advertised with a Native American death ritual. The clip showed a young Navajo escorting his senile father to his would-be burial place in the desert, both clad in full tribal regalia. “Son, today is a good day to die,” said the father as they walked up the hill, to which the young man nodded, his eyes fixed on the sun which had just reached its zenith. As the elderly Navajo lay down, his son leaned over to cover him with a blanket when a Mars chocolate bar accidentally slipped out of his breast pocket and fell into the father’s lap. While the son performed the Navajo death song, his father blissfully consumed the Mars bar (which the clip sold as a thing of a “wonderful and unique taste. The taste of life.”), visibly rejuvenated by the resulting sugar rush. He then flashed a salacious smile and asked his son to “tell Silver Moon that I will come to see her tonight.” The clip ended with the two descending from the mountain, shot against the monumental rock formation of Delicate Arch, Utah, and the snow-covered Rocky Mountains in the background.

Although, as pointed out by Cristina Ene, the Mars commercial strove to faithfully render a number of elements of tribal identity through the use of traditional attire, sense of humor, and Navajo language (one could add the clip’s location, which is not too far removed from the northernmost tip of the Navajo Nation territory in the Four Corners region), it also invoked a number of stereotypical tropes.

such as the vanishing American, the noble savage, and “Indian” stoicism. Along with the arbitrary choice to advertise an emblem of civilizational diseases using representatives of a social group with the highest diabetes patient ratio, such marketing both unfortunate and symptomatic of the longevity of cultural appropriation in American food commercials at the time (Polish viewers may recall similar commercials for other Mars Inc. product, Uncle Ben’s rice, aired in the 1990s and conjuring the figure of an African American butler; or another popular coconut and chocolate bar, Bounty). Two decades later, the outlook has changed significantly. With ethnic minorities largely successful in their struggle to evict racially charged images from advertising, the employment of ethnic stereotypes in food industry commercials has become far more sophisticated. The presence of minorities in food campaigning has been either reduced to comic / “positive” narratives or superseded with ostensibly neutral images. And while “a trip down the grocery aisle,” as Debra

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128 Throughout the chapter, my use of the words “Indian” and “Indianness” will be informed by the sense conferred on them by Gerald Vizenor, who uses the term indian (intentionally spelling it with lower-case letters) to refer to “bankable simulations of the savage as an impediment to developmental civilization, the simulations that audiences would consume in Western literature and motion pictures, [which] protracted the extermination of tribal cultures” (“Manifest Manners” 6).


130 See Doskonały rezultat za każdym razem (Uncle Ben’s TV commercial, 1995). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZffl_UVeg. This Mars Inc. campaign was based on contrapuntal video clips featuring an Anglo-American mother using Uncle Ben’s ready-made sauces and rice to prepare dinner for her family, accompanied by blues music. As the family sat down to dinner, the ads cut to colorful stills showcasing the range of Uncle Ben’s products, each marked with a signature African American butler, whose appearance bore an eerie resemblance to William Henry Cosby Jr. And while other politically charged American food brands such as Aunt Jemima did not make it to post-transformation Poland, Uncle Ben’s subservient smile on the company logo invoked a similar “trademark eagerness to please whites,” even if the collection of traits signified by the figure were “no longer acceptable in the 1990s” (Manning 151); Face (Bounty TV commercial, 1999). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jljQ9_L1cYEQ is an erotically charged clip which exploits the figure of a Polynesian noble savage turned lover—young, muscular, his face covered with ‘indigenous’ paintings—summoned as part of a sexist fantasy projected by the advertiser on a female consumer, whom the Polynesian male presents with a Bounty bar as a fetish of his physical absence.

Merskin pointed out, does, to an extent, continue to reveal a range of staple products such as butter, dairy, honey, etc., “emblazoned with images of Native Americans” (“Winnebagos” 159) — just as tequila commercials aired during intermissions of MLS soccer games continue to reveal the vitality of Anglo-American fantasies about Mexico — the signifying practices traditionally associated with food branding, and the relations between marketing signs and processes of political power have undergone an intriguing transformation that “lights up this field from a [brand new] particular angle” (Eagleton 29). It is no longer possible for Anglo-American owned corporations to simplistically exploit the by-now compromised representations of Otherness to endow foods and beverages with authenticity. Crude exploitation yields vehement social backlash, as recently evidenced by Donald Trump’s attempt to retract his aggressive anti-Mexican comments by posting a Cinco de Mayo tweet in which the future U.S. President assured he “loved Hispanics” and posed thumbs-up with a taco-bowl (a gargantuan pseudo-Mexican dish contrived and sold at his own restaurant in Trump Tower), or a number of “ethnic” commercials pulled down following massive protests from Hispanic Americans (e.g. Burger King’s infamous 2009 Texican Whopper commercial, discussed in detail in the second section of this chapter).

Still, while mostly rid of their racial overtones, food commercials continue to be emplotted in ways evocative of familiar narratives that efface historical violence and present-day disparities, concealing past and present frictions behind Jamesonian “artificial reconstruction of the voice” (“Political Unconscious” 1297).

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133 One in-depth study of such sanitizing practices is provided in Hsuan L. Hsu’s brilliant deconstruction of America’s ‘historical’ theme parks industry, which according to the author had been nourished by fetishes of Wild West authenticity exploited for entertainment purposes (204-327).
With respect to the scope of my dissertation, this chapter attempts an analysis of several marketing strategies exploiting ethnicity (each of which can be traced back to the Western genre) that have been utilized by food advertisers in the past dozen or so years. The common trait of these strategies is that, in using Western tropes, they generate a nostalgic appeal among their target group (i.e. middle-class Anglo-Americans) while also cementing the two analyzed social groups (Native Americans and Mexican Americans) within essentialist visions that commodify them and buttress divisive discourses of the populist present.

The nostalgic commercials examined in this chapter are largely founded on a recollection of “times and places that are no more, or are out of reach, [or have never been],” to use Katharina Niemeyer’s phrase (5). I hope to demonstrate that such marketable nostalgia preserves compromised historical narratives, facilitates the process of collective amnesia, and pacifies potential ambivalence of the advertised goods. Since such nostalgic representations of ethnic Others also figure in contemporary neoconservative Westerns, my analysis in this chapter offers a comparative critique of ideology that binds these texts together. I explore the common themes behind three recent film productions and several food and beverage industry campaigns as a means of “gratify[ing] a deeper and more properly nostalgic desire to return to that older period” and “reawaken[ing] a sense of the past associated with those objects” (Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 1960). The pictures analyzed in this chapter include Gore Verbinski’s The Lone Ranger (2013), as well as Emilio Aragon’s A Night in Old Mexico (2013) and Michael Berry’s Frontera (2014), which are juxtaposed with ad campaigns of such food brands as Arrowhead, Sue Bee Honey and Land O’ Lakes, on the one hand, and
several fast food, beer, and tequila brands (Cazadores, Don Julio, and Tequila Arette).

The two sections of this chapter demonstrate how these two groups of ads rely on familiar Western tropes such as the Vanishing American and the Noble Savage, as well as the benevolent paisa and Mexico as a locus of the carnivalesque, which all resurface in the aforementioned movies. I approach these clips as nostalgic artifacts assisting consumers in dealing with the ever intensifying stranglehold of late capitalism: nostalgic, consumable placebos mitigating the anxiety of living in the state of constant flux that rewards adaptable individualism and punishes those who fail to adjust to its demands, among which John Ehrenreich lists such factors as the rise of “new multinational corporations created globally, integrated supply chains,… decline in manufacturing, switch to financial and service industries,… withdrawal from protections of the poor and middle class” (17-19). From this angle, the discussed foods and drinks cease to be mere consumable goods, instead acting as “nuggets of the ‘real’ West” (Handley and Lewis 4), magical potions enabling consumers to revisit the past, and madelaine cakes for what Gary Cross refers to as consumed nostalgia,” stimulating the recovery of memories “distinctive to the object of modern childhood and consumerism” and “a quest for an experience lost to today’s adults” (Consumed Nostalgia 17). If, as Cross argues, consumed nostalgia longs for the momentary restoration of past experiences revived through the consumption of specific goods rooted in one’s formative years, then one may conceive of the Western genre as one of those very “ephemeral commercial goods

134 In his analysis of the notion of consumed nostalgia, Cross construes it as a measure that helps resolve the tension between the tendency of “us moderns” to leave the unmodern behind “and embrace an accelerating pace of change,” on the one hand, and the inclination to “long for the past, no matter what our age” and the craving for “what was once novel but what we long ago discarded” (2), on the other.
first experienced in childhood and youth,” and of its tropes in food and beverage advertising—as “material and sensuous markers to recall” those moments (11).

My focus in this chapter rests with some of the latest neoconservative Hollywood Westerns, each anchored in the productions of the pre- and proto-revisionist era, as well as with the emanations of their most distinct tropes in present-day advertising. Thus, in the first section I concentrate on Gore Verbinski’s intriguing yet ultimately frail attempt to revamp the Lone Ranger and Tonto as prototypical American superheroes in the light of the tradition of sympathetic Westerns, which Joanna Hearne defines as productions that strove for historically faithful renditions of Native Americans yet wound up as “frontier melodramas” (8), solidifying the legacy of Manifest Destiny, and repeating the trope of the Vanishing Indian despite being “marketed as presenting the ‘real’ story—specifically the ‘real Indian’ story—of the Western frontier for the first time” (12). Similarly, my reading of Aragon’s A Night in Old Mexico and Berry’s Frontera is informed by the legacy of Hollywood’s border cinema. More specifically, I interpret these two films as a counterwork to such ambiguous pictures as The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada or No Country for Old Men, which Camilla Fojas saw as narratives that “pose challenge to the prevailing perceptions of the borderlands of Hollywood” and “expose the disparities and divisions rendered by the fracturing economies of globalization” while also addressing “the issue of the political, racial, gendered, sexual, and ethnic borders of the United States” and the “fantasies and mythology of the Southwestern desert” (186-187). In tracking the tropological affinities between Aragon’s and Berry’s films and commercials of Mexican alcoholic drinks, I approach the former as a throwback to traditional Hollywood border movies that asserts Anglo-American identity by structuring Latinos as “signs of difference to an
Anglo and white imaginary” (190), and consolidates the model of post-NAFTA, separate-but-equal Mexican-American partnership, heralding the election of the incumbent U.S. President. My ruminations on the tropes of the Vanishing Indian, the eternalized Noble Savage, Mexican *paisa* and rural Mexico as a vestige of stability in liquid times have been inspired by Gerald Vizenor’s critique of Anglo-American representations of “Indianness,” Zygmunt Bauman’s analyses of the friction between the notions of mixophilia and mixophobia, Jamesonian artificial reconstruction of the voice, as well as Gloria Anzaldúa’s writings on U.S.-Mexican borderlands, and the Bakhtinian category of the carnivalesque.

4.1. **Land O’Fakes: Vanished Americans, Sustainable Landscapes, and the Reinvention of “Indianness” in Modern-Day Food Commercials**

In the introduction to her seminal study on the Western as an antithesis of the nineteenth-century sentimental novel and a genre which reactively bans women from its wild domains, Jane Tompkins paid homage to Native Americans as another group of people excluded from the vast majority of canonical Western movies. Admitting that the Indigenous Peoples were “one of the things that lets you know when you’re in a Western” (7) Tompkins also noticed that, to her own surprise, representations of Indians in Westerns would not be a focal point of her analysis. She then stated that the handful of films in which they had figured treated them as “props, bits of local color, textual effects… Now and then a weak imitation” (8), adding that the few Indian characters depicted in those films as complex individuals were played by white men, and that the presence of Native American actors was limited to brief cameos and extras, “doodles in the margins of the film” (9).
Within the frame of the classical Anglo-American Frontier narrative, the archetypal Indians invariably disappear, supplanted by their “natural” white heirs. What remains is a landscape sanitized of Native American presence, one that “serves as the sanctifying or authenticating stage of American western experience” and exploits Indigenous histories to “locate spiritual meaning and value in nature,” giving rise to what Renato Rosaldo described as “imperialist nostalgia,” i.e. a longing for all things vanished and transformed in the process of Westward expansion (Handley and Lewis 6). Under such circumstances, “actual Indians,” writes Drucilla Mims Wall, tend to be removed “in favor of simulated ones” in both high- and low-brow culture that “reduce[s] them to controllable, sanitized, virtual” entities and a “human aspect of the wild American paradise of flora and fauna” (103). The transfer of land from Native Americans to their white “successors” in the Western activates the topos of the Vanishing (or Vanished, to be more precise) Indian whose presence is simulated by, confined to, and/or erased from Anglo-American collective memory (“I suppose I should begin by saying that in the beginning all this was land. Empty land,” says Dr. Hovaugh, an Anglo-Canadian character in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* (102)).

Played out in the Anglo-American psyche, the figure of the Vanishing American has been a permanent fixture in the nation’s pursuit of identity, “skulking in and out of the most important stories various Americans have told about themselves” (Deloria, *Playing Indian* 5). Sequestering Native Americans in the past had long allowed America to overlook their presence in contemporary world,

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135 In the introduction of their edited volume on the representations of Native Americans in Hollywood films, Leanne Howe, Harvey Markowitz and Denise K. Cummings echo Scott Simmon’s genealogy of the Vanishing American’s rise to prominence during the silent movie era. Just as Tompkins saw the Western as a patriarchal antidote to the sentimental novel, Simmon argues that showcasing the (i)gnable savage in the first Westerns was part of America’s efforts to counter the then ubiquitous French films with distinctively American productions that, similarly to their literary antecedents, featured Indians as unique tokens of American identity, and thus blazed the trail for the subsequent cinematic (mis)representations of Native Americans (xvii).
appropriate their land and traditions, and exploit their material culture for political and commercial purposes. Within popular imagination, the Indigenous Peoples were eventually reduced to tokens of romanticized history, collectible items, and gratuitous brand symbols, from cigar store Indians, through Indian maidens on dairy products, feather hats and arrowheads as symbols of beverages, and Indian chiefs as sports team logos, “their sole purpose… to incorporate colorful, exotic imagery into advertising directed at non-Native market by drawing on one or another (supposed) characteristic of American Indian culture” (O’Barr, “A Brief History” 8). And while most of these images have been successfully done away with (one notable example includes the 2001 defamation lawsuit filed by Oglala Lakotas against SBC Holdings for putting Crazy Horse’s name on the label of a cheap liquor manufactured by the company),136 numerous ad campaigns continue to appropriate material symbols of Native absence. Emulating the conventions of Anglo-centric Westerns, commercial narratives devolve “Indianness” to products/consumers through the use of material synecdoches (arrowheads, feather hats, mascots, logos, etc.) that signify the “authenticity” of the product. Thus, not unlike the sympathetic “Indian” Westerns, advertisers obey the convention that transfers the “authority on matters concerning Indians… to him who identifies them by their signs, who presents them—in their synecdochical forms” (Prats 34).

Still, importantly for my discussion of the latest sample of “Indian” food commercials, once could argue that the mode of these ad campaigns has steadily evolved from celebrations of fetishized exoticism towards complete erasure of “Indianness” and its potentially offensive symbols or, alternatively, a drive towards superficial inclusion of Natives in the marketing process. Reversing Gerald

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Vizenor’s allusion to Rene Magritte’s pipe in *Manifest Manners* (“This [beads and feathers] portrait is not an Indian”), I argue that the pristine California/Minnesota landscapes in the ad campaigns of such brands as Arrowhead Mountain Spring Water and Land O’Lakes dairy—landscapes emptied of “Indian” presence—are in fact inverse variations on traditional representations of “Indianness” (this absence is an Indian), and that the artificial reconstruction of Lakota voice in Sue Bee Honey campaign perpetuates the very logic that reifies Natives and eternalizes them as children of nature.

To a degree, and despite the noble intentions of its authors, the archetype of the Vanishing Indian and the pseudo-rectification of cultural appropriations of Native Americans resurfaced in what has been by far the most expensive Western production of the current century – *The Lone Ranger*. Released in 2013 and intended as a summer blockbuster, Gore Verbinski’s box office bomb had been hailed as an inclusive retelling of a once popular radio and television show that featured an unlikely tandem of an Anglo-American gunslinger vigilante and his Indian sidekick

The original idea of George W. Trendle and Fran Striker was born in the 1930s as a rather unsophisticated transposition of the myth of Zorro, with the Hispanic nobleman replaced by a masked Texas Ranger and his slow-witted Indian companion tellingly named Tonto (*Sp “dumb,” “silly”*). Hyperbolized by Sherman Alexie as the utmost among all evils brought along with Anglo-American cultural domination, “the one who started it all,” and “the first really mainstream, pop culture Indian figure, the monosyllabic stoic Indian stereotype” (qtd. in Bataille 9), Tonto had long served as

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137 Analyzing this analogy, Zuzanna Ładyga notices that the reference to Magritte’s famous painting of the pipe that flauntingly denies being a pipe enabled Vizenor to capture the fundamental contradiction at the foundations of contemporary Native American identity, i.e. the discrepancy between anthropological fetishes that substitute stereotypical images of Indians for their actual presence in contemporary America, and the fact that the very same clichés inescapably serve as a starting point for uprooted, modern-day Native Americans, enabling them to contest them through parody and subversion (239).
the quintessential generic Indian: an amalgam of Anglo-American fantasies of “Indianness,” which not only helped “transcend the specificity of each individual tribe” (Madsen 3) but also justified Anglo-American conquest and its legacy.

In an attempt to rebrand the racially charged duo into the multicultural proto-superheroes of post-9/11 and post-crisis America, Disney turned to proven Hollywood talent in Johnny Depp, fresh off his exploits as Captain Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The engagement of Depp, whose grandmother reportedly “grew up Cherokee or maybe Creek Indian” (sic!), along with Depp’s and Bruckheimer’s declared commitment to amend Hollywood’s long history of misrepresentations of Native Americans, were meant to boost the “insufficient symbolic capital” and nullify the “incommensurability” of the Lone Ranger franchise with modern times, and restore the figure that “once rivaled Mickey Mouse as a cross-media and merchandising phenomenon” to his former glory (Santo 18-19). To do so, the producers subverted the symbolic order within which the duo originally operated, and reversed the order on the film’s billing by foregrounding Tonto and casting John Reid/Lone Ranger (Armie Hammer) as his supporting actor in the story. “Intelligent, sarcastic, and well-aware of how he had been misrepresented in popular

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138 See Anthony Braznican, “Johnny Depp on ‘The Lone Ranger’.” *Entertainment Weekly* (8 May 2011). http://ew.com/article/2011/05/08/johnny-depp-tonto-lone-ranger/. While no doubt aimed as a means of lending credibility to Depp’s portrayal of Tonto in *The Lone Ranger*, Depp’s comments were a somewhat offhanded and counterproductive replication of a common “wannabe Indian” cliché, often teased by Native American writers and critics. Among others, this appropriative practice was ridiculed by Sherman Alexie in his debut collection of short stories, fittingly titled *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. In one of the short stories, Spokane Indian character Victor Joseph meets a Native American stranger at the reservation trading post. Sharing a bottle of cheap wine, the two exchange self-ironic pleasantries that deconstruct the then widespread tendency among Anglo-Americans to claim Native American ancestry—one which the demographer Ross Baker referred to as “the *Dances With Wolves* syndrome” (qtd. in Hine and Faragher 213)—“’What tribe are you, cousin?’ Victor asked him. ‘Cherokee.’ ‘Really? Shit, I’ve never met a real Cherokee.’ ‘Neither have I.’ And they laughed” (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 91). Succinct and bitterly funny, Victor’s conversation with the stranger could well serve as an anecdotal definition of Vizenor’s “postindianness,” i.e. the practice of teasing stereotypical misrepresentations of Native Americans and appropriations of their culture within Anglo-American discourse, intended to “renounce the inventions and final vocabularies” of dominant culture and advance a postmodernist “survivance hermeneutics” (*Manifest Manners* 167).
media” (Santo 222), Depp wanted to reconfigure Tonto from a racist shtick to an autonomous, self-ironic entity in the grain of Native American tricksters:

I remember watching it as a kid, with Jay Silverheels and Clayton Moor, and going, ‘Why is the f---ing Lone Ranger telling Tonto what to do?’ I liked Tonto, even at that tender age, and knew Tonto was getting the unpleasant end of the stick here. That’s stuck with me. And when the idea came up [for the movie], I started thinking about Tonto and what could be done In my small way to try to—‘eliminate’ isn’t possible—but re-invent the relationship, to attempt to take some of the ugliness thrown on the native Americans, not only in the Lone Ranger, but the way Indians were treated throughout the history of cinema, and turn it on its head. (Santo 230)

Verbinski’s film begins in 1933, at a Wild West Exhibition in San Francisco, with a contour of the Golden Gate bridge construction dwarfing a fleet of ships flocked in the Bay. A circus solicitor advertises the exhibit in a Buffalo Bill-like fashion, urging a little boy to “step right up” and “come with us to yesteryear. Witness the Wild West as it really was. The greatest show on Earth. Fun and educational for you, young sir.” As if inspired by Gerald Vizenor’s tease of “diorama indians,” which the Anishinaabe critic denounces as “cultural pageantry” that bound representations of Native Americans to “the archives of dominance” (Fugitive Poses 145), the boy is baffled by an Indian figure that suddenly comes to life inside a showcase made up of a faux tipi, a threshing floor, and a giant painting of Monument Valley buttes, annotated with a plaque, “The Noble Savage in His Natural Habitat.” From the get-go to the finish line, the film professes disrupt national myths, with Tonto-the storyteller reinventing himself as a defiant trickster, revisiting the Wild West and consistently “flipping old Western signifiers” (Seitz), while also fiddling with countless Western classics in the process (the list of intertextual references
seems inexhaustible and spans from Buster Keaton’s *The General*, through the body of work of John Ford, Sergio Leone, Delmer Daves, Sam Peckinpah, and Jim Jarmusch, among others). The railroad implicates corporate greed, cavalry—racial violence, the American flag—ethnocentric bigotry, etc.. From top to bottom, Verbinski’s vivid, CGI-saturated roller-coaster strives to deliver a thoroughly subversive, kaleidoscopic fairy tale, suffused with Washington bureaucrats, genocide, cynical conmen, grotesque temperance unions, exploited Chinese-Americans (and, one is tempted to add, Vanishing Indians).

On surface, the retelling of the conquest of the West in *The Lone Ranger* bears the trace of “the heterogenous and explosive pluralism of moments of carnival and festivals (…) such as the immense resurfacing of the whole spectrum of the religious or political sects in the English 1640s or the Soviet 1920s [or post-Civil War Texas]” (Jameson, “Political Unconscious” 1296). And yet, in spite of a dialectic that enables the mute diorama Indian to disestablish dominant narratives in his own retelling of how the West was won (“an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant value system” (1296), the subversiveness of Verbinski’s Tonto is stymied by his market obligations—after all, the goal behind Disney’s refurbishment of the old franchise was as much to repeal its racist legacy as it was to sell the story of the face-masked crusader to several generations of consumers. Given that an attempt to completely overhaul the tale to appeal to modern-day sensibilities would likely deprive it of its resonance among those for whom the Lone Ranger was a childhood icon,

139 In an interview with Mark Grasser published by *Variety*, Jerry Bruckheimer (the executive producer of *The Lone Ranger*) asserted that when spending others’ money, one must be convinced the investment will yield benefits. This interdependence of artistic and business motivations visibly hampered Verbinski’s reevaluation of the Western mythology, which—if completely debunked in the process of historical revisions—would have likely cause this family-oriented film to lose much of its “innocent” appeal. See Grasser, Mark. “Disney, Jerry Bruckheimer See ‘Lone Ranger’ as New Genre-Bending Superhero.” *Variety* (25 June 2013). http://variety.com/2013/film/news/disney-jerry-bruckheimer-see-lone-ranger-as-new-genre-bending-superhero-1200501501/.
Verbinski’s film ultimately arrives at a curiously conclusive ending. Having told the boy his story, the elderly Tonto bids him farewell, packs his “Indian” props into a suitcase, and walks off into the distance, transported into real-life Monument Valley, his silhouette shrinking every step of the way.

In view of this run-of-the-mill ending, Depp winds up as another in the long line of Anglo-American Hollywood actors “playing Indian(s),” endlessly removed beyond the horizon of progress, and resigned to transferring their territory to the white stewards of the land that follow in their footsteps (“Up to you, kemosabe,” says Tonto to the boy in his disappearing act). For all his consummate acting, flamboyant attire, and professed respect to the Comanche tribe, it is difficult to convincingly classify Depp’s portrayal of Tonto as “postindian” in the Vizenorian sense, because as much as he adeptly simulates Indian stereotypes throughout the movie, he is not a Native American “subject who dares to play with and beyond the stereotype of Indian identity” (Madsen 167), and his narrative concludes with a scene that perpetuates what Vizenor denotes as a pose of “victimry” within a narrative of U.S. dominance. Thus, one may grudgingly see the decision to cast a white actor to play a Native American as a sediment of what Ward Churchill referred to as a “fantasy of the master race,” i.e. Hollywood’s tendency to assign the roles of Native American characters to Anglo-American stars (such as Charles Bronson, Jeff Chandler, or Burt Lancaster), a tendency particularly strong in the sympathetic
Westerns of the Cold War era, when “Hollywood consistently hired whites to impersonate native people in a more ‘believable’ manner” (174).  

One telling instance in which Verbinski’s film unwittingly follows in the footsteps of Manifest Destiny is the conversation between the Lone Ranger and the chief of the Comanche, Big Bear (Saginaw Grant). While displaying a good deal of humor in his verbal charades with the Ranger, whom the tribe take as their captive (asked if they can strike a temporary peace agreement, the chief replies “Not so much,” and the film cuts to a frame in which the Ranger and Tonto are buried in the ground with only their heads sticking out, about to be stomped by the impending U.S. cavalry charge), Big Bear concurrently slips into the clichéd role of the Vanishing American, saying “our time has passed… We are already ghosts.” His sentiments are echoed by Tonto in the final scene of the film, in which the boy to whom he recounted his story realizes it is late and he “should be heading home,” to which the pensive Tonto replies with a stifled murmur, “Home…,” his back turned to the camera as he gazes into the sterile landscape of Monument Valley.

Incidentally, Home is also the title of the first in the 2016 series of television ads released by Arrowhead Mountain Spring Water, a California-based company.

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140 In his exhaustive analysis of the history of the Lone Ranger brand, Avi Santo shares Churchill’s sentiments about casting Anglo-American actors to play Indigenous characters. “There’s really no way,” writes Santo, “the film or Depp himself can clear the handle of casting a white actor in a role that has largely defined the screen image of Native Americans for decades… Watching Depp mince about in a headdress and war paint and roll his eyes at the gawky white man by his side can’t help but feel vaguely uncomfortable, not to mention exploitative” (243). One could only surmise what The Lone Ranger’s cult following would be if, say, Disney boldly cast a Native American/First Nations actor as Tonto (Gary Farmer? Adam Beech?), and entrusted Depp—the audience magnet—with the role of the Lone Ranger (Jim Jarmusch’s Dead Man can serve as one token of evidence for how beneficial such a duo would be in buttressing The Lone Ranger’s revisionist message).

141 Big Bear’s prediction becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as the Comanche valiantly attack the railway corporation only to be slain by a regiment of the U.S. Cavalry commanded by a George Armstrong Custer lookalike, Captain Fuller (Barry Pepper). Along with Tonto’s dissolution into the arid Monument Valley, their death fits what Joanna Hearne describes as “the melodramatic schema of limited options” that confines them to the past, “suppresses the idea of autonomous self-invention or community identity outside of the narrative trajectories on offer in the genre and excludes the imaginative projection of future tribalism, intergenerational activism, or collective land holding” (33). Such an approach sadly mitigates Verbinski’s efforts to avert stale historical representations and contemporize Native Americans in popular imagination (one is reminded here of Vizenor’s stipulation that “the stories that turn the tribes tragic are not their own stories” (Manifest Manners 16).
currently owned by Nestlé Waters North America Inc., which continues to obtain ground water on a large scale across the state in spite of perennial drought that has plagued the region, much to the protest of Anglo- and Native American activists). Arrowhead extracts mineral spring water from several mountain locations across the state, including the iconic Arrowhead springs at the foot of the San Bernardino mountain. The name of the spring was inspired by a vegetational feature shaped like an ace of spades (as the first settlers reportedly referred to it) or an arrowhead (as presumed by another hypothesis, according to which the landmark was a work of Native Americans who created it to point towards the healing waters at the bottom of the ridge (Meek 38)). While it was only ‘natural’ (in the Barthesian sense) for the company to use the landmark as its logo, the distinct ethnicization of the arrowhead graphic cannot but connote the trope of the Vanished American whose implied bygone presence in the location elevates a staple product to a mythical stature. Paraphrasing Barthes, one could argue that the consistent use of the “Indigenous” design of the Arrowhead logo seems as insistent as Roman fringes in Hollywood swords and sandals productions of the 1950s, and act as labels of “Indianness,” a marker of assurance employed so that no consumer can doubt that they drink from an ancient spring. Although physically transparent, water thus becomes a token of appropriation “thanks to the most legible of signs” (Mythologies 24): an “Indian” arrowhead.

Discussing the significance of arrowheads in American pop mythology, Drucilla Mims Wall writes that they “speak of a magical connection to a sacred past when the land was unspoiled by overcultivation” and act as emblems of “defeated

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and removed enemy no longer a threat, link to the unmediated hunt for animals as food source, evidence of life and work unalienated by a market-driven, urban economy” (108), while also sterilizing history of violence (“Those are… not Indian sufferings remembered as Indians remember them. It is a luxury of the colonizing group to play with imagined memories of the subjugated Other” (109)). On another note, debating the linearity and circularity of tourist souvenirs, such as copies of ancient artifacts, Anna Wieczorkiewicz observes that items from distant past (or their stylized copies) tend to be doubly resonant. On the one hand they hail from the past (or pretend to do so), while on the other one may currently take possession of those items and thus include them in the present (48). My intention is to demonstrate that the interplay of these two temporal modes lies at the heart of the four Arrowhead clips discussed below.

*Home* opens with a sweeping vista of the San Bernardino mountain range, shot from above in the winter season. The arrowhead landmark is likely hidden underneath the snow that covers the rocky ridge, and only sparsely scattered spruce trees stick out above the snow cap. In the background, the sun is seen setting in the midst of thick clouds. The bird’s-eye-view photos are interspersed with close-ups of lush mountain streams and frozen wild flowers, until the frame eventually returns to the aerial perspective, captioned by the Arrowhead logo that appears in the midst of the screen. The slow-paced clip is punctuated by minimalist solo piano music accentuating the solemn valley girl voiceover: “There’s no place quite like home. No

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143 To a Native American critic, the fetishization of an “Indian” item as a token of product authenticity embedded in Arrowhead’s logo reinforces the dominant cultural expectations, while also acting as “a shorthand for the dense economies of meaning, representation, and acts that have inflected both American culture writ large and individuals, both Indian and non-Indian,” thus tacitly reproducing asymmetrical social, political, and economic relations (Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* 4). Analyzing the dominant signification of the arrowhead, Deloria argues that this “little fragment of culture, picked up and remixed” connotes and reinforces clichéd expectations that “occur in little fragments and in sweeping narratives throughout American and, indeed, global culture,” subsisting cultural ignorance, social interaction, and economic exploitation (225).
place at all. At Arrowhead, we’ve called these hills home for over a hundred and fifty years. It’s why we care for our mountain springs and their surrounding environments. It’s what makes us Arrowhead” (Home).

The short narrative in Home alludes to Arrowhead’s long history of water extraction, which allegedly began at the turn of the 1850s with the foundation of the local springs resort (Meek 27). The video emanates a sense of homeliness and intimacy, casting the transnational corporation as the historical landlord of the springs, which the narrative appropriates as “ours” along with the “surrounding environments.” The care extended over the natural environment is said to characterize the company (which does not prevent it from mining its resources on a massive scale and using plastic bottles to can it), establishing it as the right(ful) steward of the San Berdnardino water supplies and naturalizing its claims through prescription. The ultimate seal of approval comes with the appearance of the arrowhead logo that projects a sense of organic authenticity on the product and

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144 In spite of its pretentiousness, I deliberately use the word “steward” here, as the term resurfaces in the commercials of another American food company that has long exploited “Indian” imagery, i.e. Land O’Lakes. In the context of the forced transfer of land from Native Americans to Anglo-Americans, such a choice of the word purges the Westward expansion of its violent overtones, while also demoting Native Americans to the role of donors who upon performing their role as assignors may be reduced to tokens of marketable commodities (within this narrative, the dominant culture is likewise released of the troublesome duty to confront their continuous presence). Thus, as Debra Merskin accurately pointed out in her semiotic analysis of the Land O’Lakes logo (an “Indian” maiden), the “Indian” transforms food, “be it butter, sour cream, or other Land O’Lakes products” into signifiers of “youth, innocence, nature, and purity,” i.e. a collection of “qualities stereotypically associated with this beaded, buckskinned, doe-eyed young woman” (“Winnebagos” 165). While some of the latest Land O’Lakes commercials seem do depart from using the “Indian” maiden logo (or at least minimize its exposure on the packaging), the myth of the Anglo-American farmer as the assignee in the transfer of Native American land and the “natural” heir to the values it traditionally connotes, has prevailed. Watching Land O’Lakes ad documentaries, one may learn that the farmers “farm, ranch, and we do it best we can. We hope we’re good stewards of the land” (Co-op Pride (2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehDI86IkJPog), and that they are “modern stewards of our American heartland to help feed our neighbors, our country, our world, and nourish their minds and bodies” through what they “coax from the earth: a gift from the great many people who provided it” (Demystifying Modern Farming (2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNhj QuAViA). Casting Anglo-American farmers as “stewards of the land,” these commercials imply structural continuity predicated on the affirmation of selected components of history (i.e. the ones that fall within the scope of dominant historiography), and a simultaneous omission of actions that have not been recorded in that history, hence “systematically de-historiciz[ing] the events to which they refer” (Hassler-Forest 15).
endows it with “Indigenous” qualities. As for the Native Americans who had once “called these hills home,” Arrowhead neatly steps over potential quagmire by ridding history of Native presence and “elevates sanitization to pedagogy,” to paraphrase John Purdy’s analysis of Disney’s 1995 Pocahontas. Similarly to The Lone Ranger, Home confronts the viewer with a selective memory of its former appropriative exploits, one that results from the dialectic of “radical departures from a tried-and-true formula,” on the one hand, and the failure “to modernize said formula,” on the other (Santo 242). Arrowhead may have compacted the extent of appropriation of Native American material culture down to the company logo (one will not find here what the Vizenororian typology of “obscure simulations of indianness” that includes “decorative feathers, beads, leathers, woven costumes, silver, turquoise, bone, native vesture” (Fugitive Poses 160)), but it nonetheless reverts to the familiar formula that reifies Native Americans, relegates them to the (ever-more distant) past, and exploits archeological fetishes as exotic surrogates of their presence.

Sanitized history is also present in Gold, another Arrowhead commercial released as part of the campaign. Crafted in a manner akin to Home, the clip opens with a bird’s-eye-view of the San Bernardino mountains, this time filmed in the summer. Here, too, the landscape is presented at its most ephemeral, as the clip was shot in a Malickian fashion, during the so-called golden hour, with the last rays of sunshine illuminating the sandstone hills. Gold also interweaves aerial perspective shots with close-ups of natural wonders such as a crystal-clear bed of a mountain stream, and a waterfall filmed in slow-motion. As in Home, the ad uses the same valley-girl voiceover to deliver its message:

One hundred and sixty years ago, people flocked to these mountains hoping to find gold. It turns out there’s something much more precious in these hills. It’s why at
Arrowhead we deliver most of the water resourced in the state, right here, where it was found, because a treasure like this should be enjoyed in California. It’s what makes us Arrowhead. (Gold)

As the clip concludes, the signature arrowhead logo appears on the screen, accompanied by the company’s “#naturallydifferent” slogan. The Gold commercial solidifies the message introduced in Home, while also adding several twists. The narrative of the Anglo-American “discovery” resurfaces, establishing the history of California within the traditional framework, oblivious of Natives and Hispanic colonizers who had dwelled there before the Gold Rush. The add also unwittingly attributes the adventurers’ trek with Manifest Destiny-like qualities, as the Anglo-American expansion in California is rendered in quasi-religious terms. Gold diggers are said to have “flocked in these mountains” to mine gold, but the clip immediately purges the influx of Anglo-Americans into California of its material motivations, flipping the narrative to underscore a nobler, more durable reason for Nestlé’s presence in the mountains: to extract “something much more precious” and share it with the state’s population. Thanks to this subtle narrative twist, Gold becomes covertly nostalgic, for, as one is reminded by Alastair Bonnet, nostalgia is also manifested “in the act of enjoyably lashing out at something that everyone agrees is both pitiful and reprehensible” (2). The exploitative part of California’s heritage (hydraulic mining,145 urban sprawl, fracking, etc.) is rejected without being overly condemned, and Nestlé’s own dubious role in the state’s desertification is whitewashed with its statewide mission to “deliver” Arrowhead water to consumers. To mockingly paraphrase John O’Sullivan, in spite of changing seasons, extracting

water is the company’s high destiny, and they pledge to accomplish it in nature’s eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect.¹⁴⁶

The “natural difference” professed to characterize Arrowhead Mountain Spring Water is a recurring theme of the campaign. The emphasis on publicizing the company’s supposedly organic bonds with nature, and its sustainable approach to water extraction, inform two other clips in which these connotations (which the American imaginary traditionally ascribed to “Indians”) are silently transferred from their “original” carriers to their implied “natural” inheritors. Whereas in The Lone Ranger the sympathetic, subversive, and humorous narrative eventually fails due to the film’s conclusive and traditional ending and its retreat into the practice of “playing Indian,” the Arrowhead ads overcome the “Indian” problem in one fell swoop, eliminating Natives from the narrative, while at the same time reserving the right to exploit the cultural sedimentation left in the process. In a way reminiscent of Sherman Alexie’s Reservation Blues, two Arrowhead clips—Sustainable Water and Water Sustainability—remind the viewer that one does not need “actual Indians” to mine and sell “Indian” products (two practices that Verbinski’s film condemns, as its greedy railroad tycoon finds his death underneath a pile of silver extracted from the Comanche land upon extermination of Tonto’s village). “Most any white who joins up with Indians never wants to leave. It’s always been that way. Everybody wants to be an Indian,” says Chess Warm Water, a Flathead Indian girl and member of a Native American rock band in Reservation Blues (168), denouncing Anglo-America’s tendency to appropriate Native American heritage. Her critique proves to be prophetic, as the band are ultimately rejected by a New York-based record

company that supplants the group with a girl band of young Anglo-American women (“We can still sell that Indian idea,” conclude the producers, assessing the marketing potential of the idea. “We dress them into the tanning booth. Darken them up a bit. Maybe a little plastic surgery on those cheekbones…. Dye their hair black. Then we’d have Indians. People want to hear Indians” (269).147

*Sustainable Water* and *Water Sustainability* seem to continue in the very grain of New Ageist haziness teased by Alexie in *Reservation Blues*. Returning to the San Bernardino mountain range in the lush spring season, the two videos revel in bucolic imagery of rainfall, grassy mountain meadows, overflowing creeks and rain-soaked catkins, capped by an aerial view of the San Bernardino Valley by night. The clips are narrated by the now familiar valley girl, who divulges the company’s mission, worded in a cryptic, quasi-spiritual fashion. The target audience learns, respectively, that “there are men who spend their lives trying to leave a mark on the earth. Then, there are those who strive to leave no mark at all. It’s why at Arrowhead we work hard to leave Mother Nature in balance, so she can continue to nurture her children. It’s what makes us Arrowhead” (*Sustainable Water*), and that “within these mountains is the water of your father’s father. Some day it will be the water of your children’s children. It’s why at Arrowhead we work with a team of field experts to

147 Among the most memorable examples of the wannabe Indian tendency in Anglo-American culture was Iron Eyes Cody (born Espera Oscar de Corti), an Italian-American actor who, like Johnny Depp in his pre-Tonto interviews, claimed Cherokee and Cree heritage, and made a career of playing Native Americans in Hollywood films, including such classics as *The Big Trail* (1930), *The Great Sioux Massacre* (1965), and *A Man Called Horse* (1970). Iron Eyes’ most famous “Indian” impersonation, however, came with the *Keep America Clean* television ad campaign, in which he portrayed the figure of a crying Indian in a string of public announcements urging the nation to curb environmental pollution. *Crying Indian*, the flagship clip of the campaign, saw Iron Eyes paddle down a mountain creek-turned-river-turned industrial harbor, with toxic waste gradually mounting around his canoe. As the visibly shaken Iron Eyes steps ashore, he stumbles upon a multi-lane highway during rush hour, clogged with traffic and plastic bags flying around, causing the Crying Indian to shed a tear of despair. The video was punctuated with alpha male voiceover, “Some people have a deep abiding respect for the natural beauty that was once this country. And some people don’t. People start pollution. People can stop it.” See Ginger Strand, “The Crying Indian.” *Orion Magazine* (20 November 2008). https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-crying-indian/.
care for our springs and our surrounding ecosystems. It’s what makes us Arrowhead” (*Water Sustainability*).

Combining pastoral imagery with eternalizing, circular narratives, the two Arrowhead commercials can be read as a somewhat convoluted return to the roots of the archetype of the Vanishing American. In her aptly concise critique of George B. Seitz’s 1925 *The Vanishing American*, White Earth Anishinaabe critic Jill Doerfler describes it as a film that set the mold for Hollywood constructs of Native Americans as ghosts of the past, trapped in the perpetual circle of violence in which “the American Indians will be doing the ‘vanishing’ and the European Americans will be assuming control of our lands” (3). Ninety years removed from the premiere of Seitz’s movie, Arrowhead’s commercial put a new twist on the story, removing the traces of Native presence in favor of a sterile idyll (“The races of men come—and go,” reads the final line in *The Vanishing American*, “but the mighty stage remains” (Doerfler 6), in which Nestlé positions itself as the custodian of the matriarchal pulp appropriated in the course of conquest and acculturation. It seems that, given the constraints of exploitative advertising in the age of emancipated Native America, the company played it safe and opted to forgo playing the “Indian” card. As a result, not only does Arrowhead’s implied Vanishing American dissolve into thin air (as was the case with Tonto in *The Lone Ranger*), but on top of that, in his disappearing act he is indeed the one “who strives to leave no mark at all,” belatedly fulfilling the prophecy of *The Lone Ranger*’s railroad mogul, Latham Cole (Tom Wilkinson), who, shortly before being dragged into the abyss, assures Tonto, “pretty soon no-one will know you people were even here.”

In all fairness to Nestlé, the 2016 Arrowhead Mountain Spring Water campaign does contain one video which, rather than circumventing the trope of “Indianness”
through nebulous retellings of history, pursues the strategy of ostensible inclusion. A
collage of personalized accounts by several Arrowhead employees, each of different
ethnic origin, *Arrowhead Proud* includes stories of Native American and Hispanic
American men, whose presence may have been intended as a boost to the company’s
“organic” connection to the land previously in possession of those very groups.
*Arrowhead Proud* begins and ends with a slideshow of images of company workers
accompanied by electroacoustic guitar music and voiceover that introduces them (the
phrase seems inexhaustible throughout the industry) “stewards of the environment.”

**Narrator:** At Arrowhead, our people are not just employees. They’re stewards of the
environment, proud members of your community, and passionate about bringing you
mountain spring water.

**Phil, unit leader:** A lot of people don’t know this, but Arrowhead mountain spring
water started in California over one hundred years ago, and the original spring source in
southern California is still used today.

**Isaac, Preventive Maintenance:** This mountain spring water has refreshed southern
California for generations. I grew up in California, and so did Arrowhead, and it makes
me so proud to work for the same company that cares for the same land that I care
about.

**Marie, Volunteer Coordinator:** We care more than for the actual spring sources. I
spend my time organizing volunteer events for the community. We strive to do our part
to save nature and have a positive impact for the future. We’re proud to work for
Arrowhead. (*Arrowhead Proud*)

Interlacing pictures of company employees with stills of Californian nature,
from the Sierra Nevada to the northernmost sequoia forests, the commercial
concludes with a collective montage of all workers, foregrounded by the handsome
Native American employee Isaac in the foreground, his hair undone and fluttering in
the wind (he does look a bit like Rodney A. Grant playing Wind in His Hair in *Dances With Wolves*), his eyes pensively fixed on the earth below. Wearing a hip checked shirt and speaking with a “rez” accent, Isaac is a dream come true for the brand that has sold its commodities by means of veiled cultural appropriation. Alongside Phil and Marie, Isaac is a representative of an ethnic minority whose presence helps the company build its image of corporate social responsibility, lend its actions credibility, and effuse an aura of organicity around its products. He is the perfect “steward of the land,” whose symbolic claims to its resources as a Native American are indisputable. Isaac’s internalization of corporate speech (he is “proud to work for the same land that I care about”) not only includes him in the process of production and benefits but also substantiates Arrowhead’s use of the “Indian” logo.\(^\text{148}\) One could say, in Spivakian terms, that where Verbinski’s “white” Tonto fails in applying the strategy of paleonymics strategy to confer new meanings on the long-compromised notion of Hollywood “Indianness,” Arrowhead’s Isaac seems tailor-made for the role of a catachretic role-changer, his presence in the clip implying (and filling out) the incompleteness of the “Indian” label. Turning post-colonial decentering on its head, Arrowhead poses Isaac as a genuine Native American who endorses corporate interests; he is no longer an “improper word,” or what Spivak refers to as “a mark with an arbitrary connection to its referent” (quoted in Morton 136), but a self-assertive individual whose testimony advocates Nestlé’s dubious activity and whitewashes the history of conquest.

\(^{148}\) Isaac’s internalization of his company’s agenda may be seen as a byproduct of what, parallel to Althusser, one might refer to as ideological corporate apparatuses, for, as Terry Eagleton argues in *Ideology: An Introduction*, “the consciousness of the oppress is usually a contradictory amalgam of values imbibed from their rulers, and notions which spring more directly from their practical experience” (36). Similarly to ideological state apparatuses in the U.S. Armed Forces commercials, Arrowhead’s ideological appeal is both authoritarian and dialogical, enabling the inclusion of its subjects in the dynamically adjusted discourses it produces (“Even an authoritarian discourse is addressed to another and lives only in the Other’s response,” writes Eagleton (46)).
Paraphrasing the campaign’s lingo, one could thus say that at Arrowhead, the Crying Indian is no more. An advertising master stroke, *Arrowhead Proud* cynically accomplishes what Fredric Jameson dubbed the artificial reconstruction of the voice, delivering a revamped version of the “Indian” and his artifacts. “The individual text, the individual cultural artifact” is slotted into a refurbished context that purports to transform it into a work of “dialogue of class voices” and an “individual utterance” in the “vaster system” of demonstrative inclusion (“Political Unconscious” 1297). Revamped in accordance with PC schemata, no longer does such an evocation of “Indianness” appear as a cultural monument that “perpetuate[s] only a single voice in this class dialogue, the voice of a hegemonic class,” but rather as a foregrounding of “a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered in the winds” (1297). Still, despite of this ostensible inclusion of minorities in *Arrowhead Proud*, and in view of the company’s empty rhetoric throughout the campaign, one may be inclined to think that the clip is but another instance of Indigenous voices being “reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture” (1297). While far from a token of Native American absence, Isaac’s internalization of Arrowhead’s policy does seem more akin to the Vizenorian “simulation that serves the spurious histories of dominance” (*Fugitive Poses* 25): an amalgam of a stereotypical reservation accent, a hippie appearance, and a quasi-metaphysical “care for the land.” All these qualities are reminiscent of another popular Western archetype—that which eternalizes the “Indian” in his “natural habitat” (to use the phrase mockingly utilized in Verbinski’s film).

This very trope is perpetuated by another recently produced commercial released by the Sue Bee Honey Association, a Sioux City-based cooperative that, much like Arrowhead and Land O’Lakes, has built its brand image through “Indian”
connotations. Established in 1921 and advertising itself as “America’s honey,” the company’s annual honey production rests at 40 million pounds. Analyzing Sue Bee Honey’s logo back in the early 2000s, Debra Merskin observed that the company logo—a black and white drawing of a native American girl—“draws upon the child of nature imagery in an attempt to imbue qualities of purity into their products” (“Winnebagos” 166). Within this imagery, the Native American woman connotes the supposed qualities of the hunter-gatherer culture such as the freshness of the product, the sustainability of its processing, and the intergenerational transfer of lifestyle. All these connotations are present in A Sioux Honey Beekeeper Story, a 2017 documercial whose title is a play on words based on the phonetic similarities between the tribal appellation of the clip’s protagonist and the company’s own name. Narrated by Darrel Rufer, a Lakota beekeeper and Sue Bee Honey contractor, A Sioux Honey Beekeeper Story is a story of how the eponymous beekeeper strove to set himself up in the business, and a testimony to the company’s values. In the commercial, Rufer declares that

It’s about beekeeping families. About tradition, about their love for bees, their love for the bee industry, taking care of bees, producing high quality honey… My dad was the top man at that company… Beekeeping is big families. Brothers, sons, dads, grandfathers: sometimes they go, sometimes they come back, find out that they want to be part of the family. It’s a family deal.

My first go-around was, I was working in a restaurant in the Twin Cities, and I come out from doing the lunch service and there was a swarm of bees hanging in a small tree. I put my motorcycle helmet on first, put my t-shirt over my face, and shook them into a box and strapped them to the back of my motorcycle. That’s how I got started in beekeeping. I didn’t expect it, I wasn’t looking for it. It went from a hobby to ‘I gotta be

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149 Data as per the Sue Bee Honey Association website. See https://siouxhoney.com/sioux-honey-association-2/.
a commercial beekeeper.’ I sold the house, and I sold the motorcycle that I loved dearly. So it went from 4 colonies the first year, to 35 to 200 to 600 to 12 hundred. It took me about 25 years before I could buy another motorcycle.

… This business was not built just by me. It was built by my family. It was built by my brother, my sons, my wife… As with most businesses, it’s a lifetime endeavor. That’s why it’s a generational thing. So when I take care of the bees, I realize these bees don’t belong to me, I’m just here to take care of them. How much money does one person need to make? I run fifty five hundred colonies. Do I need to run twenty thousand or thirty thousand? No, I don’t need to… Forty years, it’s a long time. I was a young man when I started this. No I’m not young anymore. (A Sioux Honey Beekeeper Story)

Invoking the archetypal “Indian” as nature’s child, A Sioux Honey Beekeeper Story shields itself from criticism by approaching it in a way that mirrors the revisionist bits in the Comanche subplot in The Lone Ranger. On the one hand, Darrel Rufer is a contemporary Native American who is allowed to speak for himself, and ample time to do so: within the generous confines of the commercial, one learns of his family story and his own struggle to establish his business, with a bit of self-ironic Indigenous humor in the process—all that infuses the clip with a refreshing air of personalized authenticity in place of boilerplate platitudes used in the Arrowhead videos. In spite of the consignee’s use of a derogatory tribal name “Sioux,” Rufer delivers a relaxed, straight-from-the-heart testimony. Amending the textbook sins of silver screen appropriation, the ad takes pains to provide the protagonist with a family and community context, using original photographs from the Rufer family archive, and avoiding a direct ethnographization of its protagonist. One learns that Rufer is an avid biker and a former “Armani Indian”\(^{150}\) who spent a

\(^{150}\) This tongue-in-cheek denotation was proposed by Sherman Alexie with reference to a large group of Native Americans living outside of reservation land, mostly in large metropolitan areas of the Mid-, North-, and South-West. See Joanna Durczak, “Sherman Alexie’s ‘Armani Indians’ and the New Range of Native American Fiction.” Polish Journal for American Studies, Vol. 2 (2009). 127-140.
good chunk of his life in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area. As in the case of *The Lone Ranger*’s Big Bear, Rufer’s narrative subverts the customary connotations of pop-cultural “Indian” male imagery. Confronted with John Reid’s devotional mumbo-jumbo (“I’m a spirit walker”) that alludes to *The Lone Ranger*’s appropriative past, the bewildered Big Bear asks him, “Tonto told you those things? And he told you to wear the mask? That’s funny. Very funny.” Rufer’s story possesses a similar demeanor: he may be a beekeeper out in the wild, but his actions are firmly rooted in a contemporary, business-oriented context, and his decision to follow this particular career path was completely arbitrary.

In enabling Rufer to speak uninterruptedly throughout the entire clip, the advertisers thus hide behind the Indigenous narrator, allowing the protagonist to transmit the message on his own behalf, while also speaking in their name. Such an apparently passive objectivity enables the effect of “middle-voicedness,” i.e. the inclusion of unprocessed and spontaneous utterances instead of traditional emplotment, in Hayden White’s words (199), as the Sue Bee Honey commercial relinquishes the right to encase Rufer’s story within a visibly perceptible corporate narrative (such as the one used in *Arrowhead Proud*, where the omniscient voiceover introduces statements from the respective members of Arrowhead’s staff).

All of the above may be the case, yet *A Sioux Honey Beekeeper Story* cannot fully escape its chief marketing goal. After all, the clip was not produced as a way of paying tribute to hard-working people, but a signifier of the unique characteristics of Sue Bee Honey. And while the cooperative has thankfully dropped its racially charged logo from its latest campaign (to those curious to find out if the “Indian” girl logo was pulled from product packaging may company, Big Bear would no doubt reply, “Not so much”), a large portion of the implied narrative”—one that advertises
food products as an “Indian” domain—remains in use. In a similar manner in which Verbinski’s efforts in *The Lone Ranger* were thwarted by contradictory producer demands, Rufer’s vibrant story is, to an extent, stifled with worn-out “Indian hunter-gatherer” tropes, such as the high resolution stills of sun-burnt prairie, the images implying a tender, near-spiritual relationship between the bees and their keeper, a close-up of Rufer’s callused “Sioux” hands as he takes a honeycomb out of a hive, or a melancholic soundtrack. The montage has been based on a repeating sequence of actions that comprise the beekeeper’s routine (smoking the bees towards the bottom of the hive, raking honey from the comb, inspecting the apiary, etc.). Together with Rufer’s circular narrative of departure from, and return to, the tribe (“Sometimes they go, sometimes they come back, find out that they want to be part of the family”), these organic actions attribute the product with a sense of attachment to land, an air of organicity, and an aura of timelessness. The Sioux beekeeper may be a modern man, but the paratextual devices employed by Sue Bee Honey undercut his narrative and, to a degree, embed him in preexisting scenarios that, much like Hollywood’s latest sympathetic Western, reconstitute Rufer’ story within an all too familiar storyline.

In light of the above, it may be inferred at first that *Arrowhead Proud* and *A Sioux Honey Beekeeper Story* seemingly empower Native Americans by means of economic enfranchisement and an abrogation of colonialist discourse by those whom it was originally meant to represent. And yet, such a reversal does not quite overlap with the inversion of hegemony against itself as postulated by Maureen Trudelle Schwarz, who describes numerous ways in which Natives appropriate the imagery of the Western to establish themselves politically and economically through symbols, products, and services involving “Indianness”—be it consumable goods, political
slogans, cultural artifacts (films, literature, fine arts) or business ventures such as casinos and green energy—to defy neocolonial policies and cultural silencing (1-14). Arrowhead’s Isaac and Sue Bee Honey’s Rufer may not be “inscribed in a certain disenfranchised societal position in order to keep America Indians powerless” (4), but their voices unwittingly legitimize corporate ventures infamous for environmental abuse and the exploitation of Native American material culture. Operating as subsidiaries of Anglo-American business structures, the corporate Natives are to an equal extent enfranchised and franchised to sell images and ideas that are literally “ripe for white consumption” (Deloria, Indians in Unexpected Places 230).

4.2. “Down Here in Old Mexico”: Commodifications of the Carnivalesque in Tequila Ad Campaigns

Aside from a number of critical (and critically acclaimed) Hollywood border films released since 9/11, such as Tommy Lee Jones’s The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada, Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu’s Babel or the Coen brothers’ No Country for Old Men, the past dozen or so years have also seen an upturn in the production of far more unequivocal takes on the Southern Borderland and related issues, of which one could say, after Camilla Fojas, that they have “reflect[ed] and promote[d] a hostile shift in attitude against migrants and foreigners within an ever-increasing preoccupation with national security” (184) in the wake of 9/11 (and the post-NAFTA outsourcing of blue collar jobs abroad). On a similar note, Leo Chavez argues that post-NAFTA shifts in the structure of employment on both sides of the border, along with the increasing sense of economic insecurity among Anglo-
American blue-collar workers, triggered the intensification of what he dubs the “Latino Threat Narrative,” a discourse which presupposes that Latinos are reluctant to, or incapable of, integrating with the Anglo-American community, and envisions them as “an invading force from south of the border that is bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs” (3). The discourse of the Latino threat, contends Chavez, manifests itself through a multitude of practices, from media representations of immigrant spectacles, through Minutemen vigilantism, restrictive immigration laws, forced interments, and the exacerbation of the public debate (as of 2018, one could also add deportations of “Dreamers” to the list) (6). In light of the above observations, one may interpret Michael Berry’s Frontera as a benevolent form of the “Latino Threat Narrative” that—despite its sympathetic tone—eventually embraces the idea of the border as a segregation line.

Some of the more recent releases in this “reactionary” strand that renders the U.S. inaccessible to migrants include two pictures that were released roughly a decade after John Lee Hanckock’s The Alamo, discussed in detail in the first chapter of this dissertation, namely Michael Berry’s Frontera and Emilio Aragon’s A Night in Old Mexico, both premiering in 2013, two years before Donald Trump announced he would be running for president in the 2016 elections. While not remotely close to The Alamo in terms of their limited publicity and distribution, these two neoconservative contemporary Westerns are equally revealing as to the prevalent moods on the American right concerning the country’s immigration policy, in particular with respect to the tensions in the U.S.-Mexican relations—which they engage through the lens of the “narrative structures and textual practices of a neo-colonialist capitalist ideology” (Carter, “Crossing the Beast” 91). In this section, I analyze Berry’s and Aragon’s films in light of their exploitation of Hispanic others in
the course of nostalgic attempts to preserve monological, Anglo-American (male) identity at the times of a populist upheaval in American politics, and inspect how the reifications of Mexico and Mexicans present in these movies (and dating back to counterinsurgency Westerns) have been transferred onto television ads for alcoholic beverages informed by carnivalesque sensibilities.

As stories of encounters between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans, *Frontera* and *A Night at Old Mexico* both end by separating their protagonists upon conclusion of their quests for self-recognition. In *Frontera*, the retired sheriff and land owner Roy McNary (Ed Harris), whose wife was accidentally shot by an Anglo-American boy pulling a prank on a group of illegal Mexican migrants, parts ways with Miguel Ramirez (Michael Pena), one of the said illegal migrants, framed into the murder of McNary’s wife but released home thanks to McNary’s determination (as if in perverse symmetry to McNary, Ramirez’s own wife is raped and nearly dies after trying to cross the border to meet with her husband). McNary escorts Ramirez to the border, which adjoins his land, and hires Ramirez as a farmhand, entrusting him with weekly checkups of the fence that has been regularly damaged by the crossing migrants. Having made their arrangements,¹⁵¹ the two go their separate ways:

¹⁵¹ Roy’s instruction is as detailed as it is futile in attempting to render the border impermeable to breeches from what the global North has come to euphemize as the “immigrant crisis.” Admitting his own discouragement (“This fence has been pushed over, cut, stepped on… I’m tired of repairing it), he remains unyielding in spite of the apparent senselessness of his actions (“I’m not taking it down”). As much as he is aware that a barbed wire fence will not prevent the influx of migrants (which Alice Mesnard estimates at approximately 1 million illegal aliens annually (32), topped an average of 222,000 vehicles crossing the Southern border every day (Henderson 144)), Roy decides to keep up the appearances, outsourcing the job to the very Southerner that has attempted to trespass on his land. “Here’s what I propose. I will pay you for your time and materials if you repair this fence on a regular basis. You can do to the work from your side of the fence (sic!). You’re going to need to purchase some materials. Here’s money to get you started. We’ll meet here every Thursday around the same time, and we can speak about what sections can be repaired” (*Frontera*). Berry's film seems to go along with the curious strategy of the global North that, despite the increasingly more urgent nature of the problem, elects to stand pat rather than decisively engaging in the elimination of its roots, and obstinately pretends it can withstand the pressure mounting on the Western European and American “islands of prosperity” (Welzer 29).
Roy: You can go ahead and cross back through here. Your father-in-law will pick you up down the road.

Miguel: [speechless]

Roy: That’s my horse. So you go ahead.

Miguel: [dismounts]

Roy: So I’ll see you next Thursday?

Miguel: [yes]

Roy: Okay…

Miguel: Thank you very much.

Roy: You’re welcome, Miguel… Goodbye… Good luck. (Frontera)

A vaguely similar scene concludes A Night in Old Mexico. In Aragon’s film, an elderly Anglo cowboy, Red Bovie (Robert Duvall) loses his property to foreclosure and is forced to move into a cheap, trailer park assisted living facility, but instead opts to light out for the Mexican territory one last time. Accompanied by his grandson, Gally Bovie (Jeremy Irvine), a teenage wannabe cowboy who has never met his grumpy grandfather yet fortuitously happens to visit him on the day of the old man’s eviction, Red drives south to Mexico in a nostalgic journey of self-re-discovery, finding consolation in the arms of a Mexican would-be diva-turned-stripper, Patty Wafers (Angie Cepeda). The unlikely trio get into serious trouble—

152 Upon landing in Texas, Gally Bovie acts on a whim and buys a cowboy hat, a plaid shirt, and a belt at the airport souvenir store, making a quintessentially touristic purchase that, according to Anna Wieczorkiewicz, tends to be driven by the autochthonic significance connoted by those objects, which the tourist then uses to create their image and designate their desired status as a member of the visited community (61). In A Night in Old Mexico, that desire is presented as permanent, with Gally returning to Texas a "true" cowboy, having proven himself during the family forage south of the border, and proudly parading his souvenir store Stetson that was shot through by a bullet of a Mexican drug lord. "You know," says Red to his grandson, "You can... tell a lot about a man just by the hat he's wearing. Read his whole history, as a matter of fact... Every damn thing he's been through, everything he's made of... By God, it's all written right there in his hat. Chop through and worse.” (Inspecting the hat, Red ends his monologue by assuring Gally, “I found me a grandson!”). A Night in Old Mexico thus reifies Mexico in the mold of “interventionist” Westerns, transforming it into an arena for the Anglo-American’s rite of passage, to be visited, consumed, and left behind upon serving its role in the identity-shaping process. (Joan D. Laxon argues that, despite their noble intentions, the scope of such consumption-oriented journeys hardly ever leads to bridging the gap between visitors and natives, but rather enhances ethnocentric outlooks and perpetuates stereotypical imagery (Wieczorkiewicz 168)).
courtesy of petty drug smugglers (Jim Parack, James Landry Hebert), their Mexican
drug lord contractor (Luis Tosar), and one clichéd Mexican hit man (Joaquin
Cosio)—but are lucky enough to escape unscathed with a suitcase full of money,
finding their respective identities in the process. Having proven himself as a young
alpha male, Gally heads back for the U.S. border, while his cantankerous grandfather
journeys to southern Mexico, hoping to live out his days as a sugar daddy to his
“exotic” female companion, who promptly assures him that “Mexicans are not afraid
of having old people around.”

Red: If that invitation is still open, I guess we’d just scoot on down to that little Mexican
town she come from. Maybe buy us a little old ranch around here somewhere you
know… You know, run a few cows and horses, things like that… Much money we got,
be living like the king and queen of Zion, remember?… There’s still a Wild and wooly
country down here, you know, you just might like it. (A Night in Old Mexico)

These two endings unveil the dialectical tension at the foundation of Anglo-
American cinematic representations of the Southern border as a mythic space which
Hollywood has long employed to project America’s political hopes, economic
inequalities, and racial tensions. On the one hand, many Cold War Westerns
imagined Mexico as an economically and socially stratified society of “the wealthy
and cultured and the immiserated, primitive peasants” (Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation
416), braided into narratives of what Matthew Carter refers to as a paradigm of
“paranoid defense,” with Anglo-American characters “resisting—often with extreme
violence—the attempted ‘incursions’” (“‘Crossing the Beast’” 89) from ethnic
Others (while often indulging in such incursions themselves as another means of
channeling Anglo-America’s pastoral impulse). On the other, a plethora of
multivalent films, from Peckinpah’s Major Dundee and The Wild Bunch to Inarritu’s
Babel or Denis Villeneuve’s Sicario, managed to problematize transgressions behind narratives of border-crossing, yielding less programmed and more horizontal visions of Borderland as a liminal, synergic space in which “various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness” continue to intertwine (Anzaldúa, Borderlands 85). Within this ambivalent location that grants unlimited mobility for privileged visitors from the North, on the one hand, and a locus of forced, neo-feudal immobility that denies this privilege to the natives of the South and assigns them to their soil for perpetuity, on the other, such (im)mobility become potent with implications of servitude, with the U.S.-Mexican border reminiscent of medieval castles and fortifications guarding what the Southern “peasants” have mythologized as a land of milk and honey (Bauman, “Panika” 8-9). Embedded in this neo-colonial construct of America as a beleaguered center, writes Danilo H. Figueredo, is the native representation of the U.S. as el norte: a location that transcends “a geographic designation, a point on the compass, a vague spot on the world,” and designates “a precise and easily definable destination… a place of possibilities where pessimism have room for optimism”—a notion largely internalized even by those critical of the American materialism and the U.S. meddling with domestic issues of Latin American countries (11-12).

With respect to the thematic interrelations between the latest conservative strand of Hollywood border films represented by Frontera and A Night in Old Mexico, on the one hand, and “Mexican” food commercials, on the other, I propose to interpret the themes of Anglo-American mobility and Mexican immobility through the lens of what Zygmunt Bauman identified as the consumerist tension between “mixophilia” and “mixophobia.” Bauman defines “mixophilia” as the affection for

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153 As accurately pointed out by Matthew Carter in his analysis of Cary Fukunaga’s Sin Nombre (2009), “myths abound on both sides of the border, for what else are the ‘wetbacks’ chasing but their own myth of the USA? In their own ways, the migrants are attempting to establish a place for themselves, an identity within terms of the socioeconomic prosperity promised by the American Dream” (“‘Crossing the Beast’” 91).
commodifications of the foreign, different, and diverse, developing in Western urban areas as a vehicle for the consumption of tokens of Otherness (food, material culture, literature, music, etc.), an affection that entails the experience of the “unknown and unfathomable” (Obcy u naszych drzwi 15). Conversely, Bauman uses the term “mixophobia” to denote anxieties behind the impossibility to contain the wave of the “unknown, unstoppable, repulsive, and uncontrollable,” with migrants as the sole common frame of reference for the otherwise divided autochthonic social classes, from financial elites to local “miserables” (16). Within the scope of mixophobia, the migrant functions as the messenger of ill news, and a reminder of the global ailments the West prefers to forget or dispel (23).

Below I attempt an aberrant reading of a number of mixophilia-driven commercial clips for Mexican products (and their Anglo-American simulations) marketing these goods in the U.S. in the past few years through an exploitation of two commonplace Western archetypes, i.e. the persevering Mexican paisa, and the pueblo carnival interlude. The two have constituted vital parts of Anglo-American narratives on Mexico, from classical Westerns through border movies and contemporary Westerns such as Frontera and A Night in Old Mexico. The use of these themes within mixophilic clips helps them do away with the tensions within what Reagan infamously referred to as “a frontline, a war zone” rather than “a border culture, a third country” (Anzaldua, Borderlands 33), instead showcasing Mexico as a locus of never-ending delights signified by culinary and alcoholic artifacts, exploited to promulgate ethnocentric consumerism.

The appropriation of “Mexicanness” for commercial purposes in TV food commercials has been recognized and examined by a number of cultural historians of advertising, including Juliann Sivulka, Debra Merskin, and Brian D. Behnken and
Gregory D. Smithers.\textsuperscript{154} Perhaps its most (in)famous manifestation came with the introduction of Frito Bandito to advertise a Frito-Lay brand of corn chips in 1967. An epitome of denigrating representation of “Mexicanness,” this minuscule cartoon figure “featured a Speedy Gonzales-like appearance that included a large sombrero, wispy mustache, a white pantsuit, large buckteeth, one of which was gold, two revolvers, and two bandoliers” (Behnken and Smithers 43). And while the emancipation of the growing Mexican American population in the 1970s brought the gradual demise of openly derogatory commodifications of Latino cultures—such as the Puerto Rican \textit{paisa} on a donkey advertising Merito rum (“Try these delecious cool rum dreenks made weeth Merito Rum”) or the Mexican bandit and his licentious companera in the posters for Tequila Gavilan (“One taste… and you’re not a Gringo anymore”)\textsuperscript{155}—the use of “Mexicanness” as a marketing vehicle has carried over into this century, with the archetypes of the \textit{paisa}/subservient sidekick and Mexico as a consumable oasis resurfacing most notably in fast food and liquor commercials.

Analyzing several tequila commercials released in the recent years, I focus on how the use of virulently racist imagery has given way to a more benevolent representation of Mexico as an exotic arcadia. To begin with, however, I would like to examine two clips from a parallel market sector, one by Burger King (2009), the other by Taco Bell (2013), that can help illustrate the process of departure from that stereotype towards the “positive” image of Mexico as a platform of self-identification for the contemporary Anglo-American \textit{homo ludens}. The 2009 \textit{Texican Whopper from Burger King} employs the figure of the Tex-Mex alliance between the

\textsuperscript{155} See https://i.pinimg.com/originals/1d/d2/83/1dd28360e56ad5eb29c35948ccb589e4.jpg. 25 June 2017.}
archetypal Anglo-American and his “Mexican” sidekick that dates back to Hollywood counterinsurgency/professional Westerns of the 1960s and has been continuously redefined along with the development of the genre’s formula, from John Sturges’s *The Magnificent Seven*, through Richard Brooks’s *The Professionals*, Sergio Leone’s *Dollars Trilogy*, Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch*, Kevin Costner’s *Open Range* or, most recently, Michael Berry’s *Frontera*.

In the Texican Whopper clip, an Anglo-American cowboy, who looks very much like Chuck Norris in the 1993-2001 TV series *Walker, Texas Ranger*, a rugged, tough-looking, red-haired alpha male, looks for a place to live in, preferably a shared apartment. Browsing through the classified section, he stumbles upon an offer tailored to his needs. The ad reads “Housemate wanted: 1 House, 1 Room, 1 Guy. Pets Welcome!!” As he turns up for the showing, dressed head to toe in full cowboy regalia (a Stetson hat, a bandana, a plaid shirt, blue jeans, chaps), he is greeted by a diminutive *lucha libre*156 fighter, likewise overdressed as if he were to enter the ring (a spandex wrestling costume, a face mask, cowboy boots, all in the green, white and red colors, capped by a Mexican flag which he uses as a cape). Equally surprised with one another, the two instantly bond, as the *luchador* welcomes the cowboy to his abode. They unpack the cowboy’s luggage (a pile of leather suitcases and a pair of leather saddle bags), set up his rodeo trophies in a display cabinet, struggle to open a jar of pickles in the kitchen (the *luchador* uses his wrestling grip to help the cowboy out), clean up the place (the cowboy is shown mimicking his Mexican flat mate who shows him the ropes of window cleaning), send the *luchador’s* autographed photographs to his fans (the horse joins in the procedure, licking the

stamps before the cowboy glues them on the envelopes), and relax at the garden pool
(while the Mexican swims, the cowboy uses a leaf skimmer to pick up the floating
foliage). These scenes are accompanied with the voiceover, “People said it’d never
work, but somehow, one plus one equals three. The Texican Whopper. The Taste of
Texas with a Little spicy Mexican. To understand it you must try it” (Texican
Whopper from Burger King).

Promoting a twist on the chain’s signature dish, Texican Whopper from Burger
King is rich in cultural references. The ad professedly strove to promote integration
between the two countries, as per the company’s official statement (“It was our
intention to promote a product whose culinary origin lies in both the American and
Mexican cultures, and was meant to appeal to those who enjoy the flavors and
ingredients that each country offers” (Parekh)), but instead perpetuated what many
Mexicans felt was a unilateral vision of the countries’ relations. While far from the
Slotkinian “primitive peasant,” the luchador is portrayed in a condescending manner
and displays a number of features evocative of Mexican paisas as depicted in
Hollywood Westerns. He not only welcomes the cowboy’s “incursion” to his home
but even invites it by posting the classified ad, and the cowboy makes the most of the
invitation. Similarly to Mexicans in “professional” Westerns (Old Man (Vladimir
Sokoloff) in The Magnificent Seven, Jesus Raza (Jack Palance) in The Professionals,
Angel (Jaime Sanchez) in The Wild Bunch), and much like in Frontera,157 the
luchador is both literally and figuratively inferior to the cowboy: incapable of
properly handling some of the duties on his own, and in need of the cowboy’s

157 In Berry’s film, Miguel and his wife (Eva Longoria) are cast as benevolent, hard-working pollos,
smuggled across the border and unable to escape ruthless exploitation by their coyote compatriots. It is
only thanks to the intermediation of Roy, the Anglo-American retired “professional” (in the sense
proposed by Will Wright in Sixguns and Society) who spent his life working as county sheriff (“The
hero is a gunfighter”) patrolling a scarcely populated region (“outside of society”), and now hunts
vigilantes who shoot illegal immigrants (“[His] main task is to fight the villains who are threatening
parts of society”) in a community incapable of addressing the issue (“The society is portrayed as
weak, but is no longer seen as particularly good and desirable”) (85).
assistance to properly deal with house chores, as he is too short to clean windows / fill out the trophy cabinet / skimp the leaves from the pool. And while it is also possible to interpret the latter sequence as a humorous disestablishment of American hegemony, with the cowboy filling in as the stereotypical Hispanic gardener, the parodic effect is largely nullified due to the congestion of other petrified clichés, and is more akin to pastiche. To paraphrase Jameson, the clip imitates a peculiar style (the Western), wearing a stylistic (and literal) mask, and using a dead (neo-colonial) language; the stifling of its subversive swimming pool sequence with the other scenes that multiply stale stereotypes strips the video of its satirical impulse, and becomes “a blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor” (“Postmodernism an Consumer Society” 1958). Largely self-referential, *Texican Whopper from Burger King* commodifies the Other in a mixophilic fashion, turning the *luchador* into a signifier of “a little spicy” in an otherwise unoriginal narrative that pitches the Burger King meal into consumers (“to understand it, you must try it”) as something unknown and unfathomable (“People said it’d never work”). To once more paraphrase Vizenor, this portrait is not a Mexican.

In order to test the waters, *Texican Whopper from Burger King* was first used in Europe, garnering overwhelmingly negative reviews from the target audience, including Mexico’s ambassador to Spain, who wrote that the “advertisement denigrates the image of our country and uses improperly Mexico’s national flag” (Parekh). The campaign ended overnight, as the clip was pulled and the company vowed to release a corrective ad “as soon as was commercially possible” (Parekh). And although Burger King’s ad can serve as another example for the endurance of ethnocentric advertising, the mobilization of Mexican American audience in response to overt stereotyping in commercials has gradually led to an overhaul of
marketing strategies among U.S. food tycoons. An intriguing case in point for new, indirect ways of exploiting “Mexicanness” to promote fast food can be found in Taco Bell’s 2013 Super Bowl commercial Viva Young.

*Viva Young* directly employs Cross’s strategy of consumed nostalgia, presenting a restorative narrative featuring a group of senior citizens on a mission to recreate the experience of their youth by indulging in uncontrollable consumption of Mexican food that concludes a night of cruising, club crawling, and public misbehavior. The video shows a bunch of residents at what looks like a stereotypical Sun Belt retirement home. Upon being put to bed by the nurse on duty, an elderly man sneaks outside, where he is picked up by fellow retirees. Together, they spend an adventurous night, cannonballing into a stranger’s pool, setting off firecrackers on another stranger’s doormat, indulging into one night stands at a dance club, etc. In the meantime, the elderly man gets his surname tattooed on his back with a Mexican street gang-style font, following which the “gang” winds up at a local taco bell for an early morning food binge, briefly interrupted by the warning siren of a passing police vehicle.

A baby-boomer trip back in time, *Viva Young* is a time machine for its protagonists, a group of those who, like Red Bovie in *A Night in Old Mexico* (or, on a literary plane, Ray Forkenbrock in Annie Proulx’s short story “Family Man”), grew up and launched their professional careers at a time determined by a “widespread consensus that profits were inseparable from broader social goals and obligations” (Ehrenreich 160), before those goals and obligations began to be perceived as obstacles to market performance, and were consequently minimized to

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the extent that resulted in the growing disenchantment and gradual evaporation of America’s working class, from the Rust Belt (Clint Eastwood’s *Gran Torino*) through Texas (*A Night in Old Mexico*, David Mackenzie’s *Hell or High Water*). *Viva Young* offers those blue collar cowboys an elusive escape from the “liquid reality” to the days of security when “A [rodeo] buckle used to mean something” and “everything was fine just the way it was” (Proulx, *Fine Just the Way It Is* 10).

Leaning against the hood of their car, these cowboys of industrial yesteryear indeed regain their youth (“Somos jóvenes,” read the lyrics of the song in the background), even if it is only for a night. “I’m old, see. I’m broken, I’m alone,” confesses Red in a flush of honesty in *A Night in Old Mexico*, “And I’m more scared of dying when somebody spoon feed me oatmeal than anything else in the world.” While far more eventful, Red’s nostalgic trip to Mexico is likewise regulated by consumed nostalgia, as he returns to the town in which he once met his dead wife, his main goals are to numb himself with tequila, visit a local brothel, and help his grandson lose his virginity (“You don’t sing, you don’t dance. Goddam, take you out to a fancy whorehouse, don’t even want to get your horn hogg’d”). Visiting “Old Mexico,” as the country is pretentiously referred to throughout the film, enables Red to cope with the ever accelerating passage of time, and revisit his childhood, in “search for the wonder years” of his youth, and with the hope to “find solace from the ephemerality of time in the nonephemerality of things” (Cross16).

*Viva Young* follows a pattern of playful transformation and role reversals that has been employed in other ad campaigns promoting Mexican or Mexico-inspired products, such as, for example, the 2016 Corona beer add *Happy Cinco de Mayo*. Produced by the Mexican beer mogul Modelo Group, the clip continues in the grain of a decades-long campaign that glorified an obscure local holiday (celebrated in the
province of Puebla and regionally in the American South West to commemorate the Mexican victory over the French in the 1862 battle of Puebla, and mistaken by many in the U.S. for the Mexican Independence day) and helped to transform it into a nationwide phenomenon. This short video shows preparations for a Cinco de Mayo garden party in the suburbs of an American town, with a multi-cultural (but mostly Anglo-American) community in attendance, who are busy mounting light chains, cooking meals, fixing drinks (close-ups of limes cut in halves, freezers filled with ice packs, etc.). Using Cuban salsa (sic!) as its incidental music, the clip ends with a rhetorical question, “Cinco is coming. Are you ready?”

In the pre-party microcosm depicted in Happy Cinco de Mayo, everything seems to have gone upside down. Carried away with festive atmosphere, the people in the video appear blithe and free of their daily cares. It is all about celebration, no matter its faux background, misplaced music, or shortage of actual Mexicans. No more tight deadlines, company meetings, overdue down payments, mobbing from the boss, etc. The corporate collar has been loosened, and the hipsters are about to engage in festivities. Jokes and banter abound. If one were to interpret third wave capitalism—in which the middle- and working classes are subject to continuous pauperization while the proverbial 1% reaps more and more benefits at their expense—as a quasi neo-feudal system, then one could be tempted to interpret the Corona commercial as a representation of the modern day counterpart of the medieval carnival (in the Bakhtinian understanding of the term), in which the hierarchical corporate order is temporarily suspended, and laughter reigns supreme. For the duration of the carnival, no other forms of life exists aside from the unofficial Cinco de Mayo culture that transiently supplants its official counterpart. One is

unable to escape its reverse regime (as one cannot avoid the ubiquitous promotion of Cinco de Mayo by the Modelo Group), and its universal character that briefly overthrows dominant order to facilitate regeneration and renewal for all parties involved; during the carnival, life plays games, and those games briefly become life; one does not watch the carnival but lives it (Bakhtin 146-147), regardless of their social, economic, or ethnic background. The carnival adopts laughter-based and seriocomical myths as its governing principles, introducing parodical characters, doubles, and mischievous doppelgangers (145). Within the confines of the Corona carnival, Cuban salsa stands in for Chicano corridos, a garden party substitutes for a barbacoa, with Anglos free to consume “Mexicanness,” no strings attached. Much like the old Tequila Gavilan poster, the Modelo Group ad transforms Corona into a magical potion, enabling consumers to act out their exotic longings. It does seem to take as little as a taste of Corona for one not to be a gringo anymore.

The carnivalesque episode alluded to in Happy Cinco de Mayo has been a staple interlude in Hollywood Westerns and border films, from the 1960s counterinsurgency/professional Westerns through post-9/11 and post-crisis productions discussed in this chapter. Embedded within narratives of professional tough-mindedness, the fiesta sequence usually provides those films with comic relief and enables their Anglo-American protagonists to both reinvigorate before a pending shootout and define themselves in opposition to the paisas, while consuming tokens of their culture. This pattern can be observed in two most recognizable representatives of what Will Wright would classify as the “professional plot,” namely The Magnificent Seven and The Wild Bunch. In both films, groups of Anglo-

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160 As early as 1996, drinking Corona beer became the predominant Cinco de Mayo association among American consumers, with the marketing director of the Gambrinus Group (of which Modelo is a subsidiary), Donn Mann, half-jokingly remarking that “Corona is the first thing that comes to mind when customers think Cinco de Mayo” (Teeter).
American gunslingers venture into Mexico to fight villains for money, acting on the nostalgic impulse to relive their own former glory as representatives of a vanishing profession/way of life. In each case, the gunslingers avail themselves of Mexican hospitality, indulging in the cornucopia of rustic food and drinks (in its own way, each film points to the illusory nature of that lavishness, which is obtained at the expense of the local population).\(^{161}\) In Berry’s *Frontera*, prior to, in the midst of, and at the conclusion of Roy’s quest to clear Miguel of his homicide charges and reunite him with his wife in Mexico, the viewer is offered several bucolic interludes such as the birthday party for Miguel’s mother or a barbecue in the yard overlooking the desert. Finally, *A Night in Old Mexico* features a chain of carnivalesque sequences that involve its Anglo-American characters, who are on a crawl through bars, shady night clubs, diners, food stalls, and a full-blown *Dia de Todos los Santos* carnival, with mariachis, cemetery feasts, and street vendors. In each case (to the utmost degree in Aragon’s film), Mexican characters engage in what tourism anthropologists P. Albers and W. James described as a mystification in which autochthones “offer” material tokens of their “genuine” culture (goods, food, bodies, etc.) to Western

\(^{161}\) Reminding the viewer of the elusiveness of “Mexican” festivities, which are accessible only to the visiting gunfighters, *The Magnificent Seven* includes a scene at the village tavern, in which the gunslingers gather around a table laden with food, “lonely technocrats dreaming of a lost pastoral,” as put by Slotkin (*Gunfighter Nation* 478). “These people really know how to cook. Dig in, there’s tons of it,” says one of the Seven to Bernardo O’Reilly (Charles Bronson) as he enters the tavern. O’Reilly ironically enumerates the gastronomic riches on the table (“Chicken enchiladas, carne asada, and Spanish rice. Looks good”), before he informs his companions that while they enjoy those festive dishes, the villagers are limited to “tortillas and some beans,” as if to point out such carnivalesque profusion is only available to the select few, and that it constitutes but a brief reversal of Bakhtinian “official culture” which governs the village life. In *The Wild Bunch*, the mood is far darker and menacing, as the carnivalesque undercurrents are quickly dimmed by all parties involved. Pike Bishop (William Holden), Wainscoat (Dub Taylor), and Don Jose (Chano Urueta) may share a moment of bliss and male camaraderie over ample quantities of tequila, Tex-Mex food, and village dance (“We all dream of being a child again. Even the worst of us”), but that drive is self-conscious and mitigated by the sense of the upcoming doom of those who used to “ride the high country,” to paraphrase the title of another Peckinpah classic. There is a good deal of despair in the eyes of the three men, and their gallows humor foreshadows the arrival of industrialism in the West. Given the Bunch’s subsequent visit to the Mapache headquarters, and the mood of disillusion that pervades *The Wild Bunch*, one may see that, in contrast to the world of Sturges, the world of Peckinpah is more acutely aware of the fact that the village idyll cannot last and is bound to become “a product of capitalism disguised as a ‘pastoral’” (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 599).
visitors, creating [a carnivalesque / mixophilic] illusion of equality between the host and the guest, one that effaces economic and cultural divisions between the consumer and the native (quoted in Wieczorkiewicz 182).

This carnivalesque mystification is perpetrated in *A Night in Old Mexico* and a number of tequila commercials produced for the U.S. market. In the recognition scene of Aragon’s film, which results from Patty Wafers’ overnight crush on the senile Anglo-American cowboy, the singer confesses she would be delighted to host Red in her home village down in southern Mexico, offering to take care of him for the rest of his life.

Patty: Come home with me then.
Red: Home with you?
Red: Thanks, but I ain’t much on charity!
Patty: I’m not offering you charity, you stupid f…g gringo. I’m offering you a home and a family! And me! (*A Night in Old Mexico*)

Although the film presents Patty’s offer as genuine, it seems difficult to cynically overlook its rashness, and its possible materialistic overtones; even if one brushed them aside, Patty’s fervency is suggestive of a nostalgic Anglo-American male fantasy in which the aging white cowboy projects his desires on the Mexican female who, in the course of one night, undergoes a radical transformation within the Anzalduesque dichotomy of the *puta* and the *virgen*. “Ethnocentrism is the tyranny of Western aesthetics,” wrote Anzaldua when discussing the appropriation and transposition of Native American masks in U.S. ethnographic exhibits (*Borderlands* 90), and it seems *A Night in Old Mexico* deserves its own showcase, oblivious of
dynamically shifting borderlands consciousness. (“All the same, nothing’s changed,” says Red to his grandson when strolling down the street of the Mexican border town, as the film unveils a series of “consumable” images of “Mexicanness:” *pozolerias, tortillerias*, children prancing back home from school, rickshaws, and carnival masks).

The mixophilic mystification behind the invitation to join in on native festivities can also to be found in the 2013 ad campaign of Tequila Arette. In *El Llano: Distillery History*, the viewer is introduced to a narrative akin to the invitation extended to Red by Patty Wafers. Using “authentic,” ethnicized voiceover of a young Mexican man, the clip promises the realization of Anglo-American carnivalesque fantasies.

Today, I want to share with you a story that took place in the land that saw me grow up. It was more than a hundred years ago that my father initiated a tradition of passion for quality and hard work. The story started in the beautiful town of tequila Jalisco, where my family plants and harvests the best agaves that are used to produce Tequila Arette. With love, patience and dedication we have been taking the flavor from my home town to the rest of the world. It takes our agaves 8 to 10 years to reach full maturity. During this time they grow and absorb the volcanic minerals accumulated over centuries in this soil. Once they reach maturity, the agave plants are carefully selected for our *jimadores* to harvest them. Our *jimadores* keep using the same tools and techniques that our ancestors used centuries ago… After cutting off the leaves, the *jimadores* leave only the heart of the agave, called the *piña*. Once they arrive at el llano, which is what my great-grandfather named his first distillery… The *reposados*, *anejos*, and *extra anejos* are obtained by leaving the tequila *blanco* rest in used bourbon oak barrels. This is how we obtain our delicious Tequila Arette (*El Llano: Distillery History*).
At the visual level, *El Llano: Distillery History* unfolds as a distant foretoken of the carnivalesque as a work in progress. The ad begins with shots of a highway “down in Old Mexico,” in the province of Jalisco, famous for its tequila plantations (a big roadside reads “Bienvenido a Tequila,” as if in a promise of ecstatic inebriation). Underneath the sierras overlooking local plantations, straw hat-wearing *paisas* work in scorching heat, cutting agave trees and extracting *piñas* for the tequila must. The painstaking process is represented with great detail, at a relaxed pace, with “ethnic” music underscoring the aura of harmony (the *paisas* sharpen the blades of their cutting tools, wipe sweat off their foreheads, load the *piñas* into saddle bags carried by donkeys that take them to the old colonial building in which the distillery is located (an inscription is seen painted over the main gate that attests to the company’s distilling traditions: “El Llano. Desde 1900. Antigua fabrica de tequila”).

*El Llano: Distillery History* appeals to the target group by means of a mythologized offering that positions Mexican peasants as diligent providers (“passion for quality and hard work”) of an “ethnic” and “authentic” service to Anglo-American consumers (“I want to share with you a story that took place in the land that saw me grow up”). Having developed their distilling traditions “centuries ago,” they enriched them by applying American devices (the use of “bourbon oak barrels” somewhat mimics the transfer of “professional” knowledge from gunslingers to *paisas* in counterinsurgency Westerns), using “minerals accumulated over centuries” (another phrase vividly suggestive of Tequila Arette’s “genuine” qualities,

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162 The affected manner of the narrative could be classified as a representative of what Umberto Eco dubbed the “kitsch reverence” employed in hyperreal reconstructions of the past at many American museums. The aura of kitschy reverence “overwhelms the visitor, thrilled by his encounter with a magic past,” be it the reconstruction of Lincoln’s country hut, or the re-enactment of traditional tequila-making techniques (10).

163 A strikingly similar marketing device used to persuade Anglo-American consumers to buy the product can be traced in the 2010 ad campaign of another popular tequila brand, Don Julio, which also uses “imported whiskey barrels made of American white oak, in which he [Don Julio Gonzalez] aged his tequila for longer than required by law” (*The Legend of Don Julio*).
while also helping eternalize the product and those who yield it),\textsuperscript{164} as attested by the vintage filters utilized by those filming the clip.\textsuperscript{165} As remarked by Paul Willis, such a strategy allows the producer to romanticize peasants, who are conceptualized and represented “through particular categories of time (because they belong to the past; thus we can also romanticize them and become nostalgic about those parts of ourselves which they seem to represent” (165).

Within the bounds of mixophilic carnival, Mexican \textit{paisas} are thus presented in a way that, on the one hand, consolidates difference and renders it consumable (Bauman would likely point out that such a strategy likewise consolidates the global North and South as two increasingly more reified categories: on the one hand the clean, healthy and mobile North, on the other—the South along with its “outcasts” and “wasted lives” (\textit{Obcy u naszych drzwi} 100-101)). Striving to make itself impenetrable, Anglo-America also secures its claim to escapading South to reenact past as a means of re-establishing itself in opposition to, and through the consumption of, “Mexicanness,” connoted by tacos, beer, and tequila. Sanitized of their dark overtones, the ad campaigns for ”Mexican” products activate consumed nostalgia, operating by means of what Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley refer to as “retrotyping,” i.e. through a regressive use of “a limited set of idealized images

\textsuperscript{164} Once more, the archetype of the eternal peasant emerges in Don Julio’s clip, which pledges that its products are “true to its heritage.” The video uses near identical images of agave fields, \textit{paisas}, red dirt, harvest scenes, donkeys laden with agave \textit{piñas}, punctuated by generic “Mexican” string and guitar music (\textit{The Legend of Don Julio}).

\textsuperscript{165} See Gil Bartholeyns, “The Instant Past: Nostalgia and Digital Retro Photography.” \textit{Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future}. Ed. Katharina Niemeyer. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 51-69. Analyzing the phenomenon of digital vintage filters at the disposal of modern-day social media users, Bartholeyns focuses on their capacity to convert the digital back into the analogue, and thus spark nostalgia in the eye of the beholder looking at images of the past (which often depict immediate recentness), by rendering people and objects represented in the picture more alive, unique, and fragile by means of the association with the uncertainty and expenditure embedded in traditional, analogue photographs, such as e.g. over- and underexposure (51-52). Thanks to the use of such vintage filters, advertisers can thus “fantasise about ‘the halcyon days’ before you were born and to feel the mythologizing effect of intentionally aged images. These images act in the same way for everyone because they exist in the present but bear the hallmarks of authenticity that suggest they also existed in the past” (54).
of the past” that appeal to “the component of backwards longing” in consumers (Pickering and Keightley). Popping open a bottle of Cazadores, one is promised a trip back in time, to the days of “yesteryear,” as The Lone Ranger had it, where the *paisa* was an episodic stick figure in Anglo-oriented gunslinger narratives, their differences suspended for the duration of a village carnival, and mingle with the locals upon paying for one’s drink. They may even learn a few tricks, e.g. how to howl like a coyote the way Raul “Coyote” Navarro does in *Why Do They Call You Coyote?* (2017). Introduced by his brother as a man “born here in Los Altos, Jalisco,” Raul has developed a signature coyote howl that helped him gain his nickname. The documentary ad captures the two men after work (it is implied that they are employees at the Cazadores distillery) dressed in peasant clothes relaxing at a rocky hill overlooking their home town of Arandas. Accompanied by accordion and guitarillo music, the clip’s rural setting, along with images of simple pleasures, grazing cows, tufts of sundried grass, immediately establishes a readily-accessible rustic tone, and eternalizes the two as representatives of *paisa* life. “Así es” (“And that’s the way it is”), says Raul’s brother, his curt statement implicative of invariable stability connoted by Cazadores, a stability that invites one to break away from the constrictions of “liquid reality” and metaphorically “scoot on down a little Mexican town” and “run a few cows and horses” in the “wild and wooly country” (*A Night in Old Mexico*).

As manifested by the “Indian” and “Mexican” commercials discussed in this chapter, it seems that, despite long-time efforts to rid the public sphere of crude ethnic clichés, advertisers continue to sell food and beverages by using ethnic Others as tokens of product authenticity. Continuously evolving to circumvent resistance from minority advocacy groups, stereotypes of “Indians” and “Mexicans” originating
in the Anglo-American imagery of the Frontier and the Borderlands—rehashed in the latest neoconservative Western productions—endure in commercials of commodities stereotypically associated with particular ethnic minorities. Challenged over time by the shifting social perceptions, the ongoing historical revisions, and the intense scrutiny embedded in the politically correct mainstream media culture, advertisers find new ways to recycle generic representations of ethnicity in narratives designed to generate financial rewards and sustain dominant ideologies within a system of concentrated ownership. Turning to gesture politics, copywriters sustain cultural and economic hegemony using strategies that help obscure the continuous dissemination of the dominant ideology under the guise of token inclusion. (These strategies include, among others, the celebration of cultural heritage (Corona, Don Julio), the superficial enfranchisement of minorities through ownership (Arrowhead, Sue Bee Honey), and the use of subaltern voices to lend credence to corporate agendas (Tequila Arette, Sue Bee Honey, Cazadores)).
Conclusion: Come to Where the Flavor Was: The Myth of the Western in the New Gilded Age

In early February 2017, I was in the midst of a search query for the final chapter of this dissertation, courtesy of the Free University of Berlin’s JFK Institute for North American Studies. At the end of each day, I would clear my desk in the reading room, walk past the bronze bust of JFK in the hallway, and stare silently at Barack Obama’s presidential campaigns posters as the library clerk checked out my latest finds (my German was schlecht, as was the clerk’s English, and so our small talk was usually terse and limited). Donald Trump had been sworn in as president not long before, and Obama’s “Hope” poster seemed all the more past its expiration date. On my way home, I would usually walk past the Polish ambassador’s house in Thielallee, marked with an unmistakably humongous national flag, as if to announce that my country, too, was poised to make itself great again. I was staying right around the corner, next to a school-turned-refugee-center, above a pizzeria frequented by Dahlem’s finest, most of whom looked old enough to have witnessed JFK’s Ich bin ein Berliner speech.

Other than the few ridiculously overpriced Mediterranean places, the neighborhood appeared numb and lethargic, cocooned in nostalgia for its former glory. I could find no place to catch the upcoming Super Bowl, which I had tried to watch every year over the course of my dissertation, not so much for the football as for its commercial breaks. A global pastime in its own right, the Super Bowl commercial marathon had already provided me with several primary references for my project. There was no sports bar within walking distance from my
Wohngemeinschaft, so I settled for a four-pack of Berliner Kindl and streamed the event from home.

Two clips of notice were aired throughout the game, one for a building materials company, the other for America’s best-selling beer company. Both were immigration-themed and at variance with the new administration’s controversial security policies. In a manner evocative of Michael Berry’s Frontera, 84 Lumber’s Complete the Journey166 featured a perilous journey of a mother and her child through the Mexican desert and across the newly built border wall that the woman’s husband unwittingly helped to erect. And yet, the two migrants managed to get through to the United States, as it eventually turned out that the part of the structure raised by the husband/father was in fact a gate that opened, somewhat miraculously, once the little girl pulled out a home-knitted U.S. flag from her backpack and held it up against the wall in silent supplication. Similarly, Budweiser’s Born the Hard Way167 recounted the transatlantic journey of Adolphus Busch, and his subsequent meeting with Eberhard Anheuser in Saint Louis in 1852, which marked the establishment of America’s (and the world’s) largest beer producer, Anheuser-Busch Companies, LLC. Filled with numerous ‘Go back home!’ and ‘We don’t want you here’ shouts from Busch’s future compatriots, the brewer’s near-fatal passage down the Mississippi culminated on a high note, mostly thanks to his vision and determination (throughout the commercial, Busch is seen incessantly fine-tuning his ideas and mastering the language of his second homeland, albeit with a noticeable German accent).

While ostensibly anti-Trump (Fox TV even threatened to pull the 84 Lumber commercial for being “too political”\(^{168}\)), the two ads nonetheless promote the continuously updated neoconservative myth of America as a land of limitless opportunities for social and economic advancement. These two narratives distill and refurbish familiar Frontier/Borderland plots, projecting Rooseveltian narratives onto contemporary times, and aiming to monetize on nostalgic patriotism generated in the process. Contrary to Snickers’s (eventually unaired) self-reflexive, Western-themed Super Bowl meta-commercial\(^ {169}\)—in which the hungry Adam Driver involuntarily causes the collapse of an entire Wild West film set, while the actors playing his antagonists get hit with paintball bullets, as the director keeps shooting in a desperate attempt to salvage the scene—the 84 Lumber and Budweiser clips utilize Western and Borderland film topoi in ways that help perpetuate the ideological agenda of market deregulation and campy patriotism, similarly to the clips analyzed in the course of this dissertation.

Out of twenty four companies whose commercials were run during Super Bowl LI, two turned to (post)Western aesthetics to advertise their products (in fact, in the past few years Budweiser has routinely fashioned its Super Bowl commercials using folksy Western themes). The continuous presence of Western topoi in television commercials aired during America’s most watched television event, and the persistent recurrence of those themes in political ad campaigns released at times of crisis (9/11, economic recession) may be seen as a symptom (granted, a minor one) of the indefatigable efforts of American corporations and neoconservative political


elites to uphold the socio-economic status through nostalgia-themed, consumerist appeasement.

In this regard, the Western’s pulp formulas (updated and contemporized) seem to play a similar role in the production of restorative political narratives, on the one hand, and in the pitching of “retrotyped”\(^{170}\) consumer goods, on the other, much the way they did at the time of their origin during the Gilded Age. And while the Western no longer plays the role of a primary platform for neoconservative values (where it has been effectively replaced by its sci-fi/superhero/cop/war movie offspring), I have tried to demonstrate that, in certain respects, it continues to function as an auxiliary in the culture industry that assists in substantiating the ideologies of military interventionism and market deregulation. The persistent recurrence of the neoconservative brand of the Hollywood Western, along with the numerous applications of its topoi in the ideologization of political notions and consumable goods, seems all the more fitting in the era of precipitous wealth disparities so infamous they have prompted many on the political left to refer to it as the New Gilded Age. The continuous rehashing of reactionary Western formulas in sectors targeting some of the most affected by the inevitable cognitive dissonance between the values they have adopted as their own, and the geometrical progress in the concentration of wealth that has invalidated those very tenets, suggests that such transhistorical comparisons, to paraphrase Paul Krugman, are not hyperbolic; they are the simple truth.\(^{171}\)

\(^{170}\) Consistent with the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I use the term “retrotyping” in the sense proposed by Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley (83-94), i.e. as an exploitative practice of commodification of the past idealized through popular memory, with the hope of (re)activating nostalgic feelings and values as leverage for purchases of goods.

Like most genre formulas, the Western has been appropriated by a number of ideologies throughout its history, often by different political factions at the same time. As a foundation myth, it has been used descriptively and prescriptively, as an energizer for counter-cultures and a sanction for dominant ideologies. In my analysis of the uses of the Western topoi in a number of commercials across different public sphere and market sectors, I have aimed to demonstrate that—aside from serving as a vessel of inciting, formally innovative critique (which it has to a large extent become in the recent years)—the Western nonetheless also continues to lend itself to conservative cultural and economic projects. I hope that in the case studies conducted throughout this dissertation I have demonstrated a plethora of strategies—moral panic, othering, naturalization of history, restorative nostalgia, artificial reconstruction of the voice, and retrotyping—in which neoconservative inflections of Western topoi have nursed the interests of the security state and the corporate capital since 9/11. While attempting to sustain these oft-compromised notions, the analyzed cinematic and commercial narratives help attenuate the growing sense of insecurity (while also triggering a sense of adventure) by managing anxieties through familiar, anachronistic tropes, and channeling them through commodities mythicized into tokens of stability and authenticity. In keeping with John Ehrenreich’s study of Third Wave Capitalism, these narratives—to various degrees of success—contribute to the perpetuation of individualistic ideology of deregulation circulated in neoconservative, corporate-owned media (164). The temporal correlations between national traumas (9/11 and the War on Terror / small business foreclosures and corporate bailouts during the recession), on the one hand, and the dissemination of Frontier simulations illustrated by the discussed films and commercials, on the other, point to the longevity of the myth of the Western in Anglo-American popular culture,
and to its tirelessness as a selling point for various symbolically-charged commodities. The Marlboro Man may be dead, but his specter continues to lure embattled white men to come to where the flavor (once supposedly) was.
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