

ROAD CULTURE -
An Investigation of the Road
as a Means of Mental and Physical Exploration.

An extended research essay submitted in partial requirement of

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Abstract:

Chapter one considers various manifestations of the concept of 'journey' and how they have changed over history. The Odyssean journey that the hero undertakes to reach a point of self-realisation is investigated. This leads to a other discussion of types of journeys such as pilgrimages, as well as 'wandering'. These are contrasted with the twentieth century perceptions of journey. Questions of travel are then dealt with: how the nature of the traveller's path has changed over the centuries, various points of travel and gender, and how in the last century solitary travel has been transformed into mass tourism.

The second chapter deals specifically with the motorcar, the mobility it enables and how it has led to the rise of a roadside culture. Different factors that influenced the rise of the motorcar are looked at. The motorcar as a cell and eroticism and the car are also investigated. The twentieth century city, it's restructuring, as well as the highway systems is discussed.

In Chapter Three, the sense of freedom that the motorcar created is considered in particular reference to escape, aimlessness, and road weariness, as well as the landscape as a symbol of freedom. This leads to a discussion on the notion of speed, the sense of power and the romanticisation of death in car crashes.

Chapter Four investigates masculinity and the road. The frontier as a place in the psyche of the male is also dealt with. The road as a means of testing and regaining masculinity in the mid-twentieth century is

considered. Issues of the male domination of the land and the feminine are discussed, with the chapter ending with a brief examination of the woman as traveller.

Lastly the masters' submission exhibition, entitled *RODE* is discussed with direct reference to the theories investigated in the previous chapters. Individual works as well as the methodology are looked at closely.

Contents:

1. Introduction.

2. Chapter One: **Journey**: the purposeful journey, self-realisation, pilgrimage, wandering, the twentieth century, 'homecoming'. **Travel**: the path, travel and masculinity, travel and femininity, the 'anxiety of belatedness', tourism.

3. Chapter Two: **The Motorcar**: speed, consumer identity, the car as a cell, eroticism and the car. **Mobility**: immobility, aimless movement. **Roadside**: restructuring the city.

4. Chapter Three: **Freedom**: landscape, aimlessness, escape, road weariness. **Speed**: accidents, cyberspace.

5. Chapter Four: **Masculinity**: the frontier, the psychic frontier, regaining masculinity, the land and the feminine, the woman as traveller.

6. Conclusion.

7. Masters' Submission Exhibition: **RODE**.

8. Illustrations.

9. Bibliography.

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Introduction:

Road culture has developed over the centuries due to military conquest, trade, communication and exploration. This culture originated in the ancient civilizations whilst the model of journeying was set out in the epic poems of antiquity. What began as the Homeric hero's exploration into self through physical exploration into the foreign, developed into the concept of the journey as purposeful because it revealed unknown truths. Twentieth century road culture was instead plagued by the knowledge that true physical exploration into the *unknown* was no longer possible.

The first chapter investigates the journey as a physical exploration with trials that test the individual and lead to self-realisation. This chapter also looks at travel and tourism, and whether these have the potential to bring the individual to the same conclusion. The second chapter deals with what the motorcar has brought to journeying. It also looks at how the driver is enabled or disabled by the motorcar. This leads to the next chapter, which looks specifically at the sense of freedom and speed that the motorcar has brought with it.

Chapter four is about the male driver's attempt 're-establish' his masculinity by re-inventing/reviving the notion of the frontier. Issues of domesticity, man's domination over the land and his relationship to women are all investigated as means of exploring and expressing masculinity. The chapter ends with a brief look at the female traveller's mental and physical explorations.

Popular notions of roadside culture have been illustrated by examples of travel literature, road movies, and music.

"We're on a road to nowhere"

- Talking Heads, *Road to Nowhere*

Chapter One

Journey

The Purposeful Journey

The journey has been a metaphor for spiritual evolution since antiquity. It was with the journey as an end in itself and not in the attainment of the goal, that the importance lay. A hero would be chosen by the gods to pursue a certain quest, “The adventures make him; he does not in a subjective sense make the adventures.”¹ The hero would experience trials, tests and adventures which were acted upon him by supernatural forces to mould him into maturity, so as to be fit for the role or duty he had to fulfil to his fellow man. “He partly belongs to the world. He is seen in its varied settings, responds to them singly... and becomes their pupil.”² The hero set out alone on a journey to fulfil a particular quest, the journey gave him a deeper understanding of himself and of truths which were often hidden from the understanding of mortal men. The value of the Odyssean journey was that the journey and its successful completion revealed the ability of an individual, the ‘hero’, who was always male. This became the model of journeys throughout the ages - from the ancient epics of Western literature through to pilgrimages and voyages of discovery.

¹ Finley 1978.24

² *ibid.*25.

Self- realization

The journey is also a metaphor for ‘growing up’ and a search for self-realisation.³ Heroes in western literature were “... boundary testers, travelling conspicuously through some stretch of life and lighting it up for the rest of us.”⁴ In undertaking the journey, the hero would realise universal truths about life and maturity. Alienated from his self as a result of his pursuit of glory, the only way for him to achieve spiritual wholeness would be a confrontation with what appears to be a negation of the self.⁵ Often though they would fail their initiation rites, as with Gilgamesh whose journey with Enkidu to the Cedar Forest sees him shunning responsibility in favour of male bonding.⁶ In *The Aeneid*, the gods had a great stake in the journey of their hero, but they chose one who lacked assertiveness, confidence, and manliness. The journey is used by the gods to mould him towards the ideal figure of divine love and duty towards his kin.⁷

The journey to the Land of the Dead is a metaphor which suggests the opportunity to discover or uncover deep truths ordinarily hidden from mortals and to confront one’s own mortality. As a journey to inner darkness, it can be a reflection of the hero’s delving into his own innermost recesses,⁸ “ It is an outward representation of an inward process.”⁹

³ Van Nortwick 1992.35

⁴ *ibid.*37.

⁵ *ibid.*36.

⁶ *ibid.*21.

⁷ *ibid.*98.

⁸ *ibid.*130.

⁹ *ibid.*33.

In the Odyssean model the journey ends where it started but the hero has changed. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the king has evolved from the arrogant, dominating male of the poem's opening, full of pride and eager to distinguish himself from lesser beings, into a wiser man, accepting the limitations that his mortal side imposes.¹⁰ In the two parts of *The Odyssey* - the travels and homecoming - Odysseus is reduced from a victor to a lone man, with a greater sense of humility and a deeper understanding of his place amongst other men.^{11 12}

Pilgrimage

The idea of the pilgrimage can be traced back to the primitive idea of local deities. These divine beings controlled the movements of men and nature and exercised control over supernatural forces within certain boundaries. It was only within these boundaries that they could favour or destroy men. When a man from a mountain tribe would find himself in the plains and in need of divine help, he would make a journey back to the mountains to petition help from his gods. It is thus the broken tribesman who originated the pilgrimage.¹³ A religious believer in any culture who looks beyond the local temple, church or shrine, and feels the call of some distant holy place, and resolves to journey

¹⁰ *ibid.*32.

¹¹ Finley 1978.1

¹² In the classic epic, Penelope waits while Odysseus wanders. As he intrudes and seduces his way through time and space, he creates an ego of epic independence, positing it over and against a world of dangerous opponents. Enemies and elements, monsters and magical ladies exist only to strengthen his self-identity and to test the power of his autonomy. After his separation from home, he completes the archetypal hero's journey by returning to faithful Penelope...He is loosed; she is bound. To be "loosed away from" is the etymology of the Absolute: that which is complete in itself, independent of and separated from everything else. (Keller 1986.7)

¹³ *The New International Encyclopedia*, New York, 1910 xvi ,20 etc

there, is a pilgrim. Whatever the goal,¹⁴ whatever the culture, the general features of a pilgrim's journey are remarkably similar. It is primarily a popular rite of passage, a venture into religious experience rather than into a transition to higher status. A particular pilgrimage has considerable resilience over time and the power of revival. The pilgrimage has the typically three-stage form of a rite of passage: separation (the start of the journey), the Liminal stage (the journey itself, the sojourn at the shrine, and the encounter with the sacred) and the reaggregation (the homecoming). Movement is the pilgrim's element into which he or she is drawn by the spiritual magnetism of a pilgrimage centre.¹⁵

Wandering

Throughout literary history the wanderer has traditionally been opposed to the pilgrim with themes of movement and straying from the path that can also be traced in many religious texts, in the Bible as well as the teachings of Buddha. At the age of twenty nine, Buddha bade farewell to his family, the throne, and kingdom to become an ascetic in search of truth and enlightenment. His decision was based on compassionate altruism; it was an act of sacrifice and farsightedness. In the process he had to undergo great hardship and personal discomfort. His act of going forth from home into the wilderness is known as The Great Renunciation; a sacrifice for the benefit of the whole of humanity. His trials, sufferings and hardship lasted for six years.¹⁶ When Jesus was driven into wandering in the

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The goal of the journey, the sacred site, may be Banaras, India (Hindu); Jerusalem, Israel (Jewish, Christian, Muslim); Mecca, Saudi Arabia (Muslim); Meisron, Israel (Jewish); Ise, Japan (Shinto); Saikoku, Japan (Buddhist) etc.

¹⁵ Eliade 1987.328-33

¹⁶ www.House-of-Buddha.com

wilderness by the Holy Spirit¹⁷ it is God who thrust him into confrontation with Satan. Through his temptation, the devil assessed whether Jesus met the standard of faithfulness expected of the Son of God.¹⁸

The desert stories of *Exodus* and *Numbers* almost always combine the elements of danger and divine help. The wilderness is the place that threatens the very existence of the chosen people, but it is also the stage which illumines God's power and readiness to dispel this threat. When the people of Israel wandered through the wilderness, overcoming hunger and temptation, their belief was strengthened.¹⁹ For the prophets of Israel and the accounts of *Exodus*, the time in the desert is that of been led astray. In the desert mankind, deprived of social support and helplessly confronted by supernatural forces, is beset by anguish and fear. The desert is a region of savage beasts and malevolent spirits, of demons of all kinds. It is the place to which the rejected and exiled are banished. But another, parallel attitude also developed: the desert as apprenticeship and self-knowledge. As a terrain of struggle, the desert leads to the discovery of one's own being and, thereby, to the affirmation of the individual. At a more evolved stage of religious thought, it is the privileged place of divine revelation. The desert becomes a refuge from corruption and depravity, a place for the romantic yearning of the world-weary city dweller for solitude, for retreat to the desert, where he can find peace. Wandering has also been linked to immorality and promiscuity, especially

¹⁷ "And as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." (*Mark* 1:10-13)

¹⁸ Garret 1998.55-6

¹⁹ Mauser 1963.21

in relation to female travellers. Milton's Adam cannot understand Eve's "desire for wandering", which he perceives as coming from somewhere beyond his parochial existence. This dangerous blending of foreign with familiar was seen to contaminate and shame the woman's body as well as the home.²⁰

From the viewpoint of people who lived in a fertile oasis or in a city, the desert was laden with negative images of sterility, darkness and death. In China, a recurrent theme in historical writing is the conflict between settled people and nomads, farm and pasture, and culture and barbarism. Chinese poetry on the desert, is filled with a sense of desolation, melancholy, and death.²¹ In

Hebraic-Christian thought, the wilderness signifies the unsown; it is a howling wasteland, a realm of evil spirits beyond God's presence and even beyond his control. One explanation of the desert waste is that it was a consequence of God's curse: Adam's Fall brought with it the decay of the earth.²² In *Deuteronomy*, Moses warned his people that if they did not heed the commandments of the Lord, "their heaven shall be brass, their earth shall be iron, and their rain shall be powder and dust."²³

The Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century the Homeric journey became a 'trip.' Echoing the modern living experience, it becomes fleeting, unexplained, and inconclusive. Henry Ford saw life "not as a location, but as a journey... Everything is a flux, and was meant to be." In place of the epic poem, the short story is

²⁰ Lawrence 1994.16.

²¹ Kemal & Gaskell 1993.143

²² Genesis 3:17

²³ 18:23

now seen to lend itself to the modern journey in that it explores the “texture of transition, of feeling foreign and feeling at home”. The modern protagonist is no longer a hero but a subject struggling with feelings of displacement and alienation.²⁴ The model of the Odyssean journey is questioned further by Serres who subverts the idea of the linear journey and replaces it with a sense of chaos and disorder - multiple crossings, displacements and interconnections.²⁵

‘Homecoming’

But since the middle of the twentieth century the idea of homecoming has been characterised as road-and-world-weary. The rock musicians, The Rolling Stones, embarked on their path as rebel-nomads and returned as a derelict cast of tattered vagabonds, drifters and fugitives “all footsore on the road to nowhere”. Their initial strutting bravado ended as ragged, burnt-out decrepitude (*Torn and Frayed*), battered resilience (*Soul Survivor*), and as a desperate plea for salvation (*Let it Loose*).²⁶ In an endless expression of the longing to come home, the twentieth century’s would-be heroes of male rock depicted idealized images of women and femininity, proclaiming a wish to return to the womb, the ultimate return to the journey’s beginning.²⁷

²⁴ Dally & Dawson 1998.xii.

²⁵ Lawrence 1994.7. Announcing that the linear had ceased to be a roadway through the undergrowth of Nature, and that line was to turn back in on itself, images of circles began to appear in the visual imagery of the 1960’s. The linear was complete, and henceforth line would flow into line in endless circularity. (Halley 1985.152). The term *centre of the world* refers to that place where all essential modes of being come together; where communication and even passage among them is possible. The centre of the world is the heart of reality, where the real is fully manifest. Since the centre stands apart as the extraordinary space where the real is integral, it is always a sacred space, qualitatively different from mundane space. (Eliade 1997.166)

²⁶ Reynolds & Press 1995.53

²⁷ *ibid.*xii.

Travel

“To travel implies a movement between fixed points, from a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary which intimates an eventual return and a potential homecoming.”²⁸

The earliest documented travel dates from around 3200 B.C. when the Pharaoh Snefru brought back forty ships from Byblus in Phoenicia and when Hannu led an expedition to the limits of the known world, the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula around 2750 B.C. Herodotus, the Greek historian who began his travels around 445 B.C., details in his writings the quality of the roads he travelled on.²⁹ In the Roman Empire and when Rome was the power in the land, its citizens enjoyed comfort and travelling. The Latin word *viaticum*, meaning everything that a person would require for a journey, describes this concept.³⁰ With the advent of good roads and routes by Roman times, the path had not only become important but is often invested with religious import, from the *Royal Road* of Persia, to Christianity’s *Pilgrim’s Way* and Buddhism’s *Heavenly Gate*.

The Path

"How do you expect to arrive at the end of your own journey if you take the road to another man’s city? How do you expect to reach your own perfection by leading somebody else’s life?"³¹ This

²⁸ Chambers 1970.5

²⁹ The importance of good roads and safe passage is evident when one reads the descriptions given by Herodotus (*Histories* 5.52-53): “The nature of the road is as follows [the Royal Road of Persia]. All along it are royal rest stops and excellent lodgings and the entire road runs through inhabited and safe country.” (Humphrey, Oleson & Sherwood 1998.410)

³⁰ Strong 1956.25

³¹ Thomas Merton *New Seeds of Contemplation*. In Van Nortwick 1992.183

concept, to tread a different path to the rest, and of the path as a metaphor for the life one chooses to live, is vastly different to that of ancient literature. Previously, the protagonist was expected to remain on one 'right' path, with tracks and markings that were representative of moral rules and guidelines, and deviating meant falling into sin or immorality.³² But since the beginning of the Enlightenment, man alone has been considered the master of his own destiny, not the pagan deities of Antiquity nor the Judeo-Christian god. The hero was now encouraged to explore his own individuality and to choose his own path, rather than fulfil a duty to his fellow man.

The 'hard journey',³³ like the pilgrimages to holy places, has the sufferings of the ascetic who is ever seeking the path towards himself, towards the 'centre' of his being. The way is arduous and fraught with peril because it is, in fact, a rite of passing and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to god. To reach the centre is to achieve a consecration, an initiation. The original meaning and function of the labyrinth was the notion of the defending of a centre: a city, a tomb or a sanctuary. The labyrinth in essence represented the access to the sacred, to immortality, to absolute reality by means of initiation.³⁴

Travel and Masculinity

'Travel' - the term retains its many historical associations with a Western, white, middle class and

³² Humphrey, Oleson, & Sherwood 1998.419

³³ Whether it is a Cosmic Tree, a Tree of Everlasting Life or a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the road to it is a 'hard path', sown with obstacles: the tree is in inaccessible places, guarded by monsters. Not everyone who tries reaches it, nor, once arrived, manages to win the duel he must fight with the monster mounting guard. It is the lot of heroes to defeat all these obstacles, and slay the monster which guards the approach to the tree or herb of immortality, the Golden Apples, the Golden Fleece, or whatever it may be. What symbolises absolute reality, sacred power and immortality, is hard of access. Symbols of this sort are situated in a "centre"; in other words they are always closely guarded and to get to them is equivalent to an initiation, a 'heroic' or 'mystical' conquest of immortality. (Eliade.1985.380)

³⁴ Eliade 1958.380-82

with a generally, privileged male. Freud believed that a great part of the pleasure of travel lies in the fulfilment of the young male's wish to run away from home and the essence of their success would be to get further than their fathers.³⁵ 'Travel' also suggests the "motion of the free, arbitrary, *adventurous* sort associated with metropolitan behaviour".³⁶ In a sense, the idea of adventure depends on distance: the physical distance between the poles of familiar and foreign. This structure of difference between here and there often oversimplifies the opposition between home and the foreign. In the Oedipal narrative of travel, home represents the safe, feminised space to be left behind for the terrain of adventure.³⁷ In psychological terms, home's very existence as a world of familiarity and routine, devoted to nurture and comfort, appears to enhance in some individuals a desire for the unfamiliar of inhospitable places.

Get your motor runnin`
 Head out on the highway
 Lookin` for adventure
 And whatever comes my way
 - Steppenwolf *Born to be wild*

Stefan Zweig speaks of the "unrelenting masculinity" of adventure and the defensive strategy behind the exclusion of women. The adventure "represents a poignant male fantasy: moved by his desire to vanquish the many faces of woman, he reinvents the shape of manhood itself so as to free it from its multiple attachment to the feminine." He notes that in his anxiety, man tries to "exile this frightening female energy to far away" but it reappears in the form of obstacles that the hero must vanquish

³⁵ Freud 1936.247

³⁶ Appadurai 1992.34-37

³⁷ Lawrence 1994.4.

during the course of his journey.³⁸

Travel and Femininity

Generally women were only allowed to figure as symbols of home and purity; women as active participants in travel can barely be imagined.³⁹ With the British colonialism, published women travellers were potentially revolutionary in showing that, in direct contradiction to the discourses, they could in fact travel alone without coming to harm. However, this revolutionary possibility was often undermined because they were labelled as 'eccentric', which was a way of warning off other women in case they were tempted to pursue such behaviour in their own lives.⁴⁰ Travel literature by both sexes explores not only potential personal freedoms but also cultural constraints. In flights of the imagination, as well as on the road, home is never totally left behind. That is why travel literature explores the tension between the thrilling possibilities of the unknown and the comfort of the familiar, between a desire for escape and a sense that one can never be outside a binding culturally network. Travel literature by women created a permeable membrane between home and the foreign, domestic confinement and freedom on the road.⁴¹

³⁸ Zweig 1974 in Lawrence 1994.51

³⁹ Mills 1991.3

⁴⁰ *ibid.*96.

⁴¹ Lawrence 1994.19

Tourism

In modern travel literature one encounters travellers of various kinds who chart their path of 'explorations' while recognising that they follow in someone else's footsteps. This anxiety of belatedness is found in both the narrative account of travel as well as the voyage of discovery.⁴²

Though modern day people travel, its function as a significant transformative experience has been lost. This is sometimes attributed to mass tourism in that it has created a sense of an homogenised world.⁴³ The anthropologist Dean MacCannell's "anti-tourist" is the "wannabe" tourist, catered for in Sunday supplements with advertisements for expeditions and independent travel. Here the modern traveller tries to chase after "vestiges of a lost reality", writes Levi-Strauss, "we are all tourists now, and there is no escape".⁴⁴ In Paul Fussell's book *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars (1980)*, he asserts that tourism is all we have and travel is no longer possible. This illustrates the "end of journey" where tourism and travel are at polar opposites: while travel is elitist, tourism caters for the lowest common denominator, and while travellers explore, tourists go to designated pseudo-sites.⁴⁵

In his book *America*, Baudrillard discusses the idea of 'pure-travel' as opposed to the impure travel of tourism: "in fact the conception of a trip without any objective and which is, as a result,

⁴² Susan Sontag's short story *Unguided Tour* also suggests that it is impossible to have a travel experience that is unburdened by the weight of previous generations of responses, even if trying hard "to see the beautiful things with an open mind" Sontag 1978.371-81, Lawrence 1994.x in Kaplan 1994.246

⁴³ Elsner & Rubies 1999.232

⁴⁴ *ibid.*234.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*232.

endless, only develops gradually for me. I reject the picturesque tourist's round, the sights, even the landscapes (only their abstraction remains in the prism of the scorching heat). Nothing is further from pure travelling than tourism or holiday travel. That is why it is best done in the banality of desert, or in the equally desert-like banality of a metropolis - not at any stage regarded as places of pleasure or culture, but seen televisually as scenery, as scenarios."⁴⁶ Max Weber called the problem with mass or modern tourism, "rationalization". This can be defined as "the increasing effort to ensure predictability from one time or place to another. In a rational society people prefer to know what to expect in all settings and at all times."⁴⁷ This is thus an avoidance of the disruptive, revelatory experience that travel sought, or seeks, to achieve. The late twentieth century desire to travel but simultaneously to stay "at home" is experienced through reading or watching television. In Don DeLillo's *White Noise* a character says, "for most people, there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their T.V. sets."⁴⁸ In Paul Verhoevens' 1990 film *Total Recall*, the protagonist, a construction worker in 2084, goes to ReCall, a travel agency which neurologically implants artificial memories of a holiday journey to Mars. In his high-tech chair he enjoys the pleasures of a 'vacation' without moving.⁴⁹ This notion of travel without moving is a popular metaphor in the computer-software marketing. "Where would you like to go today?" suggests that the software has created a global village one step beyond television. The Internet acts as a world

⁴⁶ Kaplan 1994.78-9

⁴⁷ This has been realized by what Macdonalds have done to the global food industry that since has become a model for many different kinds of commercial, social and cultural organizations. This results in "travelling as a version of being at home...Spain is home-plus-sunshine; India is home-plus-servants, Africa is home-plus-elephants-and-lions, Ecuador is home-plus-volcanoes. (Elsner & Rubies 1992.233)

⁴⁸ *ibid.*248

⁴⁹ *ibid.*248

wide web or a cyberspace where national affiliations and travel is now redundant. The only frontiers thus become economic and technical: 'travellers' are those who can afford the gadgets and know how to use them.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Gibson 1984.67 in Elsner & Rubies 1992.249

Chapter Two

The Motorcar

Mother Shipton, witch and prophetess predicted 500 years ago in *Prophecy*: “Carriages without horses shall go, and accidents will fill the world with woe.”⁵¹

The ‘Devil Wagons’ of 1896 began their rush into society first as “the instrument of the adventurous”, then as the “toy of the rich”, then as the “ambition of the poor”, and in time as the “servant of everyone”.⁵² To many it had a mission, as if ordained. Herbert Laid Towle in the 1913 *Scribner's Magazine*, felt that the automobile provided “greater liberty, greater fruitfulness of time and effort, brighter glimpses of the wide and beautiful world, more health and happiness - these are the lasting benefits of the motor car... We shall thank God we live in the Motor-Car Era.”⁵³

While the automobile primarily was a replacement of the horse-drawn carriage as the transporter of goods and passengers, there are various indications that the success of the automobile is influenced by ‘non-transport’ motives. To begin with, there is the desire to “feel the wind”. Automobile

⁵¹ Shinar 1978.99

⁵² Schneider 1971.26. A piece in Harper's Weekly of 1902 swells with romance: "... the road comes moving towards me like a bride waving palms, rhythmically keeping in time to some melody of gladness...now the entire road is one long succession of arrivals." Good tidings of the automobile were everywhere. "It has brought God's green fields and pure air seemingly nearer to our lives of industry," reported *Country Life* in 1911.

⁵³ *ibid.*28.

advertisements sell cars on the basis of image and status (“sexy” look, “slim and elegant contours” and “the people who drive”). But the greatest virtues of the car have been described as the feelings of freedom, power, and a sense of superiority.⁵⁴

Speed

The bicycle, observed Sylvester Baxter, “quickened the perceptive faculties of young people and made them more alert”. A French critic attributed the excitement of cycling to the sheer pleasure of movement, whilst the writer Paul Adam wrote that it created a “cult of speed” for a generation that wanted to “conquer time and space”.⁵⁵ The automobile captured the imagination in the 1890s and between 1896 and 1900 at least ten journals about ‘automobilism’ appeared in Britain. Attention was on the ever breaking speed records, which by 1906 had exceeded 200 kilometres per hour. Commenting on its impact the French novelist Octave Mirbeau wrote that under the impact of the automobile the mind of modern man had become an “endless track”. “His thoughts, feelings, and loves are a whirlwind. Everywhere life is rushing insanely like a cavalry charge, and it vanishes cinematographically like trees and silhouettes along a road. Everything around man jumps, dances, gallops in a movement out of phase with his own.”⁵⁶ The mechanical euphoria associated with speed creates an illusion of effortless existence and absence from responsibility.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Shinar 1978.38

⁵⁵ Kern 1983.112-13

⁵⁶ *ibid.*113-14.

⁵⁷ Baudrillard 1968

“Just as for the laws on speed limits, we are talking about acts of government, in other words of the political control of the highway, aiming precisely at limiting the extraordinary power of assault that motorization of the masses creates. This frustration inflicted on the driver (who is suddenly deprived of the ‘high’ of high speeds as he is of alcohol), this vehicular prohibition is also constitution by the state of a new beyond.”⁵⁸

Consumer Identity

The acquiring of a sought-after identity through the purchase of a motorcar was and still is a very definite reality. The ultimate promise about acquired identity is made in *Vanity Fair* by an advertisement for the La Fayette: "He Who Owns A La Fayette is envied by all who truly love fine things, quiet, beautiful and strong, this car rules any road it travels."⁵⁹ As important a symbolic object to *Vanity Fair* as it was to *The Great Gatsby*, each car emanated a social character - some did grant middle-class reliability, most, however, had considerable ambitions. These products implied that the consumers were themselves "leading", "powerful", or even "perfect".⁶⁰

The Car as a Cell

The enclosed space of the vehicle has served to create a sense of protection and invulnerability for its occupants. In cities, youths often “cruise the streets” with music blaring, enacting a territorial will to power that can not be ignored and is rarely challenged. In whatever ways the occupants of the vehicle are or feel themselves to be disempowered in other aspects of everyday life, when they

⁵⁸ Virillio 1977.27

⁵⁹ Berman 1994.19

⁶⁰ *ibid.*18.

cruise, they “reign supreme”.⁶¹ The motorcar thus becomes a cell. This reflects the twentieth century’s decay of the social and the rise of the interconnective. One enters another cell, the automobile, to travel from the cell of the home.⁶²

In Chris Marker’s documentary/film *Le Joli Mai* the car represents a no-mans-land between work and home, an empty vector of transport. “I have no more good moments,” the character states, “except those I spend between my house and my office. I drive. I drive.” The car is also an abode, an alternative zone of everyday life with a closed realm of intimacy, without constraints that apply to the intimacy of home. Home means a regressive attachment to domestic relationships and habits, whereas the intimacy of the car arises from an accelerated space-time metabolism and, inextricably, from the chance of an accident which may never occur but is always imagined. The car achieves an extraordinary compromise, for it makes it possible to be simultaneously at home and away from it.⁶³

The act of driving aimlessly, without direction, even “going nowhere”, now seems natural for the driver. The *voyager/voyeur*⁶⁴ even resents going somewhere or toward someone; to visit a person or to go out seems to require superhuman effort. The driver becomes only content in the narrow cell of his vehicle, strapped into his seat. Comparable to the moviegoer, the driver knows in advance what he is going to see.⁶⁵ The locomotive illusion allows the *voyager/voyeur* to project his

⁶¹ Swiss, Sloop & Herman 1998.14

⁶² Halley 1985.154

⁶³ Baudrillard 1968.66-7

⁶⁴ Baudrillard 1968.67

⁶⁵ Virillio 1991.68

own fantasies.⁶⁶

Eroticism and the Car

The mobility of the car removes many of the barriers between ourselves and others: dynamism, infatuation, daring. After World War I cars moved the mating dance out of the parlor, off the porch swing and away from hovering mothers. No longer were choices limited to those living within horse-and- buggy range. A car was “an incredible engine of escape” that meant freedom, privacy, comfort. The point of this new ‘dating’ wasn’t necessarily marriage. Men now used cars and, more than ever before, money to control the playing field. “The ease with which a couple can secure absolute privacy, and the spirit of reckless abandon which high speed and moonlight drives engender have combined to break down the traditional barriers between the sexes.”⁶⁷ This was also aided by the rise of the drive-in theatre in the 1930's, where a whole subculture of ‘making out’ in public began to emerge.

The freedom of the driver’s situation, fostered erotic relationships by bringing into play a dual narcissistic projection onto one phallic object (the car) or a single objectified function (speed). The eroticism of the car is therefore not that of an active sexual approach but, rather, the passive eroticism of narcissistic seductiveness. The erotic significance of the object here plays the same role as the image (real or mental) in masturbation.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *ibid.* 66.

⁶⁷ Robert Angell 1928 at www.discovery.com

⁶⁸ Baudrillard 1968.68

Depending on the way it is used and its particular features (from the race car to the luxurious limousine), the motorcar may be:

“invested with either the meaning of power or with the meaning of refuge: it may be a projectile or a dwelling place. But basically, like all functional mechanical objects, it is experienced - and by men, woman and children alike as a phallus, as an object of manipulation, care and fascination. The car is a projection both phallic and narcissistic, a force transfixed by its own image.”⁶⁹

Mobility

The first roughly trodden path is linked to the parallel traffic ways of the world's great cities by the basic instinct which roads and travels represent. This is the need to survive seen in all migratory paths, both ancient and modern. This instinct led men to follow birds and animals towards somewhere greener, safer, more plentiful,⁷⁰ to lands dreamt of since the Biblical “land of milk and honey”. In the twentieth century migration and mobility are interconnected forming what Paul Cartier terms a “migrant perspective”⁷¹. It is a viewpoint that refuses to distinguish between location (being there) and movement (going elsewhere).

“An authentically migrant perspective would, perhaps, be based on an intuition that the opposition between here and there is itself a cultural construction, a consequence of thinking in terms of fixed entities and defining them oppositionally. It might begin by regarding

⁶⁹ *ibid.*69.

⁷⁰ Strong 1956.14

⁷¹ Swiss, Sloop & Herman 1998.270

movement, not as an awkward interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but as a mode of being in the world. The question would be then not how to arrive, but how to move, how to identify convergent and divergent movements.⁷²

Immobility

Whilst the motorcar obviously promotes and enables mobility, it is also the cause of a culture which has created much immobility. Probably the greatest social fault of the automobile is that whenever it is the principle mode of travel, access to transportation is distributed very unevenly among individuals.⁷³ Full automobility requires that a person can drive and has a car readily available, but obvious financial, age and physical factors influence this. In the ordering of suburbia, with the obvious distance to shops, libraries et cetera (that one would not encounter in the old cities planned before the automobile) even more difficulties are experienced. There are the pensioners, the housebound housewives of the one car family and the young. Suburban youths grow up without casually encountering any adults who are young or older than their parents; who have not the least concept of how their parents earn their living in places they have never seen, except on television; who are utterly bored in their neighbourhoods where there is nothing to do; who must beg their parents to chauffeur them everywhere and who are afraid of the unknown world beyond their neighbourhood.⁷⁴ Such children have little reason to learn the geography through which they are driven. This enforced immobility creates generations of socially underdeveloped, dependant individuals, who may turn to other means, such as drugs or alcohol, to combat the boredom of their

⁷² *ibid.*270.

⁷³ Schaeffer & Sclar 1975.104

⁷⁴ *ibid.*6.

situation.

Aimless Movement

The automobile has been seen to encourage a state of purposeless mobility, embarking on a journey or 'ride' without a destination in sight. In the 1920's, *The Great Gatsby* has a narrative which seems quite verbally active - full of the movement of walking, running, sailing, driving. Everyone is (in more than one sense of the term) going somewhere, but mobility is characterised as 'drifting', which is the opposite of navigation. A language of kinetic exhaustion covers arrival, journey and departure. The novel may begin with the 'Columbus story' and end with the Dutch sailors seeing Paradise regained, stories that are full of heroic purpose and provide a language of intention. But when the language is applied to the protagonists, especially in terms of navigation and manoeuvre, it describes currents and roads and journeys going nowhere.⁷⁵ Similarly, in the 1960's, the rock rebels are typified by their restlessness. Immobility is threatening, with movement itself defining them as 'free men'.⁷⁶

Roadside

The Roman road was essentially built to enable military mobility, secondly to serve the

⁷⁵ Berman 1994.43

⁷⁶ "If I'm free it's cause I'm always running" - Jimi Hendrix in Reynolds & Press 1995.49

administration (in the collection of corn and taxes), and lastly only, for the benefit of the local inhabitants.⁷⁷ In the Empire, the postal system covered great distances, with horsemen who required reliable roads, rest and supply stations at regular intervals. The stations were later expanded as merchants and travellers began to use the same roads.⁷⁸ In twelfth century Europe, a religious order was founded to perform road maintenance which came to be seen as pious work.⁷⁹ In fourteenth century England, as roads were neglected by the state, the Church took over the upkeep of roads as a religious duty. Travellers were regarded as unfortunate people whose progress on their ‘toilsome’ journey it was Christian duty to assist. Looking after the traveller was seen in the same light as waiting on the sick or caring for the poor.⁸⁰

In the twentieth century, roads developed greatly due to the rise of the private automobile in society. In 1918, as the car was mainly a social toy, it was still a superficial addition to society. In the 1920's and 1930's, with the second generation of drivers and urban development to suit the automobile, good roads became a preoccupation of the State. The Continental Highway Network, which was an extensive system of highways with new and greatly improved methods of construction was completed in the U.S.A. in the 1940's.⁸¹ Ever since Hitler built the first *autobahn*⁸² the highway

⁷⁷ Raven 1993.66

⁷⁸ Humphrey, Oelson & Sherwood 1998.409

⁷⁹ Pratt 1912.12

⁸⁰ *ibid.*11.

⁸¹ Schneider 1971.38

⁸² The *autostrada* (automobile road), was the national Italian expressway system which began in 1924 and continued into the 1980's. (www.win.tue.nl/~engels/discovery/#ancient). It is interesting to note that in totalitarian states like Germany, Italy and South Africa the road systems are highly advanced and cover the entire country enabling communication, and distribution more efficiently at greater speeds.

has commandeered the integrity of both town and country for the automobile. “It builds an organic integrity of movement while bulldozing the traditional integrity of place into splintered disarray”.⁸³

“We burn to discover,” it asked, “what it is in itself , what it grants and what it withholds, what obedience it will offer its strange master, and what new lesson the new horizon may teach us...”.⁸⁴

But the motorcar soon became no longer a luxury but a necessity. The roads were in a state of constant up-keep, and filling stations began to line the main streets of towns.

Roadside architecture flourished along the new highway system. As roads are intrinsically narrative, the concept was utilised by the Burma Shave billboards which compelled you to follow one sign to the other as it told a story. Route 66, the “Mother Road”, was lined with gas stations, motels, drive-inn restaurants, curio shops, idiosyncratic ‘monuments’.⁸⁵ When Kerouac’s *On the Road* appeared roadside America was at its peak. The road was no longer simply a means to get from one place to another, but a state of being. It was a place, which had its own residents of drifters and wanderers with their own dwelling places. Soon another road ideology triumphed: virtual highways. “In the process, the utopian projections of dreamers blossomed and fail in rapid succession, leaving behind the debris of a bizarre archaeology.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Schneider 1971.49

⁸⁴ Schneider 1971.34

⁸⁵ Andrei Codrescu in www.Britannica.com

⁸⁶ Andrei Codrescu in www.Britannica.com

Restructuring the City

Historically, cities gave emphasis to access rather than movement, with city walls, narrow streets, and enclosed courtyards functioning as access controls. The nineteenth century American city changed this, with its endlessly open grid of streets and blocks, allowing for the movement of the motorcar. This free access exchange between land and street or place and movement became virtually universal.⁸⁷ The city spread out like a multi-dimensional text that could be read, 'grasped', even understood. What made the complexity of the city readable, and immobilized its mobility, was that one could be removed or distanced while surveying it, so that all one would see are the grids and the blocks, with all the order and control of the city-planners' blueprints.⁸⁸

The automobile offered, in theory, more freedom and choice to the traveller than ever before. It caused more contact between urban and rural life, expanded production and distribution of goods, promoted travel and tourism. But, in restructuring the city, the automobile can be seen as having shattered the previous sense of order and control. It altered the previously ordered environment of human living, limited movement, congested the most valuable places, wasted resources, and was a danger to life through reckless driving, accidents and pollution. It pushed people from the desired central areas and hardened the conditions of social behaviour.⁸⁹

The convenience of the automobile freed people from having to live near rail lines or stations. After

⁸⁷ Schneider 1971.49

⁸⁸ Campbell & Kean 1997.168

⁸⁹ Schneider 1971.12

World War Two the automobile, the auto industry, urban road network and suburbs grew together in America.⁹⁰ This resulted in a dispersed geography, called 'sprawl'. It was this dispersed market which was difficult to serve with mass transportation.⁹¹

Early automobilists believed that cars would relieve both the overstuffed life in cities and the under-stimulated life on farms by bringing the two into contact. Specifically, they believed, the city man could move into the country, perhaps in motor colonies, and drive to town for work and services. But soon the urban centres became congested and required parking. Parking lots and then garages appeared, decomposing the area immediately around the town centre. Driving to work prompted the Great American Strip with its nondescript markets, used car lots, and drive-ins. The spilling out, eventually to outer suburbia, was accompanied by wider streets and boulevards.⁹² If "the road moves and controls all history", as one historian has said, then Americans were seeking their place in history by a tour de force. The campaign began as a gigantic contest between the building of cars and the building of highways.⁹³ The automobile soon made an asset of its mobility and 'grew' around the old city centre, thus creating the suburban shopping centre. These centres began as merely a block at busy intersections, consisting of shops in an L-shape with ten to twenty parking spaces, but in twenty years they grew to 10-acre giants. As the automobile accelerated the 'breakup' of the close-knit city, the drive-in idea also spread to all major activities of the city:

⁹⁰ In western European counties, postwar automobile growth was constrained by government policies, which taxed cars and fuels while mass transportation was subsidised by the state. (www.Britannica.com)

⁹¹ www.Britannica.com

⁹² Schneider 1971.40

⁹³ *ibid.*52.

industrial plants, shopping complexes, office buildings, and even the city hall. Subsequently industrial districts, shopping centres, and civic centres - all really collective drive-ins - were developed to retain a semblance of coherence and convenience.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *ibid.* 114.

Chapter Three

Freedom

The freedom to go and to return suggests a desire or intention relative to origin and destination. If one begins 'here', wants to go 'there' and is allowed to pursue this wish, then the person is 'free'.

“In the Romantic patois, coming and going becomes the pure form of freedom, an absolute unmarked by origin and destination, by interest or antipathy.”⁹⁵ With the alienated condition of wandering or vagrancy, the "freedom to come and go" becomes "freedom from" - in itself the obligation to mobility. The vagrant and the poet together constitute a society based on the twin principles of freedom of movement and freedom of speech. "Romantic vagrancy", then, describes a certain idealisation of the vagrant whose mobility is abstracted from his determining social conditions. Romantic vagrancy came to describe not an external object but an internal condition.⁹⁶

In the twentieth century, the walking vagrant had become the driving voyeur with the essence of English Romanticism echoed in the psychic American frontier. The open road had long been a symbol of American freedom from over-civilisation; it meant adventure, sex and excitement before it meant commuting. The car was the embodiment of personal power, freedom, ease, comfort, and convenience all in a single machine. It was personal power in a private compartment making its way

⁹⁵ Langan 1995.17

⁹⁶ *ibid.*17.

toward the horizon. Improved roads also heightened the sense of freedom.⁹⁷

Landscape

Landscape as a construct, has been linked to liberation, freedom and the sublime. The endless landscape, particularly that of the desert, has always seemed unbound by time.⁹⁸ The desire is still strong for a unclouded and nonhuman place that challenges normal values: for the secular equivalent of spiritual devotion, transcendental experience, an impossible perfection, the sublime. In North America and Australia, the sweeping spaces of the dry interior have been elevated to mythic status. Frontier and outback have become national symbols of hardy responsible manhood, of individualism in America and camaraderie in Australia.⁹⁹ Desert explorers such as Doughty, Lawrence and Thesiger, 'disowned' not only a landscape but their own people and culture. Exploring is the longing to be taken out of oneself and one's habitual world into something vast, overpowering, and indifferent. Alien space once again offers unity but this time by overwhelming the individual. Confronted by the immensity and power of the desert, conflicting emotions including fear are aroused and simultaneously absorbed. The loss of self in alien space - even if it provides moments of exhilaration - means death.¹⁰⁰

"Now the driver, in an attempt to identify with the vector of the road, externalizes the landscape as he speeds through it. The favoured landscape still lacks variation; neither the

⁹⁷ Gitlin 1987.5

⁹⁸ To the Anchorites, it was the embodiment of divine eternity; to Caesar dreaming of turning the frontiers of his Empire into a desert, it was State eternity. (Virillio 1991.68)

⁹⁹ Kern 1983.147

¹⁰⁰ Kemal & Gaskell 1993.154-55

city nor the field, it is the blurred space in between.¹⁰¹ Towards the end of the century the optimism began to vanish: "Now, the rolling pasture land, the cows, the isolated farmhouses... seemed to hold out nothing for him, nothing he really wanted. He drove on and on with a rising sense of hopelessness and outrage."¹⁰²

Aimlessness

The irony of the automobile is that while it may seem to offer freedom, it can draw one into inescapable dependence. This arises from the captivating charm of the car and the remaking of the environment to suit it. Automobility gradually permeates the daily behaviour of people, the purpose of institution, and the structure of the cities and countryside.¹⁰³

The end of the twentieth century is characterised by a sense of aimlessness. This is mirrored in the fast-lane, cocaine novels of the city, like Bret Easton Ellis' *Less than Zero*. Things fall apart and the world of porches is connected with the world of pickups by the constant threat of the unstable.¹⁰⁴

"Where are we going?"
 "I don't know... Just driving."
 "But that road doesn't go anywhere..."
 "That doesn't matter."
 "What does?"
 "Just that we're on it, dude," he said.
 - *Less than Zero* (1985) Buzz and Jim.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Virillio 1991.68

¹⁰² Webster 1988.127

¹⁰³ Schneider 1971.22

¹⁰⁴ Webster 1988.128

¹⁰⁵ Campbell & Kean 1997.233. Similar parallels can be draw between Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady`s journeys in the 1940's and 50's.

Escape

The driver as *voyager/voyeur* often uses the automobile as a means of escape. “Men and women who share a voyage are no longer themselves... every passenger begins his trip by leaving himself behind; yesterday they didn't know each other, tomorrow they'll be forever separated...”.¹⁰⁶ The speed of the transport only multiplies the absence: travel to forget, travel to lessen the suicidal tension by offering a substitute for it - the little death of the departure.¹⁰⁷

In America, the road during the Depression years meant escape, when many dreamt of heading west away from the cold of Chicago to the easy life of the Pacific seaboard. Commissioned in 1926, Route 66 stretched from Chicago to Los Angeles - crossing rivers, mountains, canyons and deserts. At the time it created a gateway to adventure, freedom and the possibility of escape to a better life.¹⁰⁸ The first and the hardest hit victims of the Great Depression were the farmers of the dry western prairies. Driven from their homes by dust storms and grasshoppers and mortgage companies, they headed down the road “looking for a job at honest pay”. They were the *Joads*, whose tragic history was immortalized by John Steinbeck in the *Grapes of Wrath* and in Woody Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads*.

¹⁰⁶ Virillio 1991.65

¹⁰⁷ There is a belief that some people actually do tend to resort to highway collisions as means of committing suicide, as often the experience of personality difficulties coupled with a troubled life situation leads to a disability that is considered socially (and possibly personally) unacceptable. However this disability can be made acceptable if it can be blamed on an accident or physical illness, a cause that is perceived as definitely out of the control of the person. Therefore one can see that the goal of the person is not self-destruction, but some degree of physical disablement that - paradoxically - would imaginably make life easier. (Shinar 1978.37)

¹⁰⁸ Crewe-Brown, *Bon Vivant* #6.69

“I’m blowin’ down this old dusty road,
 I’m blowin’ down this old dusty road
 I’m blowin’ down this old dusty road, Lord, Lord
 An` I ain’t a-gonna be treated this way.”¹⁰⁹

There has always been ambiguity at the core of the myth of the American road: travelling as freedom or travelling as a necessary escape, something imposed not chosen. Mark Twain’s great achievement in *Huckleberry Finn* is precisely that he combined both: the journey down the river is an adolescent drifting from the rules of society given urgency by Jim’s flight from slavery. Whilst American popular culture has been persistently autocentric, celebrating the freedom of the road, it has also recognized a darker side to travel.¹¹⁰ In the 1950’s and 1960’s, the Beat Generation followed a lifestyle of freedom and the road became their central symbol - Walt Whitman’s open road that always led to the next horizon. Paradoxically, freedom was constantly linked to the notion of flight. Whenever the scene got colourless or entangling, as sooner or later it always did, the Beats took off.¹¹¹ “They were hitchhikers upon a landscape already occupied; they depended upon the automobile as much as did any garaged suburbanite.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Woody Guthrie, 1930

¹¹⁰ Webster 1988.118

¹¹¹ Kerouac whose *On the Road*, shaped an indestructible prototype of the unfettered spirit, restless to bust free of conformity, to seek God in the wide open spaces, to hit the road, whatever the destination, whatever the consequences. "I mean, man whither goes thou?" asks the poet Carlo Marx (Allen Ginsberg). "Whither goes thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?", "Whither goes thou?" echoed Dean with his mouth open. We sat and didn't know what to say; there was nothing more to talk about any more. The only thing was to go..." (Brown 1996.22-4)

¹¹² Gitlin 1987.46

The 1960's musician Jim Morrison dealt with themes of nomadism, estrangement and flight. The Door's version of psychedelic experience was about disorientation, driven by Baudelaire's *Great Malady - the Horror of One's Home*. Morrison owned nothing and lived nowhere, with women constituting only his "soul kitchen", a nourishing hearth that provided a brief resting-place before he hit the road.¹¹³ This notion is found with the Rolling Stones, where even their name contains the notion of flight - from domesticity, emotional commitment, intimacy, ties. The image of the Stones is of marauding sexual nomads - the vagrant-poet of Romanticism now tied to sexual promiscuity as an expression of "freedom from".¹¹⁴ Gradually, the free spirited nomad of the mid-twentieth century moved towards burn-out as the years progress and optimism turned to pessimism - the road leading to nowhere was now cited as life's metaphor.¹¹⁵

The cult film *Easy Rider* is gradually shadowed by a vague foreboding feeling that "the counterculture blew it".¹¹⁶ In the later *Two Lane Blacktop*, a near-catatonic driver roams the US highway system down the road to nowhere. The film ends with the celluloid catching fire, symbolizing post-counterculture burnout.¹¹⁷ Bob Dylan's romanticism birthed a tradition of rock that includes Bruce Springsteen's anthems to (auto)mobility (with songs such as *Blinded by The Light*, *Born to Run*, *Thunder Road* ad nauseam). These songs often present small-town life as a

¹¹³ Reynolds & Press 1995.44

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*19.

¹¹⁵ Virillio 1991.68

¹¹⁶ Reynolds & Press 1995.58

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*58.

claustrophobic death trap with ‘freeway freedom’ as a modern form of going nowhere fast.¹¹⁸ Cars and speed are the heroic way out of the claustrophobic confines of small-town mediocrity. In *Thunder Road* his girl is looking for a saviour but he can only offer his car and heaven lies somewhere at the end of the highway. Springsteen joined a venerable American cast of characters, latest in line of “the last real man in America” and, like Huck Finn or the Lone Ranger, he eluded domestic attachments while he set off in search of authenticity, freedom and meaning-searching for manhood in an imagined America. “As a child, I felt the myth coming from everywhere, especially from television westerns with those big landscapes.”

Road Weariness

But as it had done to every other “last real man”, America let Springsteen down. His lyrics painted a relentlessly bleak portrait of the downward spiral of the white working class. Rebuffed and rejected, he sought escape or solace in sex, cars, male camaraderie, adventure, and rock’n roll.¹¹⁹

Actor Denis Hopper’s career delineates the trajectory of this spirit - from the hippie road-wanderer Billy in *Easy Rider*, to the psychotic drug fiend of *Blue Velvet*, to the crippled, house-bound biker Feck in *River’s Edge*. In the latter films, the directors (David Lynch and Tim Hunter respectively) were clearly playing on Hopper's aura as the rebel outsider - an iconic status derived from *Easy Rider*. It reimagined the frontier as a state of mind as much as a geographical zone, its argument is that the counterculture had more to do with the ‘true’ spirit of America, i.e. rugged individualism and

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*51.

¹¹⁹ Kimmel 1996.327

pioneer adventurism.¹²⁰ In the movie the heroes hit the road, not knowing that they're heading towards their deaths. The movie may have kicked off with revved-up anticipation but by the end, the devil-may-care optimism has become road-weary defeatism.¹²¹ The film industry gave us a haunting image of urban alienation in Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. Travis (Robert de Niro) insulated in his cab, his social contact mediated by the glass that separates him from the world, had even his passengers divided from him, glimpsed in the rearview mirror.¹²² The strong sense of freedom in the open landscape with the wind blowing through Hopper's and Fonda's hair, in *Easy Rider*, is vastly different from the claustrophobic hermetic cell of the closed taxi in the heart of New York City.

The freedom to just up and move somewhere else has always had a special utopian resonance in American culture, but the root meaning of utopia is 'no-place'.¹²³

“On the road again, like a band of gypsies
 we go down the highway
 We're the best of friends,
 Insisting that the world be turnin' our way
 And our way, is on, is on the road again
 Just can't wait to get on the road again”

- Willie Nelson, *On the Road again*

Speed

¹²⁰ Reynolds & Press 1995.56

¹²¹ *ibid.*57.

¹²² Webster 1988.114

¹²³ Reynolds & Press 1995.59

“Speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on man.”¹²⁴

“We affirm that the world’s magnificence had been enriched anew by beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath- a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is beautiful...We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.”¹²⁵

High speed driving is often used to relieve pressure and create a sense of power.¹²⁶ Whilst driving fast, speed and the elements combine, anticipating the total recreation of their movement-field. The driver comes to enjoy a speed that sculpts, simultaneously, vehicle and landscape.¹²⁷ Paradoxically, it is this extreme mobility which creates the inertia of the moment. The instant becomes like the illusory perception of stability as in Einstein's example of passing trains: the feeling of the instant can only be given by coincidence (*epiteikos*), the moment when two trains seem immobile to travellers while they are really launched at top speed one beside the other.¹²⁸ The effect of speeds integration of space-time is to reduce the world to two-dimensionality, to an image. This flattens its relief, in a way it ushers one into a state of sublime immobility and contemplation.¹²⁹ The late twentieth

¹²⁴ Kundera 1996 at www.Dromology.com

¹²⁵ Marinetti (1909) “*Manifesto Of Futurism*”

¹²⁶ Shinar 1978.65

¹²⁷ Virillio 1991.50

¹²⁸ *ibid.*108.

¹²⁹ Baudrillard 1968.66

century's addiction to speed – to fast cars, fast planes, speedy motorcycles, rapid fire weapons, extreme sports and smart drugs, and to the thrills and terrors, sense of power and control they promise is reflected and reinforced by popular culture and the mass media. “We want to be velocitized.”¹³⁰

The motorcar creates an unprecedented movement towards what eludes everyone's view and understanding. The conquest of speed and the search for treasure seem always to go hand-in-hand: “this delirious joy of speed that transcends the infinity of dreams”.¹³¹ Infinity causes much of our pleasure and delight in sublime images, because the imagination is entertained with the promise of something more.¹³²

Accidents

What is now bought with the ‘speed’ machine is no longer even the chance of the exploration but the surprise of the accident.¹³³ “When I go for a walk in the forest I'm evidently exposed to the fall of a tree, to the attack of a marauder, but these are very rare risks. If, on the contrary, I find myself in a car going 60mph on the Fontainebleau road on a Sunday, any situation has become much more chancy... The fate of the driver has become pure chance.”¹³⁴ The rebel, especially the adolescent

¹³⁰ Dromologies: Ecstacies of Speed at www.Dromology.com

¹³¹ Marinetti in Virillio 1991.94

¹³² Boulton 1958.77

¹³³ Virillio 1991.95

¹³⁴ Ibid.60.

male, finds himself continually compelled to risk, and the adrenaline begins to act as a 'fix'. Tillman and Hobbs, theorists on behavioural patterns and their influence on driving, suggest "that a man drives as he lives. If his personal life is marked by caution, tolerance, foresight, and consideration for others, then he will drive in the same manner. If his personal life is devoid of these desirable characteristics then his driving will be characterized by aggressiveness, and over a long period of time he will have a higher accident rate than his stable companion."¹³⁵

The link of mobility to history, of drifting as determined, chosen or shaped by historical forces is explored in the number of accidents in new fiction on the road. Anne Tyler's *Charlotte* wakes up to find that their car has gone off the road. The male character says, "I was just driving along not thinking a thing and next I know I'm in a wheat field." Falling asleep at the wheel is an extreme symptom of his lack of control over events, and ending up in a field an extreme form of being lost. In Anne Mason's *Still-life with Watermelon*, an unexplained accident that occurs in the empty landscape seems to underlie the seemingly motiveless disruptions of a society where unemployment, problems within marriages, illness, and a wrecked pickup are all blurred together. In Richard Ford's *Rock Springs* the malfunctioning car literally and symbolically undermines the idea of freedom of the road and the promise of mobility as another chance in life. The accidents that punctuate contemporary fiction bring together the economic, the social, and the personal, all seen as the intrusion of the arbitrary. Characters believe in the linked terms of luck, chance, accident: things

¹³⁵ Shinar 1978.32

happen to them, a passivity that covers crashed cars, broken relationships, lost jobs.¹³⁶ When James Dean wrecked his racing car, his importance as an incarnation of lost hopes, soared at his death. His ghostly appearance in *Rebel Without a Cause* became a vivid symbol of how precarious was youth-who-had-everything. In the fifties, death on the road at high speed before one's time came to hold the poignancy that had earlier been reserved for death in battle.¹³⁷ The road, promising everything, could also take everything.

Jan and Dean's first attempt at the 'car song' record was *Drag City*, which came out at the end of 1963 and peaked at number 10 on the billboard charts. The album was one of the first pure 'concept' albums, all about cars. On the album was *Dead Mans Curve* which glorified driving and death.¹³⁸ The Shangri Las's *Leader of the Pack* immediately became a controversy, as it too glorified death on the road. Many stations banned it from radio play, however it charted at number one on the Billboard charts in late 1964. In the late 1970's at the end of punk and the beginning of the electronic/industrial sound, Daniel Miller wrote *Warm Leatherette* (after reading J.G. Ballard's *Crash*) a sado masochistic glorification of the car crash, death and sex.

“See the breaking glass
 In the underpass
 See the breaking glass
 In the underpass
Warm Leatherette

¹³⁶ Webster 1988.120

¹³⁷ Gitlin 1987.32

¹³⁸ Ironically William Jan Berry on April 12, 1966 crashed his new *Stingray* into the back of a parked truck on a side street in Beverly Hills, leaving him partially paralysed and brain damaged.

Hear the crushing steel
 Feel the steering wheel
 Hear the crushing steel
 Feel the steering wheel
Warm Leatherette
Warm Leatherette
 Melts on your burning flesh
 You can see your reflection
 In the luminescent dash
Warm Leatherette
 A tear of petrol
 Is in your eye
 The hand brake
 Penetrates your thigh
 Quick– Let`s make love
 Before we die
 On warm leatherette
Warm Leatherette
Warm Leatherette
Warm leatherette
Warm Leatherette
 Join the car crash set.¹³⁹

James Ballard's, *Crash*, tells of Vaughan, a "nightmare angel of the highways": a man who discovered a new world, one where car crashes and eroticism are intricately interwoven. For him wounds resulting from car crashes are keys to a new sexuality born from a "perverse technology". The characters use the icons of human progression, machines, to find new expressions of their dedicated perversion: courting death. The main character James Ballard, following a head-on vehicular collision finds himself in a subculture of crash victims obsessed with repeating their experiences.¹⁴⁰ Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* claims that in *Crash*, the machine is

¹³⁹ *Warm Leatherette* written by Daniel Miller of *The Normal* 1978 on Mute Records

¹⁴⁰ Harvey O' Brian 1997 review at www.IMDB.com

no longer an extension of the body, but rather an extension of death, of a “body confused with technology in its violating and violent dimensions. Civilisation has advanced to the point where we no longer choose to act through technology, the choices have been made for us.” In the introduction to *Crash*, Ballard warns against “that brutal, erotic, overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape”. He is cautioning against the temptation of the universe of simulation, where attempts to expediate life through technology result in a gradual enslavement. This is the case of Vaughan whose obsession with accidents eventually destroys him.¹⁴¹

“In the rearview mirror I could still see Vaughn and the girl, their bodies lit by the car behind, reflected in the black trunk of the Lincoln and a hundred points of the interior trim. In the chromium ashtray I saw the girls left breast and erect nipple. In the vinyl window gutter I saw deformed sections of Vaughn’s thighs and her abdomen forming a bizarre anatomical junction. In a tryptych of images reflected in the speedometer, the clock and revolution counter, the sexual act between Vaughan and this young woman took place in the hooded grottoes of these luminescent dials, moderated by the surging needle of the speedometer. The jutting carapace of the instrument panel and stylized sculpture of the steering column shroud reflected a dozen images of her rising and falling buttocks.”¹⁴²

Cyberspace

In the late twentieth century, the computer age, speed is no longer defined primarily by the prosthesis nexus between a beautifully engineered metal machine and the human body or by the electrochemical ‘highs’ of physical acceleration across geographical space. The new “technologies of consciousness” (like fibre-optic cables, through which information travels at the speed of light)

¹⁴¹ David Goldberg, Brown University 1996 at <http://landow.stg.brown.edu/cpace/body/dgmt.html>

¹⁴² Ballard 1973.143

challenge and often contradict our physical relationship to time and space. Now our experiences of speed occur not only bodily but also cognitively, via the imagery of mass media and the virtual nowhere of cyberspace.¹⁴³ Yet speed remains an all but absolute value in contemporary culture. “The true American religion is speed”, wrote Andrei Codrescu, “Faster invariably means better, even if we’re incapable of absorbing or responding to the excess of mediated visual and verbal information increasingly bombarding us as we slaughter each other on the freeways. Instantaneity is the ideal toward which speed aspires. Nowness is all.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Marcia Tanner, *Dromology: Ecstasies of Speed* at www.Dromology.com

¹⁴⁴ Marcia Tanner, *Dromology: Ecstasies of speed* at www.Dromology.com

Chapter Four

Masculinity

The Frontier

“...full of manly pride and friendship...
 Conquering , holding, daring, venturing as we go the
 unknown ways...
 We the primeval forests felling.
 We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines within,
 We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving.”
 - Walt Whitman *Pioneers, O pioneers* (1865)¹⁴⁵

The frontier can be seen as the meeting point between savagery and civilisation.¹⁴⁶ Throughout time each frontier has furnished a new or the same field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past.¹⁴⁷ In America, many of the nations ‘traits’ and institutions were forged on the frontier while in contact with a number of forces, such as 'free land', nature and the ‘native’.¹⁴⁸

“All America lies at the end of the wilderness road, and our path is not dead past but still lives in us... Our forefathers had civilisation inside themselves, the wild outside. We live in the civilisation they created, but within us the wilderness still lingers. What they dreamed, we live; and what they lived, we dream. That is why our western story still holds us, however

¹⁴⁵ Campbell & Kean 1997.135

¹⁴⁶ Turner 1962.3

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*38.

¹⁴⁸ Campbell & Kean 1997.127

ineptly told.”¹⁴⁹ “He had visions. He was finder as well as fighter - the trail maker for civilisation, the inventor of new ways.”¹⁵⁰

From the days of the frontier, came the notion that the American hero must contain a restless nervous energy; dominant individualism, and the buoyancy and exuberance which comes from freedom.¹⁵¹ But at the same time, he was also a destroyer inflamed with the ideal of subduing the wilderness, he fought his way across the continent, masterful and wasteful, preparing the way by seeking the immediate.¹⁵²

The ultimate relief was to “get out of town”. When Horace Greeley gave his famous advice in 1837, “go west, young man, and grow up with the country”, men moved in great numbers. “All the past we leave behind”, Walt Whitman wrote in *Pioneers! O Pioneers!* in 1865.¹⁵³ The opening sequences of many classic Western films begin with the hero emerging from the land, as if he is part of its hardness, its severity.¹⁵⁴ The land is immense, powerful, and dominating, and so “men imitate the land in Westerns... which means to be hard, to be tough, to be unforgiving”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Whipple, T.K. (1943) *Study Out the Land* (Berkeley, University of California) in Campbell & Kean 1997.125

¹⁵⁰ Turner 1962.270

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*37.

¹⁵² *ibid.*270.

¹⁵³ Kimmelthe 1996.60

¹⁵⁴ Tompkins 1992.71

¹⁵⁵ This is a chosen landscape of hills and desert, excluding as myths do so well, the other formations of land that promise 'fertility, abundance, softness, fluidity, many layeredness' for these may be confused with other feminine qualities. (Campbell & Kean 1997.132)

But for all the American fascination, the future lay with the homesteaded and with settlement, not the with the lone rider who refused to 'put his hat down'. As the main character in *The Searchers* (1956) realises, he cannot settle or own the land because it is in him and defines his being.

Ambiguity exists, as the hero needs the openness and freedom of the range and cannot exist within a social domain of the feminine, the domestic or the settled.¹⁵⁶ One of the connections that merges the cowboy to the rock star, or the mustang as a horse to the *Mustang* as a car, is the theme of masculinity.¹⁵⁷ The image of the lone cowboy "moves straight to the heart land fantasy of America" as it is believed to 'glorify the male'. It clothes him in unfeeling masculinity (his horse a kind of pedestal) to display virility and hint at imminent violence. He exists in a landscape that has been swept free of rules, regulations, and commitments. The closing of the American frontier in the 1890's was traumatic for American identity.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Reynolds & Press 1995.55

¹⁵⁷ Webster 1988.88. It is interesting to note that American car makes have masculine titles like Ford's: *Mustang, Bronco, Bantam, Falcon, Magnum*; Jeep's: *Wrangler, Cherokee*; and Chevrolet's: *Blazer*. The Asian car market followed suite with adventurous masculine names such as Colt's: *Trailbuster, Pioneer, Rodeo*; Toyota's: *Conquest, Raider, Stallion, Land Cruiser, Venture*; Isuzu's: *Fontier, Trooper*; and Honda's: *Odyssey*. European car manufacturers use numericals instead i.e. Audi's: *A3, A4, A6*; BMW's: *318i, 523i, 735i, 750i*; Mercedes's: *C180, C200, SLK 600* and Peugeot's: *306XR, 806ST*. In South Africa at the end of the 80's there seemed to be a marketing towards the white males who had completed their military conscription, the four-wheeled drive vehicle started to be come popular as these men sought the power and the go-anywhere ability of the armoured vehicle. These men in the 1990's now drove Defenders, Raiders, Troopers and Magnums.

¹⁵⁸ On the 10 May 1869 at Promotory, Utah a single telegraphed word "done" signalled the hammering of the "Golden Spike", the last spike in the railway line connecting the east coast to the west. It also signalled the closing of the American frontier. On it was engraved, "May God continue the unity of our country, as this railroad unites the two great oceans of the world."

The Psychic Frontier

Twentieth century America is still plagued by the freedom of the frontier. This is seen in its music, especially rock, which mourned the closing of the frontier, the existential wilderness. Where rock idealized the biker, country idealized the trucker as a twentieth-century cowboy. Both were throwbacks to a grander age. Post-war, demobilized soldiers who couldn't face settling down to peacetime mediocrity often became truckers or bikers. Both were a sort of toned down version of the beatnik "travelling but never arriving; popping to keep going; leaving the women behind".¹⁵⁹

The beatniks were trying to re-open the frontier - this 'new frontier' of the 1950's was a psychic terrain, but like its geographical antecedent, it was a terrain in which rugged, manly individualism flourished. Women were simply absent, a symbol of home that was left behind.¹⁶⁰ The beatnik belief, that constant mobility re-affirmed possibility, filtered into rock via Bob Dylan originally a folk singer in the tradition of Woody Guthrie. His songs often concerned lone rangers making solitary journeys. These heroic odysseys often began with a man leaving a woman (*Don't Think Twice, Going, Going, Gone*)¹⁶¹ who still served as 'bookends' to the man's journeys of self-discovery.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Reynolds & Press 1995.52. Part and parcel of the reinvocation of rugged, frontier masculinity was their veneration of The Hell's Angels, who became icons of untrammelled freedom. (Reynolds & Press 1995.13)

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*10.

¹⁶¹ Dylan's repertoire includes over fifty of these songs, i.e. *Angelina* (1981), *Abandoned Love* (1975), *All I Really Want To Do* (1964), *Can You Please Crawl Out The Window* (1965), *Coming From The Heart* (1979), *Corrina, Corrina* (1962), *Blues For Breakfast* (1968), *Brownsville Girl* (1986), *Baby, Stop Crying* (1978), *Do Right To Me Baby* (1979), *Down The Highway* (1963), *Drifter's Escape* (1968), *Delia* (1993), *Denise* (1970), *Emotionally Yours* (1985), *Everything Is Broken* (1989), *Farewell* (1991), *Fourth Time Around* (1966), *Gypsy Lou* (1963), *Girl Of The North County* (1963), *Gonna Change My Way Of Thinking* (1979), *Heart Of Mine* (1981), *If I Don't Be There Tomorrow* (1978), *If You Gotta Go, Go Now* (1965), *It Ain't Me, Babe* (1964), *I'll Remember You*

So much a part of the attempt to be truly ‘masculine’ since the mid-twentieth century, rebellion is seen as a re-enactment of the primal break that constitutes the male ego: the separation of infant from the maternal realm, the exile from paradise. The rebel ‘reenacts’ the process of individualization in endless rites of severance, and continually flees domesticity.¹⁶³ Women represent everything the rebel is not (passivity, inhibition) and everything that threatens to shackle him (domesticity, social norms).¹⁶⁴ It is the automobile which completely replaces the loved one, and the maternal figure.

“Into the great wide open
 Into the sky so blue
 Into the great wide open
 a rebel without a clue.”

- Tom Petty *The Great Wide Open*

Tom Petty also obsessively belaboured this fantasy of motion as a means of transcending the mundane. *Into the Great Wide Open* is intended as a satire on certain clichéd notions of rebellion - in the end of his music video, the male protagonist leaves his wife and home on the back of a motorbike driven by his ‘roadie’, played by Petty: two generations of rebels riding off into the sunset together. For the sexual vagrant, anywhere he lays his hat is home - from the early rock’n’roll (lover

(1985), *Like A Rolling Stone* (1965), *Mama, You Been On My Mind* (1964), *Most Likely You Go Your Way* (1966), *Oh, Sister* (1975), *Positively 4th Street* (1965), *This Wheels On Fire* (1967), *We Better Talk This Over* (1978), *What Was It You Wanted* (1989.)

¹⁶² Reynolds & Press 1995.50

¹⁶³ *ibid.*2.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*3.

of Dion's *The Wanderer*) through the mid-'60s R&B (Johnny Walker and the All Stars, *Roadrunner*) to heavy metal (Led Zeppelin's *Ramble On*). The hero becomes himself kinetic; won't be tied down to any one 'chick' or place. The Rolling Stones enshrined this stance in their restless name and with songs like *No Expectations*, the blues of a wandering cocksman. Also on that album, The Stones seized on a Biblical prototype of the footloose rebel in *Prodigal Son*.¹⁶⁵

Regaining Masculinity

In 1921 Marinetti wrote about the armoured car:

“...the driver becomes an animal that disappears in the super power of a metallic body able to annihilate time and space through its dynamic performances. Deprived, as he has always been, of will, he now requires physical assistance from the vehicular prosthesis in order to accomplish his historical mission: assault.”¹⁶⁶

Contemporary miscellanists still believe that “all men are wimps”. They feel that they need to be rescued from the clutches of overprotective mothers, absent fathers, and an enervating workplace,

¹⁶⁵ As Simon Frith points out, the appeal of the legend is that *The Prodigal Son* is rewarded and beloved by the Father far more than the other boy: his return is greeted with the killing of the fatted calf. *The Prodigal Son's* sin is that he rejects the normalcy of settled existence, makes up his life as he goes along, lives for ‘now’. To be prodigal is to be extravagant, to squander time, to refuse to worry about consequences and other inhibitions inherent in masculinity. (Reynolds & Press 1995)

¹⁶⁶ Virillio 1977.62

and to rediscover themselves through a manly quest against a pitiless environment.¹⁶⁷ For some that environment is the contemporary workplace. As they venture into the urban jungle, today's 'middleclass' men make themselves resemble their adventurous forefathers through their fashionable clothes and masculinizing accessories.¹⁶⁸ As at the turn of the century, so too now - if manhood does not come from within, perhaps it can be worn. A new sub-genre of travel literature re-creates the frontier echoing the Western novel of the turn of the century and the male-bonding war movies of the 1950's and 1960's. This strain of male travel writers ventures to difficult, inhospitable territories, exploring the boundaries of civilization, crossing the frontier into uncharted territory. Recent works such as Charles Nichols' *Borderlines*, P.J. O'Rourke's *Holidays in Hell* and Stuart Steven's *Malaria Dreams* all find the man/writer/hero hurtling through some jungle at the edge of civilization, testing manhood in a Land Rover. The global frontier remains open to 'middleclass' white men who seek confrontation with the 'primitive' at the boundaries of civilization. It is also an escape from the feminising city and an anxious quest to test ones manliness.

¹⁶⁷ The myth of the warrior-hero has dominated western imagining of what it is to be a "man", that is, a full human being. Within the most sublimated contexts, far from the battlefield, the Homeric heroes continued in the mind of every schoolboy to savage their opponents. While Christian soldiers marched onward against each other and other 'enemies of the Lord.' The archetypal hero fashions human personality in his own image, projecting an ego armored against the outer world and inner depths. His philosophical descendant is the separate, self-enclosed subject, remaining self-identical through its exploits in time. It proves its excellence through the tests of separation, establishing a mobile autonomy as its virtue (where *vir* means "man"). (Keller 1986.8)

¹⁶⁸ They wear *Timberland* shoes or cowboy boots, denim shirts, and aviator sunglasses; they drive *Cherokees*, *Wranglers*, *Broncos* or *Land Rovers*; they splash on a little *Aspen*, *Stetson*, *Chaps* or *Safari* cologne. (Kimmelthe 1996.310)

The Land and the Feminine

The male fantasy of control and domination over the land and the feminine manifests itself in the expansionist policies of westward movement in America. In relationships with women and land, man had to be assertive, to prove himself a superior, to 'tame' them in different ways.¹⁶⁹ The environment has suffered long under the hand of pioneers,¹⁷⁰ soldiers and road-builders alike. "What makes war convenient is transportation", and the armoured car, able to go over every kind of terrain, erases any obstacles. It escapes the old linear trajectory of the road or the railway. It offers a whole new geometry to speed and to violence.¹⁷¹ During the Roman Empire, roads were laid out as straight as possible, without any consideration for the landscape. Natural obstacles were overcome by building bridges, levelling off rocks, or by cutting tunnels into the rock.¹⁷² It has been only in this century, particularly with the *autobahn* in Germany, that attention has been given to the environment. Landscapers pushed for routing to be adapted to the environment to the greatest possible extent. They invented a multitude of possibilities to cover up human interference in the landscape. With the advent of environmental preservation there was a great deal of change in favour of the landscapers and often now road construction is screened for possible interference in

¹⁶⁹ Kolodny 1984, Campbell & Kean 1997.135

¹⁷⁰ Daniel Boone was the "natural man", uninterested in accumulation of wealth, always on the move, never weighted down. "Boone used to say to me", declared one backwoodsman, "that when he could not fell the top of the tree near enough to his front door for firewood, it was time to move to a new place." (Farragher 1992.327-8)

¹⁷¹ Virillio 1977.55

¹⁷² Muller 1981.9

landscape.¹⁷³

In *Shane*, which *Pale Rider* echoes in many ways, the final resistance of the land is signified by the tree stump which is collectively removed by Joe and Shane's 'manpower'.¹⁷⁴ In *Pale Rider*, the manpower, now embodied in the machine, is detached and brutal in its destructiveness, but the scene goes further, in juxtaposing the violation of the land with the attempted rape of a young girl. The environmental 'raping' of the land is parallel to the male subordination and violation of the girl.¹⁷⁵ In the practice of hitchhiking the vector automobile becomes the distillation of the universe, the loved one is no longer 'extended', she is reduced and restrained, until terror, crime or rape comes to fulfill the law of movement. The speed of displacement has perverted the kidnapping of the beauty, the ancient nuptial rape, into a means of disappearance and extermination.¹⁷⁶ The connection of violence, rebellion, masculinity and speed is echoed by Nick Tosche:

"swathed and speeding, we prowled with the windows shut against the black coldness, looking for feminine throats in the shadows, where there were none, listening to that, smiling terribly and feeling, with something like orgasm, our existence contract beatifically into that terrible smiling."¹⁷⁷

The genders seem to stand at different polarities of the journey. The traveller is seen as a male who

¹⁷³ *ibid.*15.

¹⁷⁴ Schaefer 1989.37

¹⁷⁵ Campbell & Kean 1997.131

¹⁷⁶ Virillio 1991.27

¹⁷⁷ Reynolds & Press 1995.21

crosses boundaries and penetrates space; the female is mapped as a place on the itinerary of the male journey.¹⁷⁸ Huckleberry Finn eloquently expressed the sentiments of many young American men, when he said "I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilise me, and I cant stand it. I've been there before." Women were seen to constrain manhood - through temperance, Christian piety, sober responsibility and sexual fidelity. Thus it was thought that women set the tone of those institutions that restrained masculine excess, such as the schoolroom, parlour, church. 'Woman' meant mother, the one responsible for curtaining boyish rambunctiousness; later 'woman' meant wife, the wellspring of emotional and moral strength. If men wanted relief from the demands of self control, they had to "light out for the territory". Part of the struggle was simply to get out of the middle-class house, now a virtual feminine theme park. This contrasted with the frantic and aggressive business world made the men feel uneasy in their own homes. A man's house "is a prison, in which he finds himself oppressed and confined, not sheltered and protected", wrote Thoreau.¹⁷⁹

In the multiple prototypes of the journey plot - adventure, pilgrimage, exile, for example - women are generally excluded, their absence establishing the world of the journey as a realm in which man confronts the 'foreign'. Woman, like Penelope in *the Odyssey*, serve as the symbolic embodiment

¹⁷⁸ De Laurentis finds that the "hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is...an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance matrix and matter." (De Laurentis 1984, Lawrence 1994.2)

¹⁷⁹ Thoreau (1960) *Walden* (New York, New American Library) in Kimmelthe 1996.60

of home; often, however, a female figure, like Circe, may signify the foreign itself. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* provides a modern example of woman in both symbolic positions for the male traveller - the 'intended' as the faithful Penelope, and the native women as the embodiment of foreign territory. Indeed, the plot of the male journey depends on keeping woman in her place. Not only is her place at home, but she in effect is home itself, for the female body is traditionally associated with earth, shelter, enclosure.¹⁸⁰ Although the particular symbolic geography of the female as 'home' may shift historically on a realm from nature to culture, she traditionally provides the point of departure and sometimes the goal for the male journey. This mapping of the female body underwrites not only travel literature per se, but the more general trope of the journey as well.¹⁸¹

"The voyage of Penelope [is the journey of] every woman: a bed of pain in which the mother is never done with dying, a hospital bed on which there is no end to...labour, the bed framing endless erotic daydreams, where Molly, wife and adulteress, voyages in her memories. She wanders, but lying down. In dream. Ruminates... Woman's voyage: as a body."¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ In Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments 13 -14*, he states that historically the discourse of absence is carried on by the woman: "Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Women is faithful (she waits) , man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades). It follows that in any man who utters the other's absence something feminine is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminised." (Lawrence 1994.ix.) The pattern in literature is that emotional females foster disorder, mobilising in response the hierarchical chain of male authority which restores order. This is clearly stated in the *Aeneid*, where not only when the foreign Dido in her love sways him from his path, but also the women of his kin in Sicily, who tired from the wandering set fire to the ships - the very agents on mobility, and opportunity. (Van Nortwick 1992.127)

¹⁸¹ Lawrence 1994.1

¹⁸² Cixous, H. & Clement, C. (1986) *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press) *ibid.*16.

This familiar polemic between male adventurism and female conformism, male wildness and female domestication, foreshadows Leary's discourse of heroic odyssey into the LSD maelstrom. Leary embraced LSD as a way of de-familiarizing the world: beneath this project lurked his desire, derived from his dad, to escape the family. The point of the acid trip was to shatter one's sense of being at home in the world, to rip up the map and disorientate the bearing that made life comfortable and habitual.¹⁸³ Only after surviving these turbulent white water rapids of consciousness could one make it through to “the lagoon of serenity” wherein one’s shattered ego merged with the cosmos.¹⁸⁴

Jack Kerouac’s *On The Road* propounded a very gender-specific quest for self-discovery. The story concerns two young men who embark on a spiritual odyssey that, while dependant on female support and funding pushes women to the margins of the text.¹⁸⁵ Women’s position in the beat movement is captured in the title of a memoir by Joyce Johnson, briefly married to Kerouac: *Minor Characters*. In it, Johnson is herself an aspiring writer who longs to participate in Kerouac wanderings. When she asked him why she couldn’t join him on the road, he would always “stop me by saying that what I really wanted were babies”. Women were marginal yet indispensable to The

¹⁸³ The “destination board” on the Merry Prankster’s bus (driven by Neal Cassidy) was listed as “FURTHER” - documented by Tom Wolf in *The Electric Cool-Aid Acid Test*.

¹⁸⁴ Reynolds & Press 1995.11

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*8.

Beats, providing safe harbor, nurture and nourishment.¹⁸⁶ Since rock music in the 1960's was founded on the opposition between rebel masculinity and female conformism, rebellious women found themselves caught, as Ellen Willis noted in her essay on Bob Dylan: "At the time I did not question the idea that women were guardians of the oppressive conventional values: I only thought myself as an exception. I was not possessive; I understood men's need to go on the road because I was spiritually speaking, on the road myself. That, at least, was my fantasy; the realities of my life were somewhat ambiguous."¹⁸⁷

The Woman as Traveller

Since the 1970's literature has revealed a new generation of independent women travellers. Travelling alone is possibly no less dangerous for women than it was back in the nineteenth century, but in every other respect the world of travel has shifted: in film and television remote corners of the world are made inviting. It is hardly surprising then that the women in these stories are fascinated by these places, long to take off and take part.¹⁸⁸ Characteristically women portrayed in modern literature are depicted as more likely to seek the freedom to do something, rather than the freedom

¹⁸⁶ Reynolds & Press 1995.230. *Fool for Love*, a Sam Shepard play, is set in a "stark, low-rent motel room on the edge of the Mojave desert. The two spaces suggest a division around gender, the desert and its connotations of lone male action and the motel room and its connotations of the heterosexual couple. Throughout the play the implosion of the family indoors is juxtaposed with sporadic explosions of violence outside: headlights rake the stage, shots are fired, there's the sound of tyres burning rubber. The male character's love is proved through movement (driving 2000 miles), but works towards stability, (the trailer finally anchored on a piece of ground) whilst May rejects this male world of action. (Webster 1988.102)

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*8.

¹⁸⁸ Daly & Dawson 1998.xi

from something. Typically in male road stories what is sought is freedom from domestic relationships, freedom from women and children, from the stultifying influence of the home. In stories told by female 'heroes', the children or lovers occasionally come too and some of the women don't just bond with their companions, they fall in love with them.¹⁸⁹

The 1992 film *Thelma and Louise* captured the *zeitgeist* - heralding the beginning of media joy and discomfort with the 'Bad Girls' phenomenon. This was when its two heroines abandon controlling husbands and boring jobs to seek adventure on the great American freeway. Finally women got an idea of the road trip - a story where the protagonists are either fleeing one thing (typically the law), or searching for something else (typically themselves), and exploring friendship along the way. The road trip was no longer a macho preserve. Women were no longer the civilizing force for many a road trip protagonist¹⁹⁰ and were now free to find their own frontiers.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*x.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*ix.

Conclusion:

The journey has always been seen as a means of mental and physical exploration. Whilst the Odyssean model was a linear, purposeful exploration leading to self-realisation, in the twentieth century the journey became inconclusive and circular. Only pilgrimage still exists as a movement towards a goal, but this tradition or ritual is grounded in religious beliefs. The wanderer is the link between the past and the twenty first century but whilst before wandering involved incredible religious figures, now it is a postmodern phenomenon of every man. The twentieth century revealed the individual as a subject, not a hero, who is displaced and alienated.

With the Enlightenment, 'the path' was now to be chosen by the individual, instead of laid out as a religious or moral guideline towards a goal. The freedom experienced in choosing one's own path was later echoed by the driver on the 'open road'.

Travel is still seen as the motion of a subject between the familiar and foreign. Travel was traditionally a white, privileged, male concern with the familiar¹⁹¹ represented by the domesticised space. Escape from the feminine was seen as escape from the familiar. The twentieth century revealed that there was no longer an experience of travel as a transformative experience - it had been reduced to tourism. Instead, what is experienced is an anxiety of belatedness at any attempt at

¹⁹¹ "familiar" in early English usage meant "of or pertaining to a family or household; domestic" (Oxford English Dictionary).

exploration. In recent years the new version of tourism was seen to be cyber travel. No longer involving a physical movement between the polarities of familiar and foreign, the only exploration is mental.

The motorcar changed the notion of travel that involved a *real* movement from familiar to foreign. The car itself became a cell¹⁹² which in turn was linked to the house as a cell. This created a 'migrant perspective' where movement was now seen as a mode of being in the world.

The voyeur of before became the driving voyeur-voyager with the open road representing adventure, sex and freedom. The landscape became the symbol of escape with unclouded vision. By the end of the twentieth century, driving was characterized by road weariness. The Depression had seen the road as a gateway to freedom and a better life, but by the mid-century the traveller-nomad was already experiencing 'burn-out'. As the optimism of modernity dissolved into ennui, the road to nowhere was soon cited as life's metaphor. With the purposeless journey, the conquest of speed was the only aspect that seemed to promise something more. What before was the chance of exploration, became the potential surprise of accident or death.

The testing of the subject's masculinity has always been an integral part of journeying. The mid-twentieth century saw a rebirth of ideas of the freedom of the pioneer. This was revisited in the

¹⁹² Halley 1985.154

'psychic frontier' - the concept of the lone individual encountering the savage or unexplored. Part of this experience was delving into the subconscious mind through psychedelic drugs. Right up to the end of the twentieth century, by separating oneself from the feminised household and exploring uncharted territories, the male traveller saw himself as regaining his masculinity and testing his manliness.

A manifestation of these pioneer characteristics was domination over the land and the feminine. The woman remained in the male traveller's mind (much like the Odyssean model) a form of home and shelter, providing the point of departure and sometimes the goal of the journey. But from the 1970's, women themselves began to experience travel as a means of adventure and freedom. Unlike the male traveller, these women often took their children along with them, blurring the traditional male concept of foreign and familiar.

Throughout the twentieth century, literature, music and film investigated popular ideas of road culture. As the protagonist in travel writings left the familiar to journey in search of the exotic, so the reader experiences these travels vicariously in their imagination, while in the safe space of their home. The audience watching a road movie experienced similar exploration. In contrast, the driver who listens to the lyrics about driving or journeying, would experience similar imaginative explorations even though he is in motion. Although he is cut off from the outside world to some extent, he is simultaneously interacting with the road. The view of the world through the windscreen

of the motorcar could be seen as parallel to watching the movie or television screen, with the car acting again as a cell. In the viewer and the reader, these second-hand experiences of the road, gave rise to what is essentially the glamorising of nihilism.

“Stay on these roads,
reasons being,
I’ll never know.”
- Aha, *Stay On these Roads*.

Master's Submission Exhibition:

RODE

Untitled (roads to horizon) deals with the continuous road leading to the horizon, which has been eliminated. This creates an inescapable space and a sense of entrapment.¹⁹³ The viewpoint is not of the motorist or pedestrian but is from a central point on the road. This is a study, the road documented with no indication of which direction it leads to, but simply as a space. The purposeful journey is denied, and is replaced by aimlessness. There is a concentration on the surface of the road: of driving down “into the ground”, instead of towards the horizon. Henri Lefbre in *Le*

Manifesto Differentailiste talks of the road surface:

“there on the surface, movement waves, and horizons are delineated, the superficial is freedom. Even if we suppose that in the depths there exists a monster, Leviathan or Moby Dick, if he never rises to the surface we could never meet him. The depths hide themselves, the heights are beyond us. There remains the surface, infinite and finite. Whatever emerges, whatever arises from the depths or transcends from the heights, that is all that counts.....between everything and nothing there is something.”

¹⁹³ Robert Smithson - “no matter how far out you go, you are always thrown back on your point of origin. You are confronted with an extending horizon; it can extend onward and onward, but then you suddenly find the horizon closing in all around you, so that you have this kind of dilating effect. In other words there is no escape from the limits...” His favoured *visual ideas* were mirrors and the horizon: mirrors cancelling out each other and nature by reflections, and the horizon appearing to be an edge, but receding into infinity as one tries to approach it. “A horizon is something other than a horizon” he wrote. “it is closedness in openness, it is an enchanted region where down is up. Space can be approached but time is far away.” (Hobbs 1881.32)

The non-linear, non-sequential journey is worked on in *Untitled (route markers)*. These markers are not only guidelines but contain and constrict. Here the space is confusing, chaotic and aimless because the purposeful, sequential movement towards a certain number or goal, place/space is negated.¹⁹⁴ This journey is one of many roads, which cross and interconnect with ideas of homecoming and retracing. Route markers are also landmarks to movement, showing a 'migrant perspective' but also reinforcing the traveler's feelings of belatedness.

The works *Untitled (bottle lids)* and *Untitled (cans)* acts as evidence of passage, as they are of evidence of movement through a space. These act as the personal relics of the traveller. Although these objects are transient, because they are documented they become historical.

The objects begin to be absorbed and meshed into the road's surface. The decay of this waste shows gradual disintegration and re-emergence into nature.

Both *Untitled (road kill)* and *Untitled (food)* deal with the frontier as a place of adventure where a man can define himself. The road provides an escape from everyday life; a means of flight from domesticity; a sense of freedom. In the latter the nourishing quality of the food is contrasted with the

¹⁹⁴ Laurie Anderson's art deals with endless journeying. The routines that bookend *United States*, are revealing. "You can read the signs," assures Anderson. "You've been on this road before." But it is a semiotician's nightmare, a road to nowhere dotted with signs pointing only at each other. Endlessly traveling, never arriving, she - and the audience accompanying her - is a Kerouac who has mistaken a treadmill for the road, a Huckleberry Finn lighting out for territories he will never find. (Decutis 1992.154)

masculine sterility of the road. The life-giving, positive function of the food is denied through its destruction. Round, female shapes were chosen so as to refer to hero's rebellion and flight from domestication, and the tension between the male adventurer and the women who is left behind. The continuity of these shapes is broken by the aggressive action of driving over by the male. The road functions as a border between the savage or wild, and the civilised. At the point where the two converge destruction often occurs. In *Untitled (road kill)* the machine confronts the beast. The road kill were photographed as portraits so that there would be a confrontation between the viewer and the animal. The work has a strong sense of the passage of time because of the decay of the subjects and the gradual merging of flesh and tar.

Untitled (condoms) deals with sexual encounters in cars, parking lots, dead ends and look-out points. Events such as rape and death are suggested. The classic journey has the hero leaving home and the familiar to seek the foreign and exotic, where he will encounter other women on the road. This is considered part of the experience and is something he will either be triumphant over or be defeated by. Sex in cars has none of the constricting emotions tied to the domestic. The condoms also deal with the enforced death of sperm which prevents any procreation and the possibility of death through AIDS. The phalliform condom disintegrates to the ovoid shape of the female.

Signs of hasty departure, withdrawal or flight are seen in *Untitled (shoes)*. That a shoe has been discarded suggests an encounter or accident. The notions of walking and vagrancy are universal, but

here relate directly to the poverty of rural South Africans who are marginalised, even alongside the road. *Untitled (spent cartridges)* relates instead to male rebellion, frustration, and aggression of the cowboy/ farmer mentality. This emotion is often vented by shooting at road signs, animals, or by violence. The work also alludes to crime: it has been created in the style of a forensic study and the bullets are delineated as if evidence at a crime scene. The scene could also be of domestic violence or suicide.¹⁹⁵

Untitled (glass) deals with accidents: the encounter with another moving or stationary body caused by negligence, speed or recklessness. Typically this would mould the hero's character as it would be considered one of the set backs, or near-death experiences he must endure and grow from. Glass is the most fragile part and weakest point on the exterior of the vehicle. In this way the stabilizing concept of the car as a cell or prosthesis of the body is broken. Evidence of the threat of danger is also dealt with in *Untitled (skid marks)*, where skid marks had been created by the sudden stopping of a car. These become personal traces on the road, caused by specific events which caused the driver's reaction. But the work simultaneously shows that over time many marks line the surface, showing evidence of different, convergent movements or journeys. Undeniably a

¹⁹⁵ *The only good one is a dead one*, is a video installation by Willie Doherty, projected on two walls. One of them is confined to a view through the window of a parked car, showing the eerie, pink phosphorescence of street lamps in a near-empty part of town. The other is through the windscreen of a car in motion, it's headlights giving the lonely rural road a bleached, menacing ghostliness. Nothing actually happens. But an all-pervasive dread is reinforced by the sound of an unidentified man's voice, quietly confiding his thoughts on victimisation and murderous fantasies. Even the most dull journey can, it seems, become a trigger for paranoia in a world of mistrust. (Marshall 1997.26)

sense of belatedness would be experienced by the traveller in viewing the many recurring skid marks.

Erosion by the movement of many vehicles over time creates ruptures in the road surface, as seen in *Untitled (damaged roads)*. These potholes, fissures, and cracks hinder the smooth progress of the journey, becoming an obstruction in the way of escape and freedom. Through erosion nature begins to reclaim the road as landscape. The road becomes foreboding, a site of tension, visually evoking images of scars or shallow graves. In *Untitled (sealed cracks)* the abstract design and intense focus on the broken road surface also gives a sense of the scarred, as well as veins or broken skin. The work mimics the aerial map, with road routes and intersections, crossings and dead ends. The use of repeated shapes gives a sense of movement and rhythm.

The urban city as a place of constriction and domestication is explored in *Untitled (manholes)* and *Untitled (Stop Streets)*. The driver no longer has a sense of being free in a bare, supposedly uncharted landscape but is now overpowered by rules in a controlled environment.

The work *Untitled (Footprints)* echoes the archeological, such as dinosaur footprints or the steps of early man. These modern imprints are transient however and will be driven over and eroded away - once again dealing with the passage of time and mortality. They are the evidence of the passage of one human being, with feet of a certain size, weight and manner of moving. *Untitled*

(*Dead Ends*) considers the end of journeying. Here the destination of the journey is replaced by the 'road to nowhere'.¹⁹⁶ This is the end of the road: post-modern 'utopia'. There is no longer the promise of a horizon, but the reality of the dead end.

Methodology

In taking these photographs, I travelled distances of over 12 000 kilometres over a period of five months. These included journeys departing from Grahamstown to Namibia, Cape Town, and Johannesburg. Other journeys were early morning or evening trips on a weekly basis to Cradock and Bedford, 110 kilometers from Grahamstown. I investigated and explored the roads of each city I visited, following them until I reached dead ends or cul de sacs.

I chose the photographic medium because of its historical association with capturing a sense of reality and serving as a 'truthful' document. The subjects were photographed in the styles of documentation and investigation. The use of macro medium-format equipment allowed for the most detail in enlargement, which reveals as much of the visual information as possible. This echoes both the scientific and forensic study. A ring-flash was utilized for totally flat lighting,¹⁹⁷ where the shadows fall to the margins of the subject and allow for an uninterrupted view.

¹⁹⁶ Juian Opie's *Imagine you are driving* shows an empty, monotonous road, black by day and grey-blue at night. The flat expanses of tarmac stretch towards featureless horizons. There are no obstacles to dodge, no rival cars struggling for supremacy. Everything is purged of tension, and made pointless. (Marshall 1997.27)

¹⁹⁷ This lighting is circular and is used for both close-up wild-life study and for surgical procedures.

I chose to eliminate the horizon or sky line by looking down, documenting what is often passed over or left behind on the road. This froze the object that would ordinarily be glimpsed at when passed by those in motion, and creates a sense of being in a defined space.

The repeated and grouped works were a move away from the single all-important image towards an infinite case study, as the events and evidence are not singular or unique but occur continuously.

The photographs were presented on raised mounts, creating a presence - as if the work too was an object. This related to the surface of the road raised off the landscape. It also served to enhance the two-dimensionality of the picture and bring the work towards the viewer.

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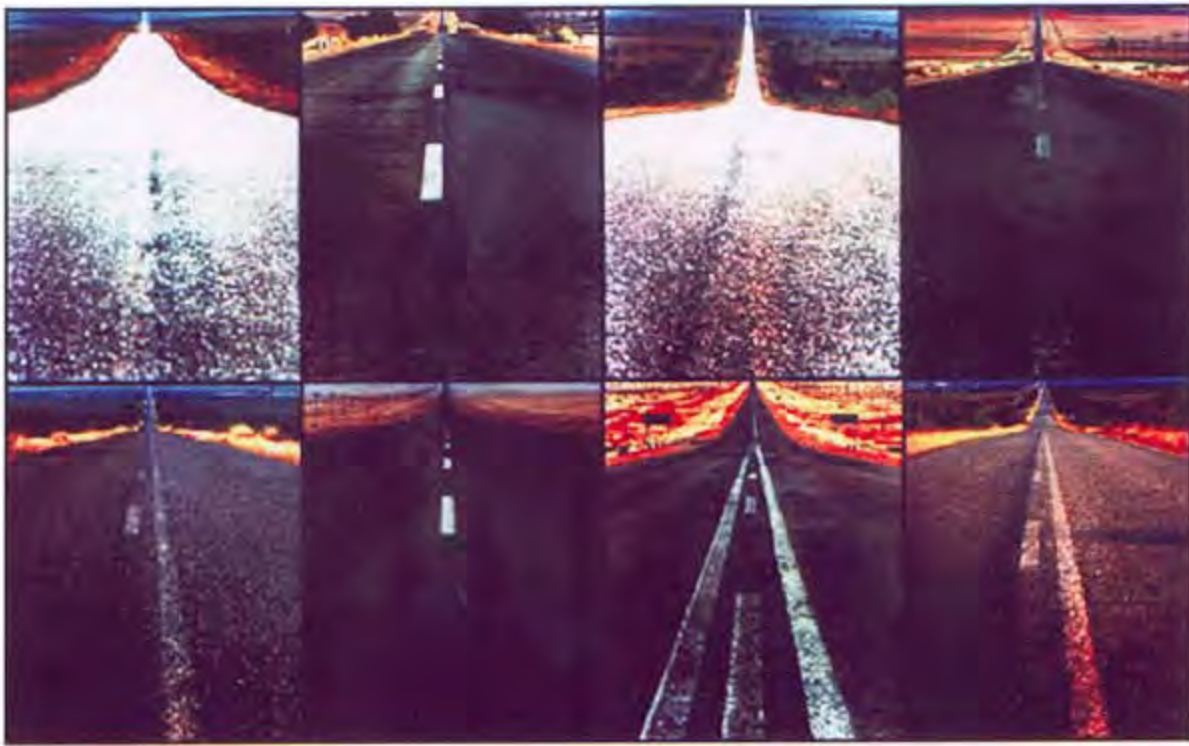
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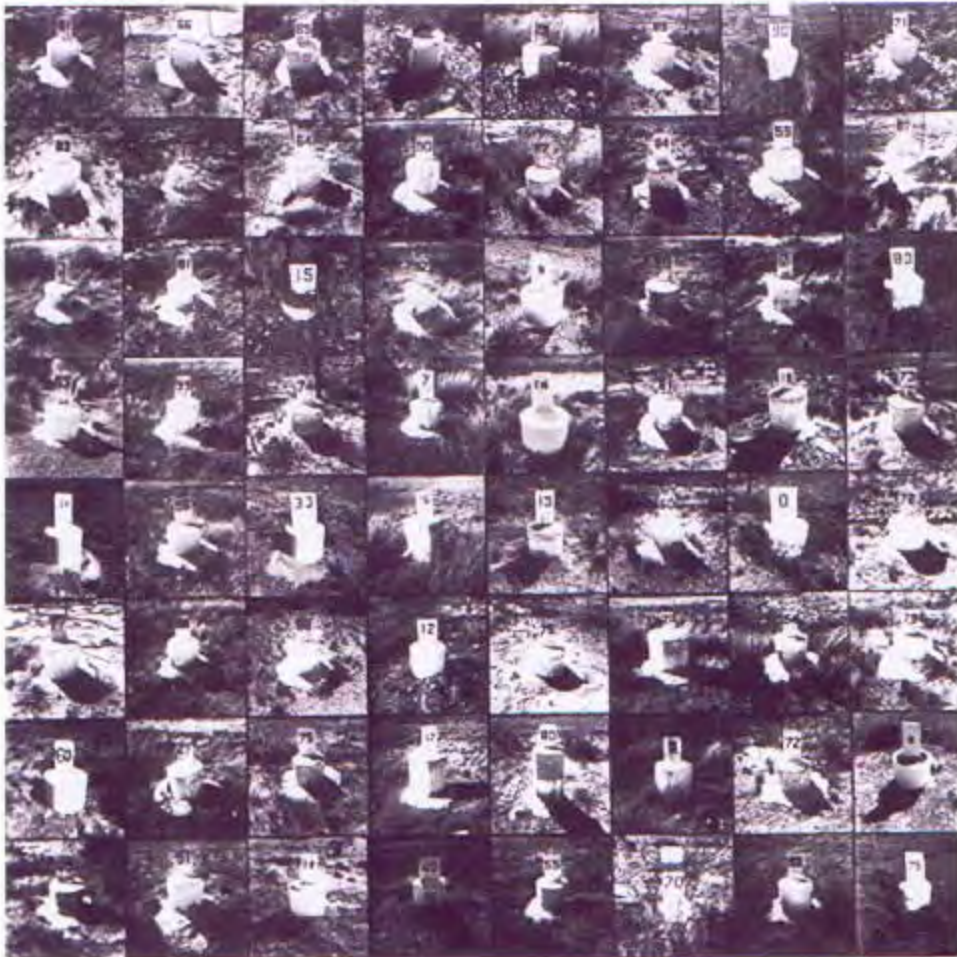
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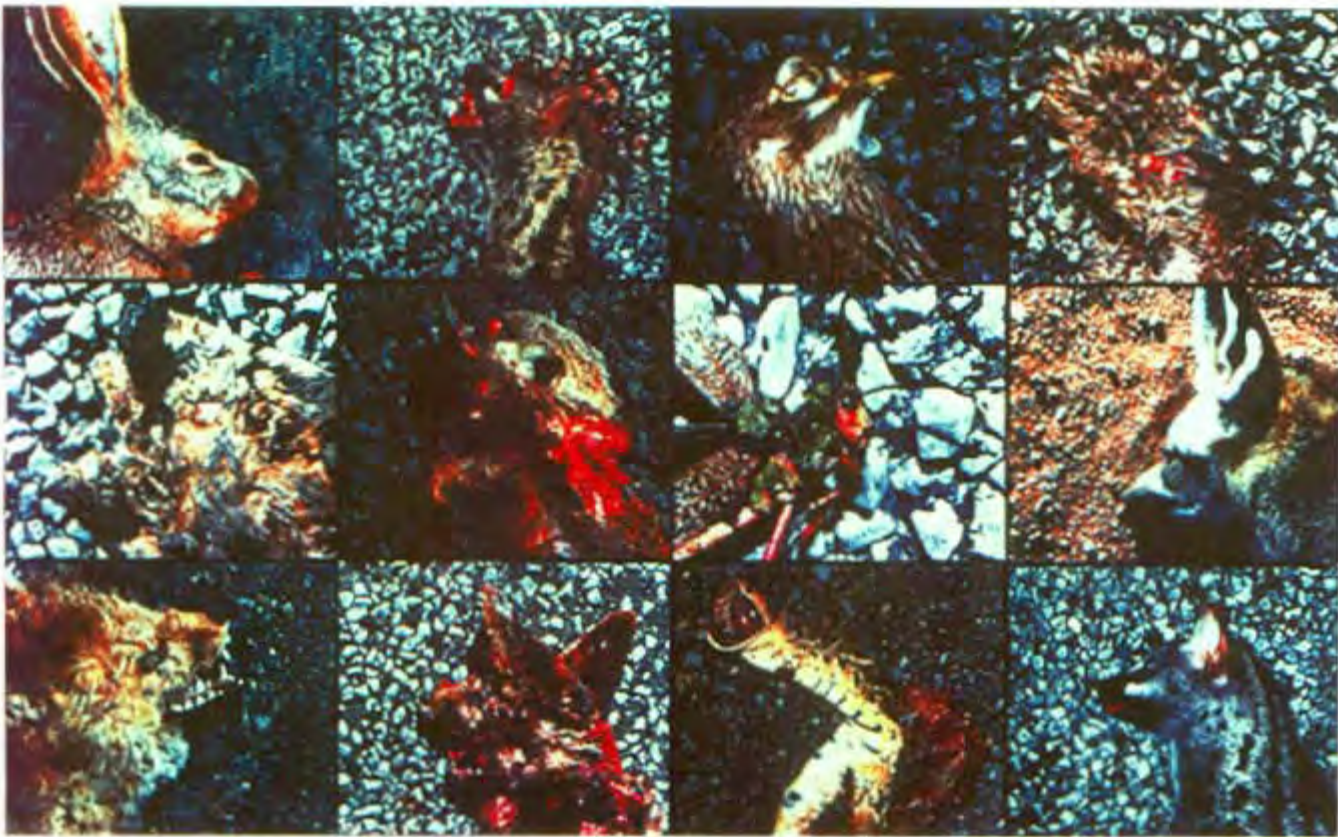
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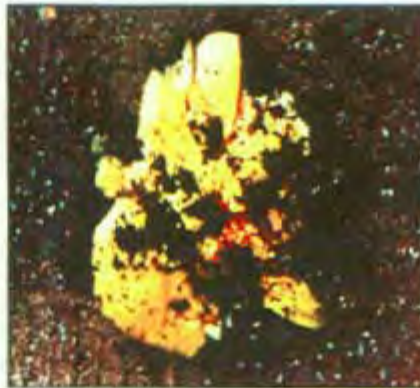
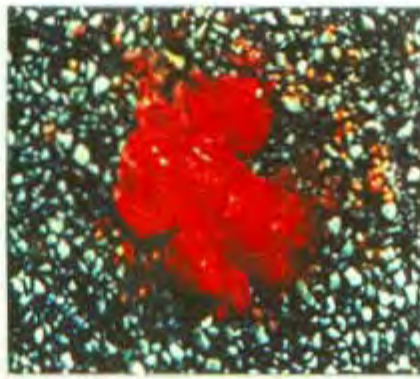
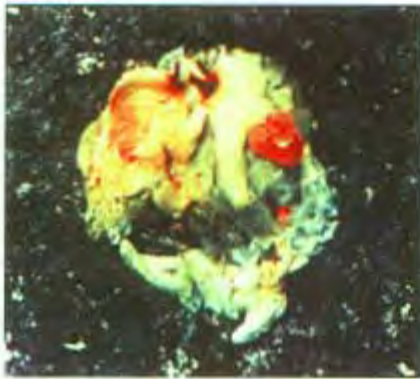
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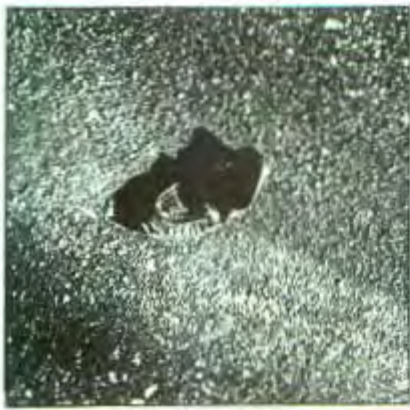
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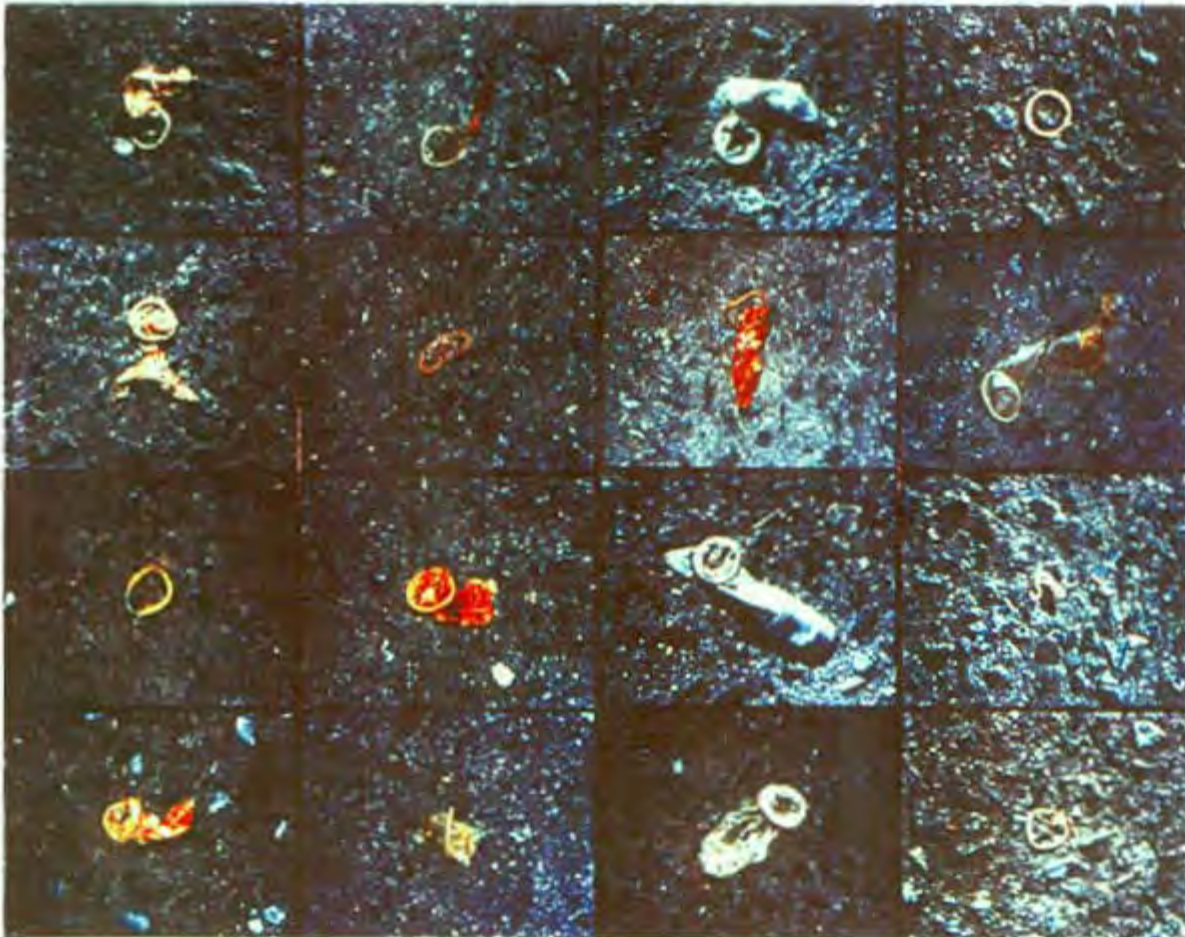
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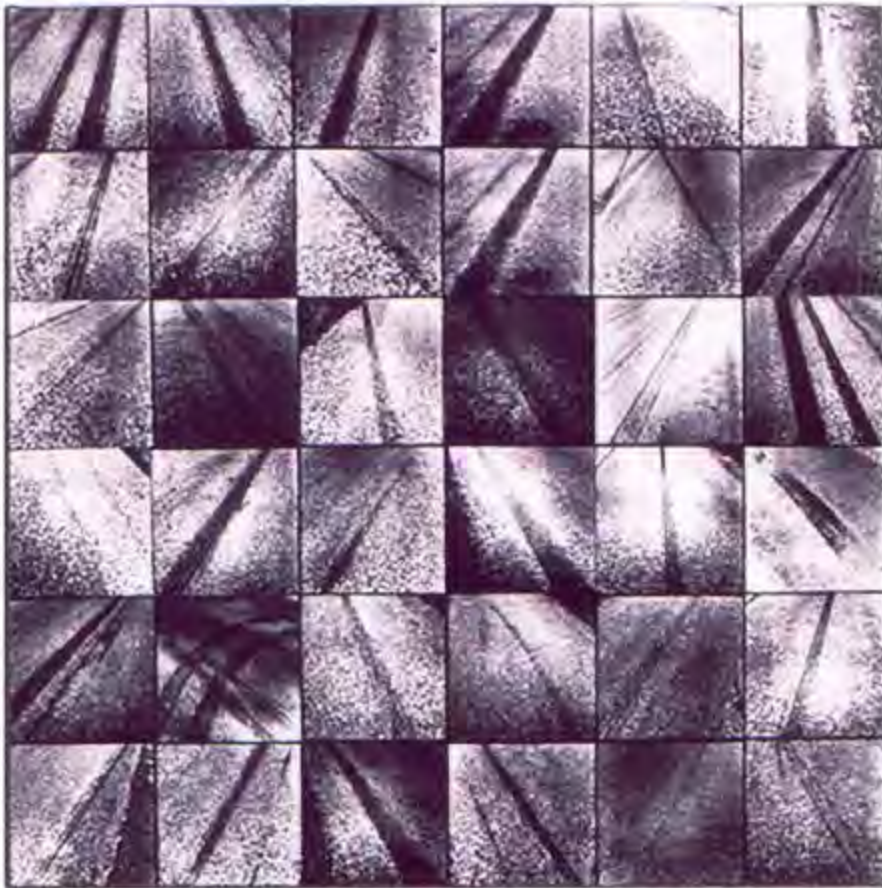
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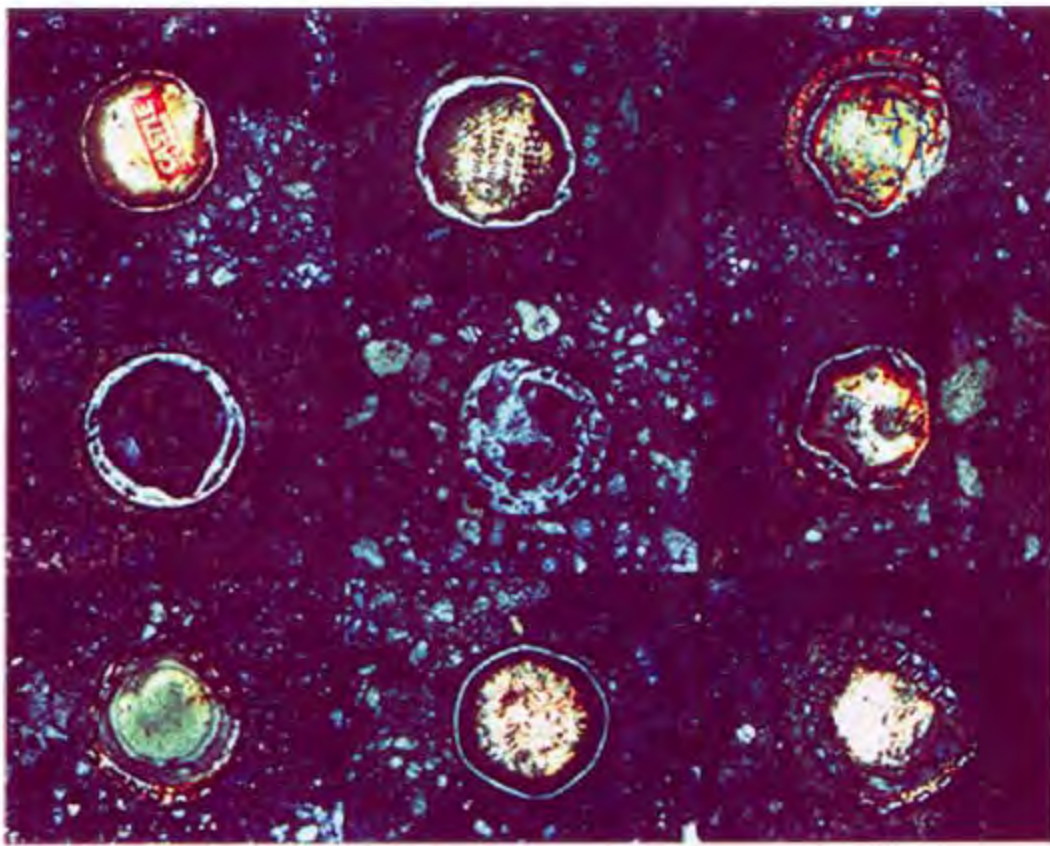
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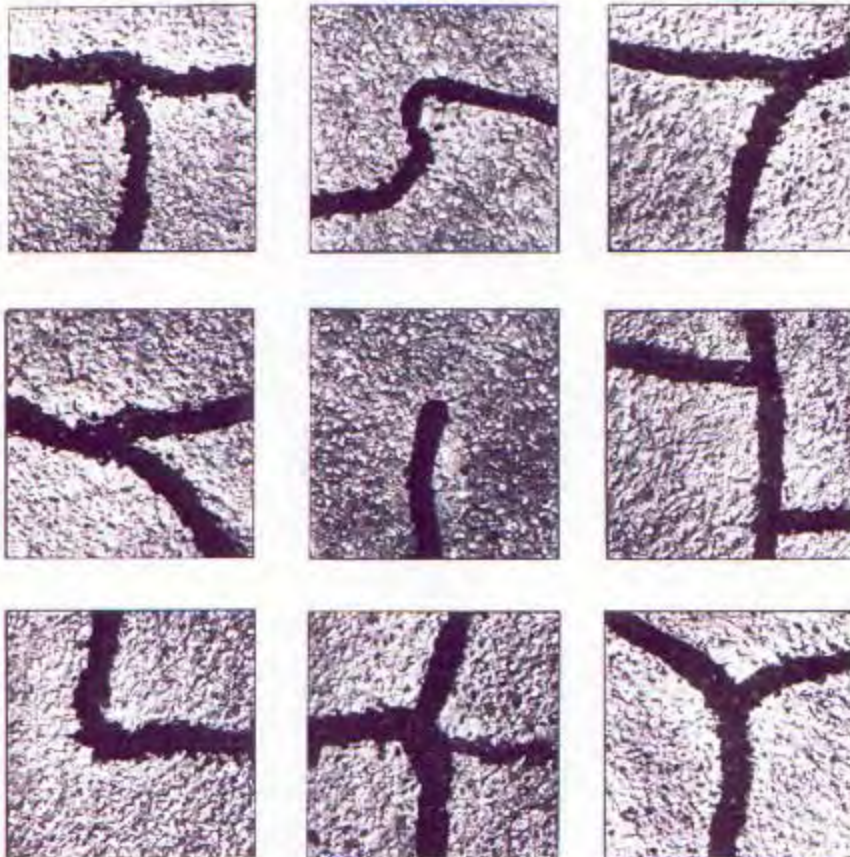
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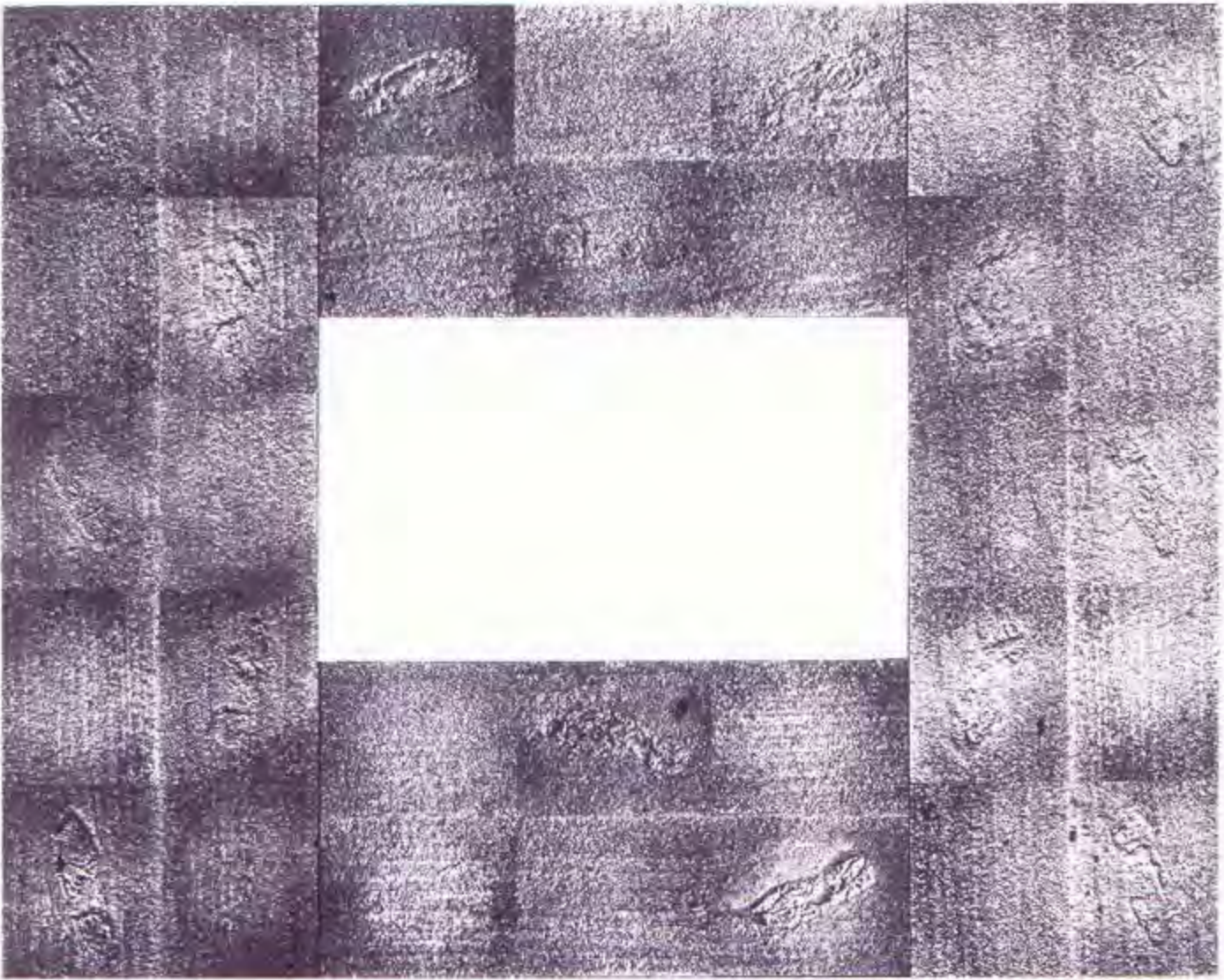
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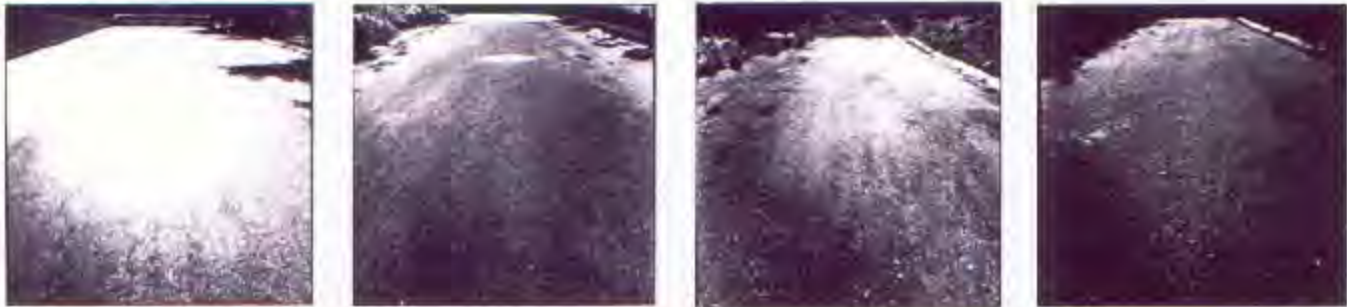
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