

### 3.3 Film Noir and the Folding of America

#### A Reading of *Out of the Past* (1947) and *Impact* (1949)

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It is conspicuously difficult to address the nature and meaning of the spaces of film noir without somehow first grappling with the question of the nature of film noir itself. Mark T. Conrad has laid out, in an economic form, the spectrum of interpretations this constellation of films has been subject to, ranging from a categorical affirmation of generic status (Damico, 1996; Hirsch, 1981) to cycle (Borde & Chaumeton, 1955), affinity by motif and tone (Durgnat, 1996) and/or style (Schrader, 1996), “transgeneric phenomenon” (Palmer, 1994), and finally to an identification of the phenomenon by a rejection of traditional narrative patterns (Telotte, 1989) or as a “discursive construction” (Naremore, 1998) (Conrad, 2006, pp. 9–14). In my view, all of these readings offer key focalisations of the phenomenon in question, and, particular argumentative differences notwithstanding, diverge mainly in terms of where each proposes its own particular cross section of noir. Certainly, when it comes to a consideration of noir spaces, generic and stylistic approaches have much to offer. This is in large part because the genrefication of noir occurred predominantly *in media res*, as studios discovered the economic advantages of homogenising and stylising motion picture production – particularly with the emergence of low-budget productions, or B movies, which many noir films were. This process is certainly one of the factors behind film noir’s intimate relationship to the *huis-clos* tradition in the theatre:

The relations that film noir holds with theatre are important and multifarious when viewed from a theoretical standpoint. The genre develops a ‘cinema of cruelty’ defined by spational and economic confinement, social and temporal immobilities, and excruciating physical closures to which it subjects the human body.

(Conley, 1987, p. 347)

This undoubtedly offers a crucial insight into the psychovisual aesthetics of noir, but an overemphasis on certain constrictive stylistic elements – aspects of setting (night-time urban scenes) and décor (enclosed spaces, high-contrast lighting, etc.), for instance – tends to obscure noir’s

relationship to its other spaces: those that stand in apparent conceptual opposition to its dominant ones, determining – from the outside, as it were – the symbolic meaning and dramatic resonance of its high-contrast enclosures.

An insistence on stylised interiors can conceal the ways in which noir preserves the *huis-clos* tradition of the theatre while simultaneously transposing it to the natural landscape. This occurs perhaps most noticeably in films such as *High Sierra* (Raoul Walsh, 1941), *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947) and *On Dangerous Ground* (Nicholas Ray, 1951). A remarkable instance from Tourneur's film of a natural *huis clos* can be found in the film's opening credits, in which the names 'Robert Mitchum' and 'Jane Greer' appear framed/trapped by the imposing mountain landscape that visually limits their vertical and lateral mobilities. In parallel with this naturalisation of the *huis clos*, however, there emerges in film noir, and in films closely related to noir iconographic and narrative patterns, a desire to imagine and project an 'other' space and its representational values. To the extent that film noir offers us a vision of America, and especially an 'alternate vision' of America, it is plausible to ask whether this alternate vision is not somehow already inscribed in its relationship to space. In light of this concern, I will here examine two films of the noir period – Jacques Tourneur's classic noir *Out of the Past* and Arthur Lubin's peripheral noir *Impact* (1949) – in an attempt to grasp the ways in which the dominant spaces of the genre, style or mode are articulated with its other spaces, leading each to project a particular representation of America.

The logic governing the representation of the signifier 'America' in film noir is determined by four complex and intertwined strands: (1) the site of representation itself, which we can designate by the metonym 'Hollywood' and which must be folded out of sight to preserve the illusion of the signifier's integrity; (2) the designation of a place removed from the process of representation, such that it can 'stand in for' the signifier 'America', confirming the latter's existence as an ideal space by offering itself as a microcosmic embodiment of that ideal (small-town America); (3) a space 'outside' that of America, which stands to the latter as its delimitation and conceptual opposite (frequently Mexico); and (4) a dialectic of anonymity and visibility that motivates – and frustrates – the transition between these different spaces or sites, marking each site and condition as an object of desire. These strands are not exclusive to film noir, of course, although the third and fourth are more comprehensively and systematically explored in this genre than in any other. Small-town America, as the answer to Hollywood's search for a formal representative of America, can be found in many different films of this period, ranging in style from *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946) to *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming et al., 1939).



As we shall see with respect to *Out of the Past* and *Impact*, however, a tendency to validate this representational sleight of hand, crucial in many ways to the success of melodrama in this period, is not equally shared by film noir. Two brief examples will help demonstrate the logic by which the representation of America, in film noir, is bound up with a dialectic of anonymity and visibility. In *Quicksand* (Irving Pichel, 1950), Vera Novak is a materially ambitious young woman who has fled to the West Coast from the anonymity of the West Virginia steel town in which she was raised, soon becoming the source of Dan Brady's spiralling debt, as the latter caters for her unquenchable desire for forms of conspicuous consumption. In *Shadow of a Doubt* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1943), Uncle Charlie flees to the fictional town of Santa Rosa, California, to hide from the law, as he is suspected of being the 'Merry Widow Murderer', insisting while there that he not be photographed – that is, that he *not* become an object of representation. Santa Rosa is a microcosm of America at large but, by reproducing America in a miniature form, it effectively folds itself away from that of which it is a part. This is why Uncle Charlie hopes to get lost in its folds and also why the detectives who come looking for him can plausibly claim that they are conducting a national census and wish to interview 'representative American families'. Meanwhile, young Charlie idolises her uncle precisely because he does not belong to the space of Santa Rosa, where, in her words, "[w]e eat and sleep and that's about all". For a more sustained reflection on the unfolding of these matters, we will turn to the films of Lubin and Tourneur.

Released just two years apart, *Out of the Past* and *Impact* are striking in both their similarities and differences, and it is precisely this uncanny resemblance-in-difference that makes an analysis of their representational logic, in the terms described earlier, particularly instructive. *Out of the Past* begins in Bridgeport, California, where Jeff Bailey/Markham (Robert Mitchum) owns and operates a local service station. As his past catches up with him, Jeff (and the viewer) is led, through flashbacks, to some of film noir's more iconic locales – Acapulco, Mexico and San Francisco – before returning to Bridgeport for the film's conclusion. As Nicholas Christopher noted, *Out of the Past* is one of the few classic noirs to place its typical urban spaces between geographical brackets:

In fact, among these films, *Out of the Past* is an oddity in that much of its narrative is constructed of non-urban flashbacks (Mexico, the desert, the small town) that frame the dense, purely urban sequence which is the film's crucible.

(1997, p. 4)

In *Impact*, Walt Williams (Brian Donlevy) is a rags-to-riches businessman based in San Francisco. When he leaves on a business trip to set up new factories in Denver, his wife Irene (Helen Walker) arranges for



her lover, Jim Torrance – disguised as her cousin – to ride with him, the plan being to murder Williams along the way and make it look like an accident. The plan goes awry: Torrance is interrupted before he is able to kill Williams and so dumps his unconscious body in a roadside ditch before speeding off in Williams's car, only to die seconds later in a head-on collision with a truck. When Williams regains consciousness, realising that he has been betrayed by his wife, he takes refuge in the town of Larkspur, Idaho – really Larkspur, California – where he finds work as a mechanic at a service station owned by Marsha Peters (Ella Raines). The developing relationship with Marsha, and with the townspeople of Larkspur in general, leads Walt back to San Francisco to clear up the circumstances of his reported death.

Both films reveal an elliptical structure, whose focal points are the noir city (San Francisco) and small-town America (Bridgeport and Larkspur), with the latter point exemplifying the invisibility and anonymity of life outside the metropolis. The dialectic of recognition/anonymity is recurrent in film noir, and it is articulated here with the urban/rural divide that appears to represent an essential fold in the fabric of America. Furthermore, both protagonists are defined in this space of small-town America by their profession as mechanics: that is, they are sufficiently familiar with the machinery of mobility to enable it for others while, by the very terms of their trade, remaining immobile themselves.

Though I cannot fully develop the implications of this point here, I wish to suggest that it is the baroque concept of the fold, as developed by Gilles Deleuze (1993), that best describes the way these two films – and film noir in general – translate the dots of an abstract map into extensive and conceptually meaningful surfaces and then fold them into contact with each other. As Deleuze notes relative to Mallarmé, and as we shall also see in our reading of *Impact*, the newspaper is one of the mediating figures through which disparate events and spaces are folded into one another:

[T]he fold of the newspaper, dust or mist, inanity, is a fold of circumstance that must have its new mode of correspondence with the book, the fold of the Event, the unity that creates being, a multiplicity that makes for inclusion, a collectivity having become consistent. (1993, p. 31)

In film noir, the automobile represents yet another figure by which this is achieved, bringing distinct spaces into contact with one another by allowing the spatio-temporal dimension between them to be folded away. In this sense, the function of the automobile corresponds to that performed by the cinematic apparatus itself, with the former standing as the visual surrogate of the latter within the genre. The inseparability of space and time in film noir can be seen in the intricate connection



ween hiding and being forgotten. When holed up in Acapulco, Kathie and Jeff reflect on their chances of escaping the reach of Whit Sterling: "You don't know Whit", Kathie says, "He won't forget", to which Jeff replies, "Everybody forgets". But the truth is that everybody forgets except Whit. When he finally lays eyes on Jeff again, years later in Lake Tahoe, Whit says: "Same guy – time-proof, weather-proof". Whit is apparently referring to Jeff, but he could equally be describing himself; Whit is a character for whom there is only space. In this respect, Whit embodies the globalising impulse, or Cartesian extension: the idea that everything can be mapped and that there are no borders or boundaries between entities.<sup>2</sup> But the space of film noir obeys the baroque "law of curvilinearity", the law of folds or changes of direction" (Deleuze, 1993, 2), and Kathie – the film's femme fatale – is the best expression of curvilinearity, for she is not knowable as a surface of connectable points, but rather only under certain conditions of lighting, as a play of the simultaneous forces of concealment and unconcealment.

If film noir's two kindred genres – melodrama and the police procedural – only the latter is directly involved in the articulated polarity of escape/hiding and mobility/entrapment, the interrelation of which is perhaps best expressed in Joseph H. Lewis's *Gun Crazy* (1950). What should be stressed is that film noir, with its emphasis on invisibility and evasion, and the police procedural, which emphasises discovery and action, are not antagonistic genres but participate equally in the geographic mapping of a symbolic space – America – folded in on itself.

It is clear that the creases formed by folding this space along national boundaries – as in the Mexico of *Out of the Past* or the Argentina of *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946), for instance – do not inevitably entail their internal folds of this same symbolic space. Such, indeed, would not be suggested by the reproduction and extension of interpersonal dynamics (Johnny/Gilda, Jeff/Kathie), the microcosmic nature of these 'eternal' territories (whether Buenos Aires, Acapulco, or later, the fictional town of Los Robles in *Touch of Evil*, Orson Welles, 1958) and the inescapability of such border-folds to figures of detection (Whit Sterling, Captain Hank Quinlan or the German cartel and Argentine police of *Gilda*). In this sense, film noir should be regarded as a cinematic progeny that re-animated the anonymous freedom the Spanish historian José Antonio Maravall attributes at the heart of the picaresque tradition:

Now, in a change of view that was genuinely scandalous to the traditional mind, freedom was found rather in the anonymous individuals of the people, in the individuals who, remote from where the decisions of sovereignty took place, guided their steps with greater independence, moved at will in that part of the exterior world that belonged to them individually.

(1986, p. 172)



And it is this anonymous freedom, in a later stage of capitalist development, that can be seen to underlie what Fredric Jameson regards as “[t]he denotative aspects of the raw material of the detective story as genre – relationship to the history of the city; emergence of a surveillance society and the role of surveillance in a market system in full transformation; relationship between public and private police, etc.” (2016, p. 39).

The point is that in film noir, as in the picaresque novel and the detective story, the discovery of the shadowy spaces created by the folds of a particular social order – spaces produced by the condition of anonymity or some form of interdiction (legal or social) – renders possible, and even necessary, the new type of social mapping these forms offer. In film noir, in particular, a tension between a public sphere of fame or notoriety and the private spheres of wealth and anonymity is frequently embodied by the newspaper, which folds these spheres into each other just as it threatens the places of anonymity, perhaps better understood as places of de-articulation from the vast social grid – bars, nightclubs, small towns – with recognition and, ultimately, incorporation. Thus, in *Impact*, Walt Williams discovers his own particular form of anonymity – death – by means of the newspaper, just as the anonymity he enjoys in Larkspur, under the fake name ‘Bill Walker’, is brought to an end by the discovery of the press clippings he has saved of the Walt Williams murder investigation.

Despite the rather uncanny similarities between *Out of the Past* and *Impact*, we should note that as ellipses, these films are mirror opposites: the former ends in Bridgeport, while the latter reaches its conclusion in San Francisco. As we shall see, this difference is more than merely formal. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, the relationship of each film to the stylistic and narrative conventions of film noir determines a substantially different treatment of urban and small-town spaces, as well as of the space that serves to mediate or frame them. In fact, this difference could not be starker, and can be expressed as the difference between the suppression of this mediating space (*Impact*) versus its active exploration (*Out of the Past*). Nothing could be more expressive in this regard than the brilliant opening sequence of the latter film, which articulates the credits with landscape imagery to create a kind of natural allegory of the film itself. The key here is not that nature anchors the plot of the film, but rather, in a quintessentially Baroque gesture, that it is immediately drawn into the film and subsumed within its allegorical structure. Nature frames and mediates the film’s spaces, but its allegorical function prevents these spaces from becoming fully naturalised. Such a use of nature resembles David Melbye’s description of the psychological allegorising of the cinematic landscape:

One of my purposes here is to clarify a rational means of determining a dividing line between those films featuring landscape as



visceral spectacle and those exploiting visceral *aspects* of landscape, in order to engage a subjective narrative mode, or, more precisely, a psychological allegory of inner human experience.

(2017, p. 109)

Thus, as noted above, the opening sequence moves from a shot of the name/signs 'Robert Mitchum' and 'Jane Greer' trapped in a natural enclosure, to an image of verticality – the mountain – and finally to the open plain, the openness of which represents the illusion of an inhabitable freedom operative at various key moments in the film. A slow pan right reveals a road sign that shows this space to be one of passage, associated by proximity with the town of Bridgeport, whose name immediately gains an added significance. A car enters our field of vision from the left-hand side of the screen, directing the camera – and the viewer's attention – towards the town, which is framed by an 'abridged' sign of its name.

From the film's initial frames, we are brought into a world dominated by the play of signs. The car that leads into Bridgeport is driven by Joe Stefanos (Paul Valentine), Whit Sterling's main henchman and the person whose accidental passage through the town sets Jeff on a collision course with his past. While waiting at the local diner for Jeff to return to town, Stefanos tells Marney, the owner, that he is an old friend of Jeff who happened to notice the sign above the service station. "It's a small world", says Marney, to which Joe replies, "or a big sign". Joe's story, we come to learn, is a lie. He does not know Jeff by the last name 'Bailey' that hangs above the station, but by the last name 'Markham', which the sign conceals. The greater irony of the exchange between Marney and Joe, however, is the apparently unintended suggestion that the world itself is but "a big sign" – a suggestion the film's opening sequence prepares us to entertain.

If Bridgeport is a sign that, in true noir fashion, indicates to the protagonist of *Out of the Past* that he must consign himself to his fate, the town of Larkspur, as it appears in *Impact*, is presented to us as a sign under erasure – that is, as a sign meaning 'real America' that signals a rupture with the genre of film noir. An initial portrayal of America not opposed to the representational values of noir is presented when Walt Williams comes to his senses at the bottom of the ravine in which Jim Torrance has left him. He climbs out to find a Bekins moving van displaying a map of the continental United States and the words "nation-wide moving and storage" on its side. When Williams reaches the road, we can read the firm's slogan over his shoulder: "on the run since '91". As mentioned, the idea of an America whose expansiveness and new-found mobility allow one to fold oneself into an anonymous existence is central to the noir, as is the moment of realisation that events have brought about a crease in one's existence. The newspaper here functions not only



as the device through which this recognition occurs, but also later in the film allows us to grasp film noir, again through this crease, as the antithesis to the narrative of the American dream: Walt Williams, assumed dead, reads about his own life under the title "The Saga of an American Success Story".

*Impact*, however, does not stay within the conventions of noir. Instead, it enlists other genres – the police procedural, melodrama and even, to a certain extent, the comedy of remarriage – in proposing a solution to the problematic nature of film noir. This generic turn within the film occurs precisely when the fate of Williams's supposed widow – the femme fatale Irene Williams (Helen Walker) – falls under police surveillance and, almost simultaneous with this, when Walter Williams himself stumbles into Larkspur. Several features of this passage are worth noting: the police station provides its officers with what suggests a pan-optical view of San Francisco, presenting in almost caricatural fashion a key ideological meaning of the police procedural; the pan right of the camera as Lieutenant Quincy prepares to leave Captain Callahan's office leads to a dissolve featuring the blankness of Idaho as it appears on a map of the continental US; and Walt William's entry into Larkspur is marked by the absence of any transitional space: the dissolve from the map insert of the US leads directly to a sign that reads "Welcome to Larkspur, population 4,501",<sup>3</sup> before the camera pans down to reveal a dishevelled Williams purveying the idyllic small town that lies before him. Unlike Bridgeport, California in *Out of the Past*, which is an actual town, Larkspur, Idaho is a forgery, its exteriors shot in the town of Larkspur, California. It is important to note that no special claims are made about the representational value of Bridgeport, while Larkspur is required to stand in for a set of values opposed to the ambiguous world of film noir, such requirements including both a clear demarcation from the state of California and the anonymity – or blankness – of Idaho.

The idealisation of the small town, in contradistinction to the urban spaces of noir, corresponds with a turning away of noir towards a new set of generic conventions, equally – and perhaps quintessentially – expressed in the relationship that materialises between Walt Williams and Martha Peters (Ella Raines). Walt first comes across Martha at the service station she owns and operates, initially mistaking her – dressed in overalls and bent over a car engine – for a boy. Martha has taken over the station after her husband was killed in the Second World War, and it is part of the film's generic reimagining of noir that its post-WWII inversion of sexual roles should be treated as a problem to be solved by the reaffirmation of their traditional asymmetry. Thus, though Martha is now a mechanic, she is not a very good one, and quickly yields her position to the more skilled Walt, a displacement that corresponds with her increasing feminisation, visually cued by the gradual shift from overalls to slacks to dresses, as well as the masculinising of Walt himself. In its noir



stage, the film repeatedly exhibits the emasculation of Walt, particularly at the hands of his wife, Irene, whose pet name for him is 'softy'. Martha thus stands in stark opposition to the femme fatale Irene Williams and the world of noir in general, which is here represented not as a complex aesthetic vision, but rather as a set of loosely associated values – and formal operations – as exemplified by the shift to 'noir' lighting that marks the appearance of Irene for her second interview with Lieutenant Quincy. It is fair to say that *Impact* projects film noir as a problem of the sexes – that is, of masculine women and feminine men – and responds to this 'problem' by returning Martha and Walt to their traditional sexual roles and associated values. In generic terms, this might be described as resolving the sexual ambiguities and tensions of film noir by a return to melodrama.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, to salvage the social recognition required by the melodramatic form, Martha convinces Walt to return to San Francisco and resume his identity – quite literally to remove the shadow hanging over him, as visually rendered during their conversation in Walt's room. Though complications ensue, Martha's dedication to Walt and Lieutenant Quincy's astute detective work allow Walt to clear his name and be reinstated as the COO of his firm. Ironically, both Martha and Walt turn their backs on Larkspur, as Martha agrees to travel with Walt to Denver, where he will oversee the opening of his firm's new factories. This is, in fact, a double irony, since it is the loss of manpower to new factories that threatens the economic existence of Larkspur and that forced Martha to 'man' her own service station. The idealised town of Larkspur turns out to be not so ideal, its presence in the film a mere narrative relay by means of which the femme fatale of film noir is shown to be the source of noir's moral ambiguities and, when viewed through the lens of melodrama, a simple error of casting.

In *Out of the Past*, the nature of Bridgeport and the desirability of substitution – to say nothing of the essence of the femme fatale herself – turn out to be much more difficult to determine. For one thing, the conversation between Jeff and Ann at the beginning of the film reveals Jeff's idealised space to be not the town of Bridgeport, but rather the mountains surrounding it, where he dreams of building a home. But Bridgeport, the mountains, fishing and even Ann herself turn out to be forms of escape from the consequences and feelings of a past that is still very much present to Jeff. Nicholas Christopher aptly describes how Ann can be seen as a perfect embodiment of film noir's tepid substitutes for its femme fatales:

As vivid and exciting as the femme fatale can be in film noir, her antithesis, the nurturing, supposedly redeeming woman is usually unrelievedly pallid and passive – to the point of repulsing us, as well as the hero. She is most often the girl back home, or the faithful,



long-suffering wife, or the steady fellow worker at the office, or the platonic friend futilely in love with the hero. [...] Ann, the small-town fiancée Jeff Bailey leaves behind for Kathie in *Out of the Past*, is the perfect example of this type. Antiseptic, static, sexually repressed, socially rather dull, she lives with her parents and works as a schoolteacher; she wants to marry and have kids and never leave her hometown. Should we be surprised that when reunited with Kathie, who is freewheeling, worldly, intellectually (if criminally) active, dangerous, and highly sexed, Jeff finds it so easy to fall back under her spell?

(1997, pp. 198–199)

It seems to me that Christopher oversells Ann's insipidness here, for the narrative tension the film generates requires Jeff – and the viewer – to invest in the qualities and possibilities she embodies. Nevertheless, this passage allows us to grasp how, in noir, the female antithesis to the femme fatale does not represent an obvious solution to the male protagonist's ambivalence or to the social and sexual complexities of film noir in general. The play of substitution and doubles – we should not forget the aptly named Meta Carson as yet a third significant female presence in the film – the partiality of lighting and the limitations of vision are means by which moral and cognitive complexities are folded back into the filmic text.

Thus, although both *Impact* and *Out of the Past* elaborate on the conventions of film noir, we must conclude that the latter offers us a far more compelling artistic vision and thus represents a more accomplished film. The narrative resolution of this film provides a poignant glimpse of this distance, as the viewer is forced to look through Bridgeport at the mediating space – neither town nor city – that frames it. After Jeff Bailey and Kathie Moffat (Jane Greer) are killed at a police roadblock – Jeff by Kathie (who realises that he has informed the authorities of their attempt to escape) and Kathie by the police – the action returns to Bridgeport where we find Ann, the young woman with whom Jeff had hoped to begin a new life in Bridgeport, leaving the police station. She is approached by Jim, her long-time suitor and thus romantic alternative to Jeff, who offers her a ride, and we immediately ascertain the symbolic import of this offer. Reluctant, Ann crosses the street and asks Jeff's assistant, a deaf mute, if Jeff had intended to run away with Kathie. Realising what is at stake in her question, The Kid nods, freeing Ann from her connection to Jeff. As Ann returns to Jim and the waiting car, The Kid gestures towards the sign "Jeff Bailey" that hangs above the station, acknowledging a shared commitment to the idea that a lie can serve one better than the truth.

In truth, however, The Kid's nod does not operate within a strict opposition of truth to falsehood, but as a frame that Ann chooses to



use in determining the nature of her relationship with Jeff – that is, in grasping it as a transition (or bridge) to Jim and their apparent future life together in Bridgeport. This life is apparent because, not being ideal, it must reconcile itself with the world of appearance. The car that Jim and Ann leave in – but are they leaving or remaining? – adopts an uncertain trajectory with respect to the town: are they heading into town or out of town and into the landscape that surrounds it? The greatness of this final sequence lies in the fact that it reveals the meaning of leaving and remaining to be, in effect, the same. Both require Ann and Jim to occupy a transitional space that they will call home. Unlike the ideal (but unrealisable) space that Ann and Jeff dream of in the mountains, or the ideal – but instrumental and thus disposable – town of Larkspur, Bridgeport is true to its name and true, as well, to an underlying vision of film noir that does not perish with its protagonist.

## Notes

- 1 The research for this chapter was made possible by a grant from the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia and by a visiting scholarship offered by the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.
- 2 “For [Descartes], the material world can be mapped out from the axis of the thinking subject, in rectilinear fashion, and can be divided into discrete units. The resulting geography resembles the order and process of the *quincunx*, a two-dimensional system of gridding and squaring that places a center (the ego) at the intersection of the diagonals of a surrounding square. When the self moves into space, it transforms one of the corners of the square or rectangle of its periphery into the site of a new center, around which new extremities are established, and so forth, until space is conquered” (Conley, 1993, p. xvii).
- 3 It must be added that the sign is being amended as Williams enters the town, a painter standing on a ladder changing the population number to 4501. Again, we are very close to the realm of parody, as this brief visual vignette registers both the responsiveness and the inclusiveness of the idealised small town.
- 4 Obviously, complexities abound as well within the genre of melodrama. But insofar as melodrama seeks to resolve social tensions by identifying them within – or projecting them onto – the family structure, however conventionally or unconventionally this might be taken, then the description of the generic relay identified earlier is, I believe, a valid one.

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